

Constitutional Convention

Sermons

OUR HOUSE

It is 6:30 in the morning, in our house.

Your house, and mine. Any house.

It is 6:30, and the baby is crying. Mommy is heating the bottle, for the baby.

The little boy howls, from the bedroom: "Mommy! Where are my *shoes*?" He can not find his shoes, because they are under the bed.

At the same time, the little girl is tugging at the apron of her mommy, saying: "Mommy, Mommy, my *dress*!" The dress is not yet ironed, and she needs to wear it, this morning, for school.

And the husband is pounding on the table. He is roaring: "*Do I get my coffee in this house, or don't I?*"

Mommy is in the middle, heating the bottle for the baby, crawling under the bed to get the shoes, ironing the dress, boiling the coffee on the stove... and sometimes she stops. She stops, and says: "I am a *servant* in this house! A servant is better! A servant gets *paid*!"

Mommy is the beast of the house. She labors for everyone, and everyone loves her, even though they do not say it. When the husband goes off to work he kisses her goodbye, without thinking, saying: "Make sure you have supper ready early tonight. I have an appointment. I'll come home for supper, and then I have to go right out!"

The little boy kisses her, saying: "Mommy, the fifty centavos! I *need* the fifty centavos!"

The little girl kisses her, saying: "Mommy, my *book*! Remember my *book*! You must go downtown and buy my *book*!"

And when the family is all gone, she washes the dishes, and cleans the house, and goes down to the market-place to buy the fish. This is her service of God: quarreling with the fish vendor over the price of fish.

But this is *religion!* This is her vocation: wife and mother. This is the job that God has given her. This is her apostolate: our house.

And suppose that she was very *devout?* Suppose she wanted to go to Mass and Communion every day? This is good... But suppose that the only available Mass was at 6:30 a.m. — precisely the hour of crisis in our house?

Which should she do?

Should she go to Mass, where it is peaceful and quiet, with no babies crying, and have breakfast with God?

Or should she stay home, and make the coffee for her mean, ugly, disagreeable husband?

Mass is good, and beautiful; Holy Communion is food for the soul; but if she has to make a choice, it *must be the home!* This is how she serves God — with the labor of her hands! This is her apostolate, and it must come *first!* If she can do *both* — that is the best! But her work as wife and mother — this is the work given to her by God.

So it is with the husband. He gets up every day and goes to work, in order that he may bring home the money to pay the rent, to buy the food, to pay the tuition at school, to run the house.

And when they come to die — the father and mother — God will say to them: “Come ye blessed of my Father, into the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was a stranger, and you took me in!”

They will tremble, and say: “Lord, when did we do all this?”

And He will say: “Amen, amen, I say to you — so long as you did it to the least of these, my little ones, you did it unto Me!”

The labor and love of Mommy for her children — this is the service of God. The labor of the father — his labor of love — this is the service of God.

This is religion.

We serve God with *life!*

But we have a bigger house. It is the country. It is the nation.

This is also our house.

We have many children — in the mountains of the north, in the muddy rice fields, out on the sea.

We must also take care of *them!*

At once we get weary — just at the *thought!* The bottle for the baby is close at hand, real — you can touch it. You can taste the milk. You can hold the baby in your arms when you give it to her.

But social justice for the people in the mountains! Land for the tenant! Security for the fisherman! These things are too big, too broad, too far away, too complicated. It is hard even to *start* working on these things.

But we *can* start!

We can begin to work, personally, for our house, for the country, for the Philippines.

In November we will elect representatives to the Constitutional Convention. These men and women will write the law for all of us for years to come. They will write the laws under which our children will grow up.

What must we do? *Work* to elect *good men*, and *good women!* Those who are honest, and wise. Those who really want to help our people, with all their hearts!

This is not too big. *This* is not too far away. *This* is something definite, clean-cut, practical! *This* we can do!

First, *vote!*

Second, vote *freely!*

Third, vote *honestly!*

Begin looking, right now, for those who — in your opinion — could best write the rules for our house, our great house, our beautiful house: the *country!*

And when we do this — *this is the service of God!*

That is why we talk about it in church!

This is religion!

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MY BROTHER

On a street in Manila two men were dragging a girl into a waiting taxicab.

The girl resisted.

They pulled her, dragged her. When she clung to the doorway of the taxi, refusing to go in, they beat her.

She screamed.

Within striking distance there were about twenty people: shopkeepers, street vendors, passers-by. They stopped, and watched.

Nobody did anything.

Two young men passed, in a car. One of them, sitting beside the driver, said: "Look at that! Stop! Let's help her!"

The young man who was driving the car shook his head. "Nothing doing," he said. "That's the way to get killed. It's probably just a love affair. Leave them alone."

The car passed by.

The men finally forced the weeping girl into the taxicab, and off they went.

The spectators went back to their business. It was an exciting story for the shopkeepers to tell their customers.

Is this *right*?

Should it be this way?

Should we watch injustice, and do nothing?

Of course it is *trouble* to get involved, but is this not the kind of trouble we *must shoulder*?

And it is not just the stray street in Manila. Others are suffering, in other areas of the country.

In the mountains a rich landowner is gradually gobbling up the little farms of his neighbors.

A poor fisherman works all night, every night, and yet his children can not go to school because they have no shoes, no clean dress, no shirt.

Who is the brother of this farmer in the mountains, who is losing his land?

Who is brother to the fisherman, who has no money to buy shoes?

Should we not help the girl in the street? Should we not help the farmer in the mountains? Should we not help the fisherman?

Look. A lawyer serves God by being a *good lawyer*, by laboring to get justice for his client. A doctor serves God by being a *good doctor*, by going out into the night to deliver the baby of a poor woman. A teacher serves God by being a *good teacher*, by preparing her classes, by correcting her papers. A mother serves God by being a *good mother*, by loving her children, and caring for them.

A mechanic serves God by being a *good mechanic*; a maid serves God by being a *good maid*.

But all of us are *citizens*!

Should we not try to serve God by being *good citizens*?

And what does it mean to be a *good citizen*? It means that we should think of all the others in the country, not only ourselves. It

means that we should think of the farmer, and of the fisherman. It means that we should do what the gospel says: "*Love Thy Neighbor!*"

It means that when people really need our help, we have to get involved.

We can not pass the girl on the street, when she is in trouble — not with a clear conscience. We can not say of the farmer: "It's not my business. I don't live in the mountains."

We can not say of the fisherman: "It is not my business. I don't live by the sea."

We can *not* say, like Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper?" *All men are our brothers, and we must try to help our brother!*

How?

One great, obvious way is through the new constitution. In the basic law of the land we can lay the foundations for social justice.

Now, not everyone of us can be a law-maker. But everyone of us can *help!* We can choose — if we go at this thing with passionate perseverance — *good men and good women* for this coming Constitutional Convention.

We can elect *honest* representatives who really want to help the poor. We can elect *wise* representatives, who know how to do it!

We can do this, if we take the November elections seriously. We can do this, if we really get *involved!*

And if you say: "Well, politics is a dirty business. There is no use trying to clean it up. You can't win!" — if you say that, it is *despair!*

Of course politics is dirty, but we *can* clean it up! The crooked politician can only succeed when the good men stay out of politics.

If we do *not* try, we are betraying the country. The nation needs us now, just as truly as that girl on the street-corner needed help from *somebody!* We have watched violence too long! We have watched injustice too long. Now we have to *act!*

The action is very simple. Very clear. We have to get the whole country involved in this new constitution. The only way to start is with yourself. You get involved!

We must vote! We must vote freely! We must vote honestly. We must cast our ballot thinking of the farmer who needs help from somebody, thinking of the fisherman whose children have to go to school!

Why do we talk about this in church? Because *this is religion!*

This *is* the practice of the gospel!

This is what the gospel *means* when it says: "Love thy neighbor."

This *is* the service of God! We serve God as a lawyer, as a doctor, as a husband, as a father, and as a citizen!

Is it *troublesome?*

Sure.

The same kind of trouble that would come to a man if he stopped the car, and got out, to help a girl who was being kidnapped on the street.

The kind of trouble that would come to man if he tried to defend the poor against the rich. The kind of trouble that would come to a man if he really began to worry about the children of the fisherman.

It is the kind of trouble that comes to anyone who wants to live as a Christian.

It is trouble that comes straight from the hand of God.

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