

THE HIGHER DUTY

AN ADDRESS

By

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Before

THE CARROLL CLUB  
TWENTIETH ANNUAL CORPORATE COMMUNION  
BREAKFAST

JANUARY 14, 1940

HOTEL BALTIMORE

NEW YORK CITY

The other day I read a statement that impressed me as so meaningful an observation on our great mutual duty as members of a democracy that I would like to pass it on to you. I do not remember the exact words, but the thought expressed was that in this modern world, it is no longer enough that we are willing to die for democracy; we must also be willing and know how to live for democracy.

My thoughts turned to this Carroll Club, and I reflected what a heartening thing it is that in this land there are organizations like yours which give young people a chance to engage in something as noble and useful as social welfare activities, and to stimulate their thinking by hearing leaders of the Church and others discuss the great tasks of mankind in these modern times.

I remembered something that was said many years ago by one of the greatest Christian leaders ever to labor in the Vineyard of the Lord--the incomparable Leo XIII. "It must not be supposed," he said, "that the solicitude of the Church is so occupied with the spiritual concerns of its children as to neglect their interests temporal and earthly." Far from that, the great Pontiff warned, "It is the Church that insists" on an active search for greater human security.

Remembering those priceless words, I was refreshed in the thought that here is an organization helping young women, in the tradition of their Church, to learn how to live for their country.

I was encouraged particularly because this is the time, if ever, that we Americans need that knowledge--the knowledge to live in such a way that all of us may travel life's path in dignity and happiness, regardless of how greatly the world may change from one year, or one

decade, or one generation to the next.

After all, what is it that we need to do if it is not exactly that; To adjust our methods of living, with wisdom and prudence, to the shape of events as they take place--to do this steadfastly in accordance with the eternal and unchanging ethical standards and ideals that find expression in our Christian faith?

It is the neglect of those ideals that is our problem. It was the neglect of those ideals that brought our suffering of the last decade and Europe's present plight. They came about when men ceased to regard their religion as a pattern of right conduct and began to treat it instead as merely one of the ornaments of life. If the world today is plagued by philosophies that belittle the values of the home, that scorn religion and set the state above all else, we can look for the cause to the vastly greater plague of spiritual bankruptcy and a sordid, resurgent materialism.

There is so much that needs to be done--so many tasks that call for the minds and hands of young people with ability and courage and vision.

There is the vast problem of unemployment and all that it means in suffering and unhappiness. Somehow we must make it possible for everyone who wants a useful, productive place in the economic system to have that place. We cannot close the door upon him. The economic system itself may perish if we do.

There is the problem of many thousands of people huddled in dwellings that are a menace to health and morals. We need to keep on building for them the kind of homes that befit a nation like ours, but that they alone are helpless to erect.

There is the situation in which great factories are closed by strikes, even though the workmen want nothing so much as they want to keep on earning their wages and the employers want nothing so much as to keep on producing goods. We need to find ways of making it unnecessary for anything so tragic and absurd to happen among intelligent men.

There is the problem of sick people who lack medical care, while able doctors who could bring them the great benefits of medical science lack enough employment to keep them busy. That should not be, and all of us know it. Somehow we must change that situation.

There is the fact that dishonest and selfish men still find it possible to seize control of governments and use them for their private gain. Even the courts, with their sacred mission of preserving justice, have not been entirely free of that awful stigma. We need somehow to erect safeguards that will protect the public service from corruption.

There is the problem of guarding our precious liberties that represent the dearest hopes and yearnings of mankind. We need to see that they are not denied to anyone, no matter how insignificant he may be, or how different from the rest of us in his physical nature or in his beliefs.

I have often thought how unfortunate it is that many individuals, while they agree generally that these things need to be done, seem to feel that, after all, they are no concern of theirs personally--that they are something for the people in Washington to worry about.

That attitude is not merely wrong; it is actually a danger to our system of government; it threatens the freedom that makes us the envy of

people all over the earth.

These problems are not the concern of government alone. They concern each of us individually, and there is not one of us who cannot do his part to solve them by taking an earnest interest in their solution.

It is not for the people in government alone--this task of creating a more gracious civilization. That opportunity lies before everyone possessed of the zeal for social justice and the spirit of service to mankind that animated the lowly Carpenter of Galilee when he said a thousand years ago and more: "I have compassion on the multitude."

That opportunity lies before all of us who believe that the same human ingenuity which gave man the radio, the airplane, mass production, the magic of food chemically constructed in laboratories-- can also end such things as the tragedy of poverty side by side with abundance.

Man has a higher destiny than war and strife. Man's destiny is to achieve a society in which the principles of justice and peace are practiced as well as believed. His destiny is to create those conditions of moderate and reasonable prosperity in which human beings, assured of the chance to earn by their labor those earthly riches that sustain a life of dignity, may cultivate the riches of the spirit.

These things are worth fighting for. If they are not, what is there left to life but something empty and barren? We cannot simply turn our backs on these higher aims; we cannot simply confine ourselves to the search for pleasure and the immediate task of making a living. As human beings, we have an obligation to take an interest in the greater errands that concern the entire family of men in this nation and in this world.

The picture that meets our eyes as we look out upon the world this morning is a dark picture; but it is not a hopeless one. For the world has suffered like this before and survived to see a happier day.

In the pages of history we read that ever since the beginning of time, through one tragedy after another, man's destiny has brought him again and again to his feet. In fact, even in the hours of bloodshed and destruction, on the highest tides of hatred and intolerance, man has been steadily accomplishing the advances in art, science, literature and religion, which are the sum of civilization.

When it must have seemed to the subjects of Emperor Nero and Caligula and Diocletian that persecution could reach no greater extremes of cruelty, the Roman Empire of the despots crashed, and there was hope again.

But on the heels of the Roman tyranny there came the Feudal Ages, and for a thousand years the common man of the Western world toiled in the bonds of serfdom.

Then Gutenberg brought to men the blessing of the printed word, and the human spirit soared to new heights during the great era of the Renaissance.

In the period of history between 1473 and 1592, Savonarola was burned at the stake, Mexico was cruelly conquered by the Spaniards, and the African slave trade was instituted by the white man; Queen Mary of Scots was executed by her cousin Elizabeth, and Spain built the Armada.

Yet, in those years lived the Father of Astronomy, Copernicus. And in those years he proved that the sun is stationary and the planets revolve around it. More importantly, in a good part of that time, Shakespeare was writing the plays and poems which are the very crown of Western civilization.

Our forefathers in this land knew the sequence of tragedy and uplift as well as any people has ever known it. Having found a measure of religious freedom, they suffered for 150 years the injustices of a subject people. But finally they broke their bonds and began the writing of the brightest chapter in the political history of man.

Even in that chapter there have been dark pages. The Civil War-- to name but one--was followed by the bitterness of Reconstruction, but out of it we gained a unity that has stood the test of time.

Often in state and local governments we have seen the strange alternation of progress and reaction. But always after retrogression there has come an interlude when men have marched steadfastly toward better things.

In this hour, again, much of the world is slipping backward-- for how long we do not know.

But those who pessimistically say that all is lost make a grave mistake. Man will survive this ordeal also, and the soul of civilization, if not its outward forms, will endure. And to those who remain will fall the duty of building again the structure that has fallen.

May it be the good fortune of America to act so wisely in the days to come that we will be ready and able, when there is peace again, to help in constructing a foundation of justice among men and nations upon which that peace may be preserved.