

THE PRIEST—THE PRINCE OF PEACE

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WHEN the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, presented to the assembled prelates his Bull decreeing the Holy Year in honor of the Nineteenth Centenary of the Redemption of Mankind, he manifested his desire that the jubilee be one of peace, especially spiritual, internal peace. He said: "Peace between man and man, between nation and nation is relatively small. It is small in comparison to the internal peace, even of a single soul with God. Even more therefore when one thinks of the great peace of the whole world, to which all mankind is called. This is the peace that Christ, the Redeemer, has come to bring to this world, suffering on His Cross the sentence of death and transforming it into the message of salvation. And this is the peace We wish to be proclaimed during this Extraordinary Holy Year with those words of order that We have already proclaimed: 'We adore Thee O Christ, and we praise Thee because with Thy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.'"¹

It is doubly fitting that the object of this Holy Year should be interior peace, for with the Nineteenth Centenary of Our Saviour's Redemption of the world comes the Nineteenth Centenary of Our Saviour's Institution of Priests, His princes of peace. At His Last Supper He instituted the priesthood that was to offer the Sacrifice of Peace and to preach His gospel of peace. His priests were to be His princes of peace. The priest is a prince of peace inasmuch as he is the mediator between God and man, minister "of the true Mediator by administering in His stead the saving Sacraments to men."² Christ by His death reconciled man to God; the priest by his life applies this reconciliation to man. Each morning as he awakens to the light of a new day he sees before him a threefold herculean task to be performed; he must reconcile to God non-Catholics and Catholics, and guide them on the way to perfection.

The priest must bring peace to non-Catholics, be they Protestants, Jews or pagans. Standing before the altar of the Most High

¹ Address of Pope Pius XI (Boston Pilot, Feb. 18, 1933).

² *Summa Theol.* III, q. 26, a. 1.

God upon which he is about to renew for all men the Sacrifice of the Cross, the priest closes his eyes for a moment and pictures the souls for whom he is about to plead before the Almighty. Among them he sees pagans in the heart of China, Japan or Russia, pagans walking the streets of New York or Chicago. Among them he sees the wandering Jew, the Protestant, the Mohammedan. They are the "other sheep" who are not of His fold but who must be brought to the pastures of the Church. For these then the priest offers to God the Holy Sacrifice, begging Him to grant them the graces they need for salvation.

But to secure the salvation of non-Catholics this prince of peace seeks human means as well as divine. After he has prayed he goes out to search for them, answering the call of his Divine Master: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."³ He teaches them all the same great truths of religion: how man sinned and lost his peace with God; how the Son of God came to earth to reconcile him to the Father; how that Son of God established a Kingdom of Peace for all men, a kingdom of which the priest is a prince, preaching the gospel of peace and administering its blessings to men. And thus having prepared the soul of the non-Catholic for the gift of faith by prayer and instruction, the priest never ceases to pray for its day of reconciliation, the day of Baptism, the supernatural birthday of the soul, when man becomes a child of God and an heir of heaven. On that day it is the priest who administers this Sacrament of peace. By pouring the water and saying the words of Baptism he opens between God and the soul the channel of grace which had been stopped by original sin.

The priest is a prince of peace to Catholics of the "Church Suffering," the "Church Dormant" and the "Church Militant"; to souls in the flames of purgatory, in the sleep of sin, and in the grace of God.

For the "Church Suffering" the priest ascends each morning to the altar of the Most High and offers the Price of their redemption. The Almighty accepts this most worthy Sacrifice and sends His angels to relieve the Holy Souls and give them greater hope of their early release, or to release them and take them to the God they love, the God in Whom they will now rest in peace forever. The priest has obtained peace for the "Church Suffering."

³ *Matt.*, xxviii, 19.

For the "Church Dormant," for those who by mortal sin have lost that peace which came to them at Baptism, God has placed in the hands of His minister another means of obtaining reconciliation, a second gate into heaven, the Sacrament of Penance. For these wayward Catholics the priest has prayed at the altar and offered the Holy Sacrifice that they repent, confess their sins and be restored to the love of God. Now he goes out to search for them just as he went out to search for the souls of the unbaptized. He preaches, he gives good example, he uses every means in his power to recapture these souls that have fallen into the snares of the world, the flesh or the devil. Finally by administering the Sacrament of Penance he removes sin, the most serious obstacle to peace, and brings the soul back into the friendship of God.

In the "Church Militant," in the souls of those practical Catholics who are fighting the temptations of life, the priest by his administration of the Sacraments increases that peace which he established in their souls by Baptism.

Although man is justified by Baptism and enjoys the peace that ensues, he lives in the midst of the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. It is now the bishop, he who has received the fulness of the priesthood, who confers upon man the Sacrament of Confirmation to enable him to keep his Baptismal innocence. Here again the priest is the prince of peace. By the power of the Holy Ghost he has enlightened the faith and strengthened the will of a soldier of Christ; he has taught him to conform his will to the Will of God. He has subjected the threefold enemy and reinforced the peace pact with God.

As it is the duty of every peacemaker after he has removed obstacles to a reconciliation, to bring together the parties at war in a happy reunion, so it is the duty of the priestly peacemaker after he has removed the sin that separates man from God, to bring both together again in Holy Communion. This holy union of God and the soul is the union of the Lover and the beloved, a direct source of heavenly peace. It transforms the soul into another Christ, infusing into it His spirit, His sentiments and His virtues. It is the anticipation of heaven, a foretaste of the everlasting union with God.

It is likewise the priest who blesses the union of man and woman in the Sacrament of Matrimony. It is he who teaches them to conform their wills to the Will of God and to model their union of love on the peaceful union of Christ and His Mystical Body, the Church.

He guides the married couple through life, their helper in adversity, their comforter in affliction, their refuge in trial and necessity.

From the cradle to the grave the Catholic is attended by the priest in all spiritual needs. When he is in danger of death from sickness the priest comes to his aid to give him the peace of the last Sacraments. Having heard his Confession and brought him the Saviour in Viaticum, the priest administers the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. This Sacrament increases the dying man's grace and peace with God; it excites in him great confidence in the divine mercy. Sometimes when it is expedient for his soul's salvation it even restores health to his body. It is the priest who brings the greatest joy and comfort to the departing soul. The physician may prescribe the last potion to sooth the physical suffering; the lawyer may put in order all mundane affairs; but it is the priest who confers the things that are eternal. He listens to the soul's most secret thoughts; he quiets its hidden anxieties; he reconciles the soul to God forever.

But the priest understands that he cannot live forever to preach and minister the gospel of peace to all nations. There must be, as it were, another self, another mediator to continue his ministry. The bishop therefore, possessing as he does the fulness of the priesthood, consecrates to God worthy men to become other princes of peace; he administers the Sacrament of Holy Orders. By this Sacrament grace and peace are greatly increased in the *Alter Christus* and assured to all mankind: to the faithful of the "Church Suffering," the "Church Dormant" and the "Church Militant," and even to the souls of the unbaptized.

The priest has yet another duty to perform in his ministration of peace; it is the duty of guiding towards perfection all souls entrusted to his care. By the grace of God some souls will advance farther towards it than others but all must tend towards it, for the Master has said: "Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."⁴ And having thus given to souls His Heavenly Father as their ideal, Christ gave them His minister, a priestly Father, as their guide, and a twofold law of love as their rule of life. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."⁵

⁴ *Matt.*, v, 48.

⁵ *Matt.*, xxii, 37, 39.

This twofold love is the source of peace; and to advance in this twofold love is to advance in peace. As minister of peace, therefore, the priest must guide the soul on the way to the perfection of this love. The way has three successive stages: the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way. First the priest gives each soul the threefold advice of the Psalmist as a motto: "Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it."⁶ To "turn away from evil" is the purgative way of self-denial, the renunciation of whatever leads the soul away from God. To "do good" is to practice virtue, the illuminative way, the way of the soul's imitation of Christ in which He is the center of its thoughts and consequently of its love. To "seek after peace" is the unitive way of the love of God, the way in which the soul becomes so united to Him by thinking of Him and loving Him that all its other virtues become as so many acts of love.

Many Catholics are in the purgative way; some are in the illuminative way; a few have so cooperated with the grace of God as to reach the unitive way. All who have renounced sin are somewhere on one of these three ways of love and interior peace. Their priestly mediator must take them as they are and guide them gradually up these ways to the sacred heights of perfection as the mountain guide conducts inexperienced climbers up the rocky path of the Alps. He must teach them to look up and forward; he must keep them from falling back over the precipice of sin; he must check them from hastening too quickly to the dizzy heights of the path of love. He must teach them on which rock of virtue to place each advancing foot; he must encourage them when they become weary. And finally when the sacred heights seem close and then are lost awhile in a cloud of aridity, the night of the soul, his guide-rope still encourages them onward to the joy that is above that cloud, the contemplation of the Sun of Truth. Who is there that is like to the spiritual director of souls, the mountain guide who takes men safely to the peaks of interior peace and shows them the magnificence of the God above and the poverty of things below!

Who is like to this prince of peace, this mediator between God and man? From the altar each morning he ascends to God, like an angel on the ladder of Jacob, to offer anew the sacrifice of the Cross for the good of all mankind. For nineteen hundred years he has gone thus to God to request His blessings for man; for nineteen

⁶ *Ps.*, xxxiii, 15.

hundred years he has always returned with the fruits of the Promised Land. He has dispensed the peace of justice to non-Catholics of every kind. To Catholics he has ministered the peace of forgiveness and increased friendship with God. Having learned from man and God the science of the saints, he has taught it to the souls placed in his care and guided them to the tranquillity of Christian love.

This Christian love and not the self-love of the world is the source of peace. The world has sought for peace that is true and lasting, but until it turns from greed and love of self to love of God and neighbor it will seek it in vain. The world has a court and laws for peace, but nations still war on nations; nations have courts and laws for man, but man still wars on man. Christ has a court in heaven where He is Prince of a Kingdom of Peace, a Kingdom He has extended to earth, where its princes are His priests. He has given it heaven's law of love which His priests are to preach to men. And only when the priest is heard and that law of love obeyed will peace begin to reign again.

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