

# YOU ARE SO IMPORTANT!

**Richard L. Rooney, S.J.**

FATHER TOM called a final cheery “good night” to the last of his departing group of young parishioners. He locked the door of the church basement where they had just finished a meeting and went over to the rectory.

He fumbled a moment in the dark, found the green-shaded desk lamp, and turned on the light, then sank heavily into the ancient leather chair which stood there by his desk and wearily closed his eyes. Another day was nearly over. As with most of his gladsome, exciting days, this was the first chance he had had during the present one to realize that he was weary—tired out, yes—but happy too. He smiled a bit as he recalled that both of these conditions, which in no way exclude each other, had become more or less chronic with him of late.

“But how could it be otherwise,” he asked the unresponding room about him, “with such a crowd as that? God bless them!” He was thinking of the young people he had just left. “They are enough to wear out an old codger like me!” (Actually the man was forty-nine and seemed much younger to the people in his parish.) “But what a joyous way to die—gladly, worn out, working in harness, trying to keep up with such a bunch of real young Christians as they are!”

## INDISPENSABLE

It had only been recently, after the few difficult first months of getting them started, that through these same young people the priest had begun to realize the full force of Pope Pius XI’s words, “Catholic Action we deem as indispensable at the present time as the priestly ministry itself.” Right here in his own parish there was this handful of young men and young women who were going places and doing things for the restoring of all things in Christ that he, Father Tom, could never enter nor ever effect. Here was a small group of spiritual elites who were actually beginning to realize for the mass of the parish the dreams that he had had for years. Yet until they had come along, he had never been able to make those dreams even start to come true.

Not that his life had been a frustrated one, mind. He had loved every moment of it despite the disappointments that are the splinters of the Cross in every priest’s life. He had thrilled at giving divine life to newborn babies in baptism. He had been humbly joyous at reconciling sinners to God in the dark silence of the confessional. He had happily broken the Bread of Life to hungry souls at the altar rail. He had rejoiced at sending this or that parishioner off to heaven, cleansed and sealed with the last anointing. But there had been added to all this the extension of his priesthood through these lay apostles. His cup of priestly joy was commencing to fill full at last.

## MEMORIES

As Father Tom relaxed, his memory began to bring back scene after scene from the years that were gone and that had been caught and held forever in the nebulous concrete of the unchanging past.

He realized now that actually before he was born Leo XIII had called upon all Catholics to assist the hierarchy in bringing society back to Christian principles. And in his early years Pius X had tried to lead men back to full Christian living by getting the laity to drink at that font which primarily and indispensably gives them the true spirit of Christ: “the active participation of the *faithful* in the sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.”

He knew now, too, though he did not know it then, that the same Pope had given Catholic Action its motto of *Instaurare Omnia in Christo*, (“heading up all things again in Christ”), and had pointed out that actively working in Christ was not an exclusive prerogative of the clergy but “proper to the laity so that they may give the lie to the militant laity that wages war on Christ.”

## SEMINARY DAYS

Next there came back to his mind the remembrance of his seminary days. He thought of his first sight of those rather forbidding old grey buildings, of the mindfilling classes, of the hours of study and prayer, the walks and the talks, the

games, the men who had been with him.

Then there had been that never-forgotten retreat just before his own ordination. During those days of solitude and thought and prayer had come the words that had burned themselves into his soul and had sent him forth to spend himself for the layfolk among whom he worked.

### **PROPHETIC**

He could see that retreat master again tonight as clearly as if he were right there in the room with him. Thin almost to gauntness, possessed of a harsh, unpleasant voice, there had been in him, burning from his eyes and blazing through his words, an almost pentecostal ardour.

He had outlined, in one of his talks, what was to come over the world. Father Tom realized now that he had been prophetic. It was from him that he had first heard or noticed the words "laicism" and "secularism," the words that Pope Plus XII had used to characterize the worst heresy of our times.

"Let us ponder the words of St. Paul to *the Romans*," the retreat master had started off, "words as old as Christianity and as freshly modern as this morning's headlines. 'Meanwhile, make no mistake about the age which we live in; already it is high time for us to awake out of our sleep.' So spoke Paul yesterday. So speaks Paul to us today.

"In many ways the Church in our age and country is in good condition," the priest went on. "It is out of the catacombs of bigotry and discrimination. Our hierarchy is becoming daily stronger and more numerous. Yearly more priests fill our rectories, and more nuns our classrooms. Our layfolk have come out of the ghetto of the stables and the ditches and the kitchens. They are in the professions in growing numbers and in business and industry. Seen thus, things are looking up.

### **THE DARKER SIDE**

"Don't think of me as a Jeremias crying 'Woel!' if I tell you, though, that there is another side of the picture, a darker side. Don't label me a pessimist if I say that there are indications that things will get worse before they get better.

"For anyone with ears open and eyes alert it is easy to read the signs of our times.

"There is arising in our midst a spirit that like an odourless, colourless poison gas will seep more and more into the minds of our people. I am not a prophet, nor need I be to foresee that by the forties you will encounter it at its height."

### **DROPPING BARRIERS**

The priest paused. Then he continued: "Only a few years back our fathers and mothers, coming to this land, found a clear line of demarcation between them and others around them. They lived with their own Catholic kind. They were met with rudeness, rejection, ridicule. They were kept in their place socially. As a result they kept untainted the faith they had brought from overseas. Though they were sometimes attacked in their goods and even their bodies, their minds were not infected by the paganising ideas around them. So they lived and worked. So they laughed and loved and played and died.

"Gradually the barriers dropped. They came out more into the world. They began to climb higher on the social ladder. We, and it will be more true of the people you deal with in the years ahead, have begun to adopt the customs, the ways of conduct, and habits of thought of the non-Christians about us. We are becoming more and more de-Christianized.

"Our amusements, pleasures, pursuits, books, ambitions, our political and social ideas are losing their distinctly Christian cast and are becoming like those of the people with whom our Catholics are mingling more and more.

### **NON-DYNAMIC**

"Unless you young priests do something about it, by the time you are pastors you will find your parishioners still saying their prayers, still going through religious practices, but you will find them becoming more and more laicised, more secularised. You will find the faith a non-dynamic force within them. It will be but a dead thing. No longer will it vitalize their whole lives.

"And what do you mean by that? Simply this: There will be an increasing divorce between religion and life. You will

find that their faith will cease to be *the* influence in the lives of the laity which shapes their ideas. It will no longer determine their values in regard to *everything*: in regard to amusements, as well as going to Mass; in regard to the jobs they take, the clothes they wear, the places they go, as well as their prayers. God will still be given a place at Sunday Mass, but He'll be excluded from their business, social, recreational life for the rest of the week. He will not be consulted about anything which is outside of what they call their 'religious life.' He'll be excluded, even by these same Catholics, more and more from government, business, education, the family circle . . . yes, even from private conversation. He'll be left in His eternal heaven as though He had no right to a place in His temporal world.

"Our people's faith will become more and more a thing of musty tradition and dull routine rather than the fountain source which alone can give life a real meaning and vitality."

### **WAKING THE LAITY**

In the silence of his study and with the added light which shone out of his priestly experience, Father Tom realized how truly that priest had foretold the trend the world would take. He recalled also how the retreat master had continued with great earnestness: "There is only one way to meet this paganising, de-Christianizing secularism, and that is by waking the laity, not only to their danger, to their peril, but to the power that lies in them to bring Christ back into a world that would rid itself of Him anew.

"The laity must be made to realize by the priests, who are themselves convinced of it, that merely saying prayers instead of praying, merely going through pious practices, yes, even receiving the sacraments in a merely superficial way which does not change them radically, will never save their world, will never bring Christ back into it."

### **THEY ARE CHRIST!**

Again the words rang in Father Tom's ears as though he were there in that seminary chapel actually hearing them. He felt his heart surge in him again tonight as it had when they were enunciated years ago.

"For the sake of God, then for the sake of the souls whom you will meet to save and sanctify, teach your parishioners, the layfolk on the benches and in the confessional and at the altar rail before you— teach them in season and out of season to be what Christ has made them: His other self! Teach them how important they are by teaching them that they *are* Christ all over again. Make them realize their terrifically vital place in Christ's whole redemptive plan. They are His light in a world that is sinking into darkness. They must shine that Light and Love into that darkness. They are the salt without whom the world will lose its savour. They are the leaven by which the mass of humanity must be, not only humanised, but divinised as well.

"Teach them to 'put off foolishness,' to slough off their secularism, and to give themselves to Christ so completely that He can use them as He wants to—use them as His instruments, His tools, His ambassadors, His co-workers in penetrating the world of men with His ideas and His ideals, with His principles and standards and values, with His love and His life.

"They must be brought to realize that *they*, not we priests, are on the battlefronts of today's world. They show Christ to the world of our day in the store, the bank, the restaurant, the office, the factory, the shop, the theatre, on the dance floor, the beach, and the playing field. We do not.

"Spend yourselves to help them to make real to themselves the vast responsibility and the glorious privilege that is theirs because they *are* Catholic laymen and laywomen.

"Show them with unmistakable clarity that, though there is still place in the heart of Christ for the weak, the lowly, the sinful, this is the day of heroism. Help them to slough off their littleness and meanness and mediocrity. Aid them to put on the armour of Christ, to spend themselves in saving their own souls by working for the souls of others. Make them Christianizing, as well as Christian, souls!"

### **GLORIOUS TO BEHOLD**

The voice out of yesterday grew still. But Father Tom remembered how its words had lingered in his soul. He saw with

growing clarity that the time was come for the layfolk to take their rightful place in the redemptive action of their Lord and Master. The priest at the seminary had painted the picture so. So it had risen before Father Tom, time after time, again and again, even as it was there before him tonight. Always it had made him feel very excited and very humble—very excited at the thought of the importance of these everyday Christians, very humble that he should have been chosen to serve them.

### **AH, APATHY!**

He had found among his own parishioners many good folk. They got to Mass fairly regularly, did not eat meat on Friday, made their Easter duty. Some of them were frequent communicants. Yet they seemed to live on the surface of these things. And how cancer of paganism was eating into so many of the rest of them! They were so worldly in their ideas, ideals, and ambitions. They were secularist in their attitudes, being Catholics on Sunday and very much like everyone else for the rest of the week, even as the retreat master had foretold. Their lack of any knowledge of their share in Christ's priesthood, and consequently in His apostolate, appalled him. And their apathy, their unconcern about the whole thing! How he had longed during those earlier days for some of them who would take their baptism and confirmation seriously enough to become, not merely Christian, but Christianizing souls as well! How he longed to impart to them a knowledge of the wondrously adventurous lives they might have lived in their cheap boarding houses, their tawdry flats, their cheap hotels, their little neat houses!

How narrow were the horizons of these sons and daughters of God, these commissioned apostles of Christ, these most important people in the world! They should have been dissatisfied, filled with a divine discontent. And here they were quite satisfied with a good job, a passable salary, a good life insurance policy, a radio, a car, a few friends, good food, good drinks, an occasional evening out, a vacation at the beach or in the mountains. And all this they sought with but an occasional thought of the good God who gave all these gifts. Father Tom's heart was filled with pity for these poor smug, self-satisfied people. His heart was hot with a consuming desire to rouse them to the exciting life that could be theirs.

### **PAPAL ENCOURAGEMENT**

Father Tom kept himself from the cliffs of discouragement, to which the inertness of so many often pushed him, by taking heart from such words of Pope Pius XI as came back to his mind again that evening as he sat there thinking all these thoughts: "The crisis we are experiencing is unique in history. It is a new world that must burst out of a crucible in which so many different energies are boiling. Let us thank God that He makes us live among the present problems. It is no longer permitted anyone to be mediocre. Everyone has the important duty to remember that he has a mission to fulfil, that of doing the impossible, each within the limits of his activity, to bring the world back to Christ. Only by being radicals of the right will Catholics have the dynamism to withstand the radicals of the left and conquer the world for Christ." By words like these the priest was spurred on to battle a "what's-the-use" attitude in himself and mediocrity in his people. Come what would, he must make them heroic Christian radicals!

With the dream of the formation of such radicals bright in his heart, the priest had at last taken over the pastorate of this ordinary lower-middle-class parish where he was this night. Life had not been too easy there at first. Father Tom remembered how but a short time back he had read once more Pope Pius XII's *Sertum Laetitiae*, his encyclical letter to the Church in the United States. He wondered at the time if His Holiness had made an unknown visit to his own parish! For actually within its limits he had seen in years gone by all too often instances of the items cited by the Pontiff of how Christ's desires to permeate the modern world with Himself were being thwarted by the very laymen and laywomen whom He had commissioned to help Him!

### **EVILS TO BE EXORCIZED**

The words came back and stood before his mind's eye in the midst of his reverie: "immoderate and blind egoists." He had seen much too much of their "egoism" displayed by individuals, families, industry, and business, even within a

stone's cast almost of Christ's own house. "Had seen?" he asked himself. No, still saw too much of it day after day.

There was "the thirst for pleasure" that bedeviled his young people. So many of them jammed the movie houses and dance halls and party spots far into the night. So many found no "fun" in a morning at Mass, and so they *did* not attend it. If there was a social in the parish hall, these youths and maidens showed up in goodly numbers. They were conspicuously absent, however, from devotions and holy hours.

"Immodest and costly styles in dress"— while men and women and children went naked overseas, his better-to-do parishioners had their smart business suits and furs and plunging necklines. Among his poorer parishioners he had seen cheap and immodest imitations of these same styles.

### **IGNORANCE OF SIN**

The awful thing about the whole matter to Father Tom lay in the fact that all these people seemed to see nothing wrong in it all despite the Pope's talk of social justice and the love of others! They still thought in terms of the ordinary sins they had learned in catechism days. They did not realize that a pagan, selfish cast of mind could often be more dangerous to them than a single evil act. They were shocked at murder and adultery and the theft of Dives, but they smugly smiled with indifference at the sufferings of the modern Lazarus' at home and abroad. They knew the Commandments; they had no living conviction about the Beatitudes or the works of mercy.

The youth organizations had done a good job, but up to the coming of his young Catholic Actionists they had not been completely successful in preventing "crime even among minors," for there was Tommy Smith who had been sent away just last week for stealing. How often he had striven to cast out of all his parishioners the devils of their "neglect of the poor" and "base craving for ill-gotten wealth."

Marriage? How lightly some went into it! How ignorantly, despite his instructions! He recalled that there was one recent ray of hope here, however, which was continually brightening. Since he had started the Pre-Cana Conferences, there seemed to be more seriousness among those getting married. There was less to-do about the wedding gowns and receptions. There was more emphasis on the rich sacramentality of what they were doing. Despite that fact, there were still broken homes about him and divorce. "The cooling of mutual affection between parents and children" still existed right in that house brazenly facing the church there.

### **HIS JOB**

In his warfare Father Tom had carried on despite his weariness, his failures, his near defeats, and his occasional victories. He had kept at the strategy given him by the Popes' high commands and that retreat master's burning words. He had spent himself unto fatigue and exhaustion that Christ's desire to penetrate into the whole life of men by other men, by laymen especially, might be realized.

Father Tom again looked back over the years. He decided that he had not nagged or hounded or driven his people. Nor had he railed at them, nor ranted, nor raved. He had dedicated himself early in his priestly career to the task of instructing and inspiring and leading his flock to a realization of the richness of life that could be theirs.

### **YOUR JOB**

He had taught his people that they were wrong if they thought that it was only the hierarchy and not they themselves who had a great part to play in the whole scheme of the world's redemption. Over and over and over, in one way and another, he had held this idea before them: "You, you people here before Christ this morning, you plumbers and tradesmen, you mothers and students, you professional men and business women, you are the most important people in the Church of God today. It was to serve you that we priests were ordained. It is for you that all authority in the Church exists."

At the end of busy days he had sat up long hours into the night studying the papal encyclicals from Leo XIII's to those of Pius XII. From these he had taught the people with growing insistence the fact that it was through the laity that the will

of Christ to conquer the world and give Himself to all men and women was to be realized. Without them as His *lay* apostles, His cause would be all but lost.

These ideas had been taken out of cold print and heavy phrase and had been made to come alive in the heads and hearts of an increasing number of his people.

### **MODERN PROBLEMS**

Father Tom got up from his chair and paced slowly up and down the room.

Again his memory carried him out of his study into the pulpit, onto the platform, to parish meetings and parlour visits, to all his contacts with his people. In public talks and private conversations, in season and out, he had striven to implant in the minds of the men and women and youths and children under his care this knowledge of Christ's tremendous ambition for them.

At all times and in all places, too, he had held Christ's awful crying need for them before their eyes and their hearts. God in His providence would save men, not by angels, not by miracles, but by men; not by; priests and bishops alone, but by laymen like themselves. He had kept ever before them also the fact that the main issues faced by the Church today were the practical everyday issues of Christian lay life as it is lived in a very de-Christianised, very paganised world: international peace, the harmony of Church and state; the right relationship of the state and the individual; social justice; housing; labour laws; harmonizing capital and labour; prices and wages; taxes; marriage; family life; education; interracial justice. All of these, as he had tried to make them realize, were essentially problems which lay people could recognize, meet, handle, and solve ever so much better than any cleric.

### **IN THE MIDST**

They, the laity, were more in and of today's world than priest or bishop. Their experience of the doings and ways of life and action in the world was wider than that of any clergyman. They, the laity, could mix better with people in the world. Few enough of these worldlings came to the priest in his church or his rectory. And if he were to go to them in their banks and business houses and courtrooms and places of amusement they would reject him. They would order him to go back to his altar and pulpit and to leave the things of Caesar, the things of this world's affairs, entirely alone, as if God their creator had no stake in them whatever! But they, the laity—they were right in the midst of the whole moiling messy business! They were accepted at the forge or the counter, in the nightclub or at a political rally. They ran the industries and offices and stores, or they worked in them. They too were the masters and mistresses of man's hours-off at home and abroad.

If they would live up to their apostolate, they could turn all these toward God. If they failed, He would be cast out of them.

### **MONSTRANCES OF CHRIST**

Even when people did see a priest or a nun, it was often of little avail for the kingdom of Christ. As Father Tom used to say again and again, "Sure, they shy away from a Roman collar or wimple, you know, as they would from a hyena! So often our own Catholics become like clams in their reticence with us. But these ordinary layfolk, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, are not that way with you. They live next door to you. They see you and ride on the bus and train with you. They talk to you and know you. Actually you are the Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Catholic, who live in the midst of this or that neighbourhood, whose lives are looked at and examined and elbowed by others living about you. You attract or repel these others. You are the ones by whom the Church is seen and known and judged.

"At Benediction, Christ is taken from His tabernacled obscurity and placed in the monstrance and lifted aloft so that all there in the church may see Him, so that they may have Him shine His purity, His love, His peace into their hearts.

"You should make of your lives a perpetual Benediction at home, at school, on the streets, in the offices and places of work. And you can do it if you will, simply because you have been baptized and confirmed. As a result you are made

living, human monstrosities who show Christ to the little present-day world in which you live and work!

“Yes, you are the ones by whom He is known and loved or hated. You students and stenographers and office managers, you file clerks and managing editors and housewives and policemen and politicians—you are the ones who others look at and watch to see what sort of person this Jesus Christ is anyway, for you *are* Christ in today’s world!”

### **IN THE BALANCE**

In season and out of season he had striven to impress on them that Western civilization, the survival of Christianity in the Western world, was hanging in the balance. “How the interests of God and His Son fare tomorrow,” he kept saying to them, “will depend almost entirely on how Christly you, the laity, live today.”

Over and over he continued to paint for them the picture of a world dividing more and more into two great camps, two vast armies girding themselves, for a war to the life or death of that world. The one is a great, secularist, pagan lay force, its best shock troops being found in the ranks of the Communists. To meet this horde, there had to be that other army, that superiorly strong Christian lay force, which, not only would not go down in defeat before these enemies of Christ, but would win them to the standard of His life-giving cross.

“Whatever may have been the place of the clergy in the past,” he had repeatedly said, “it is now the laity who must be in the midst of the hand-to-hand combat of the forefront of the battle. We priests can train you. We can give you the ammunition of knowledge and love. It is for you to fire it--not unto murderous death, but unto the salvation of the world.”

### **PICKED BANDS**

Father Tom halted in his pacing. He recalled that under the influence of the same preordination retreat he had promised God and himself that he would never spare himself in serving the all-important laity. He looked back at the struggles he had had in keeping that promise. He had sweat and wept and almost bled to give to his people only the best he was capable of. His instructions, his sermons, his talks had not had the mush and milk of easily dreamed-up pious pap, but the sound, solid, practicable teaching that would form them as fully as possible to the mind of Christ. There had been the long exhausting hours in the confessional, the patient listening in the parlour, the sleep-shattering sick calls taking him out into the cold and darkness of the night to bring some poor soul home to the light and warmth of heaven.

As the years had passed, a conviction had grown on Father Tom. He began to suspect more and more that, while he must always serve his whole flock, the rank and file, it was actually with a few select souls that he would effect most for them. Fairly early in his pastorate he became suspicious of numbers, of statistics, of mass organizations. He remembered the remark of one priest to another which he had read somewhere. The first man had said, “There has been enormous spiritual progress in my parish in the last few years. The number of confessions has increased by forty per cent, and the number of Communion by thirty per cent.” The older and wiser man had replied drily, “You talk of spirit and spiritual progress, and you express yourself in calculations and percentages just like a banker.”

### **OUR LORD’S STRATEGY**

He remembered too the way Our Lord had acted. With divine strategy He had preached to the multitudes. Then out of them He had chosen seventy-two disciples. Finally He had fixed upon twelve men to be the little band to whom He would give special instructions and formation and powers. On them He would build His Church. Through them He would begin to apply His redemption to the world. Father Tom grew more and more convinced that the disciple could not go at things in any way better than that which his Master had adopted.

The more he thought and worked, the more he prayed that he too might find his twelve, his group of elite, who would leaven the whole mass in his parish.

His search for these picked bands had been interrupted by the war years. That war had been a terrible, terrible thing. But as always God had drawn good out of it. The priest had noticed a difference in some of the young men and young women when they had returned from the services. Oh, not all of them, mind, but a few. Fr. Tom had carefully watched

these few. They seemed more adult, more grown-up, more serious. They were at the sacraments more frequently. Oh no, they had not become pious; they were still the same “regular guys and gals” of the parish as of old, but they had become deeper and more stable in some intangible way. The priest felt that it was now or never if his dreams were ever to become more than merely dreams.

### **OPPORTUNITY**

He had begun his work by sounding out quite unobtrusively certain of the more likely prospects. He had marked out ten or twelve whom he felt to be discreet, prudent, unselfish, capable of generous, zealous service to others. He had drawn them into conversation at different times and places. He had asked them this, that, and the other about the parish and the places where they worked and recreated. He had listened to their gripes. Then had come the opening wedge. “O.K., so you don’t think that things in the parish are going just as they ought. What can we do about it? And by ‘we’ I mean you and I. Would you be willing to help out in any way? Are there any other fellows or girls whom you know who might lend us a hand?”

So it had gone on until he had about a dozen or so who were really interested and ready for action. He had gathered them at the parish hall for a few get-togethers during which he had laid before them the various needs of the parish which they had brought up. He had shown them that the means for meeting those needs lay in their own hands. He had laid before them various forms of Catholic Action.

He grinned to himself there in his dim study tonight as he remembered their eager reactions. “Sure, you’d never know I’d mentioned the same ideas to them a thousand times before!”

### **ORGANIZATION**

Though many labours lay ahead, much had been accomplished. Both groups had not been long in discovering that their apostolic efforts would be weak indeed unless they drew power for them from active participation in the Mass. They had not only learned to participate actively in the Holy Sacrifice themselves by praying it, offering it, eating of its fruits, living it, but they were gradually getting other parishioners to use the missal. More and more of his people were beginning to realize that people who worship and pray and chant together feel more at one with each other at other times and places too.

### **EARLY RESULTS**

Both observation outside of it and the hours within the confessional told Father Tom of the slow but steady beginnings of a fuller growth in his people of the Christ-life which was commencing to radiate from these smaller groups. They had worked hard to forward the Cana Conference movement. Family life was slowly being enriched by their successful house-to-house canvass to establish the Family Rosary and the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the midst of homes. An industrial plant in which a number of his parishioners worked had been forced by their zealous efforts to improve working conditions, hours, and wages. A maternity fund for expectant mothers among the poor of the parish was on the agenda. The teenage recreation centre would soon have a good staff of willing workers to teach the youngsters Christ as well as run dances and picnics.

### **TWO REASONS**

Father Tom realized that these young people had been effective for two main reasons.

First of all, they had gone to work in their weekly meetings and had read, discussed, and applied to conditions in their own lives and their own parish the teachings of Christ as they found them immortalized in the pages of the New Testament. They had realized that, though He had done these deeds and spoken these words in definite concrete circumstances of long ago, He had never intended that they be restricted to those times and climes. The externals of His life had been caught in the cold fingers of the past. The essence of that life was for all men. His words were spoken and His works done

for people of today as well as for those crowded round Him in Jerusalem. When He spoke to the rustics of Galilee yesterday, He had in mind the rural-lifers of today.

With that realization in mind, and aided by the apostolic commission given them by confirmation, these young men and young women had looked about their parish and had seen how it compared with the teachings and example of Our Lord. They had delved into the “why’s” of the gap between things as they were and things as they should have been. Then they had gone to work. They had taught catechism. They had taken a census of the parish and had flushed some fallen-aways and had brought them back to church. They had righted a number of marriages. They had painted the parish school. They had formed discussion groups. They had started a fund which in time would be used for scholarships for boys from the parish who wanted to go on to the priesthood but were prevented by financial difficulties. They had sponsored forums on all sorts of pertinent current topics. They had gone through the parish, begging from house to house for food and clothing for Christ in His wretched overseas. On they had swept, bringing Christ to others because they had Him so fully in their own hearts.

### **LIKE WITH LIKE**

The priest realized that there was also another reason for their success. It was one thing for his parishioners to hear the teachings of Christ from the pulpit from a priest; it was quite another to see these same teachings brought right into their homes by ordinary layfolk like themselves. It was one thing to listen to a man in a black cassock; it was quite another to come into contact with Christ in one garbed as they were.

These people were more affected when Our Lord appeared again in their midst in someone looking like themselves, having the same cares and fears and temptations as they had. It made a terrific impression on them to feel His presence in one who shared their thoughts, their weariness, their weaknesses.

The people of Nazareth had been scandalized when Mary’s Son, their own youthful carpenter, had proclaimed himself the Messiah. The people of Father Tom’s parish had felt new stirrings in their hearts when these young people had manifested Him in themselves. It was only because they had seen these laymen and laywomen actually don Christ, prove their belief in the indwelling Holy Spirit, and become aflame with the adventure of the apostolate, that they were beginning to understand what their pastor had meant when he talked about their importance despite their poverty, their dullness, their innate selfishness, and the drag of their sensuality.

### **FELLOW APOSTLES**

Father Tom stretched luxuriously. Yes, God had been very good indeed to him by giving him these fellow lay apostles of his! However, he had to be in shape to keep up with them so he had better get some sleep. He picked up his breviary. He would finish Compline and then off to bed.

Just before making the Sign of the Cross, he offered a quick fervent prayer asking God to sustain him in the days ahead so that he might continue to labour with these young folk who had proved to him and the parish what a body of live lay apostles can do for the kingdom of Christ.

He chuckled when he recalled how some of his fellow priests, still suspicious of the laity, had warned him to look out that these young people did not take over his parish. “I’m not so sure they couldn’t do a better job than we!” he had answered them all good-humouredly. Actually, in a comparatively short time they had helped him penetrate further into the minds and hearts and lives of the other layfolk about them than he had done alone in years. “God bless them all!” the priest breathed. Then he began the opening words of Compline: *Jube, domne, benedicere. Noctem quietam et finem perfectum concedat nobis Dominus omnipotens. Amen.* (“Pray, Sir, a blessing. The Lord almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Amen.”)

He paused, a bit startled. “Why they even make my own office mean more to me!” he exclaimed in glad surprise.

## HOW ABOUT YOU?

And now, gentle reader (as they used to say in the Victorian novels), you can leave Father Tom to his prayers.

If your reaction to the printed pamphlet is the same as that of some to whom it was submitted in manuscript form, you are experiencing a twofold feeling right now. First of all, you're saying to yourself, "Well, I *am* pretty important!" Again, you are asking yourself, "What can I *do* about all this?"

To give you a full answer to that last question would take another pamphlet. There are a few things, though, that we can suggest as a starter.

First of all check into your prayer life. How much, how well are you praying? There never was a real apostle yet who was not a man of prayer. What about Mass and Holy Communion? Are you a "once-a-weeker"? Better step things up. If you are going to give Christ to the world, you must have Him vitally and fully in yourself. There is no place better than the altar and communion rail to fill yourself with Him.

## FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

Secondly what about your own "good works" as an individual?

Are you:

feeding the hungry . . . overseas? giving drink to the thirsty . . . buying someone a coke?

clothing the naked . . . abroad and at home with those cast-off s of yours?

ransoming the captive . . . getting that pal to confession after all these months?

harbouring the harbourless . . . helping someone to find lodgings in these houseless days?

visiting the sick . . . that friend in the hospital?

burying the dead . . . having a Mass said for someone deceased?

Are you:

admonishing the sinner . . . by the sinlessness of your own life?

instructing the ignorant . . . by being able to answer non-Catholics' questions?

counselling the doubtful . . . by cutting out the devil of worry or anxiety?

comforting the sorrowful . . . the chap that just flunked out of school, the girl who was just jilted?

bearing wrongs patiently . . . even on the bus or tramcar?

forgiving all injuries . . . even rank injustices?

praying for the living and the dead...especially those who have none else to pray for them?

## GROUP ACTION

The third thing to do is to go to your pastor or to one of the curates and find out from him what organizations in the parish there are that might use your help.

**If** there aren't any such, see if he would be interested in having you get a group together to start one.

We know of one such group which grew as follows. A sextet of couples got together to study the New Testament. They went about it rather theoretically at first. Gradually, as the yeast of God's word worked in their souls, they began to see how Christ meant for now, as well as then, what He said and did. They began to realize, too, that to come to fullness in Christ mere study is not enough. It must be accompanied by prayer. So they set themselves to make a quarter hour of mental prayer daily. They signed up with the Apostleship of Prayer. They began to make Fatima Saturdays of Reparation. Their eyes opened up to some of the un-Christianness about them. They have started to work on these evils. So they are growing.

There is no reason why any reader of this cannot go and do likewise. If you haven't done it up to this, then it is time that you began to throw your importance around . . . for the kingdom of Christ among men!

Nihil obstat:  
W. M. COLLINS,  
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