

“You Are Christ In The World”

By Fr. A. Connors, S.M.

It would be a shame for a Catholic to live out his life without realizing the glory that is his. The Catholic Church is Christ in the world; it is God made man continuing His work on earth. Catholics are Christ in the world.

Our Lord had a hard campaign to wage in His three years' ministry. He had to reach souls. He had to go into the market places and compel the merchants to listen to Him; had to tell them, “Your buying and selling are not the most important things. There are other things much more important. There is a God. You have a soul; what about that? He drove Himself into the hills, into the far places of Tyre and Sidon, and He preached to every wandering individual He could find: “There is a heaven, there is a hell; and for you it is one or the other for all eternity.”

He went to the fishermen of the lake and He told them: “Not for you the pursuits of this world; you will spend yourselves in the catching of souls.”

Into the Council of the Jewish Elders He was taken, and all He had to say was, “I tell you this; you will see the Son of Man again, when He is seated at the right hand of God's power and comes on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt. 26: 64.)

Always it was the same. He must drive Himself, reach everyone, tell them all that their life is a short one, heal their bodies to reach their souls. He did heal often, but He also said often: “Do not sin any more, for fear that worse should befall thee.” (John 5:14.)

He must defy the forces of Satan; so much so that the very devils cried out, “We know who you are! You are Christ, the Son of God.”

He walked the streets and lanes and roads and mountain sides, He went into every city and village: “So Jesus went about all their cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every kind of disease and infirmity. Yet still, when He looked at the multitudes, He was moved with pity for them, seeing them harried and abject, like sheep that have no shepherd.” (Matt. 9 : 35.)

And He has never stopped. Christ was too big for Galilee and Judea. He walked right out of Palestine. The feet of Christ have left tracks over the whole world ever since. There is not a street in the world He had not tramped, there is not a country He had not preached to. Christ is still walking our streets, day and night He roams this country. His footsteps are urgent; they echo to the sound of ‘God,’ ‘souls,’ ‘heaven,’ ‘hell.’ Is there a soul in distress? Christ is there to point the way. Is there a sinner? The Good Shepherd dogs his footsteps, waiting to rejoice over his repentance. Is someone heart-broken? Christ is there to encourage her.

We do not see Him! But He is there! Christ is here! And how? Because the Catholic Church is Christ Himself. He had only one pair of feet; He could not travel quickly enough in His physical person; He could not see enough souls, cure enough distress, forgive enough sins. There were millions to be taught, and He had only one voice; thousands sick, and He had only one pair of hands to minister to them; many to be encouraged, and He had only one presence. So He said: “I will change my physical body for another one. I will no longer work as an individual, but as a society. I will do my work in future as the Catholic Church. That will be my Body and my Person. As the Catholic Church I can be everywhere, I can teach all men, remind them all of eternity, sanctify them all.”

The Catholic Church is Christ, stalking the world, hungry for souls. When the Catholic Church speaks it is Christ who speaks. When sin is forgiven in the confessional, Christ is acting there. When truth is taught, or poverty relieved, or the sick cared for by any Catholic individual or society, it is really Christ who does these things.

When people are helped by any Catholic charity, they are helped by the ready generosity of Christ, who *is* there as truly as He was in the streets of Jerusalem dispensing His bounty in a slightly different way. Because the Catholic Church is Jesus Christ. The members of the Church are the members of Christ's body. Hands, feet, eyes, lips, heart, made up the body of the physical Christ—men, women, old, young, make up the society which is His new body. The teaching of the Church is Christ's, the grace it dispenses is His, its endeavours, longings, ideals are those of Christ.

There was a time when we had to defend the Church – show that of all the numerous religious bodies it was the one which was God’s and taught His truths. I do not take your time with that here. It is quite evident to every Catholic, and to many others as well, that ours is the true Church. I take occasion here to remind you of the glory that is yours. Do you realize that our Catholic Church is Christ Himself, sprawled over the whole world, grasping for souls, that you are part of that body of His? In the countries where the Church is free Christ is there working through it, using every means to spread the truth. Where the Church is persecuted Christ is suffering. When some poor, ragged Russian or Pole is chased down a narrow street and cornered in his poor hovel and brought terror-stricken before the authorities to give an account of his Catholic belief, it is Christ who is chased and caught and put on trial. He suffers in one of His members.

The Church is the body of Christ. A body is an organized unit. It has various parts, each with its own work, each helping towards the good of the whole. The hands and feet and heart and head do their own work; but they do it for the good of the whole body. The Catholic Church, too, is a body; it has various members, boys and girls, mothers and fathers, priests, nuns and bishops. Christ is the head, these are the members— of *one* body. They all have their own work to do in the Church. Every good action each does helps the whole organization. The Church, spread over the world, is a giant body, each member a cell in the body—and that body is the body of Christ.

But that body, sprawled as it is over so many countries, over so many races and colours of men, holding them all in its arms, is not a dead body. It throbs with life, its arms are forever grasping, its feet are always on the move, its mind is alive and alert to all events. Because that body, that organized unit of many parts, is the Body of Christ, and it is restless with the life and energy of Christ— not the life of flesh and blood, but the life of grace, the share we all have in the life of God Himself.

At the very beginning of the Church, St. Paul, who did so much in the way of preaching and travelling to spread the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, saw and wrote what the Church is. (1 Cor. 12.) “A man’s body is all one, though it has a number of different organs; and all this multitude of organs goes to make up one body; so it is with Christ. We, too, all of us, have been baptised into a single body (12 - 13) . . . we have a multitude of organs, and one body (20) . . . you are Christ’s body (27) (1 Cor. 12/12 -27) “We, though many in number, form one body in Christ.” (Rom. 12:5.)

Know the Church for what it is then. It is Christ Himself—His body, of which we are the parts, His life in which we share—Christ Himself, still searching the streets and roads of the world, driven by that frenzy for souls which has always been His. The Church is Christ the Good Shepherd, searching the byways of this country for the lost sheep—searching in the persons of all those who long for the salvation of souls. The Church is Christ praying in the world, as He prayed on the hillsides of Galilee and in the garden of suffering—Christ praying in all those members of His body who raise their hearts and minds to God.

At the very instant of His death on Calvary, when He could work no more in His physical body, Christ took His new body. The Church came into existence at that moment, Christ began to do the same work in His new body as He had done in the old. For a few weeks He rested, as if His passion and death, His change to this new body had exhausted Him. But the Holy Ghost came to energize His new Person. He began to work with renewed zeal. In this new body, as in the old, He always kept moving, always was on the move to preach the gospel. In a few months He covered the whole of Palestine. In His new body He stepped across the borders of the chosen land and out into the ebb and flow of life in the wide Gentile world. The history of the Catholic Church is nothing but the story of Christ, Our Saviour, setting His face to the ends of the earth and preaching the gospel as He went. And what a story the march of Christ through the ages has been— the story of how He has taught and governed and healed and sanctified and suffered and prayed and triumphed and failed sometimes, in that body of His through the centuries!

The pattern was the same as during His human lifetime. His infancy had been obscure, He had been persecuted early in life, He did His work of prayer and redemption in secret in His hidden life. It was the same in His new person, the Church. A few men set to work on the whole world— they seemed insignificant in the face of that task. They were despised and persecuted as Christ had been, but they were resolute as He had been; they made themselves heard as He had done. They never disguised the truth, they spoke openly and boldly: to the poor and humble, to the great ones of the world. As with

Christ Himself, those who were sincere listened, those who were not stood up and defied the word of God, and tried to stifle it. Those who did listen were listening to Christ Himself: those early Christians *were* Christ. The Church *is* Christ, doing in the world in His new body what He had already done in Palestine in the old. “He who listens to you, listens to Me,” He had said. (Luke 10: 16.)

Followers came to the new Christ as they had done to the old: “And the grain that fell in good soil stands for those who hear the word, and hold it with a noble and generous heart, and endure, and yield a harvest.” (Luke 8: 15.) The new Christ grew in strength.

As He had done before, Christ joined battle with the forces of Satan. The Church raised its voice all over the world and cried out: “There is a God! Men must adore God. All men have souls, they must save them at all costs.” The forces of hell hissed back, “Away with this man. Crucify Him.”

Crucify Him they did. They ran at Him in hatred and hacked His body about with daggers. The new Christ was pawed at and mauled by wild beasts, His members, His Christians, were boiled in oil. The virgins of Christ were ravished to death, the men of God were made slaves. And Christ suffered all that in those early martyrs. The Church then was Jesus Christ setting out to teach the truth and to sanctify, it was Christ suffering for the truth. The Church is Christ Himself in the world.

He is still in the world doing His work in the same way. He still teaches in the same style. God made man was never anything but direct. He said in fact, “There is only one God and one truth and therefore one religion which I preach.” In His Church He speaks just as directly : “There is only one true faith, the Catholic faith, which I preach.” Christ was, and still is, intolerant of error. When His enemies spoke lies, He said, “You brood of vipers.” (Matt. 8 : 7) When error is preached the Church says : “That is wrong. Those who preach it are wrong. When Christ taught a truth He was sure of it, and He spoke dogmatically. “They were amazed by His teaching, such was the authority with which He spoke.” (Luke 4 : 82.) The Church would not be Christ if it did not speak dogmatically, too. The Church is sure of the truth with the certainty of God. There is only one voice of God in this country— it is the Catholic Church. Catholics can have no truck with false religions and beliefs. The early Christians gladly died rather than give in one inch to error. What are we to think of those Catholics who try to patch up the differences between the Church and Protestantism so that they can live, as they say, in peace? “Do not imagine that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have come to bring a sword, not peace.” (Matt. 10:34) What are we to think of those Catholics who go and take part in heretical services for the sake of a little public opinion, and only then come back to Christ in His Church and ask was it all right? It was not all right! It was a betrayal of Christ!

In no way, perhaps, is it made more evident that the Church is the body of Christ than in her treatment of sinners. In the new Christ sinners still find the same tenderness and forgiveness which Christ dispensed during His sojourn in Palestine. The Church has never abandoned the derelict, the repentant have often washed the feet of the new Christ with their tears and known that they were welcome. During His public ministry Christ often defended those who had been cast out by the world, He became known as the “friend of publicans and sinners.” Those who had been crushed by the weight of their sins and had the burden lifted clung to Him. A word in His defence from the good thief won for him the pardon of a lifetime of crime. “I am not come to save the just, but sinners,” He said. And again, “I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And yet again, “The Son of Man is come to seek out and to save that which was lost.” Who can say what joy has filled the heart of sinners in the arms of the new body of Christ? A phone ringing in the dead of night, a priest rising in the small hours of the early morning to make his way through the darkness to the bedside of a dying sinner.....a word of sympathy uttered in a dark confessional, a soul feeling a lifetime of sin washed away in the words of absolution.....the mother of a tragically dead child coming with tears in her eyes to the tabernacle.

It is not easy to be a good Catholic, to stand up in the face of a hostile world and say, “Yes, I’m a Catholic,” and then take the consequences. It may mean losing a promotion, it may mean an opportunity of marriage lost, it may mean half-starving on Friday— but it means loyalty to Christ. If you are a good Catholic there will be consequences— “They have persecuted Me, they will persecute you.” Christ still suffers in His new person, the Church. Of old He suffered at the

hands of Satan. Of Communism Pius XI has said, “This satanic scourge... spawned in hell, a struggle cold-blooded in purpose and mapped out to the last detail against all that is called God.” He suffers in His whole body and in all the members. The heart of Jesus is everywhere bruised still, His back is scourged, He is still spat upon. He suffers every time a Catholic is called upon to endure for His sake. He suffers even more when a Catholic betrays Him. It was to one of His chosen ones that Christ spoke, “One of you is about to betray Me.” Judas paved the way for those who were to crucify Christ. Each time I fail Christ in my conduct, in my speech, at work, in company, I am paving the way for Christ and His Church to be persecuted. Suffer with Him you certainly will—you will be ridiculed, discriminated against—but don’t make Him suffer at your hands.

So Christ walks this land. Wherever the Church is, Christ is. The Church here is a part of His body—doing a part of His work. What will you, the members of the body of Christ do? What will you, the voice of Christ, say? What will you, the heart of Christ, long for? You will think about, and speak to and long for *souls* and their salvation. You will make your own the purpose for which Jesus Christ became man, for which He lived and suffered and died, for which He took His other body, the Church, in which to roam the world. Woe to you if you don’t.

The Catholic Church has a purpose. Christ says it would be better for millions to die of starvation, for a plague to decimate the earth, for a chemical bomb to wipe the world clean of human beings rather than that one should be lost; no, rather, than that one soul should commit a venial sin. The Church has a purpose and every individual Catholic has a destiny, too. “Woe to those,” says Cardinal Manning, “who die without fulfilling their destiny.”

Here, I want to point out a part of your destiny. From the fact that you are a Catholic you have immediately a serious obligation, a vocation; it is to spread the gospel: “I have other sheep, too, which do not belong to this fold; I must bring them in, too; they will listen to My voice; so there will be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10: 16.) I’ll be point blank—there are millions of non-Catholics, mostly pagans in this country. (In a recent film when the word “crucifixion” was repeated many times, some did not know what is meant.) It is your duty to bring them to the Catholic faith. If you have never been responsible for the conversion of at least some *one* person to the faith, you have hardly fulfilled your destiny. The thousands who walk the streets with you will remain pagan unless *you* do something. The work is beyond the possibility of the number of priests—they would preach to and have preached to these people, but their first duty is to you. It is your work. The Pope himself has said on this matter, “We send forth to the whole Catholic world the call to mobilise.”

Christ is not asking for the sacrifice of material things now. He is asking you to get into this fight for souls; the souls of the ones you know well, who will otherwise one day die and stand before God amazed and ask: “Why didn’t you Catholics tell us? If only we had known that you still live on the earth and teach and save souls in your new person, the Catholic Church. We didn’t know.” Are we to be damned for their apathy?

Send them to hell instead. There may be a soul waiting for you in hell now to cry out for your damnation. There may be a soul, one of your best friends, perhaps, in the streets now, who will one day judge you. But don’t do it only for fear, do it for love.....because Christ loves you, has given *you* the faith, because He loves *them*. The Good Shepherd follows their waywardness, He suffered for them, He longs for them.

The need for action is urgent. You have contacts that a priest can never have. You are not being asked to give the instruction, just make the contact, dispose the person. You must know someone. Who is it? Even if you fail you have worked for the salvation of a *soul*, and I have never known anyone to do that and regret it. And I tell you, there are so many non-Catholics just waiting to be asked or to be told.

“Woe to those who die without fulfilling their destiny”; but also, “He who shall cause one sinner to be converted from the error of his ways, his own soul shall be safe and he shall cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5, 20.)

Live your whole life then, knowing that you are a part of Christ. That is what it means to be a Catholic—to live by the life of Christ, to be a part of Christ’s body, to be His hands reaching for souls, His feet carrying the news of the gospel, to be His voice, His throbbing heart, to suffer with Him and to do His work, to *be Christ* in the world. That is what it means, because the Catholic Church is Jesus Christ. In many places today He is hounded, His back is lacerated, His feet are

bleeding. I leave Christ in your hands here. You are His body; what you do in this place Christ is doing. If you fail here Christ fails here.

Mary, the Mother of Christ, had a very important role in His life on earth. She mothered the Redeemer, gave Him His human life. She watched over the growth of Christ, saw His first feeble efforts to walk, saw Him grow to manhood. She stood by while He sacrificed Himself, and shared in His work by her co-operation. And Mary is the Mother of the new Christ, too, the Mother of the Catholic Church and of Catholics. She remained in the world to foster the first efforts of the new Christ, saw His new body begin to course with strength, heard His new voice begin to speak, saw His feet travel the known world. In heaven she continues her role. She watches over the whole body of Christ. If a part of Christ suffers she is there to comfort, if a heart aches she can soothe, if the footsteps of the new Christ falter in their march across the nations she can encourage. Mary will be waiting to receive each member of Christ's body into heaven. To all members of the body of Christ she has the same to say as she did to the followers of His physical person. About Christ speaking now as the Catholic Church, she says, as she did at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2 6.)

Nihil Obstat:

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