

"THANKSGIVING DAY CONTRASTS"

INTRODUCTION Some of you may recall that it was on Thanksgiving Sunday a year ago that your minister showed up with a bad case of laryngitis and was unable to preach the sermon prepared for the occasion. Instead of the twenty minute sermon you were richly blessed with three minutes of quietness for meditation and reflection on the words of the closing hymn. That sermon was filed away with the thought that it might help me out this year, but in reading it over earlier this week it appeared to be unsuitable. And so it went back into the file. once again.

You may wonder why it was not appropriate. The reason is fairly plain, for while the foreground of Thanksgiving is essentially the same from year to year, the background, however, does change. The foreground - composed of football, family get-together and ritual observances - is more or less the same each year. But the background of national and world events is not the same; this changes from year to year. And this year, at least to my own way of thinking, the background of our Thanksgiving is composed of two contrasting factors: food and famine, ~~waste and want, hope and hunger~~, plenty and poverty.

DEVELOPMENT The President's Thanksgiving Day Proclamation helps to set the framework and provides me with a springboard for what I wish to say. Let me begin by reading several sentences of the Proclamation to you.

"To the people of the United States:

America and the world have changed enormously since the first Thanksgiving 353 years ago. From a tiny coastal enclave on an untamed continent, we have grown into the mightiest, freest nation in human history. A civilization whose farthest reach was once the earth's uncharted seas has now plumbed the secrets of outer space.

But the fundamental meaning of Thanksgiving still remains the same. It is a time when the differences of a diverse people are forgotten, and all Americans join in giving thanks to God for the blessings we share - the blessings of freedom, of opportunity and abundance that make America so unique.

This year, in the midst of plenty, we still face serious problems and massive challenges. In giving thanks for the many things we hold dear, let us also pray for the courage, the resourcefulness and the sense of purpose we will need to continue America's saga of progress and to be worthy heirs of the Pilgrim spirit. May we, too, find the strength and the vision to leave behind us a better world and an example that will inspire future generations to new achievements".

I like the tone of the President's Proclamation and I believe that our leaders mean what they say in this regard. Yet, in spite of the lofty tone of this eloquent and moving statement, I find myself coming to this Thanksgiving Day with doubts and wondering, with troubles and problems that seem almost too difficult to comprehend. "Serious problems and massive challenges" do face us. "Courage and resourcefulness" are needed...if we are to be worthy heirs of the Pilgrim spirit."

It troubles me deeply, as it does many of you, that the World Food Conference in Rome ended last week without completing plans on how to save 460 million people from threatened starvation in the coming year. Think of it! "More Talk, Less Done Than Was Needed" was the caption over the picture of the starving child in last Sunday's New York Times. It troubles me that during the Marshall years of 1947 to 1950, 10% of our federal budget was given to relief aid, compared to only 1% of it now, a scant fraction of the Defense Department budget. It troubles me that our country under great pressure to give another million tons of wheat said no because of a possible negative impact on our economy here at home and food supplies specifically. Food and famine.

Let me share with you some lines from a recent editorial in the Post:

"On a stretch of Minnesota farmland, the trucks draw up near the edge of the ditch. The animals - scores of calves, sheep and hogs - are led off by the grim men in the wind-breakers and the slaughtering begins. Carcass after bleeding carcass is pitched over the edge of the pit; they tumble to the bottom and lie still.

Half a world away, the starving mothers, their emaciated babies and the enfeebled aging are unloaded from trucks and trains at the feeding camps near the capital of Bangladesh. For some, there are bowls of lentil gruel and a few wheat cakes. Others, weakened by their journey from the famine-stricken countryside, wait to die.

Sickening waste and appalling want are among the oldest indulgences and most ancient curses of mankind. The squandering of precious food for the sake of a political demonstration occurs amid the death of the hopeless hungry - to whom the destruction of 300 head of livestock would seem inexplicable madness.

The pits have now been filled in; elsewhere, graves for human beings will be dug. What hope is there that the UN Conference on Food, now comfortably convened in Rome, will confront these horrors?"

Waste and want. ~~Famine and food. Hunger and hope.~~ The contrasts are appalling and the burden is heavy on our conscience. We must do something.

The United States is the world's major exporter of wheat, soybeans and rice. I understand that 75% of the world's grain that is exported is exported by this nation. And this year, despite the recent restrictions on sales abroad, we will export half of this nation's crop - enough to provide about one quarter of the world's 3.9 billion people with a least one meal a day. Yet, even at this rate, half a billion people are suffering from some form of hunger. 10,000 of them die of starvation each week in Africa, Asia and Latin America. And while hunger in the United States is a much smaller problem, it is no less painful for those who endure it.

The sharp rise of food costs due to inflation and depression are forcing many Americans to be hungry at least part of their lives. Right here in NYC, there are children who suffer permanent mental and physical damage as a result of malnutrition. There are older people who are supplementing their diets with dog

food because it's all they can afford. To a person who is hungry, it makes little difference whether he resides in "Fun City" or Bangladesh.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

There are some experiences so devastating that you force yourself not ever to think of them, because you find them difficult to handle when you do. This has happened to me two or three times in my own lifetime. I simply can't face the implication of what my own eyes have seen, but neither can the experiences ever be far from my awareness. Such experiences provide us with a permanent shock.

One experience took place twenty years ago last Spring on a trip to Palestine and North Africa. A three or four year old child sat in front of a dilapidated house, looking at me with distended eyes in a face gaunt and fleshless, her little stomach severely swollen. She was dying of starvation. As her searching eyes stared into mine, my way of life came under judgement. I shall never forget that moment. It continually comes back to haunt me. Strange, but something of that same kind of feeling, of judgement came this past week as a woman at the door of this very church begged for help. Looking straight into my eyes, she whispered, "Reverend, you don't know what it is not to have enough to eat; you don't know what it is to be poor". To know that there are children and adults like this in a world where my own garbage pail frequently contains discarded food is difficult to cope with. A sense of helplessness and an inability to handle what we have seen often come to us.

Now-a-days these night-marish scenes are set forth in greater profusion than ever before in papers and magazine. Tonight, John Chancellor, on Channel IV will be dealing with this concern in a program called, "Nature and Cause of World Food Shortage". North Africa is the scene of mass starvation because of shifting weather patterns. Elsewhere Arab oil manipulation is creating havoc beyond imagination. The food supply of poor nations depends on fertilizers which need the petrochemicals of oil. Now these countries cannot afford fertilizers. This is why Secretary Kissinger speaks incessantly now-a-days of world hunger. He, too, has looked into the faces of the poor and the hungry. Perhaps some of you have, too. You know...

"Massive challenges....serious problems....courage and resourcefulness.... if we are to be worthy heirs of the Pilgrim spirit",

TRANSITION

The problem of translating the intentions and the paper structures of the Rome food conference into effective programs in the real world will require a political will and a moral commitment of the highest order.

Hunger - that reality which is essential for the development of that will and commitment - is largely an abstraction in those countries which must shoulder most of the early political burdens required by the Rome agreements.

For some, pictures of hungry children or the knowledge that close to 500 million people in 32 countries are endangered by this mammoth food crisis will be sufficient reason to support whatever policy changes or whatever sacrifices may be called for. We commend to you such organizations as Church World Service and Oxfam America, both of whom are already mobilizing the massive challenge of world famine. "Bread for the World" is another organization we encourage you to learn about. Headed by Eugene Carson Blake, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, it is attempting to work through political channels and to grapple with issues that have a bearing on hunger and poverty.*

TO MEET

There is no profound mystery about some things that need to be done to re-

(* - for more information on this, speak to Mr. Zier)

lieve mass starvation around the globe. Basically, it is a matter of more generously distributing to the hungriest what is now produced. It is a matter of applying known technological improvements to produce more and of improving on those improvements to further expand production, of prudently saving part of the world crop for emergencies, and over longer periods of time of regulating population growth so that there are fewer mouths to feed.

Hunger and hope. If we can put a man on the moon, surely we can feed the hungry of the earth.

CONCLUDING SECTION The same day that the Presidential Proclamation appeared in the Times, there was also this ad on the last page of the first section along side a picture of an attractive young lady.

"What am I thankful for this Thanksgiving? Plenty! My health is frisky and vibrant, my job's still challenging and satisfying. I have fabulous friends and a lifestyle I've always wanted - plus - best of all - a terrific man who is in love with me. My favorite magazine says 'rejoice'....it's a great time to be a woman in this best of all possible times for women. I love that magazine. I guess you could say I'm that COSMOPOLITAN GIRL!"

OK.....health, work, friends, lifestyle, love, a great time to be alive. It's all there.....perhaps expressed in a way that we might not put it, but we do have many things for which to be thankful as we approach Thanksgiving, 1974. But it's only half of the picture. As someone said long ago, "To whom much is given, much also is expected".

The word "Cosmopolitan" (as you know) means "to belong to the world...at home in any country...not local....without prejudice". I would like to challenge that cosmopolitan girl and others like her to be essentially more cosmopolitan in their view, to look out on the world and let their sensibilities be sensitized by the suffering of others, to consider celebrating Thanksgiving this year with a conscience.

And knowing something of famine and hunger, we overfed Americans may be a bit more inclined to reconsider this country's wasteful patterns of food consumption and be impelled to make the sacrifices necessary to help feed a hungry world. It means thinking about our own meals differently. If we give up one McDonald's hamburger a week, 10 billion tons of grain would become available. That's one from today's NY Times. If enough of us care and share in this kind of concern, our timid government may even be emboldened to develop programs that will help to diminish the haunting spectre of famine abroad.

Thanksgiving Day, 1974, might be an appropriate time for us to start trying. Thanksgiving Day is always a fine and a special day, clutter it as we may with indigestion and football. Basically, however, it is a time of the spirit when we let it be, and a time of the heart, despite ourselves.

Hunger. Famine. Want. To all of you, a blessed Thanksgiving. May it be for you a feast of the spirit and of the heart!

PRAYER As we approach this time of Thanksgiving, O God, mindful of all that we have been given and of how we have in this land been richly blessed, let us celebrate the day with a conscience. Amen