

"THE CHURCH IN THE HOME"

TEXT: "Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church that meets in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord"
(I Corinthians 16: 19)

INTRODUCTION

Today is a day with something of a double meaning in the life of the Christian Church. First of all, it is the Festival of Pentecost - the Sunday we celebrate as the "birthday" of the Christian Church. Nearly 2,000 years ago a group of nervous, discouraged disciples gathered together in a room in Jerusalem. A strange Power and a dynamic Conviction suddenly moved among them. Lives and resolves were changed. People of various races and languages worshipped together. They were able to communicate with each other and thus to understand each other. This was the Holy Spirit at work; the church was born on Pentecost.

It's also the Sunday we celebrate as the Festival of the Christian Home (the church's name for what is more commonly referred to as Mother's Day). And so in what I say to you this morning, I hope to be able in some measure to touch upon both observances and to bring them together.

DEVELOPMENT

Certainly for the majority of people today the word "church" suggests a building - perhaps a particular building. But when Christianity first came into being it had, of course, no buildings. In those early days, the followers of Jesus simply gathered for prayer and fellowship in one another's homes. And when their numbers increased they did not proceed to build a place of public worship, but rather set up other house congregations. We read in the New Testament of such household groups in Jerusalem, Troas, Colossae, and Rome. "The church that meets in their house" is a frequently encountered phrase.

HOME: SEEDBED OF CHRISTIANITY

There's an old proverb that goes, "Charity begins at home". So, too, does Christianity. The home is its seedbed, its natural and normal habitat. Christian education is the responsibility of two institutions: the home and the church. And of the two, the home exercises in case after case the far greater influence. The day by day associations in the home, the atmosphere that prevails there, the standards that are observed and respected there - these leave on the young an indelible mark.

I feel that I speak for many of you. You know what your home stood for. It was there you were first introduced to the Bible, to the name of Christ, the concept of God, the matter of prayer. Your parents were your earliest teachers; ~~from them you get your first introduction to Christian truth and principle.~~ They provided you with moral and spiritual guidance. They took you with them to church and because it counted for so much with them, it began to count with you.

Just as influential as Christian education in the home is the personal example of parents. Nothing tells like consistency between word and deed, like belief and behaviour mutually supporting each other. A man cannot lead a loose and selfish life and then suddenly become a fit companion for his children. Nobility of character is the most precious heritage of a family and it is transmitted from generation to generation by personal association and inspiration. (New Yorker....)

From the moment a child forms impressions, he is on the way to acquiring habits. He absorbs his character from those who are constantly about him by processes which in most cases are quite undesigned. His thoughts and action take shape and substance from the habitual attitudes of his mother and father. A child has a quick ear for false notes and can usually spot a phony; by the same token he recognizes sincerity and strength of character, respects them and time and time again reproduces them.

States today. Earlier civilizations have grown soft and eventually decayed because of a breakdown in family life, and this is a present danger. The home use to be a producing unit - the family working together in the family workshop. Until recently it was a consuming unit, a place where meals were cooked and eaten and family pleasures enjoyed together. Now more and more meals are eaten in cafeterias and restaurants and more and more evenings spent away from the home. Life in and around the great cities of this land tends to reduce the home to a dormitory. The children of busy men and women sometimes see little of each parent. A social worker pictured a farmed out child as offering this prayer:

"Bless the dear clinic which weighed me with care,
And the nursery school teacher who tooth-combed my hair,
And the youth movement leaders, so care-worn for me,
And my mother, God bless her, whom I never see"

So much juvenile delinquency can be traced to parental delinquency. Some time ago the principal of one of our schools in an area of this city where the incidence of juvenile delinquency is high spoke to a group of ministers. He was asked to what he attributed the high rate of delinquency. He said there was no single explanation - that bad housing, the want of standards of common honesty, the craving for easy money, the glamorizing of sex in advertisements, films and novels, the bad influence of some television were all factors to be taken into account, but he was emphatic that the major cause of the trouble lay in the homes of the children.

The making of good homes is a top priority today. Parents who care unselfishly for their children, who provide for them spiritually as well as materially, are performing an invaluable service. They are helping to create a stable and secure world. They are making a contribution to ultimate and abiding values. The home is the training ground for national and world citizenship. I think the young person who has learned in the discipline of the home, with all its possibilities of friction and strain, the art of living in harmony with father and mother, brothers and sisters, will have learned to live rightly with others outside the home. Respect for personality within the home will teach respect for all persons.

FALLING SHORT IN PRODUCING CHRISTIAN HOMES

concern. I fear that we are failing to produce Christian homes. What are the facts? I think we would discover that in the majority of American homes today little specific moral and spiritual guidance is offered. More and more the practice seems to be to delegate this task to the church. The physical needs of children are handsomely provided for, but their religious and spiritual needs are being neglected. The attitude of many parents is that children should not be "forced" in the matter of religion.

Now it is not only good homes, but Christian homes that ought to be our

I recall a cartoon in a magazine with this caption: TEACHER - "When is your 6 year old little brother coming to Sunday School, Alfred?" ALFRED - "Please, Miss, mother doesn't want him to take up religion just yet". What Alfred's mother was overlooking was that the allegiance to what is fine and good, to Christian values and Christian ways, should begin in childhood. It is then that moral and religious character is decisively affected. In the majority of cases, the decision as between religion and no religion is decided by something that takes place before youth and adolescence.

Parental irresponsibility on a large scale means that many young lives are growing up without Christian training or instruction. Chaplains in our universities report that they are meeting with an increasing number of students - physically sound,

serious minded, well-intentioned - but religiously illiterate, with scant knowledge of the elementary doctrines of Christianity or of its foundation moral principles though western civilization was reared on both. The Churches, to be sure, come in for some of the blame, but bound up with the failure of the local church is the failure of the average home.

Parents have incomparable opportunities. Remember that scene in the movie, "The Caine Mutiny" a number of years ago, based on the book by Herman Wouk. Willie Keith, a young officer in the Navy, receives a letter from his doctor father conveying the information that, when the letter reached him, the father in all probability would be dead from an incurable disease. The father offered to his son three bits of advice in that letter. First, "There is nothing" he said, "more precious than time. Wasted hours destroy your life, just as sure at the beginning as at the end". Second, "Religion.....I'm afraid we haven't given you very much of it, not having had very much of it ourselves. But I think after all that I'm going to mail you a Bible before I go into the hospital. Get familire with the words. You'll never regret it. I came to the Bible as I did to everything else in life, too late." And third, "Think of me, and what I might have been Willie, at the times in your life when you come to the cross roads. And for my sake, for the sake of the Father who took the wrong turns, take the right ones....Goodbye my son, be a man!"

There's a sadness in those lines. Especially the line: "Religion....I'm afraid we haven't given you very much of it, not having had very much of it ourselves". I think more needs to be said about family life as a Christian vocation. We need to look upon parenthood as a ministry to which men and women are called by God. A parent should be as proud of success in making a home into a happy and secure little world as a great statesman in ordering a nation's affairs. ~~Here is the dedication to his parents, set down on the fly leaf of one of the books written by the Rev. A. J. Gossip:-----~~

"To the memory of Robert Gossip whose heart was as a little child's and of Margaret Grieve Gossip in whose face I saw God's face".

~~And~~ here is the entry made in his diary by Studdert Kennedy:

"I am the King of a tiny kingdom of three sons. I desire above all things on earth that they may grow up fair and fine and free. Frequently I am filled with a fear of my responsibilities. And because of the knowledge which that fear brings, every day of my life I pray: God save the King".

I quote again the text from Paul's letter to the Corinthians - his salu~~at~~ion to Aquilla and Priscilla: "Give my love to the little church that meets in their house". That sort of house has solid foundations and enduring joys. Christ is its Unseen Guest. He is its Law, its leader, its Lord. Reared in such a home, and looking back in retrospect on it at the end of a long and useful life, David Cairns wrote:

"Of all the many good gifts God has given me, among the very greatest I would put my father and my mother and the home they made for us, their children. I am not at all blind to their limitations, and even mistakes, but they both in different ways made it easier for me to believe in goodness and in God, and ~~I can think of no better name for God than our~~

our Lord's name, 'Father' or for heaven than "our
father's house"

And I think that is about the greatest tribute that any child can pay to his parents.

LET US PRAY God, our Father, we would remember before thee at this time the
mothers of our land, and not only the mothers, but the fathers as
well and the children that are being reared in the homes of our land. Keep us loyal
and true to all within our family circle. Deal lovingly with those who are at
variance with one another - husbands and wives who have drifted apart, sons and
daughters who have left home in rebellion and resentment, relatives who have
quarrelled over things that do not matter compared with their soul's peace. May the
homes of our land be cradles of truth, thy truth and life and love which has been
brought so close to us in the life of the man from Galilee. Amen