

## AMERICA'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

### INTRODUCTION

Today is Mother's Day. It is not really necessary for me to remind you of this fact for Mother's Day is an established date on the calendar of our American way of life. It is the one day in the year when we pause to pay our tribute of love and respect to one whose care and example and training have done more for us than we shall ever be able to put into words.

To think about Mother's Day is to think about the home and the family. For in a very real sense, it is in the home where the mother's influence is the greatest. She makes the home. The home takes its character from her. The father is the head of the family, and the mother is the heart of the family. However important the authority of the father, the mother has been throughout the centuries the vital center, the heart of home life.

### DEVELOPMENT

This morning we're going to spend our time together thinking about the home and the family life of this nation. I think you know as well as I do that no man is what he is entirely by himself. He's largely a product of his home environment and what his family has made him. And I think you know this too that the home is the most basic and most fundamental of all human institutions. It's the breeding ground of character. It's the source of noble dreams. And it can also be the source and the root of a great many troubles. I think that all that makes a nation strong and great is a matter of moral and spiritual tradition, slowly accumulated and enriched, and the home is the preserver and propagator of that tradition.

Perhaps before I go any further I should say this that I realize all too well that in a congregation like this there are bound to be some whose families have already been reared. Their children have grown up and left home and have been successfully launched on to the open seas of life. And then too I realize that there are bound to be others who have no family and who probably never will have. But I realize too that there are quite a few others in our church who are at the present time in the process of raising families, like myself, and many others who in the near future, God willing, will begin to make their homes and establish their families. This sermon will probably have more meaning for this group than for others, but it is my hope that all of you will profit from it and take it to yourself whenever it applies and wherever it is possible.

### FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

I would begin then by reminding all of you that a nation's first and best line of defense is always to be found in its homelife. Military preparedness is important and perhaps it is essential living in the kind of world in which we find ourselves living. One cannot dispute that fact, but it seems to me that the best line of defense of this nation, or of any nation, is to be found in the kind of family it produces. The richest resources of any nation are its homes. They determine its destiny, and the future of this country will be determined largely by the kind of family it is now producing. I think it was this thought that inspired Grace Noel Crowell to once write:

"So long as there are homes to which men turn  
At close of day,

So long as there are homes where children are  
Where women stay,  
If love and loyalty and faith be found  
Across these sills  
A stricken nation can recover  
From its greatest ills."

In other words, give a child a good home, by which I do not mean simply a comfortable home, and the chances are ten to one that when he becomes a man he will be upright in character, honest in business, a responsible citizen, lending strength and stability to his community.

#### FAMILY LIFE THREATENED

However, it is becoming more apparent with each day that passes that family life and family morale in this nation are not at their highest point. As a matter of fact, it is gravely threatened. Our nation may be in danger from without, but an even greater danger exists within. Subversive activity takes more than one form, and one could wish that there was a deeper concern over American family today since the decline of morals and family morale has been at the root of the disintegration of more than one mighty nation. For without integrity, rectitude and principle, a nation lacks stability, no matter how abundant its material resources or how formidable its military might.

For instance, for increasing numbers of people marriage is not a life-long contract, nor has it any real religious significance. Its continuance in so many cases, as I see it, is conditioned only on the will and desire of the parties to it. There is no total commitment of person to person. Affinity is substituted for fidelity and when the sense of affinity is lost - and in many cases its only basis is physical - there is nothing to keep husband and wife together. In connection with all of this, Dean Pike or Bishop Pike of California recently asked a question in an article in the Christian Century. He asked "What is the meaning of incompatibility or for that matter, what is the meaning of mental cruelty?" He then went on to answer his own question in this fashion: "All too often it means no more than this - two persons who took each other for better, for worse, have neglected to make the adjustments called for by differences in temperament and possibly in sex urge or have failed to meet with courage and good humor the inevitable wear and tear of daily life."

I know I've discovered in the few years that I've been in this profession that ministers often hear some strange things said, strange in the light of Christian standards, by those who have in mind the dissolution of the marriage bond. Things of this nature: "Well I really don't care to hold him if I have to rely on my marriage vows to do it." Or "The development of my personality is being prevented by living with him". "If he really loves me, as he says he does, he's surely not going to let the fact that I'm already married to another man stand in his way or let that come between us". It's been that sort of thing I suppose that recently tempted a cynic to propose the addition of four words to the marriage service: "Till death us do part, or circumstances do alter". And so I would say this to you that for people who rationalize in this fashion divorce is an easy way out which it should never be. If it is resorted to at all it should only be with extreme reluctance and from a conviction that it is the lesser of two evils. The increase and prevalence of divorce, with its trail of broken homes and emotionally bewildered children is one of the most disintegrating influences at work in our national life today.

### A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Of course poles apart from this is a Christian marriage. It is a lifelong partnership, sealed by a religious vow. Its keynote is fidelity, through sunshine and shadow, sickness and health, adversity and prosperity. It rejoices in a developing and deepening affinity - physical, mental and spiritual. Husband and wife love one another and love many things together. They are good companions, in agreement on the main issues - what is right, and what is wrong - what is primary, and what is secondary - what matters supremely and what is of little importance. Theirs is an experience which grows through shared interests and common sacrifices into a union of personalities.

A psychologist by the name of Louis Terman connected with Stanford University some time ago made a very important study of marriage. He points out for us the four most important influences that go in to making up a happy marriage and these are the four things he suggests:

1. Having parents who are happily married, and who set their children a good example of how a happy marriage works.
2. Having a mature character and an effective personality. All of the habits contributing to character and personality contribute also to a happy marriage.
3. Being religious and being married under the auspices of the church.
4. Being eager to have children or to adopt children.

And so I would try to impress this point upon you: that marriage is a serious business. It can affect human life for good or bad more than any other personal program. And yet most people enter into it with little or no preparation. We prepare our young people for careers of all kinds, and yet we trust to luck in perhaps the most important career of all - the career of wife and husband. Marriages that are built upon common loyalties, loyalty to the same values, loyalty to the same circle of friends, loyalty to God and above all a steadfast loyalty to each other - such marriages, I think, can be expected to be full of happiness and mutual satisfaction.

### BACK TO THE HOME

I started out by suggesting to you that a nation's best line of defense is to be found in the home-life it produces. Provide moral and spiritual guidance there and you provide the nation with a stabilizing quality that will make it strong and secure. What then about our homes? What kind of example is being shown there. Is it not true that it is not so much what children are taught as it is what they see that makes them what they are. With this thought in mind, let us consider first of all what is being taught in our homes, and second what it is that children are observing.

For the most part I think we would discover that very little is being taught children in many homes when it comes to this matter of moral and spiritual guidance. More and more it has become the practice of parents to delegate the task of education to the school and the church. The physical wants of their children are being generously provided for, but their religious needs are being neglected. So much for this matter of what is being taught.

Now let us consider what the children for the most part see in their own homes. In far too many instances, I think they would see

their own parents living under no supreme spiritual authority, and I suppose this is one of the reasons why so many parents today have so little authority over their own children because the parents themselves are living under no great authority. For instance, in trivial things like traffic laws, they treat them lightly and laugh at the breaking of them. In things like drinking, they drink to excess and let the children do pretty much as they want to when this matter comes up. They go to church when they feel like it, a great many of them; some of them not at all. They put their values on mediocre things and then wonder why their children follow suit. They are committed to a multitude of minor things - things of little lasting value - uncommitted to one supreme concern for which they are willing to make a few sacrifices and in the light of which they make their judgments.

I think it is well for us to remember that the day by day association, the atmosphere that prevails, the standards that are respected and observed, the habits of speech and behavior that are passed on from parent to child - these determine character. Children are more sensitive to inconsistency than we sometimes give them credit for being. If we want them to be honest and just, we must be honest and just. If we want them to make a place in their lives for religious values, we had better make a place for it in our lives. If they do not see in us any reverence for a Power greater than ourselves, any evidence of religious conviction in our conversation and conduct, the chances are they will not have it. We must strive to be what we want our children to be. It's not so much what they are taught as it is what they see that makes them what they are.

All of this, to my way of thinking, raises an important question. And it's the question I suppose that in one way or another ought always to come at the end of every sermon. To when then ought we as adults and parents - what ought we to be committed. And my answer is always the same although I put it to you in different ways. The head of the family - the father; and the mother, the heart of the family, need above all else to be committed unreservedly to that new way of life that we have experienced in the man who was raised in a family in Nazareth and who God himself raised from the dead. And as a person becomes committed wholeheartedly to that new life, he begins to live under divine authority. And as the head and the heart of a family live under that divine authority, the chances are that their children will respond more and more to their authority and they will be given the respect, the obedience and the love that is needed. And so to bring it all together here at the end: in order to keep America's first line of defense strong, sound and secure it is necessary for you as individuals and families to bring that element of Divine Authority back into the family life of this nation. And what better time to do this than on Mother's Day, the day when we pause to pay our tribute of love and respect to those who in former years have done so very much for us.

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 also the father and the children that are being reared in the homes of our land. Guide them and strengthen them and may the homes of our land be cradles of thy truth and thy life and thy love which has been brought so close to us in the life of the man from Galilee in whose name we pray. Amen