

"TO WHAT ARE YOU DEDICATED?"

TEXT: "I beseech you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service".

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday afternoon I was listening to the second game of the doubleheader between the Yankees and the Angels. Following Mickey Mantle's sixth inning home run which won the game, the sports announcer, Joe Garagiola, made this observation of Mantle as he circled the bases, "He's a complete and dedicated ball player". The word "dedicated" caught my attention.

He was using an adjective in describing Mantle that not too long ago was almost entirely confined to the language of Christian devotion, but now is to be seen and heard everywhere - in newspaper reports, in theater reviews, in political discussions, and yes - even in the sports arena. The word is "dedicated".

DEVELOPMENT

Sometimes the reference is precise. For instance, we speak of a dedicated doctor or nurse - meaning one whose talents and energy and concern are wholly given to the medical profession; or a dedicated teacher, or administrator, or minister, or secretary. In each case we mean that the person concerned is wholly and seriously devoted to the work and doesn't just look upon it as a means of earning a living. We also speak of those who are utterly devoted to a cause - living for it and willing to die for it, as dedicated.

SOMETIMES - WITHOUT REFERENCE

Then too we find the word being used without specific reference. We often hear it said: "He's a dedicated man", or "she's a dedicated woman". In many walks of life, we meet men and women who leave such an impression on us that we can't help but think of them as "dedicated". They may be prominent citizens or completely unknown except to a handful of friends. The word we want to use about them is the word "dedicated". Somehow it marks them off from the careless, drifting, self-regarding, rudderless crowd. And so we speak of the dedicated housewife, or the dedicated bus driver, or the dedicated door man.

This word "dedicated" is acceptable in our time in a way the word "holy" is not. I don't think any of us would relish being described as "holy" - yet, I think we would give a lot to be living the kind of life that would cause others to look at us and say, "He's a dedicated man". The words aren't too far apart in their meaning. I think there's a part of us that knows we shall never grow to our full stature, never make sense of life, never reach fulfillment, unless we are dedicated people. No man, no woman, no nation has ever left an imprint on the world without this spirit of dedication.

DEDICATED TO WHAT

The question arises: dedicated to what? If we agree that it is vital to be a dedicated person - we must raise this question: to what are we dedicated? The dictionary reminds us that the word means: "devoted exclusively to the worship and service of a divine being". And a book far more important than the dictionary reminds us from beginning to end that to be dedicated means nothing less than to be yielded - body and soul - to the God who made us.

We cannot be dedicated in a vacuum. The kind of life to which we aspire is the result of finding a God to whom we can offer ourselves absolutely and without reserve. He becomes the living center of all our hopes and ambitions, our desires and our energies. The Christian Gospel shows us such a God. The God who meets us in Jesus of Nazareth is One to whose worship and service we can commit ourselves openly and without compromise.

time in which we live is

THE PRESENT TIME

Every thoughtful person knows that the ~~next few years will be~~ critical for the human race. It is not simply the question of finding the wisdom and the courage to avoid a nuclear holocaust. What is being decided in our time is the kind of society, the kind of ideals, the kind of liberties, the kind of authority under which future generations will live. Whatever happens, it will be a different world.

Will it be a world in which men, women and children will be free to think and worship, free to grow in faith and love; will it be a world in which truth and honesty, respect for human life, acceptance of rights and duties, are the basis for a society encompassing all men.

These things are all threatened today and not only from the outside, but also from the inside. Remember this that the waters begin to run more swiftly as the river approaches the cataract. The church is struggling to stay afloat in a world that just won't stand still. This is not time for the church to be resting on its oars. It takes dedicated men and women to keep us moving in the right direction. And the production of dedicated people is the top priority of the church. For what is a church if it is not the place where we learn who it is to whom we must dedicate our lives, the place where together we yield ourselves to the overwhelming love of God in Jesus Christ.

DEDICATION In writing to the Church in Rome, Paul said:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice - holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service".

We have here one of the great texts of the New Testament. You may recall that the choir sang these words as an anthem back in the month of March; it was at my request that they repeated this anthem this morning. These words come straight to us today as the word of the living God. Mind you, the mere fact that we have been baptized, that we have been members of the church most of our lives, that we have been well disposed to the Christian church, does not guarantee that we are truly dedicated people. Dedication is not something that happens once in some rarefied, spiritual atmosphere, and then can be forgotten. The Bible speaks of a continual call to which we must make a continual response. Living the dedicated life is rather like the attempt to climb the escalator that is coming down. Unless you keep moving up you will slowly and surely be dragged down.

"Your bodies" "a living sacrifice". There's nothing mystical or vague or Sunday morning only in this matter. The phrase "your bodies" brings you down to earth. In other words, it's YOU that God wants - the whole YOU. We are asked to present to him this body - the same body that tomorrow morning will be up and off to work, the same body that will be in contact with other bodies, the body that eats, that sleeps, that walks, the body that expresses the inner you in so many different ways, the body that houses your brain, that is the instrument of your will, your spirit. When the finger of God points in your direction summoning you to dedication, it is you - the whole YOU, the real YOU, the every-day YOU - that he wants.

We have been through one of the great seasons of the church year - Lent, Easter - a period when the faith of even the slackest is aroused and lifted. And yet, following such high moments, there is always the inevitable let up and lowering of dedication. I would remind you then that the work that clamors to be done by God in our time can and will not be served well by a seasonal faith, but rather served best by a continuing

and disciplined effort on the part of all of us. I summon you then - each of you - to renew your dedication at the altar this hour. I should have called this meditation "To Whom Are You Dedicated" rather than to "What Are You Dedicated" for is it not true that the most satisfying dedication one can make is not to an ideal or a cause, but to a person. And there is no person so compelling, so worthy of our utmost loyalty as the God who meets us in the humility and the radiance of Jesus Christ.

LET US PRAY Eternal God, Our Father, again we pause to remember thee at the beginning of another week. As we come to thy table this hour, kindle our affections, quicken our imaginations, inspire our thoughts, renew our commitment that we may not be found lacking in our loyalty to Thee.

Grant us thy grace and thy guidance at this time. Support all who truly seek ways of justice and of peace. Remove suspicion and bitterness; direct the energies and inventions of mankind into fruitful and constructive enterprises. Enable us, our Father, to hold within the circle of thy healing love all who suffer through illness or accident, all victims of violence of man or nature.

And now grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. We pray this in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

"Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee.
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands and let them move At the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be, Swift and beautiful for thee"