



Bp. Charles H. Helmsing
First Bishop of
Springfield-Cape Girardeau

First pastoral gives blueprint of diocese

Introduction

Given less than a month following the installation of Bp. Charles H. Helmsing as first bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, the pastoral letter, "On Directing Our Intention," outlined a blueprint for all to follow in achieving salvation.

In the letter, Bp. Helmsing made clear that a sense of direction would be needed if the new diocese was to achieve lasting goals.

The first pastoral letter is divided into four main parts—an introduction, a section underlining the need for conforming individual wills to Christ's, a third section outlining the tasks facing the diocese, and a conclusion.

Feast of St. John the Evangelist Dec. 27, 1956

To the clergy, religious and zealous laity of the diocese
Dearly Beloved:

The common-sense philosophy of the ages has a saying: "That which is first in intention is last in attainment." A building presupposes plans and specifications. Only when the architect outlines them clearly can there be hope for a beautiful, serviceable edifice in the future. For our new diocese obviously we are not the architects. "The Shepherd and Bishop" of our souls alone gives us the blueprint. Yet precisely because of the seeming complexity of the tasks which overwhelm us, we can easily lose sight of the intention that must always be ours. After my appointment as bishop almost eight years ago, two wonderful friends—a zealous lay apostle and a priestly director—gave me two complementary bits of advice. The one envisioning the work of organization, planning, building, fund-raising, conferring, counselling, etc., proposed a formula of executive management: "Organize, deputize, supervise." The other calmly remarked "simply be Christ" and you will succeed. The first counsel will require us to continue and (wherever possible) augment the unified organizations which we have inherited from the two well-organized dioceses of Kansas City and St. Louis.² The second bit of advice has been the object of meditation during the ensuing years. When studied in the light of Our Holy Father's recent letter on Devotion to the Sacred Heart,³ it proposes to us the direction of our combined efforts as bishop, priests, religious, and laity in accepting the challenge and the labors involved in the establishment of our Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau.

The whole Church, our diocese, your parish, your Christian fam-

ily, your school or institution, and your organization—all exist so that one with Jesus they may "glorify the Father" and at the same time sanctify and save souls. A few months ago, Our Holy Father stated that "true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the epitome of all religion."⁴ We might paraphrase: "Being all one in Christ Jesus,"⁵ our immediate aim must be so to live in union with our Divine Head that we copy His love first, for His Heavenly Father, and then for our fellow men.

Faith in Our Lord's teaching helps us to appreciate that this personal union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not a figment of the imagination or of sentimental false piety. The Sacred Liturgy is the indispensable source of such union. Buried together with Christ⁶ in baptism unto his death, we arose unto a newness of life—sanctifying grace. The character of this Sacrament of Rebirth made us like to Christ into whose Mystical Body it incorporated us and made us receptive of ever increasing supernatural life as children. Because of it, we could really exclaim with St. Paul, "We have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father."⁷ With Jesus we were given the "power to be made sons of God"⁸ doing "always the things that please"⁹ the Father.

Later sealed in Confirmation, and further formed unto the likeness of Christ, we were actively empowered to promote the Father's glory and advance the Kingdom of His Son. However, in a much higher way, those marked with the character of Holy Orders become one with Jesus as his ambassadors so that, daily, they might make present, in an unbloody manner, under the forms of bread and wine, the Sacrifice of Calvary to give infinite glory to the Father and to apply the graces of the Cross to souls. The greatest marvel is that a personal participation in the Sacrifice of Love is open to all who are baptized, for Jesus the Victim of the Cross "made obedient unto death,"¹⁰ and loving "His own even to the end"¹¹ unites Himself to each recipient in Holy Communion. As the "Bread of the strong," He is not assimilated as ordinary bread, but transforms into His own likeness those who place no obstacle of sin, and imparts to them the sentiments of His Sacred Heart.

The liturgy of the Sacrament of Matrimony¹² boldly reminds the spouses who enter this permanent union that they represent Christ to sanctify each other as His instruments of love. And Penance and Extreme Unction are mercifully instituted to remove the obstacles of perfect union

with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Once we are conscious that the Church is Christ and ourselves in "one Body,"¹³ we should see that our purpose as a diocese is to imitate the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the double direction of His life as our God Incarnate: to do the will of the Father and to love our fellow men.

Thy Will be done

Jesus proclaimed through the prophet, "Then said I, behold I come to do thy will, O my God."¹⁴ Having come into the world he did, "always the things that please"¹⁵ Him. He taught us to pray, "Our Father, Thy will be done."¹⁶ He Himself prayed in His agony, "Not my will but thine be



done."¹⁷ Only when he had "become obedient unto death"¹⁸ in fulfilling His Father's will, did he cry "It is finished."¹⁹

Obviously our first aim in the diocese must be to imitate Jesus in His loyalty to the Father's Will. Expressed negatively, this means careful avoidance of every sin no matter how seemingly slight. Put positively it means that we must be guided by God's Will shown to us in the Ten Commandments²⁰ and in the Sermon on the Mount.²¹ In matters left undetermined in the decalogue and in revelation, we must be led by the Church, which directs us by the prescriptions of her canon law, synodal and diocesan regulations, and the authority of our superiors. For all of us there are also the obvious duties of each one's state in life—from seeming trifles, obliging children and the often vexing details of administering temporal affairs, to the sublime work of administering the Sacraments and offering the Sacrifice of the Mass. Every detail of our lives

falls under doing the Father's will.

Besides this positive conformity of our wills with the signified will of the Father, we must, in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, abandon ourselves to the all-wise disposition of God's Providence. He who asked us to learn from His Heart to be meek and humble,²² tells us to become as little children,²³ lovingly embracing success or failure, sickness or health, joy or sorrow, plenty or want.

What has been outlined is obviously a program of sanctity. By it we glorify the Father in obedience and loyalty. By it we carry out the command of Our Lord, "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

Love of neighbor

But all this is only one phase of our union with the Sacred Heart. The disciple who leaned on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper²⁵ understood this; for in his Epistle he asked the early Christians, "How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see."²⁶ We too, must, capture from the Sacred Heart the reason why He became Man. We sing in the Nicene Creed, "Who for us men and for our salvation—was made man." Consequently one with the Sacred Heart, our wills must be filled with that fire of fraternal love which Jesus came to cast on earth.²⁷ We as a diocese—individuals, priests, religious, laity, families, and organizations—must be one with Jesus "for sinners" and for their conversion, salvation, and sanctification. Jesus came to call, "not the just, but sinners."²⁸

And we are all sinners. And we all need the mercy of God. At the same time, Our Lord wishes to use us as his instruments of mercy for others. The

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one condition in lending ourselves to Him as his instruments of love is that we love one another,²⁹ and live and act in harmony: priests, religious, laity, parishes and families, institutions and individuals, and societies among themselves. The mystical sending of the disciples two-by-two³⁰ prefigured this essential harmony according to St. Gregory the Great (Cf. Breviary Lesson from the Common of Evangelists).

Now if our work in the diocese is to enlighten and convert sinners, and if we are to persevere in this Christlike charity until souls are safe in heaven, we must be prepared for long-term tasks of sowing the seed of truth, softening the hardness of prejudice and hatred by the sweetness of charity, and following through to the saving waters of Baptism and the forgiving sentence of the Sacrament of Penance. Not only must sermons and instructions be enlightening and appealing, but priests especially must practice heroic availability for all members of their flock. They must prove themselves as easy of access for breaking the Bread of Life in the Holy Eucharist as for breaking the bread of truth. And around them, priests must be zealous co-workers to make straight the path of unbelievers and sinners to the open Heart of Our Savior.

The mercy of the Sacred Heart evidently stooped first to those in greatest need. We who are one with Him must do likewise. In our new diocese, we are a decided minority and we see all about us vast territories and especially vast numbers of souls deprived of the saving knowledge and graces that are ours. And yet we are blessed beyond measure, "little flock" that we are,³¹ in comparison with the more than a thousand million souls who do not "know the One true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent."³² Obviously, therefore, our first thoughts should be for a well-organized, efficacious program of assistance to the foreign missions. "Give and it shall be given to you"³³ is a promise of the Sacred Heart in which we must trust implicitly, must trust in it not only for material assistance, but even more for vocations and supernatural assistance. We must rejoice in the vocations already given to the foreign missions; for we have confidence in the promise made by Christ's Vicar of blessed memory, Pope Benedict XV: "In the place of one priest you might send abroad, God will raise several

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priests to do useful work at home."³⁴

We must also be grateful to the Sacred Heart for the number of boys at present in our two minor seminaries for the missions (at Cape Girardeau and Carthage), and we pray that they will join them. We hope, likewise, that there will be a large increase in the number of virgin souls from our midsts who will give themselves completely as religious men and women to serve in the field afar. We need not remind our devoted cloistered religious of the Visitation and the Trappists of their world embracing vocation of prayer and sacrifice; but we gladly remind ourselves and all the faithful of the truly catholic gifts of prayer and sacrifice which we make each day in our morning offering to the Sacred Heart. Our hope is that the full programs of the Holy Childhood Association for children and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for adults will meet an ever-growing spirit of cooperation and that many of our grown-ups will adopt that most modern method of mission aid known as the "Daily Worldmissionaires."

Next to the pagans in mission lands are our own countrymen reared often without knowledge of God and living a practical materialistic existence. Then there are our separated brethren who know something of God and His revelations—honest, God-fearing souls, whom we rightly regard as equivalent members of the Church, but who are deprived of their rightful heritage of the faith and especially of the full channels of Our Lord's grace. Again there are "the fallen-aways" often through no fault of their own.

And lastly, there are the apostates and sinners who know better, but because of passion or wounded pride, walk no more³⁵ with Our Lord. Yet all these are the objects of our Lord's love. And since we are one with His Sacred Heart, we, too, "must be straightened"³⁶ until all are won back to His love.

To say this much and stop, would be a betrayal of the very vision we must have of our purpose as a diocese. Souls truly respond to the love of Jesus for them only when they themselves burn with a like-charity to save and sanctify others. "For them do I sanctify myself that they may be sanctified in truth"³⁷ must be our constant prayer as it was that of the Sacred Heart at the Last Supper. Each Christian family must therefore aim at producing apostolic souls: true Christian mothers

and fathers of the future, and especially priests and religious to carry on the mission of the Sacred Heart because of the docility of Mary, "the slave girl of the Lord,"⁴⁰ we marvel at the Providence which made us choose as our motto almost eight years ago: "Servus Tuus, Filius Ancillae"—"Thy slave (of love) and the son of thy handmaid." Those words of the Psalmist,⁴¹ employed in the Divine Office of the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, we pray, may always direct our intention to the union of love with the Sacred Heart of Our Savior and Head in promoting the glory of Our Father and the Salvation and Sanctification of souls.⁴²

Priests especially must embrace the arduous task of spiritual direction—really one much easier in our small diocese than in the populous urban sees. "One soul striving for perfection is worth more in glorifying God than 10,000 ordinary souls," must be their conviction as it was St. Teresa's. They will foster retreats, third orders, sodalities, confraternities, pious unions, etc. Always, however, with the connection that the members, only by fidelity to their approved rule, can be adequately formed in the Christian life.

May we therefore conclude with a final observation on spiritual formation in the Christian life of union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus in His twofold love of the Father and for souls. There is a sure and easy way and that way is the Immaculate Heart of Mary. That way has been outlined by St. Louis Marie Gregnon de Montfort, canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1947. Prodding us on to heed this great Marian Saint we have the pleas of Pope St. Pius X (patron saint of our diocese), Benedict XV, Pius XI, and our present Holy Father, Pope Pius XII. Introducing St. de Montfort's teaching to the English-speaking world through his translations from the original French, the great Fr. William Faber wrote: "Mary is not half enough preached. Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It is frightened out of its wits by the sneers of heresy—Hence, it is that Jesus is not loved, that heretics are not converted, that the Church is not exalted, that souls that might be saints wither and dwindle. Jesus is obscured because Mary is kept in the background." Fatima and Our Lady's pleas there merely corroborate the reality of Mary's position and our need of imitating the "Handmaid of the Lord" in order to be one with Jesus in His twofold love.

Providentially in our day, God has raised up a hidden movement known as the Legion of Mary to live de Montfort's Devotion which, like the mustard seed of the Gospel, is mighty in its effects. We recommend it to our priests, religious, and people, and promise every assistance and encouragement so that we may as a diocese be formed "unto the likeness of Christ"—the "Servant or Slave of Jahweh"³⁹—the "Slave of love"—obedient unto death in fulfilling the will of His Father, and likewise the "Slave of Love," laying

down his life, "for us men and our salvation." Recalling merely that we have this Divine Heart because of the docility of Mary, "the slave girl of the Lord,"⁴⁰ we marvel at the Providence which made us choose as our motto almost eight years ago: "Servus Tuus, Filius Ancillae"—"Thy slave (of love) and the son of thy handmaid." Those words of the Psalmist,⁴¹ employed in the Divine Office of the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, we pray, may always direct our intention to the union of love with the Sacred Heart of Our Savior and Head in promoting the glory of Our Father and the Salvation and Sanctification of souls.⁴²

In our united missionary efforts, therefore, we will no doubt always be compelled to confess with St. Paul that we do not count ourselves as having attained, but at least we will with our intention, one with that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, avow each day that "we press toward the mark of our supernal vocation in Christ Jesus."⁴³ To us is given⁴⁴ with St. Paul to make known the riches of the charity of Christ. In doing so, it is ours to win souls for His Sacred Heart. For with St. John Vianney, the Patron of Parish Priests, we must avow that "the world belongs to him who loves it most." Our Divine Lord wills ardently that by imitating His Sacred Heart we prove to all those entrusted to our care that He loves them most and has proved that love.

Invoking God's choicest blessing on you for this New Year of 1957, and for our mutual tasks, I am devotedly yours in Christ,

+ Charles H. Helmsing
By the Grace of God and Favor
of the Apostolic See, Bishop of
Springfield-Cape Girardeau

NOTES

- ¹ Peter 2:5
- ² A Pontifical Decree makes obligatory for the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau "The Eighth Diocesan and Synod of St. Louis" 1950, with the changes indicated in the same decree.
- ³ Encyclical "Haurietis Aquas," May 15, 1956
- ⁴ Ibidem
- ⁵ Romans 12:5
- ⁶ Romans 6:4
- ⁷ Romans 8:15
- ⁸ St. John 1:12
- ⁹ St. John 8:29
- ¹⁰ Philippians 2:8
- ¹¹ St. John 13:1
- ¹² Ephesian 5:22-33
- ¹³ Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12
- ¹⁴ Psalm 39:8, Hebrews 10:9
- ¹⁵ St. John 8:29
- ¹⁶ St. Matthew 6:10
- ¹⁷ St. Luke 22:42
- ¹⁸ Philippians 2:8
- ¹⁹ St. John 19:30
- ²⁰ Exodus 20
- ²¹ St. Matthew 5:6-7
- ²² St. Matthew 11:29
- ²³ St. Matthew 18:5
- ²⁴ St. Matthew 5:48
- ²⁵ St. John 13:23
- ²⁶ 1 John 4:20
- ²⁷ St. Luke 12:49
- ²⁸ St. Mark 2:17
- ²⁹ St. John 13:34
- ³⁰ St. Luke 10:1
- ³¹ St. Luke 12:32
- ³² St. John 17:3
- ³³ St. Luke 6:38
- ³⁴ Encyclical "Maximum Illud" par. 30, Nov. 30, 1919
- ³⁵ St. John 6:67
- ³⁶ St. Luke 12:50
- ³⁷ St. John 17:19
- ³⁸ Pope Pius XII, "Menti Nostrae," Sep. 23, 1950
- ³⁹ Isaiah 53
- ⁴⁰ St. Luke 1:38
- ⁴¹ Psalm 115:16
- ⁴² Cf. St. Louis de Montfort, "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary," and "The Secret of Mary" with excellent commentaries in Tanqueray's "Spiritual Life" and the "Legion of Mary Handbook."
- ⁴³ Philippians 3:12 to 14
- ⁴⁴ Ephesians 3