

It Was Ordered: It Can Be Done, But Leadership Is Lacking

The scene is Mount Olivet and the Lord and his faithful ones are standing at the very top. The artists have always pictured it so; in part because dramatic effects would require that idea. But actually that rendering is correct because the eastern road from the city, normally taken by Our Lord and his followers, passed over the summit. There would be another reason why the renown should come to it of being the place of the Ascension.

It already stood in history as the spot where King David had been accustomed to worship, perhaps because it was from that point of vantage that he witnessed the Ark of the Covenant approaching Jerusalem. Subsequently it ranked as a place of special devotion. It affords a perfect panorama of the country all around. From it one looks down on the places which played notable part in the Redemptive drama. A sort of geography of the Gospel lies beneath, including the locality of Our Lord's agony and

arrest, of his lamentation over Jerusalem, the cavern in which he held discussions with his disciples, the tomb of the Virgin and Bethany.

The Mount Olivet Commandment

On that great Thursday the sun was shining brightly in an almost cloudless sky. We know this because of the season and also because the Acts of the Apostles tell us that when Jesus arose a cloud received him into his bosom and he was seen no more.

No more awesome spectacle could be imagined. The man who had risen from the dead stands before them, his mission accomplished to its last detail. He is about to return to the Father who had sent him. He has just promised to send that mysterious being whom he calls the Paraclete.

His appearance must have appeared quite heavenly, for the gates of Heaven stand open to receive him and a foreshadowing of glory must rest upon him. Even in normal life there has been something intangibly extraordinary about him. The phrase occurs in scripture that no man spoke as he did. In every act and word his personality impressed itself upon all who came in touch with him, on the great rulers like Herod and Pilate just as much as on the poor beggar or the thief beside him on the Cross. Circumstances did not affect that radiant force of his. It showed itself whether he was raising the dead or was himself dying. That magnetism drew multitudes after him to hang on his words, just as a word of his caused others to leave their possessions to follow him.

Now he is on Mount Olivet and about to speak his final words on earth. What sort of thoughts are in the minds of those who listen? Are they capable of thinking at all

at a moment of such shattering quality? In that setting, with every eye and ear strained towards him, he utters that colossal commandment which you have taken to yourselves as your very watchword: that every man on earth is to be sought out and offered baptism.

What a devastating commission to deliver to a handful of un-influential people! As I have previously suggested to you, the world was then an unknown quantity. The instruction that they were to penetrate to the ends of it bringing the message of the Gospel to each person would have seemed to them to be less realisable than if we were told to deliver the Gospel out beyond the stars. At least we have some notion of what the universe is and science now clearly shows the possibility of manoeuvring around it.

But there it was. The figure whom they loved and believed in with every fibre of their being has given them that order. Nobody even dreamt of questioning it. Things have proceeded far beyond that point. They acquiesce. But that is all they can do. It is to be wondered if their minds are capable of coping with the immensity of what has been declared to them. Perhaps all that they can take in at the moment is the coming of the Great One not many days ahead, who will tell them what they are to do and open up the next mighty stage.

The Lord Had Ascended but Mary Was Still With Them

The Lord blessed them with his final blessing. Then he left the earth and in a moment the cloud enveloped him. He was gone from them. We are not told what their immediate reaction was but we can guess. When his rising figure no longer held their rapt attention, of course their gaze is at once concentrated upon the one to whom those

happenings meant the most. She is with them still and of greater consequence to them than ever before. She is the mother who has been left behind on earth to care for them. She perpetuates Jesus among them as the moon continues the light of the sun. She will be their pillar of strength, their refuge in every need. Just now, as every eye surveys her, she restores their dazed bewildered minds to equilibrium.

What would have been her own feelings at that moment? They must have contended in her if we could say so in respect of one who was faith and peace itself. Did she suffer as she did at the foot of the Cross or at the tomb? It is strange to think this at a moment of such glory, and yet there was something in it of the same finality and separation. He has left her. She is alone as she has never been before, and yet not in the same sense for he has given himself to her in a new form. She has now to mother the Mystical Body of Christ. In the interval of her meeting her beloved once again, she has to devote herself to her new family.

I repeat: what a moment! What an overwhelming spectacle! But now the overstrained minds are back to normal and in their behaviour we can see something like what the Legion would be doing in emergency conditions. The disciples go back to headquarters for the meal which they must so greatly need. There they would begin to think. Every word that Jesus had uttered would come back to their memories and be meditated and debated, but with a difference! They had heard him say those things when they only dimly understood him and only half believed in him. Since then there has been the Resurrection and the Ascension, so that every word of his would burn in their minds with new lustre and added meaning.

The Invitation to the Great Supper

In particular a parable of his would come to memory by reason of its similarity to the instruction which they had just heard. It is the parable, set out in St Matthew (22) and St Luke (14), about the feast to which guests have been invited but discourteously do not turn up. Let it be borne in mind that the parable form was Our Lord's way of driving home a difficult teaching by reducing it to the simplicity of a story. Note also that he preludes this parable by stating expressly that the feast is the enjoyment of Heaven and the king is God himself. I like the rendering in St Luke the better, because it strikes more vividly the note of universal and promiscuous approach. I give it to you as contained in Lk 14: 15-24:

A certain man gave a great supper and he invited many. And he sent his servants at supper time to tell those invited to come, for everything is now ready. And they all with one accord began to excuse themselves. The first said: I have bought a farm and I must go out and see it; I pray hold me excused. Another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am on my way to try them; I pray hold me excused. And another said: I have married a wife and therefore cannot come. And the servants returned and reported those things to the master. Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servants: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and the crippled and the blind and

the lame. And the servants said: Sir, your order has been carried out and still there is room. Then the master said to the servants: Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in so that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none who were invited, shall taste of my supper.

How completely that parable tallies with the Mount of Olives commandment! The first was a preparation of minds for the second, just as Capharnaum had cleared minds for the institution of the Blessed Eucharist at the Last Supper. The message of both is the same: His followers are to go out into the highways and byways, the lanes and hedges of the whole world to try to induce all to come to the Church. Here I would point to that chapter of the handbook which expands the highways and byways into thirty out-of-the-way categories – even to where the rainbow rests – in the effort to impress on legionary minds as if with a branding iron, that absolutely no place and no class is to elude the divinely-ordered search.

But there is more than the order to go forth. Both the parable and the words of Olivet conclude with the dread insistence that the message of Salvation must be listened to – or else! Those who do not receive it shall be condemned (Mk 16-17); they shall not partake of the heavenly banquet (Lk 14-24).

Modern Excuses for Not Going to All Men

It would be simple madness to deprive that order and accompanying threat of real meaning as the moderns are doing. Where in those divine utterances is there any warranty for suggesting that we are not to present the

Church to every man? Or for thinking that one religion is as good as another? Or for supposing that there are some who need not be approached because their religions are already good enough? Emphatically there is no justification for reading any such meanings into Our Lord's words.

And here enters a peculiar feature. Today it is the King's servants and not the invited guests who are busily coining excuses for not fulfilling the divine command. Which of the two is the greatest offender, the guest who will not come or the servant who refuses to convey the invitation? Truly it is the latter who would merit the severer condemnation.

Nowadays the catch-cry goes up: 'We must respect the opinions of others', as if to explain Christianity to them would be a violation of their personal freedom. Surely it is the other way about; that if we withhold Christianity from them, we are not only doing them a supreme injustice but also interfering with their liberty. Because if they do not know what Christianity is, they are being deprived of the liberty to choose.

Moreover, modern life is built on the idea of proposing one's opinion to others and endeavouring to have it accepted by them. It would be a radical inconsistency to impose a contrary rule in regard to Catholicism.

Anti-abortion and Anti-conversion Anomaly

Another current inconsistency lies in the fact that while right-minded Catholics are outraged to the depths of their being by abortion because it takes life from the unborn, those same persons are found exhibiting a total indifference towards conversion. Abortion brutally refuses the possibility of faith to multitudes, but the non-

converting policy denies it to billions of people and their future offspring.

And may I carry that particular idea a stage further? Mary is the divinely constituted mother of men. If knowledge of her is withheld from them, it thwarts that motherhood.

It cannot be too much insisted that the motives which are causing Catholics to be silent about their faith are being misunderstood by those outside the Church. On several occasions persons have told me that they would not consider the Church because they had never met a Catholic who appeared to possess any faith. In view of the great number of excellent Catholics whom those persons knew, that was a shock. It was only on analysis that I discovered what they meant. They were equating faith and the effort to give it; that is regarding the two as inseparable. They could not understand how one who had faith could have no wish to give it.

That parable which we have been discussing is particularly concerned with the filling of vacant places. The idea is basic in the human mind. Nature too, abhors a vacuum. Man was created to fill the places left empty by the fallen angels. It is unthinkable that precious places should remain unused. This principle has special application at this moment when so many Catholics have proved faithless and have deserted. It is certain that if at such a moment we go to those outside the Church we will find that divine grace is impelling many to come in and fill those vacant places. I think this contention is justified historically. After the Reformation, missionary efforts in South America filled the places abandoned by the apostates. After the losses incurred by the French Revolution and its sequels, efforts in Africa replenished the depleted tanks. So today, spurred

on by that thought, let us go to those outside the Church, particularly in Asia, to repair our present losses.

Charting World Conquest with Mary

But now let us return to Jerusalem, to Pentecost, and to the first disciples. There was not among these any doubt or disputation as to the import of the Lord's directions, nor any hesitation in proceeding to obey them. An old copy of the *Maria Legionis* had a cover-picture which tries to conceive the very first step. It depicted a meeting of the twelve with Mary in their midst. Before them lay the primitive maps of the time. These showed with some approach to accuracy the Holy Land and the countries adjacent to it. Outside that circumference there would be vagueness verging into the unknown and fabulous.

That absolutely unparalleled assembly is planning the Christian campaign. They do not know what lies out in that unchartered territory, but they deal with what they do know. As they proceed they will know more and they will reach out more.

Compared with that territorial chaos and their absence of human resources, how much easier is the task that faces the Church today, even though the population of the earth has grown inconceivably. We know almost every inch of its surface and can go anywhere with comparative facility, in fact in luxury. It is unlikely that many would meet with a crude reception, still less with the grim death that awaited each apostle.

Let us in imagination re-assemble that planning meeting, with Our Blessed Mother and the apostles in our midst, and consider what impact we can make on the modern problem. It has grown greatly but so have our assets and aids.

The Legion is in more than 1,900 of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the world. So it can be said that everywhere legionaries are available, to them can be repeated that order to go into the highways and byways, lanes and the hedges, to invite the people into the Church. Those legionaries do not refuse to go but too often they are not sent. On the other hand see what happens when leadership is given to them. Obediently they go where they are led and they deliver the Master's invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven. In different places they have been persecuted but they have not flinched before it. It is evident that the Holy Spirit is breathing on them.

Leadership Is All That Is Needed

You know that at the end of every year, with a map of the world stretched out before us, a programme is drawn up of places not yet attempted. Then volunteers are summoned and assigned, and during the ensuing year the paper plan comes to life. The dreams turn into the reality of thousands travelling to far off places. Can it not be seen that if this be done with a greater sense of urgency, on a larger scale, and necessarily with a greater emphasis by authority, the population of the whole world can really be approached in the name of the Church. It is not the supreme exercise of faith that the Mount Olivet command was to those who heard it. It has become practical politics for us today. But we must be supplemented. We must be gently but firmly pressurised by authority. Millions more must be brought into service and certain obstacles must be removed. There must, in a word, be true leadership.

There lies the vital gap whereby the plan is spoiled. It is defective leadership. Duty in this respect is not fulfilled despite the peremptory directions of the Vatican Council.

The breakdown frustrates the main purpose of the council which was the mobilisation of the entire Catholic body. Everything else in the council's legislation was intended to minister to that principal aim. So somehow there will have to be a readjustment of minds which will make possible that marshalling of the people of God.

To show what has been done by limited efforts I give some samples. You know that I could multiply them manifold.

Examples of What Can Be Achieved

The first is the case of the Philippines, deemed in the 1930s to have been completely lost to the Faith. The Legion was started and vigorously worked by all the bishops and priests. In a single generation the islands were re-established as a Catholic land, and as a secondary consequence a priest-less desert was made to bloom with vocations so that a foreign mission college could be opened.

The second example is that of an approach by twenty seven African legionaries to a Moslem area of 40,000 inhabitants. These had never been visited before in the belief that it would be resented and unavailing. Three weeks of intense visitation showed the fallacy of those suppositions. The response was 421 applications for instruction. This figure in so short a time suggests that continued effort could convert the entire community and that like effort could do the same elsewhere. Note that Islam is considered to be the greatest problem which faces the Church.

The third example is that of a lone native legionary who was sent to Kapanga, in Zaire [Democratic Republic of Congo], a territory not yet evangelised. He had no trouble

assembling classes to whom he taught an active Catholicity. When these were received, many of them became legionaries whom he used as he had been used himself. Conversions were abundant. At a certain stage it was possible to send a resident priest there which gave them the full Catholic life. At time of latest hearing there were 100 praesidia and the total conversion of the area was imminent.

The moral is: If some good legionaries can be employed so effectively by authority, what could not be accomplished if every legionary were similarly used?

The fourth example is the memorable one of China. It is another evidence that when the Mystical Body functions as a whole – that is with bishops, priests and rank-and-file united – the power of Christ is fully put forth. Despite the counter-influence of a victorious Communist Government and the efforts of determined propagandists in every district, the people listened rather to the Gospel as proclaimed by the bishops and their legionaries. A great tide of conversions resulted, such that the illustrious Monsignor Riberi could report that the situation was one of optimism; that the Church seemed to be on the verge of an era of mass conversions. That was not to be because of the persecution which was launched against the Legion and which destroyed it, but under better auspices it could have happened. In China lives one quarter of the people of the globe. Such are the issues at stake.

The proverb puts it that one swallow does not make a summer. But do not those four examples establish a principle, which is that what was there achieved is possible all over, in every place, in every situation. The methodical adding on of place to place is practicable and would reduce the fulfilment of the Olivet Commandment to an operational routine.

It was ordered that all men be approached. It can be done. But leadership is lacking.