

HOMILY AT THE MASS OF PEACE, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION  
WITH THE NOTRE DAME TEN,  
TED HESBURGH, AND CHARLIE McCARTHY CO-PRESIDING  
A.D. NOVEMBER 18, 2009

*He proposed another parable to them: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when fully grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush and the birds of the air come and dwell in its branches" (Mt 13:31-32).*

Our Gospel today at this Mass of Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation is Jesus' famous parable of the mustard seed. We have all heard it since childhood and practically know it by heart. It is found in all three Synoptic Gospels and therefore must have been in the very forefront of the consciousness of the Apostolic Church as an important teaching of Jesus. But have you ever seen a mustard seed, a Palestinian mustard seed? There are a variety of mustard seeds in the world and all are relatively small. The one to which Jesus would have been referring in today's Gospel would have been the one found in Palestine. This particular mustard seed is the smallest of them all. It is no larger than a speck of black pepper!

It is a meditation in itself to simply look at this seed with Jesus' teaching in mind. That this black speck, if sown, has the invisible power lying within it to produce the largest of plants seems to contradict common sense and to border on sheer fantasy. Yet it, *de facto*, does have such power within it.

Of course, it must first be sown if the power intrinsic to it is to be released. If it is ignored, dismissed, thrown away, or thought worthless because of its diminutiveness, its power is lost. But if planted, even the birds of the air can have a better life living in its branches and protecting themselves, in its shadow, from the blistering sun. Who would have thought, looking only at its visible surface, that this tiny speck of "black pepper" contained such power and potential?

Jesus asks those whom He chooses to "Follow Me." "Follow Me" means to follow the Way He followed. The "Way" is the original, New Testament name for what is now called Christianity. The "Way" does not mean merely a set of propositions about how best to conduct temporal life decently in conformity with cultural norms. The "Way" here means a way of life and conduct consistent with the will of God as revealed by Jesus—the Way that leads to eternal salvation. Jesus teaches that He is "the Way and the Truth" which, *ipso facto*, means that He makes visible by His words and deeds "the Way that is above all ways," to employ the phrase Saint Paul uses to introduce his famous Hymn of Love in 1 Corinthians 13.

Love (*agapé*), Christ-like love, loving as Christ loves, is the Way of Jesus and therefore must be the Way of the Christian and the Church. It is the Way commanded by Jesus of His followers at the Last Supper. As He was about to go forth to confront and to conquer evil, in the form of lethal enmity directed against Him, He said to His disciples and

Apostles: *“I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you also should love one another”* (Jn 13:31-34). John Paul II makes it transparently clear in his Encyclical, Veritatis Splendor, that *“following Christ is thus the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality...Jesus asks us to follow Him and to imitate Him along the path of love: ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you’ (Jn 15:12). The word **as** requires imitation of Jesus and His love, and also indicates the **degree** of Jesus’ love, and of the love with which His disciples are called to love.”* [emphasis in the original]. What else could the “new commandment” conceivably mean, if Jesus is the Incarnation and Word of God and calls His chosen ones to “Follow Me”? Indeed the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in §1970, leaves not a scintilla of doubt on the matter when it pronounces, without qualification, to the whole Church, that *“The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the ‘new commandment’ of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us.”* And, if this were not enough, the Catechism adds more, in the section discussing the words from the Our Father: *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Of these words, the Catechism states without reservation: *“His commandment is ‘that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you should also love one another.’ This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses [God’s] entire will.”*

The Kingdom of God thus arrives, and it only arrives, one tiny mustard-seed deed of Christ-like love at a time. One micro-act after another of loving as Jesus loves in thought, word, or deed is the building process for establishing the reign of God within the person and within the world. Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Doctor of the Church, of whom Thomas Merton writes, *“She is not just a saint, but a great saint, one of the greatest, an extraordinary saint!”* says that we will be shocked when we get to heaven to find out who cooperated with Jesus in the salvation of the world and who didn’t. Parenthetically but perhaps pertinently, this is the same Saint Therese, who writes in her autobiography, THE STORY OF A SOUL—the most read Catholic book in the Twentieth Century—*“Among the countless graces I have received this year, perhaps the greatest has been that of being able to grasp in all its fullness the meaning of love...Jesus made me understand what the will (of the Father) was by the words He used at the Last Supper when He gave His “new commandment” and told His apostles “to love one another as He had loved them.” He did not ask only that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, but that we should love them as He loves them and as He will love them to the end of time...O Jesus, ever since its gentle flame has consumed my heart, I have run with delight along the way of your “new commandment.”*

But what does this have to do with the Notre Dame Ten on November 18, 1969 or today, November 18, 2009? What does it have to do with us concelebrating a Mass of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation with Ted Hesburgh and me co-presiding? My answer is that it has everything to do with those dates, forty years apart, and with our being at Mass together this evening!

You see, except for a little act of Christlike love done by Ted, we would not be here this day. Now I suspect most of you are thinking that what I mean is this: *Since so many of*

*the people, those arrested and those not-arrested, who were involved with the Dow-CIA demonstration in 1969, were part of the Program for the Study and Practice of Nonviolent Conflict Resolution, which Ted and Charlie jointly founded, and of which Ted appointed Charlie the first director, and for which he raised \$100,000 to get it off the ground, there would probably have been no Dow-CIA demonstration of the type that occurred. Hence, we all would not be here today but for Ted's acceptance of the idea of such an endeavor at Notre Dame."*

While this would be historically factually correct, it is not what I meant when I said that "except for a little act of Christlike love done by Ted, we would not be here this day."

When I arrived at Notre Dame in September of 1958, I arrived directly from a hard-core, Boston Irish Catholic community, where there might have been many who were not sure of the existence of God, but where there were none who would not fight to the death to defend the infallibility of the Pope! No one would have missed Mass on Sunday, because of a deeply embedded fear of hell, God, and the priest; so the churches were packed. We are talking "real" Catholic here! In that community, we said the Rosary every evening at 6:45 p.m., on our knees, with Archbishop Cushing, via the radio. We made the Sacred Heart Devotions on Monday nights, the Mother of Perpetual Help Devotions on Wednesdays, and novenas to Saint Jude, Saint Anthony, the Infant of Prague, Saint Martin De Pores, etc., so often that we knew them practically by heart from childhood onward.

In that community, however, "fighting Irish" was not just a public relations nickname. It was the on-the-ground reality. Robert Kennedy is often given credit for originating the saying "Don't get mad, get even." It is credit mis-attributed. Retaliation, revenge, getting-back-at, getting even was part and parcel of the operational Catholicism of Boston Irish male Catholicism of the 1940s and 1950s. Not only was there "nothing wrong with it," it was a noble, honorable, and seemingly indispensable piece of life—personally and socially—if you were going to avoid being a doormat whom people would step all over. Revenge, retaliation, getting-back-at, getting even, via word or deed, were part of no man's weekly Sacramental Confession of his sins to the priest and to God. There was no sin possible in justice. There was no sin in straightening someone out. There was no sin in sending the message to an individual or to the community, "Don't tread on me."

When I arrived on the campus of the "Fighting Irish" in September 1958, I experienced no essential dissonance between the Catholic Christianity in which I had been nurtured for eighteen years, and the Catholic Christianity as operationally embodied in Notre Dame. As in Boston, dealing with the various priests in and out of Confession was a "Russian Roulette" situation. Some were wonderful men, others were toxic. However, soon after arriving I encountered a priest—and I would like to publicly acknowledge this today, for the first time, that it was he who started the process of setting me on the road to finding the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospel and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies.

In those days of yesteryear, all the lights were shut off in all the dorms on campus at 10 p.m., Monday through Friday, and students were supposed to go to bed. (On Saturday and Sunday the lights went off at midnight.) Every night at about 9:55 p.m., the campus radio station, WSND, would close its day's broadcast with the President of Notre Dame, the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, saying the same prayer, followed by the glee club singing the university's Alma Mater. The prayer Ted chose to pray and record, for broadcast every night, was Saint Francis' Peace Prayer:

*Lord make me an instrument of you peace.  
Where there is hatred let me sow love,  
where there is injury, pardon,  
where there is doubt, faith,  
where there is despair, hope,  
where there is darkness, light,  
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,  
Grant that I should not seek so much to be consoled, as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

In the first eighteen years of my Boston Irish Catholic life I had never heard that prayer. After only a week or two of hearing it at 9:55 p.m. each night, I began to get an unformed "feeling" that there was something right, something truthful about that prayer. And so thereafter I would be attentive when it came on. And the rest, as they say, is history—from there to here today! Never before did such thoughts as are embodied in that prayer enter into my mind as Gospel truth, let alone Gospel truth that a Catholic could accept and should live. Yet here was this priest, president of a Catholic university, praying these words publicly and, to my mind, with sincerity. To this day I can remember the sound of Ted's voice saying that prayer as if he really believed it—which I am sure he did then and does now.

For me, that prayer opened up an entirely new dimension of the truth of Jesus and His Gospel, which has not ceased affecting my life to this day. When people ask, as they have on innumerable occasions over the last forty-plus years, "*How did a guy from Irish Catholic Boston ever get from that consciousness to Gospel Nonviolence?*" I can, looking in the rearview mirror of life, point to many stops and stations, graces and people along the way, but it all began with Ted Hesburgh praying Saint Francis' Peace Prayer over WSND at the close of each day in 1958. He, trying to follow Jesus, planted the mustard seed of Gospel truth and love in my consciousness, from which, over a decade later, sprang the idea for a *Program for the Study and Practice of Nonviolent Conflict Resolution* at Notre Dame. From which Program came many of the ideas that moved Notre Dame students in 1969 to protest the fact that Dow and the CIA—two of the major

symbols of a war Thomas Merton called “an overwhelming moral atrocity”—were being permitted to recruit on a Catholic Christian campus.

The Kingdom of God can only be built-up by means of the Kingdom of God. Those means must always be in conformity with “*loving as Jesus loves*” or else they are “*the sound and the fury signifying nothing*.” I am morally certain that when Ted recorded that prayer to be part of the nightly closing of WSND, he intended to love the students at Notre Dame as Christ loves them and to teach them what Christ teaches. He, of his own free will, planted that mustard seed of Christic love and truth. The process of its fruition into a building block for the Kingdom of God was entirely beyond his control, as it is beyond the control of anyone who plants a mustard seed of Christic love and truth anywhere in the world at any time. But Ted’s faith then, as I am certain our faith and his faith are now, was the faith that Dorothy Day articulated so lucidly when she said, “*Our faith is that the good deed will ultimately have good results.*” The good deed for the Christian, regardless of his or her station in life, is the deed in conformity with loving as Jesus loved.

Today, at this Mass of Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation, we are again living off the fruits of that little good deed Ted planted over fifty years ago. We are also planting new mustard seeds of Christlike love and truth by coming together in Christ as Christian friends and brothers and sisters of Christ in the Eucharist. Our disagreements remain and are most serious. But that eternal bond of Christlike love, care, forgiveness, and compassion toward each other must not be allowed—under any circumstances—to be severed. When Mahatma Gandhi was murdered, Winston Churchill—who loathed Gandhi, and who had not one good word to say about him when he was alive—said this: “*In all my dealings with him, I never lost the feeling that he cared about me personally.*”

And so it is and must be with us today as fellow members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The Mystical Body, by the way, is the subject on which Ted wrote his doctoral dissertation. Our bond is eternal, and the love that glues it together, Eternal Love itself, is the love from which we must never separate ourselves or our actions. Jesus—the Lord, God, Savior, and Foundation of the life of each person at this Eucharist—tells us to live in and out of the eternal security of that love, and to give it a way in time and space, by loving all as He loves all, friends and enemies. Regardless of the severity of disagreement concerning truth and its application, Christlike love must not be abandoned, for it is the power and the wisdom of God, from which we are made and for which we are made. And so I am certain that today, at the moment in the Mass when we exchange some sign of peace with one another, this exchange will be symbolic of a truly wholehearted and deeply felt concern for the temporal and eternal well-being of each for the other, and of each for all—with no exceptions. And thereby will be planted more mustard seeds, whose proper and timely fruition we will leave, in serene confidence, in the hands of God, Who is Love (*agapé*).

(REV.) EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY