Quinquagesima Sunday
Rolling Meadows - 1964

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IN NOMINE JESU

I Timothy 2: 5 For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

THE CROSS AND YOUR PRAYERS

This Sunday is known as the PREPARATION. We are getting ready to go up to Jerusalem. In the days and weeks ahead we are going to following along, the Via Dolorosa - the Way of Sorrows - & we are going to look on, as all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man are accomplished. We are going to see the great heart of God laid bare in love for us and all mankind - as the holy and innocent lamb of God is delivered to the Gentiles, and mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on - as He is scourged and put to death. We are going to be there when on the third day He rises from the grave, when all is said & done - this great act of God in our behalf is the only thing that really matters, & hollow is empty &

You must know that, without this there is nothing! Without this life, has no meaning or purpose or direction. Without this there is no hope or assurance or peace in the hour of death. Without this there is no reason or sense for our worship - for our prayers and hymns of supplication. Without this there is no heaven, no angels waiting for you at the end of your days - there is no forgiveness of sins or life everlasting. You must know that there is a definite connection between Christ going up to Jerusalem to suffer, and die, and shed His blood, and the lonely, desperate cry of blind Bartimaeus, as he lifts his voice above shouts of the the multitude & the clamor of the crowds to make himself heard: Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. There is a direct relationship between THE CROSS AND YOUR PRAYERS.

I hope you will not consider it blasphemy if I ask you to do a somewhat strange and unusual thing. In order to get hold of this theme for our meditation this morning - THE CROSS AND YOUR PRAYERS - I must ask you for a moment to imagine that you are God. Only by doing this - by imagining that for a few moments you are in the place of God, can you grasp the deep, inner and eternal connection between that piece of wood outside the gates of Jerusalem two thousand years ago and the prayers you said this morning as you began the day. Imagine, if you can, that you are God - and suddenly the universe is full of voices, begging, pleading, crying - and all of history is crowded with hands uplifted, begging, pleading, reaching, and asking for something that you alone can give. Can you imagine even for a moment

the humanly incredible burden which the prayers of all mankind place upon the heart of God?

It all began thousands of years ago in the Garden in the cool of the day. You remember that fatal hour when the doors of Paradise closed and God drove out man, and at the East of the Garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. What could a man do now? Adam and Eve were all alone in the world, drawn together by a sorrow so immense that nothing seemed able to heal the wound. Think of the lonely, cold dark of being alone in a world that God had made lovely and good, and man had spoiled by his sin. The glorious adventure of Paradise was over. There was nothin now but misery, and suffering, and anxiety, and fear, and the finality of death: In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. This was all except for the assurance and promise of God - the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head - who would destroy death and redeem the world its sin.

In the long centuries to follow the earnest crys of the faithful ~~stormed the gates~~ echoed throughout the corridors of heaven ~~of heaven~~. Prayers came from the lips of kings, and patriarchs, and prophets: Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice... Be merciful unto me...Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down! The searching eyes of watchmen on the heights, the songs of David in his sin, the voices of a whole people, weeping in the prison camps of Egypt and Babylon - knowing that they were far from God and had no way to come to Him except that God Himself should send the promised One! And then, in the fullness of time, the promised One came. Conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin mother, His Name was Immanuel - God with us. Shepherds left their flocks, and wise men came from the East to see this thing that had come to pass - to kneel down, and worship, and adore. He lived His life; He loved His people; He healed their sick; He raised their dead; He heard their cries for help and relief: Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. ~~But~~ Then at the last the great flood of prayer paused for a moment, as He raised His voice in a single, lonely

prayer: Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Then, however, it really began. Day by day for two thousand years, first from the depths of caves and catacombs where the followers of the Crucified were compelled to hide, then rising into light, swelling, spreading, surging over the earth - in the first lispings of childhood, in the solemn celebrations of all the churches - from the blighted misery of the slums, from palace and hospital - in the last confessions of the dying - from 10,000 times 10,000 - day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, the prayers of a stricken humanity have come to the great heart of God. While a little boy was asking for a bicycle, a man was begging for relief from the pain of cancer. And God hears them all and answers them all! Sometimes His answer is yes! Sometimes His answer is no! Most often it is Wait a little while!

Can you imagine now what a burden that is even for the heart of God? Shall we go a step farther? For God there is no time, no past, no present, and no future. There is only the eternal NOW! And so yesterday's prayers are in His remembering heart. Tomorrow's prayers are now present before Him - all of them begging, pleading, crying - over all the water sheds of history - and all the crise of human life - from all of us now on earth there is this great river of prayers, beating forever at the heart of God. Can you see now why our theme, THE CROSS AND YOUR PRAYERS, requires a real effort - not to understand because that is impossible - but just to imagine, to think and to see.

It ~~really~~ will always remains a mystery! The Power which spins the comets and the stars through incredible space and whirls the infinitesimal particles within each atom - the Power which pulses in the sun and the rain and life and death - this Power can be approached through the simple act of prayer - by my asking for relief from pain or for forgiveness for the careless gossip I spoke yesterday. One thing is for sure - Not all the religions of ancient Greece and Rome, not Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or any other religion ever dreamed of this.

Why not? The answer is that a man called Christ Jesus hung upon a Cross

and died with a prayer on His lips. By that death and by that prayer He became the one great, single Voice in the Universe which supports our prayers, for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. On our knees we are never alone! There is always this other great Voice speaking for us and with us - the Voice and the Man who has earned the right to pray for us - to be our Mediator, our Lawyer, our Go-Between - because He gave His soul into death and took us away from a silent, voiceless, prayerless life by His prayerful death: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Luther comments: Who can express such love? His heart was so full of the fire of love that no one can comprehend. In pain and shame He acted as though He felt them not and was thinking only of our sin and God's wrath. Is that not love? He burned and writhed beneath the weight, the spear, the blood, the wounds, and yet He said: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Here is a loveliness that only the eyes of the spirit can discern.

The Cross has given us the power to pray, a Person to pray with us, and a Mediator to pray for us. This is the only answer for the darkness and fear and loneliness and anxiety of our time. Today, tonight, tomorrow, somewhere, sometime you must come to see a Man die - and by knowing that He died for you, you will enter a new and lovely world - a world of prayer a world where you can be in communion with God - where you can be poor with Christ's poor, despised with Christ's despised, accounted foolish for His sake - a world of compassion & human concern where you can join Him in pardoning the unpardonable, loving the unlovable, and forgiving the unforgiveable. This is the beginning and end of history - this love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. When you pray your prayers today, try to remember that your voice now reaches the heart of God because a Man died on a Cross to make this great mystery, this holy wonder, the final miracle possible. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He is the only One - and you need no other.

Amen.