3rd Wednesday in Advent
Rolling Meadows - 1967

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Romans 12: 1 I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

SACRIFICE

The coming of evening has always had a sobering effect upon the human heart. When the glitter of the world grows dim and dies and God lights His own sanctuary lamps once more, it is perhaps a little easier for us to consider the great, eternal, fundamental things in human life. Is it not a pity that men should use God's own darkness and the stillness of night as a cover for sin? All things come home at eventide. That should also be true of your soul and mine. Another day has gone. Our time together is so short. Something still remains to be said before the stillness and peace of our life here together merges again into the noise and confusion of the 20th Century - with so ~~little time left to accomplish~~ many things to do - not only in the world - and in our own country - and in our own lives ~~all the last minute chores before Christmas~~. I should like to ask you while I still have the God-given opportunity: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE?

Christmas demands an answer! The time between the manger bed and the splintered Cross was ~~short~~ exceedingly. It was short even as men count time - just a ~~short~~ magere 33 yrs Yet over all those 33 years there hung the divine purpose. That purpose was announced already by the angels out over the hills of Bethlehem: GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN. Here was the announcement that the Hands of this Child, so soon to be torn by nails, would take hold of the hearts of men. Here was the prophecy that those who would bring their hearts to Him would have peace. That was the divine purpose of His whole life. Tonight, as our eyes turn toward the manger, that divine purpose has become more anxious and perhaps more than ever before immediate. It is still possible for men to have peace through Him who ended the war between God and man. The world may have lost peace, but God has not. It has come back into the world over the strange road of the Manger and the Cross.

Some years after the Manger and the Cross St. Paul wrote to the men and women in the congregation at Rome: I APPEAL TO YOU...BY THE MERCIES OF GOD TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. A LIVING SACRIFICE! Before our mind's eye rises the picture of the dim altars of Moses and David and Solomon, hidden by the

smoke of incense, the flames of their sacrifice rising to the unheeding stars. Something like that, says the apostle, our lives should be. What an idea! - Life laid down on the altars of the living God! - Life surrendered to the Will of the Eternal! - Life placed in His high-priestly hands forever! - A LIVING SACRIFICE! Like thunder these words of the apostle come echoing down through the centuries to give to life, finally and forever, meaning and holiness and purpose and peace. Here is the end and the aim of life. Here is the end of the road. When we know that, we have come home.

I know that there is no unwillingness in your heart to walk that road. The very fact that you are here tonight is an indication of that. You have been redeemed by His precious blood of this Child of Xmas. You are not afraid to come near the altars of God. But you may feel that your own sacrifice will not be worth much. You think that it will not matter much if you back off or step out of line sabatical and let others carry on. YOU ARE WRONG! It matters tremendously and eternally. It matters firs of all to you personally. The tense of life changes with such pitiful speed. Today you say: What shall I do? Tomorrow brings old age and you say: What have I done? Then today and yesterday will have left their mark. It will be either the high reward of a commanding faith and a great self-sacrificing love, or it will be the mark of bitter memories and the past that can never come back - the sorrow of empty rooms and blank walls and staring windows. It does matter. It matters to you personally. It matters eternally.

But your life and what you do with it matters also to others. The circles of life are like those of a small stone thrown on still waters. Do you say that your station in life is humble and not worth much? a unimportant Surely it is not too much to say that each one of you influences at least two lives during the course of a year. Now suppose that those two whom you touch each in turn influence two other the following year. Do you know that in the course of 20 years the figure would amount to well over a million? That is God's own law of progression. You may never see the final result. That does not matter. All that matters is that we see our own individual importance in the gracious purposes of God for the hearts

of men. Our sacrifice may mean heaven to someone who is far away from us today. And that one someone is more precious and more valuable than the whole world. Just one single somebody (who before was a nobody) brought close to the Manger and the Child and His redeeming love - that is enough to cause all the hosts of heaven to break loose in shouts of joy and songs of eternal triumph - THE ANGELS OF GOD REJOICE OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS!

God never measures great sacrifices in terms of great results or the public blare of trumpets. Some years ago a cartoonist portrayed a Christmas scene that has been, at least for me, unforgettable. By contrast, I think of all the present that are given to me, my wife, and our 3 children. The tears come to my eyes, and I nobly try to pretend that I have a bad cold, or that nothing is the matter. It was Christmas Eve. The picture shows a little boy huddled in a darkened doorway with his ragged overcoat draw close about him. With sunken eyes he is looking out into a windswept, deserted street. Beneath the picture was the caption: PRETTY SOON THEY'LL BE LIGHTING THE TREES IN THE PARK AND THEN IT WILL BE CHRISTMAS AGAIN. Three things about that picture touched me. In the first place, the boy asked so little of life. Secondly, I wondered how many other boys and girls and adults were like him. Thirdly, somebody had been thoughtful enough to give him all the Christmas he would know. Perhaps it had been done unknowingly and mechanically. But it was done. And I know tonight that somewhere some one is waiting for you to bring God's own eternal Christmas into a wandering heart. This is your destiny. I APPEAL TO YOU BY THE MERCIES OF GOD TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. Amen.