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Lenten Meditation: Peace of the Cross, 1940

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About twenty years have come and gone since America paused for a moment to bury in the national cemetery at Arlington the body of the Unknown Soldier. Lost and forgotten in life, he was to become in death a perpetual symbol of the world's hope and a silent messenger of the world's peace. Near his tomb men placed an eternal light so that his memory might live in the grateful hearts of his countrymen. Today, twenty years later, the deep and grim shadow of irony surrounds that light. Peace is down and war is up. The world is mad with fear and the horizons of humanity are red with blood. Today, twenty years after the body of the Unknown Soldier found its last resting place, it looks as though he had died in vain. (The golden hopes of the world are once more torn by bullets and crushed by the trampling feet of the hounds of war.)

Today we may well pause to inquire into the reasons for this strange madness. Why do men hate each other? Why do the councils of the great of the earth calmly proceed to plan the killing of their fellowmen? To answer these questions in terms of the demands for trade and territory, in terms of the personality of dictators, in terms of the lust for power, does not strike at the heart of the problem. The answer is at the same time deeper and more simple than that. If you go out into Nature at dusk you will find that trees, stones and hills cast shadows which are out of all proportion to the realities of the world and which will give you, if you attend only to them, a grotesque and utterly unreal picture of the realities behind these shadows. Something like that
happens in the history of men with fearful regularity. Under
the accumulated burden of fear upon fear and shame upon shame,
the eyes of men turn down and down and deeper down until they
see only the shadows of the realities of God, the shadows which
persuade them that momentary panaceas and temporary plans and
endless conferences are going to heal the world's pain and turn
away the world's ruin. There is no permanent hope in that. All
the history of men and all the experience of the human heart is
against it. You cannot heal a cancer by covering it with
bandages. You cannot remove hate and fear and dismay from the
heart of the world by conducting a conference in Geneva. You
may postpone its final result, but the realities are still here
- the old envies, the old vanities, the old fear - the stark
and grim reality of the sinstricken heart of man - man who will
hate and destroy and kill because there is no peace in his own
heart.

There is the answer - the only answer which can stand up in
the light of eternity. Today it is time for more of us to see
it clearly before it is too late. Much has happened in the world
since the Unknown Soldier was laid to rest, but nothing has come
over our days and our years which would shake the deep and con-
suming conviction that today, as seldom before, the world must
wait - not for the man of the hour at the program of the moment
- but for the God of the eternities and the plan of the ages.
We have looked around for help. Now it is time to look up. We
have tried to plan a new world. Now it is time to plan a new
life. We have asked ourselves what we want. Now it is time to ask what God wants. Far more than pacts and treaties we need today the new promise of an old peace — the voice of the Eternal pouring itself into the agony of life without God — the last hope of a generation driven to its knees by the overwhelming realization that it has nowhere else to go: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

There it is. The peace of God. Here is the profoundest need of our age. Often we may not be able to put it into words, but we know it in our hearts as we know nothing else. Some years ago Bertrand Russell summed it up in the following words: "Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. For him, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the few hopes that ennable his little life." I cannot see how men can live and die on that. There must be something which will make them glad and sure again, something to tell them that their brief mortal life has immortal meaning, something which will substitute for their deep dismay a peace and an understanding which the voices of despair and doubt can never give.

And the answer to this profound need lies in the simple words "The peace of God." On these words rests the last unity of the world, the unity which unites human hearts in a higher patriotism than men, unaided and alone, can ever know, — the patriotism of
Peace of the Cross

the kingdom of God. Peace - the peace which the world cannot give
- the peace which passeth the understanding of men - comes only
from God. Long ago He gave it to the hearts of men through the
obedient life and atoning death of His only-begotten Son, Jesus
Christ our Lord. Through Him, God spoke to the sinstricken, hate-
filled hearts of men finally and forever; "My peace I leave with
you." Yesterday, today, and tomorrow this was, is, and shall be
the peace which men need more bitterly than anything else - the
peace of forgiven sin - the peace of a heart redeemed by the blood
of the eternal Son of God - the peace which rests forever and
forever in the sure knowledge that without the fear of any law
or command, your heart rests quiet and still in the Godgiven,
Spiritborn faith in the Prince of Peace. We cannot remove hate
and blood and war from the world while your heart and mine is at
war with God. We cannot stand united in anything but the most
transitory and fleeting concerns of our brief interlude between
the eternities, unless and untill we stand united in the blessed
unity of heaven, the majestic company of the redeemed of God,
bound together by a common hope, a common love, and a common
faith in Him Who even today holds in His crosstown hands the
last Peace of the human race.