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Lenten Meditation: The Abundant Life, 1940

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Noon-day Address
Monday, March 4, 1940
St. Louis, Missouri
O. P. Kretzmann

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

It is one of the momentary ironies of modern history that a phrase which has been a part of the vocabulary of Christendom for almost two thousand years has become popular during the past few years because it was once used by a modern statesman in referring to American life. The abundant life! In terms of our economic and social difficulties it means that one third of our nation should no longer be ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clad. Today this phrase is on the lips of men and women who have never thought of the fact that more than nineteen hundred years ago it was spoken by One who knew what the "abundant life" did not consist in the things which a possesses. When the Lord of the Church first used the phrase, He was standing in the shadow of the Cross with eternity before Him. The "abundant life" was to come through Him and His Cross. It was to be the treasured possession of all those who walked the ways of men with the light of eternity in their hearts.

The modern world has tragically forgotten the true meaning of the "abundant life." Life has become merely narrow and fearful, haunted by a sense of utility, a bewilderment, and a restless asking whether the game is worth the candle. To many thousands walking the streets of the world life has no meaning and no value.

One does not have to be a servant of the Church in order to understand this. If men believe that they are the final result of an evolutionary process, with no purpose and no goal, they must continue to live as the beasts of the field. They can have no hope and no light. Life becomes entirely physical. No matter how "abundant"

it may be on that level, it will still be the life of the animal. Even for many who make a desperate attempt to live on a somewhat higher level, the daily routine of modern living has destroyed the meaning of the "abundant life." It has become a waiting for something which will never come and a treadmill of dull sameness.

Here lies the tragedy of the modern world. Nineteen hundred years ago a voice speaking from eternity told men that the "abundant life" was within the reach of every man, woman, and child in the world. To live abundantly means that the narrow, confining walls of sin must be broken down. We often point to wrecked lives as a result of sin, and forget that long before they are wrecked they have become narrow and crabbed and bitter because of their separation from God and Heaven. Only on the basis of the forgiven sin can man erect a structure of "abundant life." Only under the Cross of Jesus Christ does this phrase acquire a new and heavenly meaning.

There is always the grim danger that life will be dominated by a crippling spirit of doubt and anxiety and fear. It is not easy to live "abundantly" in the modern world. The echoes of the roaring guns, the sorrow of social danger, the pain in the life of the individual — all these tell us that life has definitely gone wrong. Despite all this, however, it is possible for the individual human soul to find, even in the modern world, the fullness and richness of life to which our Lord pointed nineteen hundred years ago. God lets us see ourselves as we are, with all our sin and all our shame, until nothing but a Savior will do. Then He enters life through the Cross and His dear Son, and we begin to see the value of living. We suddenly know what it means to stand in the long line of those who have lived life, full and

rich and brave and free, borne and steadied by the nail-torn hands of the everlasting Rebuilder of the souls of men.

March 4, 1940. None of us are completely and entirely satisfied with our lives. There are the old sins and the old troubles. There are weaknesses and defeats. There are the ghosts of yesterday's mistakes which haunt us as we face tomorrow. Perhaps we have tried to compromise with God and with life. Perhaps we have made the great perennial mistake of trying to find the fullness of life in the emptiness of the modern world. More than ever it is necessary for us to hear the voice of Him who said nineteen hundred years ago, "I am come that they might have life and have it the more abundantly." With Him we can see life as He saw it from the altar of the cross, rising in fullness and brightness from the darkness of this earth to the glory of heaven. By Him life can be transformed into preludes of eternity and the everlasting values of God. With Him the world is well lost, but life is ours.