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## Homily

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## HOMILY\*

Today's first reading speaks of the travail of creation; creation, St. Paul tells us, awaits its deliverance in the revelation and the glory of God's sons. Its liberation from death and corruptibility depends, he says, on the transformation of God's own sons. The universe awaits the further thing it is to become. It is, and yet it is not yet what it will be.

In the passage from the Gospel we are told of bread *which* like manna given in the desert, comes down from heaven. Manna was perishable bread. But the other bread from heaven, the bread of life, the gift of Jesus, is imperishable bread, bread which gives imperishable life. Bread is; and yet it is not yet: it points beyond itself to the bread which is for life undying; to the bread of the new creation and the new life.

### I

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we have heard no end of things on development in our conference. For days now we have looked at statistics, at vicissitudes of trade and aid, and we have used up enough sheets to boost significantly the development of the pulp and paper industry. The operative word, in all this talk on development, has been the word *MORE*: *more* rice for the tables of the poor, *more* coins in the pocket of the peasant, *more* books in his children's hands, *more* care, *more* dignity, *more* community, *more* life—fuller, deeper, richer life.

But all these 'mores', the whole PLUS-factor we have spoken so much about...all these *mores* did not really need to bring us together, as Christians, from so many parts of Asia. As Father Schuette remarked, *this* set of concerns

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\* This homily was preached by Rev. Catalino G. Arevalo, S.J., at the concelebrated Mass on 21 July 1970, the University Chapel, Sacred Heart University, Tokyo, on the occasion of the Asian Ecumenical Conference on Development.

is the task also of individual governments and the United Nations, of any number of regional and international organizations which carry more prestigious alphabetical titles than our rather humble AECD. We do not have to be men of faith, we do not have to be Christians, to plead and labor for the *mores* which we in fact deal with—and rightly—in our resolutions and statements. But we have gathered as men of faith in the Word GOD has spoken in JESUS CHRIST, and as someone asked one morning in an open forum, “In the context of development, what does that mean?”

## II

This morning I may perhaps be allowed to suggest three things, I think, perhaps it means.

(1) It means, I think, first of all that we are called to love the world and man more than any others on the face of the earth. This may surprise the secular humanist, who has so often accused the Christian of not loving the earth, of not really loving man. But it is, I submit, true. The Christian is asked to love the earth and man more because he is called to love them wholly, passionately for what they *are*, but for that in them also, which is still to be. He is asked to love them completely, finally; he is asked to love them all the way.

We believe that Christ is risen, that in his human bodiliness he lives a larger life; that is, that beyond this thing of joy and laughter, boredom and tears we call *life*, he rejoices in the life which we call *eternal*. . . that life into which this lovely thing we hold fast to our hearts in the short span of years. . . gives us only little glimpses, glimpses that can yet ravish our minds. And that life is a gift: He was raised by the Father; that life comes from God. . . . We believe that God has promised to give to us a kingdom; that is, that this beautiful, wonderful, hurtful, painful thing we call the earth, the city of man, will in the end *not* be junked, *not* be discarded, but saved, polished, renewed, made more beautiful, more wonderful, infinitely more lovely still. And that this creature called man, the light that shines in his eyes, the

power that lives within his skull, will finally not be just ashes in a snuff box, but will go on to know and care and love more and more fully still . . . in fact, so the prayer says, *forever and ever*. You and I, all of us, have had our hearts broken by people and things too lovely to hold in them; but our faith tells us, that beyond the grave, there is a new Jerusalem, and things will be grander still, and people so much more winning.

But isn't that just the point? That the Christian looks forward in hope to the pie in the sky and doesn't care much about enlarging the cake on our earth? At least for nearly two thousand years that has been the trouble, we are told, and there are a hundred books, if there is one, which can prove all this quite learnedly.

But again, isn't that the point about this whole conference? That we have lately been playing a game called "seeing the signs of the times", and while at it, have seen that believing there will be a new Jerusalem and a life forever doesn't mean we are to despise the present time and this earth and our earthly towns of Tokyo or Manila, or spurn this life, smash the computer, or burn down the city. That in fact, one can so look for what is to come, that he loves what is all the more; since what is, is what is to come, raised by divine gift to some higher power beyond our imagining. And thus we can love what we have, knowing it will be finer and better than it is, knowing that what it shall be depends in some measure (by God's own willing) on what *we* make out of what we have. That because we love man, and know him to be made of the stuff that is somehow to *be* forever and ever, we must love him just the way he is, and even beyond that, to what he is meant to become.

For the purely secular humanist, development is to build heaven on this earth, because there is to be no other. For the Christian the task, in a sense, is quite the same: *only* he works in the belief that this world, somehow, will survive beyond all dissolution, as man will survive his death. And the city of the present, for him, draws for its model on the city yet to come, its values, its promise, the splendour of its hope. (Any one who has read the symbolic vision of Heaven in the

Book of Revelation knows that whatever it is, it is certainly not other-worldly, with its fairyland-like golden streets and gem-studded towers and its clear running waters. . . )

(2) And the *second* thing that the Christian brings to the task of development is a realism which accepts that sin is all about the earthly city: that it is there, but that it won't be there for always; that it has power, but a power that will, in the end, be broken and done away with. The Christian can accept that egoism and pride are rife in the heart of man, and thus in all he turns his hands to. That the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are going to be in view for the duration, making it always possible for Jerusalem here to become Babylon here. "Behold I make all things new". But the rust is at work, too, and prejudice and envy, and hatred in the heart of man. Men love money, and little children starve. Men fence in lovely acres they can't really use, and people and rats crowd into abominable slums. Men hate each other, and bombs drop on country villages; and we sing, where have all the flowers gone? where have all the young men gone? The Christian knows that there is not disease and poverty only, but selfishness and injustice too. That there is sin about, mostly in men's hearts, and that part of development (a bigger, more important part than some experts may think) is having men purge the poison from their hearts, and having them fill its place with compassion, with mercy, with the terrible thing called love.

But the Christian must believe, you see, that this can happen; that men *can* change, and that this change can mean all the difference.

Wherever sin is, death is. And men sicken and die; cities wither and die; civilizations know decay and dissolution; history is not one unbroken mounting curve. The Christian knows that too. Hiroshima and Biafra and Vietnam are not, after all, something at all foreign to a faith whose centerpiece is a cross.

(3) And this is the *third* thing the Christian brings with him to development: "Should not have Christ suffered these

things, and so have entered into his glory?" The knowledge, the uncomfortable knowledge perhaps, that Christ's passion is in all this too, as part of the process. Because sin is there, conflict is there also. And when one loves enough, he is going to be asked to put his love on the line. When he meets egoism, injustice, manipulation of men: the pattern of discipleship says, love through that; do something about it; give, not your spare moments only, but the core of life itself. Often enough love asks for the total gift. "That he lay down his life for his friends." "My body, which will be given for you." And the name of this gift is poverty, the poverty the Gospel speaks about. The understanding that it is servanthood which best speaks the Christ in us, which best calls forth the Christ in other men.

These three things, then: to believe in the reality of the everlasting city which is to be God's gift, but also the model of our earthly one; to believe in the reality of sin and its impress on man's history; but to believe above all in the power of Christ's passion which has made grace abound there where sin once abounded—these three things form part of the kit the Christian brings to the task of development.

### III

And they are all things which make him love the world, you see, that teach him to love man, more than anyone else on earth. For he loves man, and the world for man, *in Christ*. In Christ who is the heart of things, whose unborn form groans within all creation. In Christ the redeemer, whose saving work is at work at the core of the broken things and broken hearts on earth, healing and mending them. And because of this the Christian must love them all in Christ's passion. But he must love them in his resurrection too. And that means, he must love them even *beyond* sin and death; he must love them as Christ loved them, in an out-landish way, beyond rhyme and reason, out of all earthly proportion and sense.

For it is through Christ's risen manhood that we are to see the earth and man. And in that transformed manhood

we see them lovely beyond all imagining, as they were meant to be seen, as God sees them, at Omega point, if you will; in Utopia. And that is how we can dream them beyond what they are, beyond their present corruptibility; care for them, work in them, drive them, love them *forward* beyond what they are, towards what they were meant to be: fulness, wholeness, beauty, joy: man renewed, a new creation in Christ unto whose stature growth comes at last, and uniquely, to its true term.