

Talk by Reverend Thomas Carroll to all Eastern Cenacles via telephone - March 13, 1965

Sisters....I would like to ask that we start with prayer...."God grant that hate may be taken from our country and from our hearts. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Sisters, I want to talk to you about love but I am going to talk to you about hate. If I get emotional, it is because I am filled with emotion.

I left here after I saw on the TV Monday night what had happened, the brutality of Sunday, and I said I could no longer remain here. As I put it in the somewhat common expression, Father Carroll, you have been talking about this long enough. It is time you put your body where your mouth is. And I was afraid. And I made the decision, and I was afraid. And I made my arrangements, and I was afraid. My hands were sweaty, and they are sweaty now when I think of it.

We got a plane at 11:00 o'clock. There were fifty priests, ministers, rabbis, laymen. We landed in Atlanta at 2:00 o'clock in the morning. A great friend of mine met me there and told us we couldn't go across - not Georgia - but we dared not go across Alabama at night; particularly since there were three Negroes among us. He took us to his house and we stayed there. He said he could offer refreshments and he could offer two beds, and he could offer a large floor space. I think one of the ecumenical things was that the double bed was shared by a Negro Baptist minister and a Catholic priest. The floor was comfortable for the two hours we had. I don't think I had any nightmares, but I was still afraid. The next morning we flew across from Atlanta by private chartered plane to the little air strip at Selma. There were two Negroes with me in the back seat of the little plane and one of them pointed out that he was afraid of the plane, and I stupidly said, "don't be afraid of the plane; that's nothing to what is ahead of us." I shouldn't have said it because I knew he was as scared as I was.

We got off at the air strip and the building was closed and we were out there, and as fast as possible we called for taxis from in town. We had numbers. Negro taxis came out and picked us up and it relieved us a little bit just to get out of that open space, to be near a highway and begin to move.

We went into town and as we got into the town we came near the Brown Chapel, the Baptist chapel, which has been the center of this Christian movement. The police were all around. The police cars were there; police cars at the end of the street, at the end of each block...down below you could see milling groups. We went in, and I am going to skip from there rather quickly. I do think I should make one point to you. We were offered the facilities of the Negro homes nearby and one woman met me at the door and said, "You are welcome to my house, sir, and anything you want." I said, "I am Father Carroll from Boston" - I am going to cry as I put it - She said, "O, Father, we are Catholics; it means so much to have you here." I am going to skip because there is so much. I am going on to the afternoon.

We were back and forth - knowing what was going to happen - knowing there was a Federal injunction. A reporter came up and asked me, "Are you going to march if it is against the law?" And I said, "I would like to put it this way, that I have come, not to break the law but to fill it." He said, "You mean you won't march?" And I said, "You didn't hear what I said." Of course what I was saying was, 'I have come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it'. I said "To me, the law is something more. The law means many things. It means love of God and love of man, and Americanism, and I know that we will follow Martin Luther King."

They came, and we started. The hate, bitter hate. Just ahead of us were the policemen lined up, every step along the way, every corner along the way; but on the

side of us were the local Negroes. The thanks you read on their faces, the smiles and tears; and you knew it was worth it all. You marched on through the town and you walked ahead and as you walked the police were on either side, state troopers. You don't know what the word means - police. It means state troopers whose hatred is so palpable. It means sheriff's deputies whose hatred is tangible. It means walking hatred. It means palpable hatred. It is a viable thing. There is something in the air. I was scared. The minister next to me was helping me, particularly with the ups and downs of the sidewalk as I used my cane. We got part way down the line of march and we were getting these horrible insults from white persons back of the line, and the looks of hatred from them as well. You knew you were getting closer and closer to the moment of truth.

At the head of the line was the man the Ku Klux Klan had sworn to assassinate, Martin Luther King. There at the head of the line was Bishop Lord of the Methodist Church, Monsignor Gingras....

Part way down the street in the center of the hate-filled town we looked across and there was Dr. Sam Bachrach, a real friend of mine from way back. I never knew how much a friend he was until we went down in the plane together. He was down there to volunteer for the Medical Commission for Human Rights and he had managed to get two ambulances through to that spot half way through the line. He waved to me and suggested that I come out. He thought I looked as if I should, and he knew I wasn't going to, but the important thing was, he was there. He has said, since he came back to Boston, in all his years in medicine, his five years in service and all his time in combat, that he never before felt in a situation where he thought that the Geneva Conference Red Cross would not be honored. If there is time I will tell you what they have done about the doctors down there.

Then we came to the turn, the turn to the left to go over the bridge, and the orders were read to stop, but Martin Luther King went on, and we went on, and we went over that high bridge, and it is important that it was a high bridge, because here the troopers last Sunday were able - the troopers, I think more the sheriff's deputies, were able to crush people against the bridge. As we got onto the bridge some of the people came in and there was a woman on the outside of the line, and they said, "In God's name, get her in and two men get outside of her" - she was a white woman. We got to the top of the bridge and far, far ahead, so far that you couldn't quite tell what it was, was something stretched across the road as a barricade. I made a slip yesterday and said it looked like a non-human barricade, wood or something stretched across the road, and the slip was that it didn't just look like a non-human barricade, it was a non-human barricade - George Wallace's troopers - Al Lingo's troopers - from that distance they looked like dead soldiers.

We began going down and I couldn't go fast enough and we had to get the others in the line to keep coming around me and try to keep the lines closed so they couldn't separate us. We began forming a column of four, and the troopers were lined up and the deputies were lined up and we walked between them - they were on either side - and this great barricade ahead. I summarized it on the plane on the way out of Selma by saying 'The March of the Light Brigade'. I don't know how it goes, but 'on to the valley of death and into the jaws of hell....' This is the feeling.

And then we came to the point of horror, the point of terror, the point of truth, the point of mutilation of last Sunday, and the bull horn voice came - "This march will go no further. You will all stop. You will not walk beyond this point." It was repeated again and again. The policemen had been standing by -- I don't want to call them policemen, I have too much respect for the ordinary police -- the storm troopers at the side who had their billy clubs in the hands suddenly unloosened them

and began wrapping the thongs around their wrists and swinging the clubs, and the looks on their faces was "the food is on the table". We marched in and closed up the line and came as close as we could. As you looked back you could still see them streaming over the bridge. Over 500 ministers, rabbis and priests - 75 priests, I think - and the Negroes who had come from all over, and the white people of Alabama. As we stood there in a trap Martin Luther King was negotiating at the head of the line and we found out afterwards that what he was saying was "This is only peaceful assembly and I am asking if we may use the roads of this state and walk and march to present a petition to the governor according to the American law." "This march will go no further." I don't know what the noise was on the side but somebody might have dropped a monkey wrench. To me it sounded like the bolt of a rifle pulled back. If it was the bolt of a rifle you knew it was for Martin Luther King. He called on us to kneel there, and we knelt and a priest prayed, a rabbi prayed - and if you know what they think of a Jew down there you know what he was doing by standing in front of that group - and Martin Luther King prayed - the charismatic leader.

We were all kneeling there and the axe handles had just been passed out to some of the red necks standing out behind the line; and we knelt there and Martin Luther King prayed, and he prayed for the persecutors, prayed that God would touch the heart of George Wallace. He prayed for the state troopers. He didn't do it to incite them but believe you me, it made them angry; and he prayed and he thanked God - believe me he was praying in the name of all of us - he thanked God for all the local people and for all the people from outside who had come ready to present their human bodies on the altar of sacrifice. You knew it could happen at any moment. No one could describe the combination of the feeling of fear, of being scared, and somehow there was inner peace.

Then we rose and began to sing the Freedom Song on Highway 80 outside of Selma, Alabama, the first time in history that a demonstration was there, and the state troopers were there, and we sang the Freedom Song - "God is on our side" - you know how it goes - if you don't, I hope you will learn it - "We shall overcome, Truth shall set us free". There is one verse, "We are not afraid". As we sang that I was clasping hands right to left and left to right, my right hand in the hand of a minister and my left hand in the hand of a minister; I sang "We are not afraid" and I looked at the Reverend Mr. Baxter and I grinned, I threw a sick grin, because I ~~knew~~ how afraid I was; and I grinned at the man to the right of me and he smiled back. We were scared, yet there was the truth that "God is on our side".

And the order came to return. The order came to turn back and the leaders - young boys, marvelously disciplined boys, went back along the line and said, "We have to turn back", and they knew the orders had come from Martin Luther King. Noise came over the bull horn, "All troopers will withdraw from the road". The troopers drew back far enough so that none of us would touch them. The order came from Martin Luther King; nobody down the line questioned it. We turned and we marched back over the bridge and marched back, still through looks of hatred, and one of the priests with me said later "That was when I knew we had won". Hatred, the bitter hatred you will never know.

We went back to the Brown Chapel. The crowd was in there and I was up on the stage, rostrum, if you want. Martin Luther King was speaking outside on the steps to the throng out there. Another minister spoke inside, and the floor was filled and the galleries were filled with white and Negroes, almost by chance completely intermingled, joining hand in hand, and we sang the Freedom Song in the church as I have never heard it sung before. Who am I to say that I felt the Holy Spirit was there. Martin Luther King came in and spoke to us, and at the end I had to go, I had to run to catch my chartered plane before dusk - but I had to find time to shake the hand of Martin Luther King. I did and I said I feel my hand is freshly blessed.

What I want to say, and I want to say it very strongly - don't, don't, don't blame the South. I think that there is a bit of prejudice in our own hearts. We want ever to be working to root it out and to get rid of it. I have said this so often now that it sounds like a broken record, but it is the Gospel repeated. Don't blame the South. So much of the South has tried to do well.

I am going to read you something I read the other night. I did it the other night. I am going to try to read it. It is the lines written on the night I learned the Reverend James Reeb, who had been on the plane down with all of us, the night I learned he had just died. It goes like this: -

George Wallace, I pray tonight that God will forgive you and I pray in truth that God will enlighten you, but tonight, George Wallace, sully not the flag of the glorious lost cause. Wrap not your hatred in the beloved flag of the South of yore. Rip from your troopers those bands which proclaim your state the Heart of Dixie. Go to your neighboring great state of Georgia. Go tonight to the foot of Stone Mountain and meditate there. There is a flood on the side of the mountain tonight. It is the tears on the cheeks of Robert E. Lee. Bathe in them, George Wallace, and may God give you the grace to repent, for tonight the heart of Dixie, the true heart of Dixie, is broken.

Sisters, I will just say that the work is the work of all of us. The witness of the Church must be present there. The witness of Christ is present there. The witness of God, of Yahweh, is present there. The witness of the Church must be there in every possible way, but it also must be present wherever you are - with the people that you work with, rooting out the prejudice which you will find in its incipient form, in its inchoative form, even its very beginning. Don't let anyone call a Negro anything less than a Negro and don't let anyone call a Jew anything but a Jew. Remember what I have said before. We await the second coming of Christ. In His first coming He came in a Jewish body. There is nothing in my theology that tells me that He may not in His glorified second coming, come in a glorified Negroid body. If He does, how will you feel? And how will I feel? "For as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me".....

I would just ask your constant prayer for the removal of hatred from this country, from North as well as from South, and from us as well as from others. Stay away from the beginnings of prejudice, and if by any chance the day comes when you can be present there, remember that indeed you will be witnesses for Christ, but until that day - pray, and pray, and pray. Hatred can personify something that unless you go there you will, please God, never know.