

- Oh God, most merciful and holy, forgive us, we ask our corporate and our individual sins. Forgive us for the sin of blindness, which sees so superficially that it sees no sin. More deeply still, forgive the sins, which make us blind. The furious haste, the weary indifference, the hard sophistication, the evasive restlessness, covered guilt and the love of comfort that is so much a part of our lives. Forgive us and save us from that sin of all sins of denying thee and thy love. Forgive us for that denial, which refuses to face thee, even more for confessing thy name, but avoiding thy presence. Most of all, we ask forgiveness for coming into thy presence too well protected by self-satisfaction to be humble by thy glory or meekened by thy grace. Forgive us these and all our sins, oh God, and open our eyes that we may repent, we may accept by reconciliation, and be saved through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Hear these words of assurance from our Lord. Jesus said be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more. If a man is in Christ, he becomes a new person all together. The past is finished and gone. Everything has become fresh and new and open. Because you have confessed your sins before God and from your heart, I tell you in his name, you are accepted just as you are. Accept the fact that you are forgiven, that whatever you are have done, you are free from that bondage. You are free to live fully in the present. You are valued just as you are. Life is good as it is given by God. Your future is open. Arise. Pick up your bed. Take your life and walk. (liturgical music begins) Far Lord, as contained in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 25, verses 31 through 46. "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon his glorious throne and all nations shall be gathered into his presence and he will divide man one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was homeless and you brought me in. When I had no clothes, you gave me clothes. I was sick and you came to my help. I was in prison and you visited me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and gave you drink? When did we see you a stranger and took you in or naked and gave you clothes? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come unto you? And the king will reply, barely I say unto you, in as much as you have rendered such services to one of the humblest of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, the curse is upon you, go from my site into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the adversary and his messengers, for I was hungry and you gave me no meat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not take me in. Naked and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they in their turn will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did nothing for you? Then shall he answer them saying, when you refused it to one of the least of my brethren here, you refused it to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous to everlasting life. May God bless to our hearts the reading of his work. (liturgical music) Be with you, let us pray. Almighty God, our heavenly father, we bless and magnify thy holy name for the gift of thy most dearly beloved son, Jesus Christ, our redeemer, and for all his apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors, whom he has sent abroad into the world, for thy holy church universal, the ministry of the laity and the ministry of the ordain, we do give the hearty thanks for the

privilege which each one of us has of bearing witness to the saving grace of our Lord, we express our gratitude. We thank thee for life, for a measure of health, for friends, for food, for clothing, and for all the purposes of Christ, which give meaning to all these earthly goods. We make our prayer of thanks in Jesus' name. Amen. Let us continue to take our place in the family of man, as we offer our prayers for those in need and for ourselves. Let us pray. Our heavenly father, we pray thy mercy for all who may falter beneath life's cross, finding it heavier than their strength. For all who lose the path, finding the way too dark for human sight. For all who are struggling against odds, even though their hope dwindles to despair. For all who pray alone and driven in some (indistinct), finding no answer but the eternal light of silent stars, we lift our prayers, oh God, for all who lift their cross without bitterness, finding it's pain too deep for complaint. For all who die, finding in death what life had denied them. We pray for all these and others who have no prayer to offer out of their hopeless extremity. And we beseech thee to grant them thy mercy, and to grant us the insight to know how we might minister to their needs. Oh Lord, whose vast sight takes in the varied anguish of all men, we beseech thee to look upon thy servants gathered here in thy house. Old and young gathered in our need to praise thee and to set our hope on thee. Thou art still our refuge and all our confidence is in thy righteous judgment. If we are young, guide us in spite of our perplexities to make clear decisions. If we are old, guard with the strength of peace, then our labors humble as they may have been, may not have been in vain. If we are working at unpopular task, amid indifference or hostility, grant us the courage which only integrity can give. Oh God of ancient prophets and holy martyrs, pour out thy spirit upon us in this new day, but once again, in the hour of our need, we may dream dreams and see visions. Drop the plum line of thy justice beside every wall that we have built, oh Lord. Weigh in the balances of thy truth, all the accomplishments of our skill and science. Test with thy consuming fire the permanent worth of all of our industry and all of our art. If the earth be shaken and the foundations tremble, grant us courage to look beyond the ruins to that which has not fallen. If judgment falls and the hollow vanity of much that pass for the substance of life is revealed as nothing, steady us until we lift up our eyes unto thee and know that our hope is in thee both now and forever. Our father, this day began for some of us joyfully, for others, grimly. Some will spend the hours without anxiety and others will be caught in the web of living pain. Some will exalt in new vistas of hope and joy and others will carry a burden of heart too heavy to see very far beyond the moment. Some of us have felt and known by forgiveness and some of us still are seeking it. Some know thee, and some do not know whether they know thee or not. We are not all alike, Lord, but all of us need thee. Minister we ask to our particular needs, and grant us thy blessing in mercy and in wisdom through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray together saying, our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, by kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

- In the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit, amen. Every night it's the same thing. Will we starve to death or freeze to death or boil to death, or will we be slain by burglars? The words are the words of a silly character in a serious play, but the fears are the fears of our own hearts. Was there ever such a world as ours? Surely we feel ourselves often to be in a garish nightmare. Soon, surely we will awaken to a world of sensibility and balance. The world cannot be as our senses advise us that it is. Surely we will awaken, but we do not awake. And every night it is the same thing. Was there ever such a world as ours? Could it just be that this world, our world might possibly come to an end without even the dignity of special

lighting effects or incidental music? Was there ever a world like ours of such despair and confusion that promises always death, but that brings only madness and the obligation to endure with no opportunity to escape? Or if we should survive this day, this season, is there any assurance that things will change? We have begun yet another year torn internally by strife at home and threatened abroad by grave perils? Another year of strife and fear. Was there ever such a world as ours? It is an embarrassing admission for an alleged Christian, but a necessary confession for an honest man, that when these reflections first began to take formal shape, the Pueblo had not been captured. And yet never there was any serious thought that anything might happen to alter the relevance, relevance of beginning at the point of uncertainty and despair and nothing happened. Was there ever a world so mad and desperate as ours? But of course, says the philosopher. This is the only kind of world there is. This is what it means to have a world. Every man thinks that his burden is the worst to bear, precisely because he bears it himself. And it is not simply the philosopher who advises us that the world has always been as it is now. Listen to the words of a world where a prophet of another time, one generation comes, another generation goes, but the earth abides forever. All rivers run to the sea, but the sea is not full. What is to be is what has been, and what has been is that which will be, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there something of which one says, see, this is new? It has been before in the ages before us. No, says the philosopher and the weary prophet, the world has always been as it is, for this is the essence of existence. The hazardous life on the razor's edge of possible destruction and moment by moment, every good and cogent thing must be guarded and cherished and protected. Has there ever been such a world as ours? But this is the only kind of world there ever is. This is the meaning involved in having a world. Now, I have no zeal to answer the question which I raise. Rather I would offer a comment arising from consideration of two typical solutions that men have made to the problem of living with life in a world that is threatened. A comment that is mindful of the fact that every generation in it's way has it's special agonies. After all, it is the toad beneath the harrow that knows exactly where each tooth point goes. But even so, because there is a certain continuity in the human race, there will be a certain similarity between any world that any human has made and any other world. Was there ever such a world as ours? Probably, probably not, but there were always men like us. Nature is prodigal, prodigal, and careless in the matter of individuals. There are thick ones and thin ones and good ones and bad ones and happy ones and sad ones. Nature is very careless about the individual, but exceedingly careful of the type. So that it happens that men being always human, will somehow make a human mess of their world. This is only another way of saying that the world is as old and as shapeless as sin and sinful men will always make sinful mistakes and a sinful world. And yet there will be a similarity between other worlds and our own. Is there perhaps then some wisdom for us in looking at solutions of other times? Yes, because we look more objectively at the words of other men than we do at our own. And so, we may find comfort to ourselves, not because misery loves company, but because understanding may arise from experience, may we say not necessarily, for a wiser than I has suggested that the past will reveal to the present only what the present is capable of seeing. For a face that is blank to one age may be pregnant with meaning to another age. And so we look and see what we can find, and it is in this context that I suggest to you that we who live in a threatened and disintegrating world may find some understanding and some wisdom by looking at two typical solutions of men who lived in the middle ages. And there is wisdom really in looking at the middle ages, rather than for instance, looking at Greece. The Greek imagination never ask anything of the world beyond ineligibility. The Greek mind looked at the world and wanted it to make sense. The Greek mind accepted tragedy and comedy whenever it came. Much as the Greek mind accepted an eclipse or the tides,

asking only that these things made sense and intelligibility. And so it was that the thoughtful Greek often grew very wise in matters of anger and love, but the medieval man demanded much more. The medieval man demanded that somehow the actions of man should square with eternal veritas. The medieval man demanded that this life here and now should be an allegory of the life to come, and then it should be patterned upon it's model. That is why the medieval man often became troubled and distressed. This is finally why we have a real affinity with the middle ages. It is not simply that the medieval man gave us such homely, but revolutionary articles as the clock and spectacles and buttons and forks. Rather, we are attached to the medieval man and dependent upon him because he created universities and cathedrals as an indication of the fact that he was serious in asking, not is the world unlike any other world, this world that I know, no, but because he was serious in asking, how can I live in a world that is disintegrating? So, we covet for ourselves the eternal referent that he sought, which he did not always find. So then, was there ever a world like ours? Probably, probably not. But in another age, there were two typical solutions to living in a threatened world in the examination of which we may get some wisdom for ourselves. Now, one of these solutions was the way of the knight. And surely of all historical figures in another age, nothing is quite so similar to our own inner feelings as the attitude of the knight. That is the feelings of our culture and of our generation, for the knight was a man of action. He wanted to do something about it and we understand this reaction. And so it was the knight looking at his time, rode off on noble errands to alter the face of his generation. He endeavored to act. What he tried to do was to wear bravery to truth and honor. One could not abolish war, he said, but at least war could be honorable and victors could be gracious to those whom they defeated. Because you see, the knight was always trying to make religion the motive for romance. He was trying to clothe romance in the religious aura of mysticism. What he wanted was to taste the good things and the beauty of this life without dulling his palette for the joys of the next or ruling out the possibility that he might have his share of them. And so, whether he went to sucker a single maiden in distress, or whether he went about the business of relieving a beleaguered city, the knight was the man who was endeavoring by his action to give the dignity of religion to all that he did. The trouble was that the knight did not always live up to his chivalric ideal. Not always. He who could be so grand and gracious in battle or tournament this day, tomorrow just might be the faithless murderer. He might wear his honor as proudly as a plume, and yet he might, like Lancelot, or Tristan or even realer knights, destroy a fine home by adultery because you see, it often happened at the medieval knight. Went to mass in the morning, robbed a church in the afternoon and drank himself into obscenity in the evening. This is not to denigrate knighthood, and this is not to complain about the knight. It is simply to remember that men are men and whenever a knight went about doing errands of mercy, he was a man and he moved always on feet of clay and sometimes sadly on the cloven hoof. You see, it is important to do something. It is right to want to act and react to the misery that we see about us. But whenever we do so, we do so as human beings and our frailty will show through. You see, it is just possible for the knight to do the right thing, for the wrong reason, to go on the errand of mercy to a distant place because it is pleasant to travel in a foreign land, to attempt the unusual and the difficult, because this brings with it glamor and also celebrity in it's wake. This is the way we are made. This is the way in which we act. It is pleasanter to be a knight and to be about romance abroad than it is to be a surf and to be bound to the soil. Now, this is not simply to complain that the knight was human. It's simply to say that the knight was sinful as well. And we say this because we recognize in the knight what we know in our own heart of hearts, because do you see, we can be so busy about the errand of distant mercy that we ignore and forget the responsibility that cries for assistance close at hand. Let me be

perfectly clear in what I'm saying and let me please be understood. The rationale for instance, for the peace corps is defensible and it is appealing. And surely there be many in this organization who have done great service to God and to neighbor and for cause of peace. But it is still sad to go so quickly to the aid and to the stress of people in another place that one has not taken the time to learn the names of the domestics who clean these halls and who serve our meals. But in this case, it is not necessary to choose between the two. It is possible to do both. The knight, however, forgot this. And often he spurned the manual worker upon whose labor the citadel of his gallantry was finally erected. What can I do about this disintegrating and fearful world? You can do something, says the knight. Go upon an errand of mercy. But this is not always possible for us. And more to the point, we are committed to programs where there is little room for knighthood and less for any action, save academic, and so we cannot be knights, even if knighthood were right for us, for the next semester comes on too shortly. Now then, the second solution, which was typical of the middle ages was that of the monk. And monasticism arose at a time when a whole empire had collapsed, dragging with it to destruction an order of existence and leaving a whole race in terror. There was naught left, save dread and fear and men were so frightened that they could no longer dream of redeeming the world, indeed dream of any kind were inappropriate for it was a season of nightmare. And so, the most sensitive of them could not bear it any longer and they went to the cloister to study, to think, to pray and to reflect. And it is thanks to these cowed communities that some learning was preserved and a measure of sanity did exist, for monasticism at it's best, blessed all those and redeemed those who came within the peaceful influence of it's benediction. And it was the monks who were largely responsible for converting the barbarians. Yes, and for redeeming Christianity itself, for in God's good time, there came a Francis and a Dominic and many another whose saintly way is marked for us by that part at which the shining steps of one who knew and understood crossed the dark trail in the jungle of man's violence and greed. Who finally can worship complacently in this place? When he remembers Brother Juniper who stripped the high altar of all it's valuable apartments that he might give them to (indistinct) to buy food for herself. Or who can resist the charm of Saint Anthony of Padua, who stood on the riverbank, preaching to the fishes and reminded them that they of all God's creatures should be most grateful to him, because at the time of the deluge, when the whole world was the object of God's rath, they only were privileged to visit in King's palaces and to see houses and trees. No, there is charm about monasticism and there is power. And yet, we do remember that the monk's cell is in it's way to the middle ages, what the laboratory is to our own time. This is the institutional expression of our own age, for do you see we who are the intellectuals, say the world is going to rack and ruin. And so, we will retreat to the library, to the research laboratory, to the cloister. We will retreat and we will study and think and research and teach and preach that happily, these values that are still real in life may be preserved for whatever generation may follow. Surely the essence of life is truth and spirit, never matter of which will always turn to dust and ashes, if happily the robbers do not bury it away first. Now, we are the intellectuals, and so we will retreat from this ugly world, does not always work. Monasticism didn't always work because you see, the monks found that finally, though they might retreat from the world, the world would not leave it alone. Saint Simeon Stylites built himself up on a high pillar and throngs of folk came out to stare in wonder and all, came to gaze and remained to build a community about the vice of his pedestal, for the monk found the world always clamoring at the door of his cell, disturbing his dreams and intruding itself into his reading. One of the most charming stories of the middle ages often repeated reminds us of this. It is recorded through the mercy of Caesarius of Heisterbach who tells of how an old abbot rode out with a young monk on occasion and the youth for the first time saw

women. What are they, he asked. These be demons, said the abbot. Ah, said the youth. I thought they were the fairest things I had ever seen, for the world does not leave us alone, even though we retreat from the world, for the figure of the static is always but the figure of St. George standing with his foot upon the defeated dragon, defeated, but not slain. Whose raving can never be wholly ignored. And this attitude, again, like that of the knight, though splendidly heroic, is never quite convincing of freedom. What shall I do in this world that disintegrates? Be off upon an errand. Action, says the knight. But it doesn't always work, harvey to a cloister, retreat and reflect, says the monk. But neither this leads always to the certain path across the (indistinct) morass of our own times. And so we come to the end of the sermon and the point of it all, to, if you will, the religion of a yeoman and to a conclusion without having said what we have said, would not have the meaning which we covered for it. There were in the medieval society, not simply the knights and the monks, but there were also the yeomen. Now, in the dictionary that I read, the yeomen were attendants, less noble than esquires, who did menial task. They were retainers, but they were free men. Now, the yeoman is that one who is always sentenced to this endless journey between tedium and monotony and back again. He is the one who cannot be the knight because he has not the ability nor the desire. He is the one who will never be the monk because he does not want to and perhaps even psychologically, he does not need to be. And yet, we ask the question, is there a religion for the yeomen? And the answer is, yes. What I say to you, I say swiftly, but I say with great solemnity and I have not the right to boast it from my own experience, but I have the right to testify, for I have seen it in the lives of others. Let me give it to you in a parable of sorts. In the great window of this chancel, in the lowest rank of figures in the central position, there is a character whom you can never see. His name is Joel. But it's impossible to see him because he is hidden by the highest pinnacle of the reredos. To his right, on the extreme end of this same row, there is Daniel and to his left in the same undistinguished place, there is Obadiah. Daniel and Obadiah, sometime the folk who sit in the transept see, but Joel, nobody ever sees. He must think that nobody cares. And yet he is faithful to his place and never deserts it. And how much he contributes to our sense of wellbeing, we would know full well, if by some freakish accident, he was suddenly removed from his place and in his stead, there were a gaping aperture. It was not very long ago, and with the memory of us all that flying hailstones chipped far smaller places from the window and these tiny holes at once became the object of constant comment. What has happened, asked the visitors? What is the trouble? What is the matter? Can you remember and can you think what would happen if suddenly Joel were no longer in his place? And yet he goes on quietly redeeming his little corner of the world and our life is more stable for it. The one time on which Jesus spoke at any length about the success with which certain people had translated the Christian idea into the fabric of life, he spoke in terms not of martyrs pilloried at the stake, not of great prophets or of noble knights or of mystic monks, but he spoke of unnamed and nameless and forgotten man who in yeoman faithfulness and duty went about the business of doing the little services of love, who gave water to the thirsty, who visited the lonely and befriended them and who made community where they were instead of trying to retreat from the world that they had or seek another world which they hoped to discover. Was there ever any world such as ours? Probably, probably not, but always men like us, always men like us. What have they done when their world has disintegrated as ours has? Some have been knights and some have been monks, but most have been yeomen. Is there religion for the yeomen? Yes. And hear me and believe me. The yeomen are for religion. Let us pray. Almighty God, grant unto us faithfully to perform the duties committed to our hands, not forgetting all loyalties, not shaking responsibilities, not proud of our accomplishments, nor forgetful of thy grace. Support and sustain and save us for thy

namesake. Amen. (liturgical music)