

Sign: August 1934. P. 2. The 'Personal Appeal' of Father Purcell: "In the Diocese of Mobile there are over one million Negroes, of whom less than five thousand are Catholics."

A PERSONAL APPEAL TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS AND READERS

My Dear Friends:

After years of thought and prayer about the matter I enter upon the realization of a long-cherished ambition to work personally and directly among the poor Negroes of the South, especially those in the Diocese of Mobile, Alabama. This will necessitate my resigning the editorship of THE SIGN. Under the able direction of my successor, the magazine will maintain the high standard it has achieved; and I am sure you will give him the same loyal support you have so consistently given me. The Catholic periodical Press has a claim on all convinced Catholics.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without expressing my personal gratitude for the wonderful help you have given our Passionist missionaries in China; and I most sincerely ask you to continue to aid them, spiritually and financially, in their great work.

At the same time, you should not forget that within the boundaries of the United States we have an enormous mission field that simply clamors for cultivation. This home field is occupied by more than twelve million Negroes. Among them are only four million who profess any religion, and of these less than two hundred and fifty thousand are Catholics. All the others have been reared in an atmosphere that breeds distrust and even hatred of the Catholic Church.

The Diocese of Mobile is a vast field in itself. In area this *one* diocese is almost as large as the three States of New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts combined. It is two-thirds the size of Italy and twice the size of all Ireland.

The diocese embraces one of the most backward parts of our country; where the Church is misrepresented, vilified and hated; where Catholics are few and of no influence; where the small number of priests and nuns are unequal to the huge task that confronts them; where the Church is almost helpless due to lack of man-power and money. In thirty-five of its sixty-seven counties, covering approximately thirty thousand square miles, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has never been offered. And this in the United States of America in 1934!

For the most part, the people of the State are very poor, and the Negroes are wretchedly poor. But their material wretchedness is only a faint shadow of their appalling spiritual destitution. In the Diocese of Mobile there are over one million Negroes, of whom less than five thousand are Catholics. The five or six priests working among them can accomplish very little because of their fewness, their own personal poverty, and the vast territory to be covered.

In devoting myself to the Negro apostolate my first effort will be to erect a combined school-orphanage-and-dispensary. The building must necessarily be small and humble; but even for such I shall need all the financial help I can get. Because the project is a gigantic one, in present conditions, I am placing it under the special protection of St. Jude, whom a lay friend has described as "the impossible Saint who does the possible"—the helper in cases despaired of.

When Our Lord spoke of His "least brethren" He must have had in mind, among others, the thousands of poor, undernourished and neglected colored children of Alabama. I am asking Him to give me the grace and the time to do something for them. May I ask you, my Friends, to help me to help them? I shall be more than grateful for even the least offering you send me. And Our Lord Himself will reward a hundredfold your charity to these "least" of His brethren. You can count on that.

Please forward your offerings to me c/o THE SIGN, Union City, N. J.

John Harold Purcell, C.P.

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