

32 Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast.

February 1, 1972

Congressman Quie, and all of our distinguished guests:

Perhaps at no time or no place in America could we find a gathering which more symbolized the strength of America than this meeting this morning.

Perhaps it says it best in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, as amended, "... one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Look across this room, look at this head table, remember those who have spoken and you will see those words all represented right here in this meeting this morning—one Nation under God. There are different parties here, there are different faiths, there are different races and different colors, there are different philosophies, but it is still one Nation, and it is under God, with liberty and justice for all.

Then as we hear those words, we realize that words can mean nothing unless our thoughts go with them. "Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

So, we think of our thoughts, and we realize that, as Mayor Washington¹ has so eloquently indicated, we have made great progress, but we have a long way to go. "Liberty and justice for all" is a magnificent ideal. America has come further perhaps than most of the nations of the world. We would like to say perhaps we have come further than any other nation. But we also need humility in order to understand how much further we have to go.

But what is very important about this

gathering is that we would not be here unless we all recognized in our hearts that we were not perfect, that we were seeking to do the very best that we can in our brief stay on this earth to achieve goals that are bigger than all of us, bigger than our differences, differences between parties and faiths and philosophies, all the rest of which we are aware in this great cosmopolitan country of ours.

And now that brings us to the moment that we have now very great responsibility for.

I spoke at this breakfast 3 years ago and 2 years ago and now this year. Each year then, you remember, I spoke of peace, peace at home and peace in the world. The year 1972 is the year of opportunity for peace such as America has never had in its whole history. I say "never had." There might have been a time when America could have exerted its power for peace in a very aggressive way.

One of our very distinguished guests today is the Secretary General of NATO, the former Foreign Minister of Holland, Mr. Luna. As I was talking to him yesterday, he remarked about the fact that immediately after World War II the United States, because it had a monopoly on nuclear weapons, could have imposed its will on any nation, any place in the world. It did not do so.

We helped our former enemies until today they are our major competitors in the free world. We helped our allies and we poured out our wealth, too, to all of the underdeveloped countries of the world.

We shouldn't stand and brag about

¹ Walter E. Washington, mayor of the District of Columbia.

that in terms that make the others feel inferior. We shouldn't stand here and expect that they should say thank you. Because it was right to do so, we thought. We thought it then, we think it now. That is our way. That is our way to show our dedication to what the Nation has stood for from the beginning: liberty and justice for all, not just in America, but throughout the world.

Mention has been made of the fact that I shall be traveling on two long journeys with Mrs. Nixon, one to Peking and one to Moscow. And all of the people in this room are aware of the fact that while these journeys have never before been undertaken by a President of the United States, this does not mean that we are going to find that instant peace will follow from them.

We have to realize that we have great differences, differences between our Government and that of the Government of Mainland China, the People's Republic of China, differences between our Government and the Government of the Soviet Union. And it is naive to think, or even to suggest, that those differences will evaporate if we just get to know each other better. I wish it were so, but it is not so; it has never been so.

In fact, the differences that we have with those great powers, their governments that is, is not because we do not know them or they know us, but because we do know them and they know us. The philosophic gulf is enormous. It will continue.

But there is, on the other hand, another factor, a very pragmatic one, which brings us together. We all realize that because of the new sources of power that have been unleashed in the world that we all

must learn either to live together or we shall die together.

That is putting it in its most negative and harsh terms. I could perhaps put it in other terms.

I recall the many visits I have made to countries around the world and what impressed me the most: the great leaders, the historical monuments, all those things that impress a visitor from abroad. And then when Mrs. Nixon came back from Africa, it came to me again what impressed me, and what, of course, had impressed her on her visits.

She told me about the leaders, impressive men and women working in these countries for liberty and justice for all in their way—far from it in many instances, but trying.

But what impressed her the most were the children—children, eyes wide with wonder and hope, love, very little hate. Oh, differences, of course, because children have their differences as we know. But those children—they happened to be black—the children that I have seen, Chinese children, Russian children, by the hundreds of thousands in capitals around the world, make us all realize that that is what it is all about.

In this country, before we can help to bring peace to the world, we, of course, must have peace among ourselves, and Mayor Washington has so eloquently addressed himself to that subject. And as we have peace among ourselves, then perhaps we can play a role, imperfect though it may be, at this historic moment in the history of nations, to bring a period of peace between great nations that are very different, not just racially but, more important and more deeply, philosophically.

Then before we become too arrogant with the most deadly of the seven deadly sins, the sin of pride, let us remember that the two great wars of this century, wars which cost 20 million dead, were fought between Christian nations praying to the same God.

Let us remember now that fortunately Christian nations in the world live in peace together, and we trust will in the future. Let us remember that as a Christian nation, but also as a nation that is enriched by other faiths as well, that we have a charge and a destiny.

No longer do we have a monopoly on nuclear weapons, but the United States has this great asset as a nation that may be able to play the role of peacemaker in this last generation of the 20th century: We want nothing from any other nation. We want to impose our will on no other nation. We do not want their economic subversion or even submission. We want for them what we have, in their way as we have in our way, and try to have in our way, one nation, with liberty and justice for all.

They will all not have it, just as we have not had it perfectly. But our role may be to help build a new structure of peace in the world, where peoples with great differences can live together, talk about those differences, rather than fight about them.

Do it because we fear to die, but do it also because we think of those children—black children, yellow children, white children, brown children—over half the world is less than 20 years of age—and we think: Let us leave the world one in which they can have what we have never had,

a full generation of peace.

In the great agony of the War Between the States, which Abraham Lincoln so eloquently expressed in his Second Inaugural, he pointed out that devout men on both sides prayed to the same God. And in pointing it out, he, of course, expressed what all of us need to understand here today: that because of our faith we are not perfect, because of our faith we are not superior. Only the way we live, what we do, will deserve the plaudits of the world or of this Nation or even of our own self-satisfaction.

In that same period, as the war was drawing to an end, a man came to Lincoln and said, "Is God on our side?" And Lincoln's answer, you will all remember, was, "I am more concerned not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on God's side."

Virtually everyone this morning who has prayed, has prayed for the President of the United States, and for that, as a person, I am deeply grateful. But as you pray in the future, as these journeys take place, will you pray primarily that this Nation, under God, in the person of its President, will, to the best of our ability, be on God's side.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:05 a.m. in the International Ballroom of the Washington Hilton Hotel. He spoke without referring to notes.

Representative Albert H. Quis of Minnesota presided at the 26th annual breakfast, sponsored by the United States Senate and House Prayer Breakfast Groups.

More than 3,000 guests, including representatives from government, the diplomatic corps, industry, labor, and the academic community, attended the breakfast.