Dear Reader,

This wonderful little story is being told not only for its beauty but also for the underlying truths that it contains.

No Applause for Lincoln

At eleven o'clock on the morning of November 19, 1863, a vast, silent multitude billowed, like the waves of the sea, over what had been not long before the battlefield of Gettysburg. Americans, by the thousands, from every walk of life were gathered to hear President Lincoln and Edward Everett, the famous orator of the day.

For two hours Everett spoke, and the throng listened untired, fascinated by the dignity of his high-bred look and manner almost as much, perhaps, as by the speech which has taken a place in literature. As he had been expected to speak, he spoke of the great battle and of the cause of the war. It was truly a marvelous speech.

At last, as the ex-Governor of Massachusetts handsome, distinguished, graceful, sure of voice and of movement took his seat, a tall gaunt figure detached itself from the group on the platform and slouched slowly across the open space and stood facing the audience. This was President Lincoln.

Suddenly the voice came, in an odd, squeaking falsetto. The effect on the audience was irrepressible, ghastly. After Everett's deep tone, after the strain of expectancy, this extraordinary, gaunt apparition, this high, thin sound from the huge body was too much for the American crowd's sense of humor, always stronger than its sense of reverence. Suppressed giggles broke out everywhere. After a pause almost too slight to be recognized, the President went on, and in a dozen words his tone had gathered volume; he had come to his power and dignity. There were no smiles now on the faces of those who listened to the words of that address.

Lincoln finished his speech. There was no sound from the silent vast assembly. The President's large figure stood before them, at first inspired, glorified with the thrill and swing of his words, lapsing slowly in the stillness into lax, ungraceful lines. He stared at them a moment with sad eyes full of gentleness, of resignation, and in the deep quiet they stared at him. Not a hand was lifted in applause. Slowly the big, awkward man slouched back across the platform and sank into his seat, and yet there was no sound of approval, of recognition from the audience. In Lincoln's heart was a throb of pain. His speech had been, as he feared it would be, a failure. As he gazed steadily at these his country-men who would not give him even a little applause for his best effort. The disappointment of it cut into his soul. He immediately boarded his private train without speaking to anyone and

reached Washington during the night.

The next morning he plunged into his work in his office until late in the day when he decided to go out for a walk. His long strides carried him into the outskirts of the city, and suddenly, at a corner, from behind a hedge, a young boy of fifteen years or so came rushing toward him and tripped and stumbled against him.

"Do you want all of the public highway? Can't a gentleman from the South even walk the streets without— without—?" and the broken sentence ended in a sob.

"My boy, the fellow that's interfering with your walking is down inside of you," he said gently. "Now tell me what's wrong."

"Wrong, wrong!" the child raved; "Everything's wrong," and launched into a mad reproach against the government from the President down.

Lincoln listened patiently, and when the lad paused for breath, "Go ahead," he said good-naturedly. "Every little helps."

With that the youngster was silent and drew himself up with stiff dignity, offended yet fascinated; unable to tear himself away from this strange giant who was so insultingly kind under his abuse, who yet inspired him

with such a sense of trust and of hope.

"I want a lawyer," he said impulsively, looking up anxiously into the deep-lined face inches above him. "I don't know where to find a lawyer in this horrible city, and I must have one— I can't wait—it may be too late— I want a lawyer now," and once more he was in a fever of excitement.

"What do you want with a lawyer?" Again the calm, friendly tone quieted him.

"I want him to draw a will. My brother is— they say he's dying." He finished the sentence with a quiver in his voice, and the brave front and the trembling, childish tone went to the man's heart. "I don't believe it— he can't be dying," the boy talked on, gathering courage. "But anyway, he wants to make a will, and — and I reckon— it may be that he— he must."

"I see," answered Lincoln, and the young, torn soul felt confident that he had found a friend. "Where is your brother?"

"He's in the prison hospital there ----- in that big building. He's a captain in our army ------ in the Confederate army. He was wounded at Gettysburg."

"Oh!" The deep-set eyes gazed at the young face, its muscles straining under grief and responsibility,

with the gentlest, most fatherly pity, "I think I can manage your job, my boy," he said. "I used to practice law in a small way myself, and I'll be glad to draw the will for you."

At the prison

Dashing down the corridors in front, the boy did not see the guards salute the tall figure following him. They entered a room, and there on a cot a young man — almost a boy, his handsome face pale, lay propped against the pillows, watching the door eagerly as they entered.

"Good boy, Warry," he greeted the lad; "you got me a lawyer." He held out his hand to the man who swung toward him, looming mountainous behind his brother. "Thank you for coming," he said cordially. Suddenly a spasm of pain caught him, his head fell into the pillows. Yet while the agony still held him, he was smiling again with renewed courage. "We better get to work before one of those little breezes carries me away. Mr.— , my brother did not tell me your name."

"Your brother and I met informally, my name is

Lincoln."

"That's a good name," replied the young officer. "I take it that you are a Yankee. There's something about you, Mr. Lincoln, which makes me wish to call you, if I may, a friend. Shake hands, friends it is."

"We must do the will immediately," he said struggling against the pain that once more was gripping him. "Yes, now we'll fix this will business, Captain Blair," the big man answered cheerfully. "When your mind's relieved, you can rest easier and get well faster."

The simple will was swiftly drawn, and the impromptu lawyer rose to take his leave. But the wounded man put out his hand. "Don't go yet, I like you, I've never liked a stranger as much in such short order before."

"I want to talk to you about that man Lincoln, your namesake," the prisoner's deep, uncertain voice went on. "I'm Southern to the core of me, and I believe with my soul in the cause I've fought for. But that president of yours is a remarkable man and I've admired him all along. He's inspired by principle not by animosity." He lifted his head impetuously and his eyes flashed, "And by Jove, have you read his speech

of yesterday in the papers?"

Lincoln gave him an odd look. "No," he said, "I haven't."

" Sit down," Blair commanded. "Don't grudge a few minutes to a man in hard luck. I want to tell you about that speech. You're not so busy but that you ought to know."

"Well, yes," said Lincoln, "perhaps I ought."

"That's good of you," the young officer said, in an unconsciously gracious way. "By the way, this great man isn't any relation of yours, is he, Mr. Lincoln?"

"He is a kind of connection—through my grandfather," Lincoln acknowledged. "But I know just the sort of fellow he is—you can say what you want."

"What I want to say first is this: that he yesterday made one of the great speeches of history."

"What?" demanded Lincoln, staring.

"It was Senator Warrington, to whom my sister is—is acting as secretary." With difficulty he went on. "He was at Gettysburg yesterday, with the President's party. He told my sister that the speech so went home to the hearts of all those thousands of people that when it was ended it was as if the whole audience held its breath—

there was not a hand lifted to applaud. One might as well applaud the Lord's Prayer — it would have been sacrilegious. There was a long minute of reverent silence, no sound from all that great throng — it seems to me, an enemy of his, that it was the most perfect tribute that has ever been paid by any people to any orator. That speech will live on, and fifty years from now American schoolboys will be learning it as part of their education."

With tears in his eyes, Lincoln watched the young Captain Blair pass away, never knowing that the hand he was holding was none other than the author of the Gettysburg Address, President Abraham Lincoln.

Conclusion

One must ponder the effects of such moving words, words that could leave throngs of people in reverential awe. There is another Word, the word I speak of is the One that was made flesh and dwells among us in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

One is silenced by the sacred, one does not applaud in the presence of the sacred, we have lost that sense of the sacred, and consequently, we have lost the faithful. By 2001 Mass attendance plummeted to 17%; it was 74% in

1964. It is likely down to about 14% or lower today.

How right St. Peter Julian Eymard was when he said, “God punishes irreverences committed in his sanctuary with a weakening of faith and a withdrawal of devotion.”