

10/12/66

Dear William,

Suffering and tragedies are so intensely personal I have debated writing for two weeks not wanting to seem an intruder yet wanting very much to write, for it often happens in the ferocity and anguish that we do not realize that we are not, really, alone, that others are frustrated by their inability to reach out with what little comfort there is for what cannot be replaced.

Each in his own way in some measure suffers again with those for whom he has strong feelings from the experiences of his own past but is often unable to articulate it or fears that the articulation might only aggravate the pain. Each of us has his own tragedies, past and potential, and wants so much to diminish the grief of others. It is not easy. Often it is impossible.

During the services for President Kennedy, when so many of us felt such a personal loss when there was no kinship, the Reverend Henson read Ecclesiastes, saying it was the late President's favorite book of the bible. Suddenly I felt another bond, as I had with some of his phrases, like "roasts" "I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep", and "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." In impersonal type quotable phrases are like beauty. Their meaning is in the eye of the beholder. To me, these mean something, and about his inaugural I did try, as it was possible for me to try, to do something about it. Ecclesiastes is also my favorite book of the bible, and I have found in the past when times were trying that reading it helped me get a perspective, helped me understand what my place might be in the so many millions of uncountable places.

We all hope the earth will abide forever, that although all the rivers do not run into the sea, the sea is not full, and that as the sun sets, so also does it rise. And that man will improve, and perhaps there is something yet undone that one of us might do toward this end. I think this is some of the greatest writing and most wonderful philosophy.

I write you also, even if with misgivings, for I do not intend to intrude upon some so sacred, because in my own way I have recently learned how important letters from those unknown to us can be. I live under a constant threat, not with the dread finality of your loss but nonetheless one that will, if it ever eventuates, be the next to the worst thing that can happen to me. I have lived with it for a dozen years, and I have learned it is possible to live a worthwhile life just the same. Your letters have meant much to me, as have those and the calls of Bill and Maggie and the literally hundreds of others from people who felt that had to write on reading my book. It does soften the hard days to know that strangers also feel with us, hurt with us, and it helps let us know we are still part of a whole, not isolated, not alone, not unwanted and without.

It sounds so cold, when we have never met, so formal. I do not so intend. But if there is some small thing (for I know if there is it can not be otherwise) that it is within my capability to do, anything that will in any way help, please let me know, for I will want to do it.