

The Priest: As Effective As His Union With Christ

COURIER-JOURNAL
Friday, Jan. 19, 1968

(Editor's Note: The following is a recent letter from Bishop Sheen to all his seminarians. With his permission, we are reprinting it in the Courier-Journal, as an insight on the role of the priest which can be helpful to all the People of God.)

My dear Seminarians:

The burden of this message is how you are different in virtue of your vocation. One sometimes hears a priest say: "The work I am doing can be done by any layman, except for administering the sacraments or celebrating liturgy for the people of God."

True, as priests, you will be called to do many tasks which any layman can do. Think of the things Our Lord did that any mortal man could do. Could not a layman wash feet, go before a judge, pray on a mountain top, carry a cross, console a widow, meet with a lawyer at night, and stop to watch children playing in the streets? Very seldom was He in the Temple, rarely did He take part in liturgical service, but was anything He did different from the rest of men, and why?

One must distinguish between the worker and the work; between the person and the thing done, between the signer of the check and the writing. Could not Gehazi carry the miraculous staff just as well as Elijah? Were there not many crucifixions before and after Christ? Did not Plato speak of crucifixions? Was there not a recent one in New York City? Did not the magicians of Pharaoh simulate the miracles of Moses? But was there a difference, —and what made it? Will not the anti-Christ himself do many wonders and work like unto Christ, —but is he Christ? Cannot a layman say the words of consecration, —but does he consecrate?

Here we get back again not to the works done, but the one who does them. Any layman can do the same clerical tasks as our Ambassador to the Court of St. James, but is there not a difference in the representative character? Christ touching a leper was God's compassion; the priest touching a leper is Christ's compassion. He is the representative and the ambassador of Christ.

You will find that today the mood is to concentrate on external works and to forget the inner work of deeper union with Christ. Read the first chapters of the Apocalypse and you will find Christ saying to each of the ministers of the churches of Asia Minor: "I know your works." Seven times He says it: "I know your schools, your rectories, your big universities, your hospitals, your social service, your deeds, but . . ." In each instance there was a forgetfulness of sacrifice, repentance, and likeness to the Lamb.

Priests are not just liturgical actors; we have a mission to do works also, away from the altar. But the effectiveness of both depends on our union with Christ.

You are twice-created, twice called, and the second time is your vocation to be the servant of the laity. See how Our Lord sets you apart. "You are the men who have stood firmly by Me." This is the test — to be with Christ in His trials and agonies renewed in the bodies and souls of men.

You are Christ's when at the altar and Christ's away from the altar; whether you wear the chasuble or the suit, you are Christ's; whether you are lifting up chalice or a sick child, you are Christ's.

It is not, then, just the work you are doing that matters, for the body has many functions; it is the worker, the ambassador, the Christ-in-you-the-priest, which sanctifies everything.

Did not Herod respect and admire the steadfastness of John the Baptist, even while keeping him in prison? Did not Ahab have a lingering respect for Micaiah, unyielding though he was? Was not there a fascination about a Paul which neither Felix nor Agrippa could resist?

So the priest of God has a power of inspiration which comes from the One he represents. Why does the press like to print the story of a fallen priest? Is it not because he is expected to be different? Is it not his distance from Christ, and His representative character and his action which occasions the scandal?

Think not, then, that your mission is to be interpreted solely in terms of liturgy or solely in terms of works which are different from the laity. Your mission is to be the PRESENCE of Christ. Christ — everywhere you go, in

everything you do. When people like you, they begin to like Christ; when they hate you they will hate Christ.

Many a priest who refuses to wear his collar as the badge of his ambassadorship of Christ on the street, will put it on before he goes to buy a new car. He wants the salesman to have enough love for Christ in his heart to give a discount to the ambassador of Christ. And who gave us the title of ambassador? A Hand that is pierced.

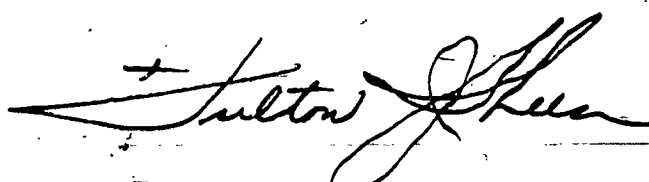
You have many tasks, like the missionaries who cook, care for teeth, bind up tiger wounds, teach women how to sew, as well as make converts. "Whatever we do" is Christ's doing. We are not Christ only at the altar; we are Christ talking to the janitor; we are Christ when we sit in the confessional forgiving sins; we are Christ to the bum on the streets, who wants to talk to us; we are Christ with a ciborium in our hands; we are Christ with a golf stick in our hands. The Person remains the same, the function differs, but it is ever "I live, no not I, Christ lives in me."

May you as representatives of Christ ever keep before you St. Paul's description of the priest of God.

"We want to prove ourselves genuine ministers of God. Whatever we have to go through—
patient endurance of troubles or even disasters,
Being flogged or imprisoned;
Being mobbed, having to work as slaves,
Having to go without food or sleep—
Our sole defense, our only weapon is a life of integrity,
Whether we meet with honor or dishonor, praise or blame,
We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord
And ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

Pray for me as I pray daily for you—

Your brother in Christ,




AMATEUR ART FILM Karen Dougherty at St. Joseph's (Notre Dame High, Ithaca) and Sister Fr. was offered for sister gram.

Thanksgiving Drive

The Diocese of Rochester collected 523,308 pounds of clothing in the Thanksgiving Clothing Drive which ran from Nov. 12 through 18, according to Father Chester Kloeck, director of the program and moderator of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW) who acted as promoters for the drive.

This fell 61,929 pounds short of 1966's total of 585,237 pounds.

Sacred Heart Cathedral, the high parish in the County of Monroe, with 20,000 pounds outside the county, St. Alphonsus Church of Auburn led the way with 17,350 pounds collected.

Other high parishes in Monroe County included St. Margaret Mary's (12,000 lbs.), St. Charles Borromeo (11,900 lbs.), Outside the county: Patrick's (5,826 lbs.) and Mary's (5,783 lbs.), both of Elmira and St. Francis of Assisi (5,751 lbs.) led the way.

The final figures in the Clothing Drive were as follows:

Parish	Lb.
Cathedral of the Sacred Heart	20,000
Annunciation	3,000
Blessed Sacrament	10,000
Christ the King	7,000
Corpus Christi	3,000
Guardian Angels	4,000
Holy Apostles	3,000
Holy Cross	7,000
Holy Family	3,000
Holy Ghost	4,000
Holy Name	4,000
Holy Redeemer	1,000
Holy Rosary	9,000
Immaculate Conception	8,000
Holy Spirit	2,000
Holy Trinity	2,000
Mother of Sorrows	7,000
Precious Blood	1,000
O.L. Good Counsel	6,000
O.L. of Mercy	4,000
O.L. of Mt. Carmel	3,000
O.L. Perpetual Help	3,000
O.L. of Victory	1,000
O.L. Queen of Peace	1,000
St. Ambrose	8,000
St. Andrew	5,000
St. Anne	4,000
St. Anthony	1,000



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The Church In Our Day

(Continued from Page 1)

literally divine the hopes of the human heart. The Church tells man that all the splendor of this world will pass (1 John 2:17), that in any case it is not enough for him. She tells him that he is meant for God. One day he will inherit not a perishable city or a corruptible body but a new heaven and a new earth. The Church speaks of an end to human sorrow, of a day when man shall weep no more, of an indestructible love that conquers death, cancels guilt, and heals alienation.

Is the Hope of the Church, Humanity or Christ?

Ultimately, then, in Jesus Christ that the Church places all her hope. In no past moment of her history did she really trust in princes and in no future moment will she rely, in fact, on the people's pleasure or the judgment of the crowd. She makes concordats with kings, perhaps, but she never presumes to bargain with Christ. She delights to be among the children of men and to find them siding with her, but she must always be on the side of God, as was Moses; and of God's honor, as was Thomas Becket. Public opinion, like the king's favor, may frequently be a passing solace to her but it fades into nothingness in the face of the judgment of God. Like her saint, Thomas More, she is the king's good servant, a servant Church among the sons of men, but she is God's servant first or she is nothing.

That is why the Church sees in Christ her sole Savior and her Founder. She does not think it too bold to declare that she was brought into being, structured, commissioned, and given her life by the Lord Himself. Her faithfulness to herself becomes, therefore, faithfulness to him. Her total mission in history begins and ends with Jesus. The human phenomenon, which demands her action, reaches its highest intensity in Christ. Divine Love, furthermore, achieves its most tangible expression in that same Christ. Thus, the Mystery of the Church is inseparable from the mystery of the human heart and its needs, above all the need for redemption; it is likewise inseparable from the mystery of that Jesus who is ever our Redeemer, the source of our salvation.

Is Christ Best Seen Through the Church?

At a time when many question the Church, when some forsake her and seek an allegiance to Christ without a Church, the Church reminds us that discipleship in Christ is necessarily a vocation to the Church of Christ. It is Christ who evokes the Church. All who listen carefully to His voice hear the clarity of His summons to belong also to the Church. But for the historic Church, there would be today no possibility of affirming or denying Christ. For without the Church men, over the long centuries, would have made of Christ what they preferred Christ to be rather than what He is. Some seek to follow the Lord without the Church in what seems to them a simple, less complex, and more spontaneous religious experience. But we must remind ourselves that without the Church, the following of Jesus subtly becomes a following of self or even a following of those false prophets against whom Christ warned and whom the Church resists.

(Continued next week)



Husband, Home --- All Lost

Phu Cam, South Vietnam — (RNS) — Her husband killed, a South Vietnamese woman leans against a bamboo pole that once supported her burned out home. Ten people were killed and 59 wounded in a Vietcong mortar and missile attack on her village of Phu Cam, near Hue.

Probing the Word

By FATHER ALBERT J. SHEAMON

Two Miracles

(3rd Sunday After Epiphany)

Next Sunday's Gospel tells of two miracles: one our Lord worked by direct contact; the other from a distance.

St. John called miracles signs. The two in the Sunday Gospel are striking signs of the sacraments of the Church. Curing a leper showed the effectiveness of Christ's words and gestures; healing the centurion's servant showed that time and space posed no obstacle to this effectiveness.

Sometimes we think of sacraments as vending machines infusing a certain amount of grace the moment a few words and gestures are done. To think like that is superstition. A sacrament is an encounter with Christ; it is the words and gestures of Christ to give life.

Consider the miracles described by Matthew. A leper dares to approach Jesus — so gentle is the Master and so great is the leper's faith. "Sir, if you want to, you can cure me." Jesus showed His will: "Of course I want to!" then His power: "Be cured!" Instantly, the leper was cured.

Shortly after, a centurion came. He came in faith and charity. He came to Jesus, hence his faith; in behalf of a paralyzed servant, hence his charity. Once again Jesus manifested His will: "I will come and cure him." He had had a hard day; He might have spared Himself—but no, His will is to cure and save.

In response to such magnanimity, the centurion's faith flashed forth. "Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured."

Jesus was astonished at so great faith from a Roman — and a soldier at that. Barracks are not generally the breeding grounds for faith. But it is significant, isn't it, that when so many prattle about a "reasonable" obedience (which in the final analysis is no obedience at all) the one man whose faith astonished Jesus, whose faith was greater than that found in all Israel, whose faith forced a miracle—that one man was a soldier schooled in blind obedience?

Our Lord's gestures and words in both incidents produced instantaneous effects. Why? Do mere words and gestures effect cures? It would do us little good to say to a leper, "Be cured."

Christ's miracles were the acts of God: the sacraments are the acts of Christ. People who meet Christ, really meet God-in-flesh; people who receive the sacraments, really meet Christ in sign and symbol.

The body of Christ was a sign which said to the people of His day, "God is here"; the sacraments are signs which say, "Christ is here still." Christ's actions were performed to heal the consequences of sin: His sacramental actions do the same: they bring us Christ who still raises the dead (Baptism), who cures the sick (Penance), and who fires men with love (the Eucharist).

Remember, the sacraments are not magical signs. The leper had faith. Faith brought the centurion to our Lord. The sacraments do for us according to our faith.

1967: The Year Of 'The Christian Manifesto'

By GARY MacEOIN

Violence, of which we in the United States in common with the world at large had our share in 1967, is understandable today only in the perspective of the growing gap between rich and poor. This, it seems to me as I look back, is the most insistent message the Catholic Church gave her members and all who will listen during the year just ended. And, more precisely than at any time since Christ took his stand, the Church proclaimed which side she is on.

The pivotal element was Pope Paul's encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, issued in March. I have previously noted some defects in its form. A message putting in words the anguish of the whole people of God would today carry more impact than the medieval-prince approach of the Roman court. A message incorporating the technical know-how of the People of God so as to deal more competently with the economic problems of development would, by giving a dimension of professional authenticity, have anticipated the Wall Street Journal's scoffs.

The encyclical, nevertheless, endures for its prophetic vibration. The tones in which it denounces injustice recalls the anger of Christ as he lashed the money-changers out of the Temple: "Let there be no mixing of words," it says. "We have a condition that we must face with courage. The injustices built into it must be attacked and defeated." When Pope Paul rejects absolute pacifism, he always does it in this concrete context. The aggressor is the system which keeps people in sub-human deprivation.

The papal *Justitia et Pax* commission, formed in January, made clear at its inaugural meeting in April that it was an institutionalization of the ideas formulated in the encyclical. Its purpose is not to make token material contributions to development, but to lead "a humanity nourished on a hundred millennia of tribalism and centuries of that larger tribe, the nation," to become a world community, sacrificing national sovereignty in exchange for global citizenship as an inescapable precondition for building a fellowship of abundance, for achieving the development "which is the new name for peace."

The lightning response of the bishops of the poor countries to these initiatives confirms the accuracy and timeliness of the papal stand. Seventeen bishops of Algeria, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Laos, Lebanon, Oceania, Singapore and Yugoslavia demonstrated a new dimension of collegiality, as well as the degree of world unification already achieved by electronic communications, in a reaction published in August.

Declaring that the rich rather than the poor are often the initiators of class warfare, they said: "The peoples of the Third World constitute today's human proletariat, exploited by the great and threatened in their existence by those who—on the basis of their power—claim the right to judge and police those with less material wealth." If the Church, they added, has for a century tolerated a capitalist system far removed from the morality of the Gospel, "it is in no way married to the imperialism of money . . . can only rejoice when it sees men develop another social system reflecting that morality better."

The same views appear in a position paper formulated by 219 bishops of Brazil

in response to *Populorum Progressio*. "Some, frightened by communism, cannot see the materialist, inhuman and cruel elements in liberal capitalism. Some are carried by their passions to the point of classing as communism any restriction on even the most revolting abuses of capitalism. . . . A unilateral anti-communism always becomes sterile and gives the sad impression that the Church is in collusion with the injustices and oppressions of the capitalists."

The conclusion, as formulated by the fourth Latin American Congress of Catholic Charity organizations (Caritas) at Caracas: "a social and economic revolution is necessary." The Congress hoped it could be achieved without bloodshed, but "it must involve violence in the moral and legal order."

Such was the Christian Manifesto of 1967: a disassociation from the power structures of our economic system, which will by necessary consequence bring in due course a dissolution of the Church's own power structures. I suspect most rich Christians took it about as seriously as our great-grandparents took the Communist Manifesto in 1848.

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MOST REV. FULTON J. SHEEN, Ph.D., D.D. President

RT. REV. MSGR. JOHN S. RANDALL Managing Editor

REV. ROBERT KANKA Associate Editor

ANTHONY J. COSTELLO Advertising Director

MAIN OFFICE 35 Selo St. — 464-7050 — Rochester, N. Y. 14604-
ELMIRA OFFICE 317 Robinson Bldg., Lake St. RE 2-4888 or RE 2-8423
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