

# Christians at Play

By FR. CARL J. PFEIFER

For most Americans summer provides increased opportunities for play. Young people enjoy long vacations from the classroom and their parents normally receive one or more weeks free from their jobs.

Easier access to travel makes new and exciting forms of playful recreation available to more and more Americans each year, while technology provides a wide array of play opportunities at home. Society even extends the hours of daylight for maximum enjoyment.

It is an appropriate time to reflect on the meaning of play in Christian life.

What is the role of play in the life of a Christian? It is a striking paradox that in spite of increased opportunities for play in contemporary culture, the ability to play appears to have diminished. Many good, hard-working people experience restlessness and even guilt when they turn from productive work to days or weeks of play and recreation. Others plunge into playful activities as an escape from their real problems and anxieties.

Some rush into vacation with such frenzy that play becomes more exhausting than the job from which they are vacationing. Still others are wholly dependent on other people to provide them with entertainment.

Most tragic of all perhaps are those who need drugs or excessive drinking as a substitute for genuine play. Play is neither an escape from reality nor is it something to feel guilty about.

Apparently it is not something that comes naturally to adults as it seems to come to children.

The importance of play for a healthy and happy life has long been recognized. The Greek thinker, Aristotle, wrote some centuries before Christ that "recuperative rest and cheerful play seem to be necessary for life." Body and mind need moments of creative relaxation.

Some philosophers and sociologists affirm that the ability to play is an expression of man at his highest level of cultural development. Some of the reasons given are that play requires and expresses a kind of happy balance, a sense of values, a freedom of spirit and a harmony of body and spirit.

Playfulness is seen as related to a sense of mystery, attuned to life's seriousness, but preserving a light-hearted spontaneity and freedom. One who can play takes life seriously, but not too seriously. Taking life too seriously stifles play, as does frivolity and superficiality.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian of the 13th century, places the quality of balanced and cheerful adaptability near the heart of the Christian art of living.

"Unmitigated seriousness betokens a lack of virtue because it wholly despises play, which is as necessary for a good human life as rest is," he wrote. In describing the virtue that makes play possible, Thomas drew not just on Aristotle and Greek philosophy, but also on a long Christian theological tradition about play.

Many early Christian theologians described God's act of creating the world as a playful act. In calling the Creator a "playing God" they were simply developing what they found in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. At the creation of the world, "Wisdom" is present and active:

"I was by his side, a master craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere in his world, delighting to be with the sons of men"

—(Prov. 8:30-31)

God's wisdom, the playful master craftsman of creation, is recognized in the New Testament as God's creative Word, Jesus Christ. Christian artists echoed this theology of creation as play by portraying the infant Christ playing with a globe of the world as His Mother holds Him in her arms.

The imagery of a playing Creator stressed a profound Christian insight about God's creative activity. The Church Fathers were teaching that creation is meaningful but not necessary; sustaining the world is the creative act of a free and loving God. The playing of God reveals that creation is an expression of God's love, and that this love, though full of meaning and purpose is a love that works in creative freedom wholly ungoverned by necessity or constraint.

If the world and its people are the result of a free, creative act of a loving God, then human life is seen as meaningful. It is to be taken seriously, but not



## Today and Tomorrow

Tomorrow is beginning right now. How much does the success of tomorrow depend on the careful listening engaged in today? (NC photo, Roland Freeman)

as the absolute. The Christian can deeply love the world, commit himself to its improvement, without distorting it into the ultimate, or finding it absurd and meaningless.

Enjoying a joyful security and spontaneous freedom — because of his faith in God's creative love — the believer neither

cynically despises the world nor allows himself to be consumed with its pleasures. He can be light of heart and joyful, entering into the risks of freedom because his ultimate security rests in God, the Creator. The deeper his faith, the freer he is to love the world, take it seriously, yet smile at it. He can truly play.

# Tucson's Colorful Liturgies

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

Travelers in Tucson, Ariz., on a Sunday morning would do well to visit St. Augustine's Cathedral. This church, beautifully renovated for the new liturgy in 1968, combines a Spanish, mission, Southwest United States tradition with contemporary simplicity and freshness. The real attraction, however, is a varied worship program which takes place within its walls.

The published Sabbath schedule, for example, provides services for persons of every temperament:

7 a.m. No hymns

8 a.m. Mariachi San Augustin (Spanish)

9:30 a.m. Folk Guitar

11 a.m. Festive, Hymns

12:30 p.m. Festive, Hymns

5:30 p.m. Festive, Hymns

At the end of April I stopped into St. Augustine's for the 8:00 a.m. Mass, a celebration featuring mariachi music, singers, and instrumentalists. The cantor was ill that day, but a half-dozen serious and sedate men led the congregation in Spanish hymns at the customary times.

Two teenage boys played violins; one man, a trumpet; the others, different kinds of guitars. These people obviously care about this task; their conscientiousness is reflected in the fine quality of music they produce — a music quietly refined, restful, and happy.

The full church I observed at such an early hour seems to indicate parishioners appreciate that excellence and enjoy worship in the mariachi style.

# KNOW YOUR FAITH

Credit for this liturgical success (the other Masses are equally well attended and have good participation) rests largely with Bishop Francis J. Green and his master of ceremonies, Father Joseph G. Gorsuch, an associate pastor at the Cathedral. The former has manifested an open attitude toward these cultural adaptations and given strong encouragement to his diocese's liturgical renewal. The latter has called upon pre-seminary military experience, a perfectionist nature, early pastoral training and a sound understanding of the liturgy to help in his discharge of responsibility for the entire worship program at St. Augustine's.

Little things count in a well-executed liturgy: Like 70 moveable chairs up front and to the right for various musical groups. The mariachi unit requires seats and microphones one way, the folk guitar combo another, the choir with organ still a third.

Things like an ornamented lectionary and gospel book, each carried high and solemnly by lay leaders in special choir robes. Like ushers with handsome, uniform green suit coats and identification buttons. Like standards to hold processional cross and candles at the edge of the sanctuary.

Like high school boys, carefully trained and disciplined. Like offertory processions in which an entire family — from grandmother to grandchild — brings gifts to the sanctuary. Like efficient distribution of Communion with people stand-

ing at four stations throughout the church (two in front, two in the middle) and moving quickly, easily to the nearest spot.

The General Instruction to the Roman Missal (Art. 19) has a few comments on the importance of singing at Mass: "The faithful who gather to await the Lord's coming are urged by the Apostle Paul to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (see Col. 3:16). Song is the sign of the heart's joy (see Acts 2:46), and St. Augustine said: 'To sing belongs to lovers.' Even in antiquity it was proverbial to say: 'He prays twice who sings well.'"

"Singing should be widely used at Mass, depending on the type of people and the capability of each congregation . . ."

In another chapter (art. 3), the decree amplifies this point about diversity of musical approach for distinct communities. The text suggests that a celebration will succeed if it "takes into account the nature and circumstances of each assembly and is planned to bring about conscious, active, and full participation of the people, motivated by faith, hope and charity."

The mariachi Mass certainly fulfills these requirements. But so do the others at this Cathedral in Tucson. Later we hope to describe the Swingers, a folk guitar group including drums, electric guitar and organ, which performs later in the morning to a different, yet equivalently responsive, congregation.

# Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD MCBRIEN

**Q.** The Catholic bishops in Rhodesia are threatening to close down the Catholic school system if the government continues its policies of racial discrimination. Isn't this gesture an idle threat? After all, how can the Catholic Church stop doing something which it believes to be an essential part of its mission?

**A.** Christian education is, indeed, an essential and unchanging aspect of the Church's mission. The Church could never cease its work of preaching, catechizing, and theological reflection, because these various tasks are part of the abiding process of handing on the Christian faith.

The Church has an interest in nonreligious education insofar as it is a necessary basis for human dignity and, as such, is an inalienable right of every person. However, this concern for education in the broader sense is not to be placed on the same level as the Church's prior concern for the systematic study and presentation of the contents of Christian tradition.

The Church's involvement in nonreligious education should be regarded in the same way as its involvement in the struggle for decent housing, civil rights, peace, and so forth.

Where the rights and dignity of man are being injured or denied by the indifference, ineptitude, or obstructive activity of the larger community, the church has the responsibility to make its own resources available for the solution or at least the alleviation of the problem.

While it is theologically inconceivable that the Church should ever be indifferent to nonreligious education, it is not at all inconceivable that the Church should cease operating its own school system in a given country or local community. Thus, if the bishops of Rhodesia decide to shut down the Catholic school system, it will not necessarily mean that they have abdicated an essential responsibility of the Church itself.

They may, on the contrary, be achieving a greater good by affecting a change in a national policy of racial discrimination.

**Q.** One of the most serious weaknesses of the younger generation, it seems to me, is its unrealistic attitude toward the world of politics. They talk of immediate, unconditional withdrawal from Vietnam, as if this could be pulled off without any serious consequences. Some others insist that we should destroy all weapons and put an end, once and for all, to killing.

I've even heard one person say that the Catholic Church, at the Second Vatican Council, approved of this. I find that hard to believe.

**A.** The council did not address itself to the war in Vietnam. It did speak to the issue of disarmament, however, "Peace must be born of mutual trust between nations rather than imposed on them through fear of one another's weapons," the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states (n. 82).

"Hence everyone must labor to put an end at last to the arms race, and to make a true beginning of disarmament, not indeed a unilateral disarmament, but one proceeding at an equal pace according to agreement, and backed up by authentic and workable safeguards."

Perhaps the younger generation would have greater confidence in the older generation if there were more noticeable support offered by the latter on behalf, for example, of the SALT talks now underway between the United States and Russia. Disarmament negotiations, however, have rarely excited the interest of the general electorate. The Council suggests that the abolition of war depends upon the prior renunciation of arms and force.