



Spontaneous celebration comes when the occasion calls for it. The natural need to return the heartfelt hug of a child can help break down some of the uncomfortable feeling about celebrating anything not formalized. (NC Photo by Ursula Bernath)

Celebrating by the Book

By DOLORES CURRAN

I was talking with a group of mothers recently about the home Mass, Advent wreath, nameday festivities and other home celebrations. They were obviously drawn to the idea but stymied by the newness of it all. Finally, one asked, "Do you have a booklet or something to tell us what to do when?"

"Oh, there's nothing very rigid about a nameday celebration," I replied, trying to be casual. "We just let our kids make some placemats, read a little about the saint's life, sing a song or two, have a prayer, and finish with a child-decorated cake."

It didn't work. Polite silence greeted my encouragement, a silence that told me these mothers were too uncomfortable to undertake a home celebration without a printed formula.

What a pity, but an understandable one. We have become so conditioned to scheduling and formalizing our celebrations that we can't break into spontaneous celebration when the occasion calls for it. We keep calendars telling us when to start and end seasonal festivities. We have approved days and seasons of celebration and we are uncomfortable about celebrating anything unscheduled.

But some people still know how to celebrate. Last year, a friend of mine who had been trying to publish for two years, sold her first story. She was so overjoyed, she couldn't be alone. She called several of us to come over for an unplanned feast. Her house wasn't spotless, her menu was completely unplanned, her carefully guarded routine shattered, but she knew when to celebrate. The occasion and joy were there, so that's where she put the celebration.

Scheduling and detail can kill the essence of celebration. That is why children regard us with incredulity when we tell them Mass is a celebration. Not to them.

To them, Mass is a routine, a drag, a sameness down to the final blessing which shows them little of the sense of togetherness, warmth and joy that real celebrations do.

In order to learn to celebrate as adults, we need to experience celebration as children. A sense of celebration is easy to instill in the family if parents can overcome their own awkwardness. We can encourage it by rejoicing together over little events—the recuperation of a sick child, a good report card, a place on the team, a first date, a family act of good will, a promotion—the occasions are endless. For format, the family meal does nicely. We merely need to respond openly to our child's need to express his joy by celebrating together.

Unfortunately, it's as easy to stifle a child's sense of celebra-

tion as it is to instill it. By refusing to respond to spontaneous calls to celebrate, by scheduling our celebrations by appointment, and by celebrating "by the book," we successfully manage to strip our celebrations of true feeling.

A few weeks ago at Mass, when the time came for the handshake of peace, I saw a small boy turn to the man behind him, his hand out and his smile wide. The man stared straight ahead. He didn't "see" the child.

The child withdrew in embarrassment. He had been openly rebuffed by a man who was celebrating in the Mass. The child's face turned red and he didn't look at anyone. I felt sorry for him but I felt sorrier for the adult who was so totally unable to celebrate that a child's gesture put him off.

An Adult Catholic Guide for the 1970s

By MSGR. JOSIAH G. CHATHAM
TYPES OF PRAYER

Saint Paul preached to the people of Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything . . . Yet he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being . . ." (Acts of the Apostles, 17:24-28).

Prayer is communication with God, in whom we live and move and have our being. The Holy Spirit enables us to call God our living Father, and enables us to communicate with him in prayer. Jesus said: ". . . if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name" (John, 16:23). To learn how to pray, to communicate with our loving Father, takes daily practice.

In learning how to pray, we must recognize that there are different types of prayer. We begin with a consideration of contemplation. Theologians distinguish between contemplation which can be acquired and contemplation which is infused into the soul as a special gift of God. Every person who is striving to love and serve God is quite capable of contemplation.

There are no words in contemplation, no mental images. In contemplation there is a simple, intense openness to God, a profound realization of one's total and absolute dependence upon God, in whom we live and move and have our very being.

We can contemplate any time and any place: in church, in the waiting room, by a sickbed, in jail. It may help to read a passage of Scripture, then simply lift up one's heart in an intense experience of God's presence. There should be a time every day for contemplation—short at first, and increasing in length as one grows in the ability to pray.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. McBRIEN

Q. Some theologians, canon lawyers, and others say that the present practice for the selection of bishops should be set aside in favor of a system which allows for broader participation by clergy and laity alike. Can we really change the present system of episcopal appointment without violating the essential nature of the Church as a monarchical institution?

A. Your fundamental assumption is wrong. The Church is a collegial, not a monarchical, institution. Furthermore, the whole Church—clergy, Religious, and laity alike—has received the mission to proclaim, signify, and bring about the Kingdom of God among men. Because all baptized Christians are incorporated into the People of God, each has some basic responsibility for the kind and quality of the Church's leadership.

There is, in fact, an ancient canonical principle: "He who governs all should be elected by all."

A recent Canon Law Society of America symposium made such a recommendation: "The principle of coresponsibility, the dignity and freedom of persons, the rights of Christians, and the longstanding tradition of Church order all demand the meaningful participation of the whole community in the selection of its leaders and the formulation of laws affecting its life."

In some dioceses the clergy has already been asked to express its preference regarding future episcopal appointments, but such instances are on an ad hoc basis and have no clearly defined canonical force. What seems clear enough in principle, therefore, remains as yet unsettled in practice. The matter of wider practical implementation, however, is now under study.

Q. What right do theologians have to sneer at what is called "individualistic, pietistic morality?" What other kind is there?

A. The expression, "individualistic, pietistic morality," does not mean that Christ or the Church have no concern for individuals as individuals, or that piety has no place in one's Christian life. In the expression cited above, the adjectives are derived from two historically describable "isms": Individualism and Pietism.

Individualism tends to deny the social responsibilities of man. It proposes that the Christian's principal responsibility is the salvation of his own soul (presumably by the faithful performance of religious actions and by the avoidance of certain proscribed behavior). If one has time to be concerned about issues of social justice, that is commendable enough. However, it is not necessary for an integral Christian life which is grounded rather on the individual's personal relationship with God.

Pietism, too, stresses the personal and subjective dimension of Christian faith. It started as a movement within German Lutheranism during the 17th and 18th centuries, in reaction against the aridity of contemporary academic theology and the stereotyped character of institutional religion.

The Second Vatican Council teaches, however, that "man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other . . . God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity . . . So from the beginning of salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community. This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection."

Finally, the Church is not simply an organization to which various individuals belong in order to work out their salvation in carefully defined ways. It is, first and foremost, a community, the People of God. Our individuality is determined in and through our participation in the community of Christ and in the larger human community.

If God sees fit, He can catch a person up in contemplation which he infuses into a person's being. Such moments call for profound humility, for total surrender and love. At the same time, it must be noted that the great mystics have experienced long periods of "dryness" and God seemed very far away.

Next, we consider liturgical prayer. Here, we will consider briefly the general lines of the Eucharistic liturgy, the Mass. Later we will study the liturgy of all the sacraments in greater detail.

Liturgical prayer is the official prayer of the Church, of Christ and his members, united by the Holy Spirit, praying together to the Father. In liturgical prayer, everyone should lay aside his individual, personal prayers and take part in the prayer of the community. Each person performs the role which is proper to him.

There is a liturgy of watching, walking, singing, reading, listening, praying. There is the role of the celebrant who pre-

sides, proclaims the prayers and leads the entire celebration. There is the role of the lector who reads the Scripture, the homilist who preaches, the leader of song, the acolytes, the choir, the assembly of the people and others. Everyone participates actively.

At Mass, the people of the assembly stand, watch and sing when the procession enters the Church. They respond to the celebrant when he greets them. They listen to the prayer, the scripture readings and the homily.

Christ is present in the midst of the assembly, he is present in the person of the priest, present in God's word proclaimed and preached, present, in a special way, in the Eucharist.

During the proclamation of the scriptures and the Eucharistic Prayer we should look at the reader and listen with intense faith and love. We should not read, but should listen, and try to love Christ and all the members of the assembly.