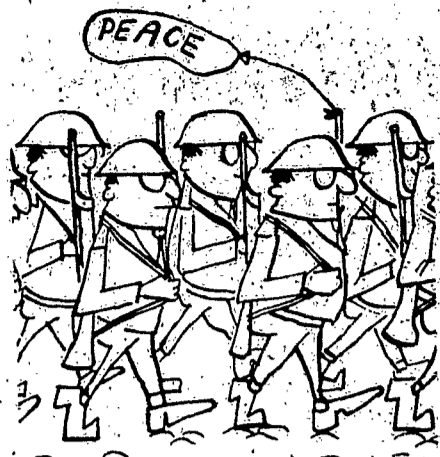


Conflict And The Sign of

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN



"I am sorry, Father, but the kiss of peace business is phony and artificial."

The observation deserves serious consideration. Should, for example, a husband and wife whose marriage is on the ropes, who are edgy and uncomfortable, who bitterly quarreled just prior to Mass turn and "express their love for one another?" Isn't this an insincere and dishonest gesture, feigning love where hate exists, pretending about peace while a cold, (or hot) war wages?

Or, to continue the illustration of our preceding column, does or will this ritual change people's lives? To shake hands in peace and then dash to claw one's way out of a parking lot parallels in some ways the forbidden practice of running into a confessional for forgiveness, then quickly falling back into the same sin without any effort at improvement.

I think the answer to these practical queries rests with the resolution of an equally debated theoretical issue on the nature of eucharistic celebrations. Does the Mass build community or presuppose it? Must we be one before we gather around the altar, or does common worship of the Lord help us become one?

It seems to me that the Mass

both builds community and presupposes it; we should work for community, strive for peace, and seek to be reconciled before gathering at the altar, true, but common worship also heals wounds, closes gaps, and deepens love.

I feel keenly about the social dimensions of liturgy but to insist on perfect peace and justice before we celebrate is to expect the Kingdom of the Lord before it appears.

Such perfection belongs to the age of Christ's Second Coming; now the pilgrim Church must work for that time of final fulfillment, prepare for it, even forge its beginnings through human efforts aided by God's grace. Common prayer at the table of the Word and of the Lord is, in the view of many, the most powerful instrument Christians possess for achieving these goals.

If we wait for perfect community before celebrating, I fear honest people would never celebrate; if we hold off on worship until poverty and injustice and war are no more, then I fear there would be no Eucharists at all; if we postpone the sign of peace until all parishioners are reconciled, full of love and in harmony with one another, then I fear we will never see this gesture at Sunday Masses.

To return to the parking lot and our miserable Mr. and Mrs. No one sanctions the selfish antics of an "I will beat you out of here" driver. That man (or woman) may in a more quiet, reflective moment even shudder at his own lack of courtesy and wonder what causes such strange, intemperate behavior at these times. However, the fact that minutes earlier he had exchanged a greeting of peace with several persons around him in church does not, in my book, make him a hypocrite.

Weak, yes; still preoccupied with his own needs, yes; hypocritical, no. Weekly worship has not yet fully overflowed into his personal world. Maybe someday, however; maybe at some future Sunday he will catch himself, fight back an urge to push ahead and act as Christian in the car as he does in the pew. When that happens the liturgy in general and the sign of peace in particular have worked. They have taken a man's basic good will, nourished, strengthened it; and built him into a better person and his parish into a better community.

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Mini-Math

By Sam Stein

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L

(Answer on 11B)

INSTRUCTIONS: Mini-Math is worked like a crossword puzzle. Use numbers 1 through 5 only. For example: (A) Horizontal may call for +3 in two squares, which may be (+4 and -1), (+5 and -2), (+1 and +2), (-2 and +5), etc. The same with Verticals.

HORIZONTAL

- A +1
- C -6
- E +1
- F -1
- G +6
- I +1
- K +1
- L -1

VERTICAL

- A -7
- B +9
- C -4
- D -3
- G +4
- H +3
- I +1
- J -1

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Wednesday, September 9, 1970

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