



An Old Man in the Sea

By FATHER
JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

The surf at beaches at San Juan, Puerto Rico, is delightful, but dangerous. A strong undertow draws bathers out to the sea and high, irregular waves will stun hesitant or unsuspecting persons who fail to dive through or ride over them.

One day in early February a 60-year-old Jewish man, on vacation for a few weeks, stayed out too long in this tricky body of water. Sensing fatigue he struggled to reach shore but found his waning strength no match for the powerful ocean. Cries for help brought husky, dark-skinned Puerto Rican lifeguards to the rescue. They tugged him to land very quickly, but their anxious faces and waving arms indicated the man was in serious difficulty.

For ten minutes the senior guard tried mouth to mouth resuscitation. Others rushed an emergency oxygen tank to the scene. Finally the man stirred a bit, breathed weakly, showed signs of life. By this time an ambulance had arrived and two men carried the poor fellow on a stretcher over soft sand to the waiting vehicle. Hurrying after them with a few articles of clothing clutched in her arms was a frightened distraught woman, also in her late 60s. The man's wife. Alone. With no one by her side. No one.

Yet all within view stood along the shore as this misfortune unfolded. And 50 morbid spectators crowded in a circle around and above the prostrate victim. But not a single soul possessed sufficient concern or courage or understanding to console this shaken, petrified woman in her anguish.

At the entrance rite in the new Order of Mass we spend a few moments silently calling to mind our sins. Big ones. Little ones. Mortal, venial, serious, slight, by word or deed, commission or omission. Then we confess (in a variety of forms) to almighty God and to "you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do."

The on-lookers, that day in San Juan committed no evil act, but they neglected a good deed. For Christians this is a failure. "I was sick and you did not visit me, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, troubled and you never comforted me."

As we prepare to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries Sunday after Sunday perhaps this silent examination of conscience and communal confession of sin will lead us to recognize that Christian living entails more than a close observance of negative precepts. It includes also a positive command to find Christ and serve Him in our

neighbor—throughout the slums, or in the suburbs, on the highway or at the beach.

The lifeguard who saved this

person's life? What about him? That night after supper he stopped at the hospital to check on the old man and comfort his worried wife.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD McBRIEN

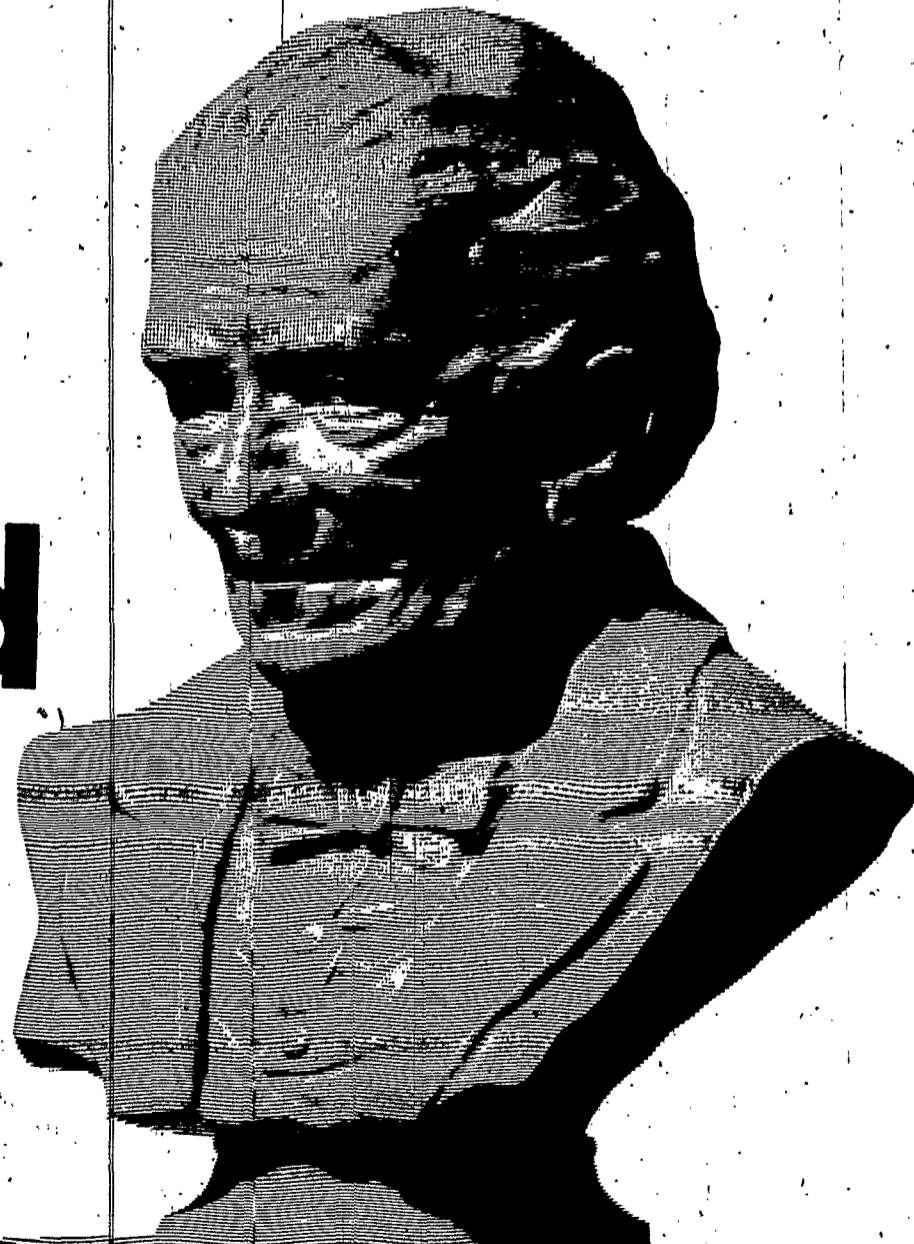
Q. A few weeks ago you answered a question concerning the "zero population growth" movement. In your reply you said: "There is nothing morally wrong with the views proposed by the 'zero population growth' advocates." You realize, of course, that some of these people are in favor of such population-control devices as abortion and sterilization. I assume that you did not wish to endorse these views. Or did you?

A. No, I did not. Nevertheless, I can understand how that remark could be misinterpreted, especially if it were taken out of context.

The main burden of my answer was to remind the readers that the Catholic Church does not condemn all forms of population control and, indeed, that the Church's leadership encourages further scientific investigation to improve existing methods of population control. The council stipulates, however, that "the reliability of these methods should be adequately proven and their harmony with the moral order should be clear" (n. 87).

Have a heart. Give your Valentine

the good stuff.



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