

Paschal Reflections of the Bishop

MY DEAR PEOPLE:

Within a few minutes Easter vigil services will begin in all the churches of the diocese—marking the end of our Lent with its special grace of reconciliation offered to all of us. The darkness which will envelop the congregations at the beginning of the services will be dispelled first by the light of the Paschal Candle—symbolic of the Risen Christ, the Light who illumines all who walk in the darkness of our pilgrimage through life.

From the Paschal Candle, tapers held by the individual worshipers will be lighted as a sign of our Christian vocation and the challenge of our faith—that our union in Christ begun in Baptism be a constant, visible sign for all to behold.

On this Easter eve I feel privileged to share with you some of my personal reflections about these last days of the most holy of all weeks when the drama of the Lord's saving action is unfolded before us in the Liturgy of Holy Week.

This liturgy, as every liturgical celebration, was performed not as a spectacle to behold as we would witness a theatrical production—nor was it presented solely to bestir our memories to what God once did for us at a precise moment of history. It was offered to us as a saving grace in this year of the Lord 1971—to challenge our lives to deeper Christian commitment.

It is traditional for the bishop of a diocese to preside at the services held in our Cathedral Church—the church which is the center of all worship in the diocese and which embraces all our liturgical assemblies.

On Thursday and Friday before Holy Week began, I presided at the funeral rites for two of our most beloved priests in the diocese, Father Joseph O'Connell and Monsignor Edward Ball. Their deaths offered me a providential preparation for a deeper entrance into the

Bishop Hogan delivered this message Saturday night, April 10, over WSAY-Radio and affiliates.

spirit of Holy Week—for here were two men whose lives beautifully reflected the Paschal Mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. They both had graciously accepted the invitation of Christ to enter deeply into His sufferings and they followed the Stations of the Cross joyfully buoyed up by their assurance of His victory.

They were Easter priests—a challenge to all of us who drag our feet in the service of Christ and to all whose failure to reflect joy in their lives indicates half-hearted and grudging devotion to duty. I have no doubt the good Lord has now revealed to them the rewards promised the generous disciple.

On last Sunday I celebrated the solemn liturgy commemorating Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The revised ceremonies encourage greater participation of the faithful. The Palm Sunday liturgy includes a ceremony of the blessing of the palms in a place apart from the church which marks the starting point for a procession to the church—and a reading of the Passion according to St. Luke with parts read by the celebrant, two lectors and the exclamations of the crowd surrounding Jesus voiced by the congregation.

I was back at the Cathedral for two Masses on Holy Thursday, the anniversary of the institution of the priesthood and of the Holy Eucharist—gifts which St. Augustine describes as the "exhaustion of divine goodness". I want to speak to you about the Chrism Mass especially.

This is a liturgy which very few of our people have ever witnessed. I suppose because for so many years it was such a

lengthy service and so unintelligible that people deliberately chose the traditional Holy Thursday Mass. It still is the Mass at which the bishop blesses and consecrates the oils used in the administration of many sacraments—the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of Chrism. But it is much more than that in the revised liturgy.

I believe now it is one of the most impressive rites of the whole year. The themes of the Mass are—the unity of our priesthood with the bishop, the renewal of our priestly dedication to zealous service in the Church, the humility and charity of Christ as manifested in the washing of the feet of His disciples, a petitioning of our people for prayerful support for our priests and bishop in fulfillment of their awesome responsibilities.

Every area of the diocese was represented in the priests who concelebrated with me. Deacons and sub-deacons from the Seminary participated in the ceremony of the blessing of the oils.

I repeated this challenge I had given our priests the day of my ordination as bishop:

"We priests, above all others, must reflect what the Church is meant to be—a Community of Charity—of men united with God in Christ—a sacrament—a visible sign to all that the Spirit dwells in us—and is manifested in our unity in Charity—that virtue, which, as St. Paul reminds us, perfects our manhood, subdues our ego and makes us patient and kind, devoid of jealousy and boastfulness, arrogance and rudeness, insistence on our own way, irritability and resentfulness.

"United in Christ there is practically no limit to what we can accomplish in the cause of Christ. Divided we can be only a stumbling block—a scandal—to the whole community."

Then there followed this public renewal of commitment to priestly service:

"My brothers, today we celebrate the memory of the first Eucharist, at which our Lord Jesus Christ shared with his apostles and with us his call to the priestly service of his Church. Now, in the presence of your bishop and God's holy people, are you ready to renew your own dedication to Christ as priests of his new covenant?"

Priests: I am.

Bishop: At your ordination you accepted the responsibilities of the priesthood out of love for the Lord Jesus and his Church. Are you resolved to unite yourselves more closely to Christ and to try to become more like him by joyfully sacrificing your own pleasure and ambition to bring his peace and love to your brothers and sisters?

Priests: I am.

Bishop: Are you resolved to be faithful ministers of the mysteries of God, to celebrate the Eucharist and the other liturgical services with sincere devotion? Are you resolved to imitate Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church, by teaching the Christian faith without thinking of your own profit, solely for the well-being of the people you were sent to serve?

Priests: I am.

Then I addressed the congregation with a petition of prayers for priests and for myself: "My brothers and sisters, pray for your priests. Ask the Lord to bless them with the fullness of his love, to help them be faithful ministers of Christ the High Priest, so that they will be able to lead you to him, the fountain of your salvation."

People: Lord Jesus Christ, hear us and answer our prayer.

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Bishop: Pray also for me that despite my own unworthiness I may faithfully fulfill the office of apostle which Jesus Christ has entrusted to me. Pray that I may become more like our High Priest and Good Shepherd, the Teacher and Servant of all, and so be a genuine sign of Christ's loving presence among you.

People: Lord Jesus Christ, hear us and answer our prayer.

Bishop: May the Lord in his love keep you close to him always, and may he bring all of us, his priests and people, to eternal life.

All: Amen.

The entire service lasted but one hour and it is my hope that it will become one of the best attended services of Holy Week—especially in these days when the powers of darkness seem to be hard at work to destroy our priestly unity by sowing the seeds of factionalism.

The Good Friday service focused our attention on the price of our Redemption. This we can never lose sight of. For there is a temptation for all of us to want to walk the glory road—to bypass the painful way of the Cross that alone leads to the joy of Easter.

The most recent Stations of the Cross are 15 in number rather than the traditional 14. The 15th is the Resurrection of Christ—the only motivation that can sustain us through the painful pilgrimage of life. And this is good—unless it encourages our common temptation for instant success that would bypass the unpleasant in life.

The liturgy of Good Friday is divided into 3 sections—

(1) The service of the Word of God which recalls that Jesus surrendered Himself to death and became the source of salvation for all of us. This part concludes with a series of 10 intercessions which gather the whole world around the Cross of Christ and plead for all classes of people.

(2) This is followed by the Adoration of the Cross while the choir sings the haunting challenges of the Reproaches—the words which the Church puts upon the lips of the dying Christ bespeaking the odious contrast between the liberality of God and the human response of ingratitude.

(3) The rite concludes with Communion, reminding us of St. Paul's words: "As often as you eat this Bread and drink this Blood, you proclaim the Death of the Lord until His final coming".

I prayed on Good Friday for all of us that we might grow in the wisdom of the Cross which teaches us better than any theological treatise about the malice of sin, our personal guilt in Christ's Crucifixion, the goodness of God who died for all, even the most ungrateful, and in the depths of His agony sought forgiveness for all His executioners; the memory of suffering (its power to make us instruments of redemption of the world).

I concluded with a prayer for our ignorance of the world and its pride which crowned the Head of Christ—of its selfishness which nailed Him to the Cross—and of its bitterness

which pierced His side—ignorance of everything except the breadth, length and depth of Christ's Redeeming Love.

The Easter Vigil is a service of light—the Light of the world which illumines the darkness of our sinful ways; it is a service of meditation on the saving action of God in our history—of Baptism which unites us to Him who alone is the Way, Truth and Life—and of Communion with Him who is the pledge of our eternal Easter. The alleluias of the victory of the man whose faith unites him to the conqueror of sin, death, every seeming hopeless situation of life, ring out.

And as Easter dawns with the promise of new life and hope—I offer my Mass for all of you—to have a deepening sense of your vocation as Easter people. St. Augustine gave the best description of the man who in faith is united to Christ—"He is alleluia from head to toe!" May we all be sacraments of Easter—a role so beautifully dramatized by Mary Magdalene in the enactment of the Passion Play in Oberammergau.

In this German town where every 10 years the people make an act of thanks—giving for their deliverance from the black plague that ravaged Europe during the Middle Ages—this woman who in real life knew the victory of Christ that resurrected her from her own hopeless living death—closed the play with these ringing words which should be ours:

"O would that I could send my voice throughout the world—that mountains and rocks, heaven and earth, might give back their echo: 'Alleluia! He is risen!'"

Joseph L. Hogan
Bishop of Rochester

Letters Clergy Should Oppose War

Editor:

While reading Father Cuddy's "Unkindest Cut" (4/7/71 Courier) my mind was still filled with a previous night's adult discussion topic. Each had gone home with one question unanswered. "Why haven't our Catholic Church leaders spoken out as strongly on Pope Paul's 'Never Again War,' as they have against contraception and abortion? Father Cuddy asks Father Appelby, why he has not taken a stand on abortion. It all seems such a contradiction.

If we are for a child's right to be conceived, then his right to be born, can we stand back and not be alarmed at his loss of life in an inhuman war? Shouldn't we as Christians fight for all life? War in this day is obsolete.

We must love our enemies as Jesus commanded us. We must fight war along with abortion. They are synonymous!

Jean Premo
Rochester.

COURIER / Editorials

A Bit of Good News

Although most of the news from Albany is usually of dire import, two items recently provided something of a silver lining. Both are concerned with those adoptable children termed "hard to place" because of medical or social reasons.

The governor has signed into law a program which sets up a State Adoption Exchange charged with helping to find adoptive homes for such children.

Local adoption agencies such as the Catholic Family Center have been active in this field but the state agency will help give the program impetus as well as providing a clearing house (forgive such a heartless term but its intent should be warmly humanitarian) for statewide action.

The term "hard to place" generally refers to four categories—black, mixed, the older child, and the physically impaired. Probably the latter has the bleakest outlook because of the worry, labor and expense which must be faced by prospective parents.

The Legislature has passed and sent to the governor another bill in this area. It encourages the adoption of such children with medical or mental handicaps, permitting a state subsidy to parents for special medical expenses.

Such a program, its sponsor, Assemblyman Charles Jerabek says, will not add to state costs since the expense of keeping such children in foster care is already underwritten by the state and is greater than if the children were adopted.

The plan will have the added salutary result of giving the children homes, which is, of course, the heart of the matter.

—Carmen J. Viglucci

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