

Our Parish COUNCIL

by Bernard Lyons



A great worry among organizers of parish councils is how to get the people to act.

If we use that old human device that psychologists call "projection," we find it convenient to point to our fellow parishioners and say, "They're apathetic." This is a lazy way of rationalizing why we are resting on our oars: "I could get so much more done if my fellow parishioners were only as willing to work as I am."

In an age of depersonalization and complexity, a leader who is convinced that people are not apathetic learns constantly to evaluate himself and his actions for 1) his friendliness and 2) his concern for the self-interest of others.

Let's see this in action, by running through an organizing meeting for a council and watching how it might be approached in two nearby parishes.

In St. Apathy parish, a small committee of men, appointed by the pastor, have agreed to work on organizing the council. After a few unenthusiastic meetings, the committee has scheduled a parish-wide meeting to talk about the parish council. They have decided on bulletin announcements and a sermon by the pastor to attract the parishioners.

In nearby Pope John XXIII parish, a small committee of men, appointed by the pastor, have agreed to work on organizing a council. After a couple of muddled meetings, some of the men went out to see other parish councils at work first-hand. They also decided that their small group was not representative of the parish. They enlarged their steering committee to include women, other group interests and the various geographic areas of the parish. They took assignments to talk with people, between meetings, so they could list what people were talking about and concerned with.

On the basis of these meetings they took a map of the parish and divided it into smaller sectors. Steering committee members were assigned to serve as temporary chairmen to organize home meetings in each area or little parish. Others on the steering committee were asked to be temporary chairmen for committees that encompassed some of the concerns that parishioners were talking about — worship, finances, the school, etc.

After countless, long hours of discussion and hundreds of pots of coffee, the council organizing committee set a date for a parish-wide meeting. They, too, wanted the pastor to preach on the council and to include bulletin announce-

ments. They also selected one of their members to talk from the pulpit on the Sunday before the meeting.

St. Apathy parish attracted the same "regulars" to the meeting. They went home afterwards talking about the apathy of the parish.

John XXIII parish had a fairly good turnout. They had the "regulars," plus some new faces, people who had not been seen except at Sunday Mass. And there were a few who hadn't been seen there too regularly. The people left the meeting with a definite date for

the next meeting. Some of them had assignments to committees. All of them had a spirit that something was "moving."

The key difference between the parishes was the approach — based on friendships (growing out of face-to-face contact) and a concern for the interests of others.

Questions, comments and other correspondence are invited from our readers. Write to "Our Parish Council," in care of Courier Journal, 35 Scio St. Rochester, N.Y. 14604.

FR. ALBERT SHAMON Word For Sunday



St. Paul sums up the goal of life thus: "Set your heart on what pertains to higher realms. Be intent on things above . . . Christ is everything." (R II). Qoheleth and Christ reaffirm the same things in a negative way: "Don't make knowledge, pleasure, and wealth the goals of life" (R I and 11).

And the reason? "All things are vanity." Vanity connotes the opposite of the substantial. It refers to what is passing in contrast to what is lasting. The Hebrew word from which it springs denotes something as fleeting as the vapor of one's breath on a cold winter's morn or as short-lived as a soap bubble. "All things are vanity," for nothing is lasting in life. All is vanishing.

Looking through my file on "Death," I re-read some of the clippings I had gathered announcing the death of name stars. One headline read, "Where Are They Now?" Clara Bow, the "It" girl of the 20's? Francis X. Bushman, the romantic idol of the silents, the Messala of the 1925 version of Ben Hur that starred another new star, Ramon Narvarro? Rudolph Valentino, the Sheik of Araby? Evelyn Nesbitt Thaw, "the world's most beautiful girl"? Yea, where are they now? The lines from Gray's Elegy ran spontaneously through my mind as I read each death notice.

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:

The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

No wonder Qoheleth looked at life and summed up the wisdom of the ages in "vanity of vanities." As King of kings means the highest king, so vanity of vanities means the highest folly. And what is the highest folly? To build one's happiness on what is ephemeral—on what is here today and gone tomorrow.

Our Lord called the man in the parable who did this a fool — "You fool." Why was he a fool? Not because he was rich. Scripture has never launched a tirade against riches. On the whole it is good to be rich. What is condemned is man's attitude toward riches. The rich man in the Gospel thought only of himself — "vanity fair." Five times he used "I." No thought entered his mind of helping others. His sole concern was for bigger barns to hoard his store, not to help. Almost worse than diabolical possession is it for man to be possessed by the money he thinks he possesses.

Secondly, the rich man sought happiness in riches—in vain! The precious things of life money cannot buy. Money cannot buy love. At a kennel there was a sign, "The only love that money can buy. Puppies for sale." Money cannot buy life — "possessions do not guarantee life" (R III).

But vainest of all, the rich man forgot that man is more than his possessions. He forgot death. He forgot even God — everything is "my" — "my" harvest, "my" bins, "my" grain, "my" goods. No wonder Christ called him a fool, and A Kempis wrote: "Vanity of vanities and all is vanity except to love God" — to grow rich in His sight.

When John D. Rockefeller died, someone asked, "How much do he leave?" Another answered, "He left everything."

Departure from the world is not to be feared. What is to be feared is to arrive at another world for which no preparation has been made. (Open your Bible and read Psalm 89 meditatively.)

LETTERS

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor, Courier-Journal, 35 Scio St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. They should be no longer than 1½ pages, typed double-spaced. Names and addresses should be included. The paper reserves the right to edit all letters.

St. Michael's Thai Priest 'Wonderful Idea' Seeks Help

Editor:

Father Ehmann's ramp that he provides for the handicapped at St. Michael's Church, (Courier-Journal, 7/21/71) is a wonderful idea.

It would be excellent and not too costly to have this done to many of our fine churches to allow the handicapped entry to God's house.

Congratulations to Father Ehmann on being in the vanguard to mitigate the problems of the infirmed.

Donald Still,
Rochester

Editor:

I'm writing these few lines in the hope that your readers may be kind to one dedicated to the services of God as a diocesan priest in this diocese of Ratchaburi. I need a lot of help, especially for the final works of my repaired church and also for my primary school. It would be very helpful and also may be easier for you to help my priestly apostolates by sending me the intentions of Masses to be said or sung as much as possible.

Fr. John Bosco Fraser, P.P.
St. Margaret's Church
Bangtan Station, Ban Pong
Ratchaburi, THAILAND

Q & A

Q. — Did the early Church teach that our Lady was a virgin at the time Jesus was born and remained that way for the rest of her life?

A. — Religious writers in the 300 years of the post-Apostolic era taught that Mary's conception of Jesus was virginal and miraculous. St. Justin, Irenaeus, Origen and Clement of Alexandria believed in the continuing virginity of Mary. Saint Jerome, Augustine, Leo the Great and Peter Chrysologous also asserted Mary's virginity before, during and after the birth of Christ. The Lateran Council of 649 made the most explicit statement, condemning all who would not acknowledge that Mary had borne her Son without losing her virginity and preserved this status for the rest of her life.



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