

Reflections on Cursillo

Some years ago I began reading about a new movement within the Church which was being promoted as a wonder-worker — accomplishing the great miracle of raising dead Christians to a new life of dedicated and apostolic energy.



My curiosity led me to read everything I could find about CURSILLO. While some writers expressed their skepticism with comments which read: "Another gimmick," "a passing fad," "an emotional binge," — most expressed a more balanced view: "Give it a try," "You must experience it before passing judgment.

And now that I have experienced Cursillo — a short course in Christian living — I am proud to be numbered among the Cursillistas of the world and to give my support to a movement which can do wonders for the Church.

It all began in Spain on the Island of Majorca when the local bishop wanted to change a common Latin mentality that religious practice was infantile and feminine, and to prove that practical Christianity was a

challenge to manliness at its best. And it worked! Long before the Cursillo weekend began, the bishop instituted what is called the fourth day program — which is now the rest of our days for all of us who are willing to share our life in Christ with others. The weekend was developed only later when it was discovered that many had no idea of what it meant to be open and to be sharng of their Christian commitment.

In 1957, two air cadets came from Spain to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and gave witness to their Cursillo Apostolate. In 1961, the first Cursillo in the English language was held in San Angelo, Texas. The growth has been phenomenal. Cursillo Centers are now operating in 115 American Dioceses, and 50 of my brother bishops of the United States have made Cursillo.

Let me share with you these reflections on my personal experience:

1. Cursillo is not an emotional spree. If anything, it is a soft-sell of the Gospel message. The talks or conferences are simple presentations of age-old truths on the life of grace, alienation from God through sin, the power of Christian witness, the virtue of piety, and the presence of Christ in the Sacraments. The inspiration and effectiveness of the talks comes

from the joyous presentation of the speakers whose lives reflected the authenticity of their message.

2. Cursillo does not rely on gimmicks. Rather, it promotes and encourages basic devotions — the Rosary, the Way of the Cross, morning and evening prayers, the participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice over and above the minimal obligation of Sundays and holidays.

3. Cursillo does not waste a moment of its weekend in negative criticisms of the 'Establishment' — nor expressions of an adolescent attitude toward authority. It seeks to open all to generous and loyal service to the Church, to seek ways to become involved in the apostolate.

4. All retreatants and all the team presenting the weekend of reflection are supported by the prayers and sacrifices of those who have enjoyed the grace of Cursillo. These palancas (as they are called) were a great grace to all of us. What inspiration to know that someone was offering a weekend of sacrifice for me personally! — to know that my brother priests were doing penances for their bishop.

Yes — I have been blessed by the grace of Cursillo — three days I shall never forget — and a fourth day I shall ever strive to live.

By Father Joseph D. Donovan

Guest Columnist

St. Mark, Patron and Evangelist

To establish a new parish is a rare challenge and privilege. It means starting from scratch, trying to identify a new people of God, bringing them together, providing a new place of worship.



The problem of choosing a patron to whom future parishioners might look for inspiration is a further challenge.

We had the privilege of starting a new parish some few years ago. We chose St. Mark to be our guiding light in the undertaking.

We thought of Mark's gospel with its exciting reports of the miracles of our Lord. Miracles prove something. Something our time needs to be reminded of. The miracles of our Lord prove that He is God. If He is God, then, all that He stood for, all that He taught, must be accepted. The Church He established must be accepted.

Actually, Mark's purpose was not to prove that Christ was God: he took that for granted, as did the other gospel writers. Mark's purpose was to offer encouragement to the early

Father Donovan is pastor of St. Mark's Church, Rochester.

Christians who were faced with persecution and the prospect of martyrdom.

Mark's gospel was written at Rome about the year 68 AD. It was the earliest of the gospels written. It was simply a summary of the discourses of St. Peter whose understudy Mark was. Mark's mother, evidently a widow and a lady of some means, made her home available to the Christians of Jerusalem as their meeting place. Hence young Mark was brought up in the very center of the Church in Jerusalem and would have had an excellent opportunity to learn all that was to be learned about the activities of Our Lord.

Mark had his ups and downs. At Antioch he was chosen to accompany Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey to the gentiles. After a tour of Cyprus the group traveled on to Perga in Pamphylia. Here Mark parted company with the other two. We can only guess why. Was it that Mark did not favor evangelizing the gentiles, which was still an unsettled question? Did he feel that Barnabas had been downgraded — Paul

seemed to have been eclipsing Barnabas and Barnabas was a close relative of Mark? The journey was a difficult one. Was it too difficult for Mark? In any event, Mark went back home and Paul took a very dim view of his leaving.

But Mark had a chance to redeem himself and redeem himself he did, for Paul speaks of him later in glowing terms. The early Christian historian, Eusebius, relates that Mark went to Alexandria in Egypt and established the Church there. St. Jerome cites the same tradition. Another early writer tells of the martyrdom of Mark who was dragged through the streets till his flesh was torn off. He was buried where he used to preach but his remains were later removed to St. Mark's in Venice.

Precious little is known about St. Mark's life. Unlike Matthew and John he was not one of the Twelve but he certainly was in a position to arrive at a very intimate knowledge of the life and teachings of Our Lord and that knowledge he has given us in great detail. Mark served the greatest cause in history and served it well; his silence about himself is the silence that often surrounds really great men serving a great cause.

Editorial

Righteous Anger Cannot Excuse Violence

The five-day rebellion of the Attica prisoners was crushed at a terrible price: forty men were brutally destroyed and forty families seared with tortured grief; penal authorities and state officials were branded with vicious accusations; prisoners were again locked up despairing that the cause of human rights the riot leader had spoken so eloquently for would soon be forgotten again.

The Attica atrocity may have many lessons and may slowly lead to insights, reforms and appropriations long overdue in the American penal system. But the most horrifying action of the grim drama — the invasion of the prison yard by a blindly destructive use of shoot-to-kill force — should be outlawed at once.

After Kent State campus was bloodied by guardsmen who turned the enforcement

of peace and order into a death scene, we all agreed that it was an unreasoned and inappropriate violence. Forces of law should concentrate on two missions: restoring order and preventing serious injury and loss of life. And this rule should apply whether the disorderly crowd is an unarmed rabble in the streets or a rebellious riot of hardened prisoners. When troopers or guardsmen or city police wade into an emotionally charged disorder with weapons that can kill, they are likely to use them — and worry about it later.

Was it necessary to storm that prison yard with masses of officers armed as killers, told to shoot anyone who did not show surrender? Was there evidence that a single prisoner had a pistol or rifle?

There could not have been any doubt that the fog of riot gas in the yard, the prison garb on the hostages, the difficulty

of knowing who were the really dangerous insurgents, would confuse the invaders and make them trigger-itchy. Did the man who gave the orders believe that the use of gunfire would save the hostages? It was expected that at the first moment of invasion the hostages would be knifed. Yet superiors told the troopers to storm the yard and let the rioters suffer the worst that was needed to recue the hostages and put the prisoners back in their cells.

The Attica killings, whether judged necessary and deliberate for the rioters, or monstrously mistaken in the case of the hostages, reflect the acceptance of violence as a way of life in law enforcement. When deadly firepower is prepared to solve a disturbance without caring for the consequences, virtues like patience and understanding, prudence and respect for life, never can moderate even righteous anger.