

FR. HENRY ATWELL

## Toward Tomorrow



Many choirs and congregations sang about the heavenly Jerusalem at Easter time.

I haven't heard anybody sing about the heavenly Rochester, or the heavenly Elmira, or heavenly Geneva.

Most cities are in trouble these days, and the bigger the city, the bigger the trouble.

Crime and taxes go up, downtowns deteriorate, and the people who could do something about it all slip off to suburbs or country hideaways.

But not everybody's gone yet. There is still a possibility we might someday again sing about our cities — as in former times people sang about the sidewalks of New York or that everything's up-to-date in Kansas City.

I recently took a real eye-opening tour of Rochester. Rev. James Rice, Presbyterian director for local missions, was my guide. More people should take his tour.

We started with a look at the Genesee Gateway area north of the Clarissa St. Bridge where an extensive housing development is soon to get underway, then to the new high-rise apartment under construction of the elderly on South Ave., over to the SEAC (Southeast Area Coalition) center on Alexander St. and the vast Southeast Loop section where work is already started for an eventual 9,000 people.

Then we visited Stanley Skinner at NEAD (Northeast Development) on Culver Rd. near Parsells Ave. and heard about the numerous projects underway there to hold or up-grade neighborhoods in that area, particularly the impact of an enlarged bus barn on University Ave.

I saw modest but neat low-income housing units off Bay St., met young, articulate William Alexander at "New Life" on North Clinton Ave. and learned of efforts there to get youngsters out of bars and pool halls and about New Life's home educational program to alert parents and warn youngsters of the hazards of drugs.

Next we visited Rev. Robert Booher at Christ Presbyterian Church on Locust St., near the burned-out Lake Av-

enue Baptist Church. I remember meeting him several years back when his church, the Baptist church and St. Anthony's pioneered an ecumenical summer-time religious instruction program that far exceeded their expectations in its success.

The new, squat Presbyterian church replaces an old, rickety structure. The new building is designed so it can be adapted for a variety of uses. Even the rug comes up easily and walls slide about so you can have a large number served at a dinner or gathered for worship, or divided into smaller study groups.

Jim Rice has other places to take me, more people for me to meet, but the one message that came through so clear is that there are still many, many people who yet have hope in what a city can be.

One prominent Rochesterian (although his home is in the suburbs) is reported as once asking, cynically, "Why are you interested in the city? It's already gone down the drain!"

Benjamin Franklin, in his famous Autobiography, describes how a dismal gentleman stopped at Franklin's new printing shop in Philadelphia in 1729 and, as Franklin tells it, "He said he was sorry for me, because it was a very expensive undertaking, and my expense would be lost; for Philadelphia was a sinking place, the people already bankrupt."

Franklin then adds, "This man continued to live in this decaying place . . . refusing for many years to buy a house there, because all was going to destruction; and at last I had the pleasure of seeing him give five times as much for one as he might have bought it for when he first began his croaking."

Every city has its croakers. What we need are more like Franklin.

John Bunyan once remarked, "There is a road to hell even from the gates of heaven."

But the reverse is true too — there is a road to heaven even from the gates of hell.

-That is the road our cities and their citizens must take — together, and quickly.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side



Shortly after Christmas C-J general manager, Tony Costello, phoned. His persuasive cordiality breezed through the telephone. "Father, how would you like a free trip to the Holy Land?" In my innocence I thought this was a reward for the scintillating OTRSide articles contributed each week, which give courage to many distressed Catholics, and which irritate Catholics of a swinging type. It turned out that he needed a tour director for a group of 40, and if I would be said director, I should have all expenses paid. Stringless gifts are rare.

Anyway, I said yes, and became the shepherd to the Holy Land, and Rome, of 46 souls, 63 large pieces of luggage, 47 pieces of hand luggage. Despite 16 transfers of luggage from and to planes, buses and hotels, not one piece was lost. Nor was any person, despite innumerable stops at shrines, restaurants, hotels, and historic spots. I became a great admirer of military logistics, and discipline.

The pilgrim group was varied in age: from the 35-year-old Giordones of Port Byron, to many middle-aged, and a few older, and delightful senior citizens. They varied in vocations, temperament and interests; yet, thanks to God and the good natured cooperativeness of the 46, the pilgrimage went with surprising smoothness.

Trying odds and ends the group handled with surprising ease. For example, all workers at Rome's Leonardo Da-Vinci Airport: porters, clerks, office workers, went on a two-hour strike the noon we were scheduled to leave Rome for home. This delayed our plane to Kennedy Airport, which in domino style, caused us to miss our connection to Rochester. The strike was a protest against the alleged foot-dragging of the air conditioning installers. As a result Air Alitalia put us up at a nice motel between LaGuardia and Kennedy over night at their expense. It was a hardship for a few who were slated for work the next day. It was a lark for the rest.

There were five from Buffalo Diocese, including Sister Sylvia Reimondo who teaches nursing at Father Baker's in Lackawanna. (Sister fell faint on her face in Rome on the marble floor of St. Paul's Outside the Wall. Miracu-

lously, she broke neither bone nor teeth nor glasses, and excepting for a cut lip, no harm done. I suggested: "Sister, will you do it over again so Tony Guidone can take a movie of it?" However, she demurred, and considered it too dramatic for a repeat performance.) There was one from Syracuse Diocese. There were 40 from Rochester Diocese: from Clifton Springs, Port Byron, Elmira, Hornell, Savona (Mary Nadjadi, who is Father Adamski's housekeeper), Geneva, Penn Yan, Romulus, West Webster (Betty Beikirk who sells guns and ammunition, and whom we proposed as an air marshal against hijackers), Corning, Auburn and Rochester.

Seven days in the Holy Land is brief, but we were fortunate in our guide. He calls himself "Charlie" because Mr. Khalil Yasmineh is too much for many Westerners. He works for the international Nawas Tourist Agency. He is about 50, slender, intelligent, and has 18 years' experience as a guide. He is well-versed in biblical history, archeology, the tragic history of the Holy Land for centuries, and in human nature. He is a native Christian Arab, educated in Jerusalem by the Dominicans, and speaks Arabic, French, English and Israeli fluently. His reverence for Our Lord, for the Bible, for the holy places, and for accuracy shone from his lucid explanations.

He was candid: "There are places we are sure of; places of which we have a general knowledge; and places which are historically legendary; I will take you to the most important places which are historically authentic." And he added dryly: "Though the head of John the Baptist is claimed by several churches in the world we are certain that St. John had only one head; and there is no certainty that any church possesses it."

Later he said to me: "I adapt my guidance to the interests of each group. Some are interested in archeology, some in architecture, some in biblical research. Yours is a group of pilgrims, and I like them especially well." In reciprocity our group liked Charlie very well. And he stressed the biblical and devotional aspects of our visits to the Holy Places.

More next week.

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