

# In Praise of Marriage Fidelity

**PART I**

On June 25 at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart I was privileged to witness the renewal of vows publicly, freely and solemnly made twenty-five and fifty years ago by married couples from every part of the diocese. In a world strewn with broken promises, fractured families and schizoid offspring, it was a joy for me to confirm and bless a fidelity as the sole assurance of the stability of family life. I am pleased, therefore, to present now and in next week's column my exhortation to the Jubilarians.

One of my favorite marriage stories deals with Patrick and Margaret, an old Irish couple celebrating their golden jubilee of marriage. Their children and cousins, friends and well-wishers had gathered from every corner of the county to do justice to the occasion. At the height of the festivities, one of the village wags brought the proceedings to a hush by a leading question: "Now, Maggie, if you're aiming to shame the devil himself, own up and tell us whether you were ever tempted or no to

divorce your husband Patrick." "Divorce him — never!" shot back Maggie. "But murder him — aye, many's the time I've thought of that!"

Read into the story whatever you will: a flash of wit, a tongue-in-cheek response, a moment of truth. But to me, it points up a profound reality: there are times in marriage when love may wear thin or run aground, but let faith remain in command, and all is not lost. In other words, in marriage love is the blossom, while faith is the root.

Some may not perceive or appreciate that distinction. Still the truth remains that the honeymoon, romantic love, sentimental experience — all have their hour or day in marriage, but only faith or fidelity or loyalty, being the deepest expression of love, guarantees the weathering of every crisis in wedded life.

It has always impressed me that one of the deepest challenges of married life was so eloquently expressed in the Exhortation Before Marriage used at the time when you exchanged your vows of love. That statement went: "It is an unbounded tribute to your faith in one another, that today you are willing to take each other for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness

and in health, until death do you part."

The key word is faith, a commitment of absolute trust. In 1970, 700,000 divorces were reported in this country. Of these broken marriages, we can be sure of little else except two basic aspects. We can be reasonably certain that each one of these disrupted unions began with some degree of love. We can be equally confident that every one of them was undermined by an erosion of faith.

Christian faith and married fidelity share common features. The "I will" we spoke to God on the day of Baptism is remarkably similar to the "I will" we spoke to our spouse on the day of marriage. On the first occasion we initiated a community of fidelity which was meant to be patterned after Christ's self-offering to His Bride, the Church (Cf. Eph. 5).

For this reason, the Christian family has often been called "a miniature church" for, like the Church herself, marriage rests on a redeeming love, a mystery of sanctification, a sign that points to Christ's unreserved self-donation. Both the "I will" of Baptism and the "I will" of Christian marriage are a gift of self, an invitation of grace, a pledge of love.

(To be continued)

**The Slot Man**

By Carmen Viglucci

## The People at Their Best

It sounds good. The food, that is, that the United States Department of Agriculture ships in to disaster areas such as the Southern Tier.



Undoubtedly it is good nutritionally. Canned chicken, canned mashed potatoes, canned corn, applesauce, grape juice, canned milk, shortening. And it was needed and appreciated, without question.

Yet one of the volunteer workmen at the Elmira City School District bus garage remarked that it can get to be pretty dull fare over a long haul. He made the point only to express gratitude on behalf of those dispossessed by the flood for

the food donations that came in from citizenry and which provided variety of menu.

Ron Poletto of the central school office told of volunteers at the school bus garage, under Carl Farmer, keeping the pickup and supply of food operation going 24 hours a day for eight or nine days.

It represented just one of the "ad hoc" organizations which sprung into operation in the emergency. Food and supplies were picked up at the Fairgrounds and delivered to such distribution centers as Notre Dame High School.

At the high school, the gym as of last Monday was loaded with clothing, actually sorted as to size. Racks held hundreds of coats, there were shoes. The clothing came in from all parts of the diocese and from as far away as New Jersey.

Fire stations, schools, bus garages all were transformed from their pedestrian natures into havens and oases for the stricken. They served as funnels transporting the goods coming from all over into the ravaged areas. The selfless people who manned them (and "womaned" them, as someone remarked) may never get personal recognition but their deeds will never be forgotten.

In buoying his people during World War II, Winston Churchill made the now famous remark "never have so many owed so much to so few." In the Southern Tier it can be paraphrased "never have so many done so much for so many."

Humanity at its best.

**Editorial**

## Clear Task Lies before Us

Perseverance is the operative word for those of us not directly hit by the flood waters that decimated so many homes, churches, schools and businesses in the Southern Tier. The job is clear for those who must work and live amid the desolation and its attendant miseries, but for those removed from the actual scene it may be hard to remember the plight of our brothers and sisters in the devastated areas.

Our job must also be clear.

Thus Bishop Joseph L. Hogan has inaugurated the Bishop's Southern Tier Flood Relief Fund as an ongoing source of support for the victimized area. A full-page ad elsewhere in this paper will explain how you can help.

The Bishop points out on Page 1 that such donations will be an act of gratitude for our own personal blessings, and

a visible sign of our abiding concern for the suffering members of our diocesan family."

Enough said.

The continuing support that will be necessary over the weeks and months ahead will be in the nature of volunteer work. Right now extra help, both adult and youth, is needed for the monumental cleanup proceeding in Elmira, Corning and environs. The Office of Human Development is processing such help.

For the long haul, skilled volunteers will be needed. Plumbers, masons, carpenters, engineers, electricians, financial advisers, social workers, contractors and people to drive are sorely needed if the Southern Tier is to resume any semblance of normal life and activity. Another full-page ad in this issue will explain how you can help.

The emergency collection to which so many Catholics contributed so generously served to keep people going in the darkest hours of the flood. It served a need, now there is a further need.

The entire community has proved its social consciousness in sending aid ranging from diapers to Genesee beer trucks which carried other than their usual cargo. At the peak of the crisis emergency organizations such as the Red Cross were joined by a wondrous, if motley, army of volunteers from every sphere of American life.

Though the drama of the crisis may wane its impact will not. Would that we all brace ourselves unflinchingly to the task of service to our brethren so they won't crumble under their burden.