

*'Catholicism is deep,
like marrow in the bones.'*

Father Ernesto Serves Migrants

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

Auburn — "For many Spanish speaking migrants, Catholicism is deep, like marrow in the bones, but time and neglect have left many Catholic in name only," commented Father Ernesto Loera who is with the Spanish Apostolate.

"It is a mystery for me how they have retained their feeling for the faith in the face of poverty and isolation from the community, but it is deep within their traditions."

Father Ernesto is a Franciscan priest from Mexico who works with the Spanish speaking migrants in the Penn Yan area and resides at Holy Family.

For several seasons, Father has taken Mass directly to the migrant camps, but this June an 8 p.m. Sunday Mass in Spanish was introduced at St. Michael's, Penn Yan.

"I have cut down on the number of Masses said in the camps because the Mass should be offered in the church," he explained. "The fruits of saying Mass in the church have shown itself through an increase in the number of marriages, Holy Communion, baptisms, and so many more confessions."

Transportation is a problem, but the migrants with cars began to help Father with transporting migrants from camp to church. Many walk.

"At the first Mass I expected perhaps 20. Over 200 came. For many, approaching a priest is breaking a silence of many years."

Father pointed out that over the seasons a bond of trust has developed as the migrants began to experience the church as one who cared enough to send a priest speaking not only their language but sharing their psychological orientation towards life experiences as well.

"They have not gone to Mass because they are poor. They are tired. They work on Sundays. They do not have the clothes. They do not have the ties to the churches in the area where they work," he explained.

"I have found the Spanish speaking person wants to go to church, but we must realize for many the church has been experienced as meeting the needs of the wealthy. It is hard for them to understand the priest who comes among them asking for nothing, except to serve and administer to their needs."

He pointed out that the migrants are more apt to be from parishes that are poor and can't share in the church's charity because the church does not have the means to give it and they themselves can't help the church.

Father believes the function of

the church among the migrants is to show charity in both a spiritual and material way because of their poverty.

"As one visits them in their camps, one becomes increasingly aware you can't divorce concern for social injustice from tending to their spiritual needs."

Father explained their mobility has not permitted them to be involved in Catholic education, often because of the lack of priests. Language is a great barrier.

"The attendance at the Mass in Penn Yan shows they want to come to the church. We are using the Mass as an opportunity to increase their understanding of the faith through instructions before and during Mass."

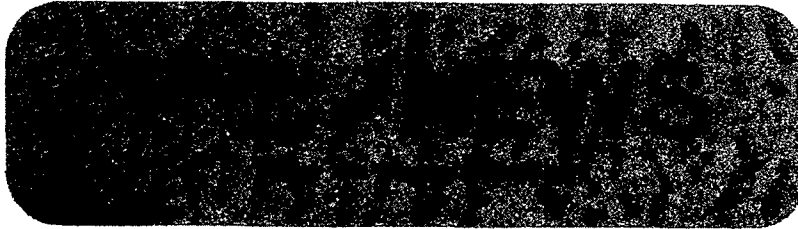
"Here they are experiencing the church as an instrument of the living Christ showing his love for all men through the sacraments, the priesthood, and the church wherever they may be. We hope attending the Mass will help change their lives, to be able to see God as love in the sacrifice of the mass."

"Father McVeigh, the pastor at St. Michael's, and Father Cosgrove, have shown they are very interested in the spiritual welfare of these people who are here only seasonally and offered the church for the evening mass. They are on hand to greet them, and although they don't understand the language, their presence is a sign of their concern and bridges the void."

Following the Mass there is a "Fiesta a la texana" in the church basement with singing, perhaps dancing. The fiesta, sponsored by St. Michael's, offers some constructive social life, a chance to see new faces and renew old acquaintances. This takes on considerable importance as socialization is ingrained in the Spanish way of life, but opportunities for this are limited because of the migrants' isolation and lack of places to congregate.

"The migrants may be with us only five or six months of the

year, but, we the church, have a responsibility toward these people whose Catholicism is a part of their traditional heritage," Father concluded. "They are part of our flock."



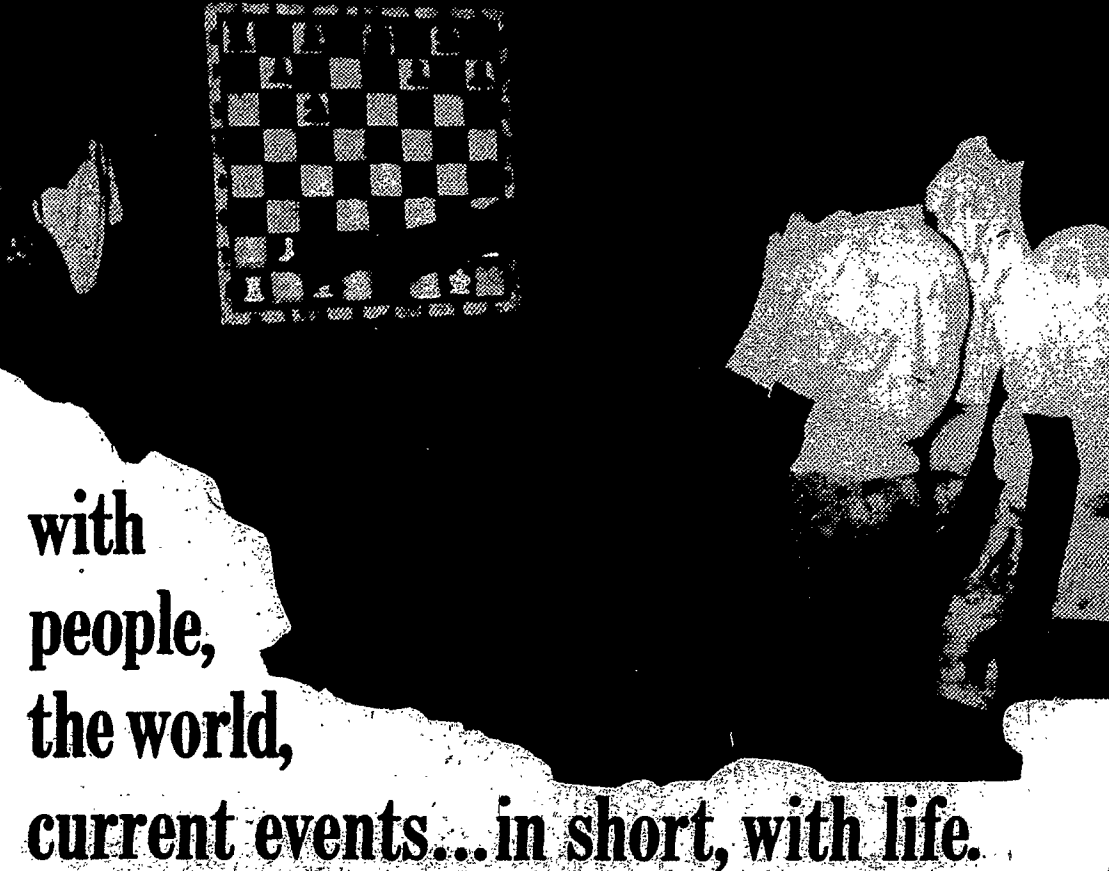
Father Ernesto and some children before Mass at a camp

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