

## Pastoral Perspective

# Lent's Third Ingredient: Almsgiving

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The underlying spirit of all Lenten regulations and suggestions is **conversion of heart**. Our celebration of **Easter** at the conclusion of this season of grace should be characterized by the joy of the power of the Risen Christ which rolls away the stone of the tomb of our selfishness and liberates our spirit.

Despite the changes in the regulations of former Lenten seasons, the emphasis continues to focus on the traditional trilogy of prayer, fasting, and **almsgiving**. Let us reflect on the third ingredient.

The giving of alms is an exterior action which is intended to strengthen and give credibility to one's conversion of heart. It liberates us from overdependence on material security and is a sign of our reliance on the gifts of God. Those who are generous in their giving experience a personal resurrection from the confinement of their petty world of self. A joyous, responsive enthusiasm for life becomes God's gift to the giver.

Originally, almsgiving from a biblical perspective was considered a duty of compassion toward the poor. It was viewed as an act of justice rather than charity. The notion of duty would be misleading if we were to identify it with a cold and calculating sense of obligation, devoid of warmth and a desire to lighten the burdens of the oppressed. But the notion of justice is a valid emphasis.

Justice respects **each man's right** to share in the goods of creation, and emphasizes the stewardship of our possessions. What is done in the name of charity can easily tend to focus too much on the giver and the sense of personal gratification accompanying his contribution. Surely it is a distorted charity that would foster attitudes of condescension of the giver towards the recipient of our giving.

The desperate needs of so many in our human family today are painfully visible for all who give even a casual look beyond themselves. Their cries of anguish are meant to haunt us. All of God's people are charged with the mission to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to those who suffer.

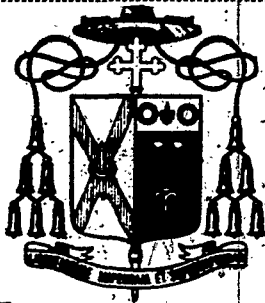
This healing power is not restricted to a financial response. Human needs extend

beyond food, clothing and shelter. One can be poor and suffering even when these needs are satisfied. The poverty of some cries out for our affirmation of the goodness of life, for trust, understanding and love. Almsgiving calls for the sharing of our time, our talents and the giving of ourselves. It is often considerably more difficult to share what we are than to share what we have.

The model we have for gracious sharing is Jesus. Through the simplicity of His everyday life, He showed the reverence He held for the goodness of life by recognizing greatness in those despised by society, in the poor and defenseless who were unable to assist themselves. Jesus' zest for life consisted not in exploiting His powers and gifts for Himself, but in serving others and in bringing to them the healing love of the Father. He spoke out strongly against those who accumulated wealth at the expense of the poor, the widow or orphan.

The cross is the fullest sign of Jesus' fidelity to the spirit of poverty, and the ultimate example of the meaning of sharing one's life. The cross teaches us to overcome blind selfishness which stifles a joyous and generous spirit. The cross teaches us, too, to overcome hardness of heart which prevents us from accepting and sharing life's gifts.

## The Bishop's Public Appointments



THE CHURCH 1973  
Fr. Andrew Greeley

### April

- 2—Confirmation, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Rochester — 7:45 p.m.
- 3—Priests' Council, Becket Hall — 10:30 a.m.
- 3—Confirmation, St. John the Evangelist Church, Spencerport — 7:45 p.m.
- 4—Celebration of Eucharist, Lenten Homily and Installation of First Parish Council, St. Joseph's Church, Penfield — 7:45 p.m.
- 5—TV PUBLIC LINE, Channel 13 — 5:30 p.m.
- 5—Confirmation, St. Patrick's Church, Victor — 7:45 p.m.
- 6—Priesthood Ordination, St. Stephen's Church, Geneva — 7:30 p.m.
- 7—Election of Superior General of Religious Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Motherhouse — 10 a.m.
- 10—Clergy Relief Society, Board Meeting — 11 a.m.
- 10—Confirmation, St. Monica's, Rochester — 7:45 p.m.
- 11—TV CROSSFIRE, Channel 8 — 9 a.m.
- 12—Priesthood Ordination, Holy Ghost Church, Coldwater — 7:30 p.m.
- 13—Priests' Council Agenda Meeting — 9:30 a.m.
- 13—Confirmation, St. Mary's Church, Honeoye — 7:45 p.m.
- 14—Knights of Columbus, C. and B. Fund Banquet, Holiday Inn, West Henrietta Road — 6:30 p.m.
- 17—Chrism Mass, St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua — 8 p.m.
- 20—Eddie Meath Good Friday Show, Channel 10 — 8:10 a.m.
- 20—Good Friday Liturgy, Sacred Heart Cathedral — 1:30 p.m.
- 21—Radio Easter Message, Family Rosary Network — 7 p.m.
- 22—Mass of the Resurrection, WHEC Channel 10 — 8:30 a.m.
- 22—Mass of the Resurrection, Sacred Heart Cathedral — 11:15 a.m.
- 27—Priesthood Ordination, St. Paul of the Cross Church, Honeoye Falls — 7:30 p.m.
- 28—Priesthood Ordination, St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua — 8 p.m.
- 30—NCCB New York State Region II Meeting, Hotel Syracuse.

One of the saddest episodes of the Vatican Council was the ecclesiastical ping pong that was played with the Declaration on Jews. While the document that finally emerged was certainly acceptable, the backing and filing of the Vatican administration detracted considerably from the declaration's impact.

To make matters worse, every time the Curia tried to shelve the draft declaration, the world press began to speculate that the reason was pressure from Arab governments. Characteristically, the Vatican ended up by pleasing no one. The Arabs were offended by the statement and so, too, were the Jews by the Byzantine process of prying it loose from papal bureaucrats.

Incredibly enough the same process is going on all over again with a "followup" document that was prepared some time ago by the Secretariat on Church Unity. The document is locked in a Vatican vault somewhere and will probably never be released — officially, that is. The text, of course, has been leaked, as is everything in the modern world. Thus the Jews are offended because the document has been suppressed and so, too, the Arabs because it was written in the first place. Another triumph for the Curia's "no win" tactics!

To make amends, perhaps, Ms. Meir was invited to a Vatican visit (and then snubbed in a Curial statement after it, though heaven knows, her behavior subsequent to the visit was not exactly a model of diplomatic skill either). But the Curia got still deeper into its swamp by offending the Arabs by inviting La Golda, then offending the Jews by insulting her. Once more the worst is made of a bad situation.

What is especially depressing about the whole thing is that the overlords of the Curia pride themselves on their diplomatic skills — from the Pope on down. And frequently, especially in their dealings with the Iron Curtain countries, they have displayed very great skills indeed. But on the subject of the Jews, Curial diplomacy seems to be out to lunch. Small wonder that many Jews see anti-Semitic overtones to the seemingly endless series of faux pas.

I don't think that the Curia is anti-Semitic — though I do think there is an anti-Semitic residue in

the Church, just as there is a strong anti-Catholic residue among certain Jewish liberal intellectuals in the United States. My guess is that we are faced rather with an incredible ignorance of Jews and a lack of serious concern about Jewish reactions. Whether one prefers stupidity to bigotry may be a matter of personal taste. The advantage of having a smart bigot in a key place is that he knows when to change his position — or at least the external manifestation of it. But the stupid never learn.

The mess in official Catholic-Jewish relationships is all the worse because it no longer corresponds to the way things are between Catholics and Jews at both the scholarly and the grass roots level. Ms. Meir's boorishness after her interview with the Pope is no more typical of Jewish attitudes toward Catholics than is the obscurantism of faceless Curial functionaries typical of Catholic attitudes towards Jews.

Deeply religious members of both traditions are discovering both in conversation and in shared action how much they have in common. Their God is the same God — a passionately loving, unpredictable, righteous, and generous God. Their symbol

systems are similar. Their basic moral codes are virtually the same. Their hopefulness and their belief in a religious history pointing toward a denouement mark them off from every other religion the world has known. Indeed, a visitor from another planet might even conclude that it was the same religion and wonder how the separation had occurred.

Recent first-century scholarship has led some observers to raise the question of whether the break between church and synagogue was necessary or intended by the religious leaders on either side. Obviously, this is still a very open historical and religious question; to raise it does not mean that an answer is clear in either way. The important point is that it has been raised.

The Declaration on the Jews of the Vatican Council notes that only God knows how unity will be finally achieved among humankind. That is the best place to leave the question. But unity will not be promoted by locking up documents in a safe or by temper tantrums after unfortunate personal confrontations between leaders who have lost their sense of history. We all might listen more closely to the God of history who is also a God of love.

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