

**Pastoral Perspective****Holy Spirit's Gifts: Discoveries in Discipleship**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

## COUNSEL

[The fifth in a series of eight meditations for the Resurrection-Pentecost season.]

Our preceding meditation dealt with Fortitude, humorously described on occasion as "baptized courage," or "holy heroism." We approached this gift as paradox: namely, human weakness discovering divine strength. Then Fortitude was seen as the moral stamina which carries out arduous responsibilities in the face of difficulties. Finally, we spoke of the constancy that is the trademark of the work-a-day Christian. In brief, Fortitude is the witness of courage, the courage of witness. It entails devotion to duty, life-long commitment, total discipleship. The prayer of Fortitude is: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" (Philippians 4:14). The gift we consider this week is Counsel.



Counsel is the least understood of the Spirit's gifts, yet perhaps the most typical of Him, the Divine Unknown. To possess Counsel is to be "led" or "taught by the Spirit," "to understand the gifts of the Spirit," "to yearn for the greater gifts." (Romans 8:14, 1 Corinthians 2:11-13, 12:31). Counsel is more than prudence which blends sound judgment and broad experience. It is more than "reasonableness and light" which tempers thoughtfulness with moderation. It is more than a matter of goals and strategies, more than common sense, which is in fact not so common after all.

Essentially, Counsel is a divinely given discernment — a superior instinct for making choices relating to ultimate values. Counsel is a movement of the Spirit that protects us from our rash impulses, our shallow

judgments, our self-indulgence. Counsel calls for genuine response to opportunities for growth, keeps track of the many directions of our life, adjusts the immediacies with the ultimates of our life.

For a relevant comparison, we might turn to space technology for a moment. Most of us TV watchers have some vague ideas of how contemporary technology programs the speed, direction, pressure, resistance and yaw of man-made space capsules. For science to achieve its bold purposes, cybernetics (the science of control adjustments) is an absolute. Even as I write this, leaders of our space program are attempting to make critical adjustments on a crippled space lab.

Counsel is a kind of spiritual cybernetics. It is an inner, Spirit-guided consciousness that teaches the meaning of freedom, the power of discernment, the truth of direction. Counsel is that power of the Spirit that moves us to see what needs to be done, and then motivates us to accomplish it. Perhaps Counsel is best described as a "heightened consciousness," a presence before God: a presence to ourselves, to others, to what is, to what should be.

But then Counsel is not just a spirit of reflectiveness. It is a spontaneous blend of attitudes and actions which transcend human logic and human motives. Someone has spoken of Counsel as "that beautiful spontaneity in our hearts which is the touch of our Father, the urging of the Spirit." From this viewpoint, Counsel reminds us that "each day is the first day of the rest of our lives." Not without reason Counsel is predominantly the gift of new beginnings, the root of renewal, the guarantee of a continuing discovery of "He Who Is" and a continuing discernment of who we are, where we are at, and why. Not content with simple curiosity, Counsel asks hard questions and looks for true answers.

For this reason, Counsel is a vibrant day-to-day "Yes" to life's unfolding possibilities.

It welcomes the challenges of a more authentic faith and freedom: the two greatest endowments God has set before man. There is a freshness about Counsel and its tasks that is as new as today's dawn. Life's opportunities stare each Christian in the face and ask: "Here we are! What will you do about us, with us?" And the basic responsibility for an answer starts with the gift of Counsel. Counsel is not the answer; it furnishes the setting within which an answer can be worked out.

From an Old Testament perspective, to seek the face of the Most High, to walk before the Lord, to come into His presence, are all different ways yet repeated invitations to practice Counsel. From the New Testament perspective, Counsel is to seek the will of the Father, to put on the mind of Christ, to be sensitive to the prudence of the Spirit.

Because Counsel is more than an intellectual power, it concerns itself with results. It is more than a matter of learning, and therefore expresses itself in living and loving. The Spirit validates life, not philosophy, gives us the experience of God, not mere information about Him.

By way of parting thought, we might briefly consider one of the truly great men of our times, Pope John XXIII. His thoroughgoing humanness, his disarming candor, his radiant simplicity, his unembarrassed poverty seemed, in the judgment of many, unpromising qualities for high leadership. Indeed, at his election some spoke of him as "a transitional pope," one who might be tolerated for a time. And yet this is the man who, by an almost spontaneous act, launched a Council that is still renewing the Church. More than the engaging style of the man from Sotto il Monte, it was the Spirit working through John XXIII that summoned the Church to the celebration of what looms ever more and more as "the religious event of our century." Men who tend to belittle John XXIII forget what the gift of Counsel can do!

**Regional Report:****Father Elmer McDonald  
South West Region**

Father Elmer McDonald's assessment of the South West Region is that "we're movin' pretty good." Father McDonald, pastor of St. Christopher's, North Chili, and regional coordinator, cites "lots of sharing, which regionalism is supposed to develop," to bolster his view.

The area, which comprises 16 parishes and three special communities, has many prayer, sacramental, and educational programs, the coordinator said.

He noted that "we operate on two levels — a staff level and a steering committee level," and by dividing the organizational functions between the two groups, "we had really organized ourselves a year before" regionalism was emphasized by the Pastoral Center.

The staff, composed of 35 to 40 priests, nuns, and sisters, plan programs which are "authenticated" by a steering committee, composed of delegates from parish councils



FATHER ELMER McDONALD

throughout the region. The set-up, Father said, allows for interaction and reaction.

One of his concerns is "communicating to the laity" the goals of the area. He said he felt the communication problem was the "biggest obstacle."

He is hoping for a regional conference "by December at the latest." He noted that each parish in the region has a council.

The assistant coordinator is Sister Elizabeth Hewes, of St. Christopher's. Michael Vigue, principal of St. Helen's School, heads up the education programs of the region. He recently assumed the post vacated by Sister Ann Habershaw, whom Father cited as having done "a great deal of work" for the region. Father Neil Miller, co-pastor of St. Augustine's, leads the human development programs and Sister Diane Branch, of St. Pius X, looks after the regional liturgy.

"We've had a lot of success," Father McDonald said, "but it's like anything else, you've just got to keep working at it."