

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

In Praise of Marital Fidelity

Each June it is my privilege to preside at a ceremony of the renewal of vows of married couples whose lives have constantly reflected the seriousness of a public and voluntary commitment made years ago in the presence of God and man. The importance of this ritual is magnified each year as prophets of doom predict the death of marriage as a permanent union. Their message seems to be gaining wider acceptance, unfortunately, as we witness a world cluttered with the fragments of broken pledges and short-ranged giving to people and causes which call for most generous and total dedication.

The study of history becomes profitable when we begin to absorb its lessons about human conduct. We do not have to probe deeply into its record to learn that the stability of society depends on the vitality of family life and that the stability of individuals emanates from the same source. I have been privileged for many years of my life to guide the destinies of young men who had the best of intentions of offering their lives in total service to the Church. I never met one who was able to survive the damage and the hurt that family instability bequeathed him. How often, too, have we seen that the children who are the products of fractured or broken homes enter into marriages that repeat the pattern of their parental homes. The vicious cycle seems to perpetuate itself. I never could get excited about the discussion in psychology texts about the relative influence of heredity and environment in the formation of a person. For, practically speaking, we inherit our environment for the most formative years of our life.

The theme of this year's Mass of renewal of vows focused on Christian marriage as a sign of God's love which is permanent and steadfast. The first reading was taken from the prophet Osee. Called by God almost eight centuries before the birth of Christ to be His spokesman, Osee became known as the Prophet of the Love of God. He spoke of God's covenant with His Chosen People as a marriage marked by undying love on the part of the divine partner and constant infidelity on the part of Israel. His teaching of God's marriage to His people was adopted by later prophets, was used by Christ Himself to describe His relationship to the new Israel, the Church, and reached its ultimate development in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

The second reading of the Mass, taken from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Eph. V-22, 23), recalled the great dignity of the vocation of marriage — likened to the union of Christ and His Church — His Bride. The Church was born from the pierced side of Christ just as every marriage is born of and sustained by sacrificial love. Love and sacrifice are synonymous terms. When sacrifice is alien to one's life, love becomes a stranger. Children who have been trained to know only the pronoun "I" are incapable of entering a mutually shared life where the "we" of community can be the only subject for living and decision. Pride, that bold assertion of self, makes marriage and all community impossible. St. Paul addressed himself to a society where men prayed each morning: Thank God I am not a Gentile, slave, or woman. How unique for his world to hear a man speak of fidelity, of a union of man and woman as permanent as Christ's union with His Bride the Church — a union that would be deathless for His Spirit would be with Her unto the end of time — even if

the gates of Hell should threaten the permanency of the union.

The Gospel reading recalled the day in Cana of Galilee when Christ and His Mother honored a young couple by their presence at their wedding and by the first recorded miracle of the Son of God who showed Himself a Son of Mary by obedience to her request. There are spiritual lessons of great value for our recollection in this story of Cana. The six stone waterpots were much less than the seven which Jewish custom considered a representative of the absolute, complete, and perfect. In fact, six was equivalent to the unfinished, imperfect, and incomplete. St. John in his narration of this event, had much more to say than that Jesus was replacing the imperfections of Jewish Law with the new wine of the Gospel of grace. He was really telling us what Jesus will always accomplish for us. Whenever He enters our life, there enter with Him a new quality which turns the weak water of our giving into the heady wine of joy. Without Him, life is dull, stale, and flat. With Him, it is vivid and sparkling. That is why the Church urges couples to invite Christ to their wedding. The promises made in marriage are naturally hopeless — "for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health — until death." The supply of newfound wine at Cana was so great that no wedding could exhaust it. Hence, the Church could assure married couples, then as now, that the grace of Christ is more than sufficient for every need, even for the keeping of seemingly rash promises.

God taught His people long years ago how to celebrate anniversaries. For He knew we could fail to remember His blessings. The Jubilee Mass truly gladdened my heart, for it is always a joy to be with people who remember — and who take time to say 'thanks' for blessings received.



Photo by Susan McKinney

Priest Interns Concelebrate

The youngest priests of the diocese, serving "internships" in various parishes, gathered at Holy Ghost Church Thursday evening to concelebrate Mass with Bishop Joseph L. Hogan and priests of the Coldwater parish. Standing with Bishop Hogan are [l-r] Fathers Louis Vasile, Paul J. Ryan, John Zimmerman, Robert Weiss, William Darling and David Fedor. Rear row: Fathers Thomas Nellis, Donald Schwab, Michael Mahler, Thomas Streb, Joseph Hart, Ronald Stacy, Gary Shaw, Edward Steinkirchner, pastor of Holy Ghost and director of the internship program for priests and deacons; Fathers Edward Palumbos and Donald Kuder, CSB, a weekend assistant.