

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Ministry of Teaching — A Redemptive Act

A privileged moment I enjoy each year comes during the Annual Institute for the teachers in our diocesan schools. I am usually asked, as chief teacher in the diocese, to extend a word of welcome to those assembled and to offer some encouragement to sustain them during the scholastic year. Lest I be misunderstood, may I say I refer to myself as chief teacher without brag or boast. It simply is a statement of the reality of the responsibilities of a bishop's office.

St. Paul had high regard for the teaching office. He includes it among the gifts of God known as charisms — a special grace and talent offered to some and not to others — and given not for a person's own possession, but for generous service to others.

Father Henri Nouwen, a famed Dutch psychologist, speaks of teaching as a redemptive process (Creative Ministry pp. 13 sqq.) whereby students are liberated unto

their full potential as Children of God. This means that the teaching mission is that of building a better world, and this becomes hopeless unless schools become the place where community can be experienced, where people can learn to live without fear of each other, and where there can be fostered a creative exchange of experiences and ideas.

The teacher holds primacy of importance in this process — much above methods and techniques and special personal skills and educational background. Learning requires a person-to-person relationship. The greatest teacher in history was Jesus Christ, because He confronted people with the authenticity of His Own Person. Since He was the incarnation of all the values He preached, He dared point to Himself and say, "Learn of Me."

Since our Christian education proposes to present Gospel values, the teachers in our schools must be visible signs to their students that they believe what they teach. While we may be tempted to reject the frankness of our young people today, we should be grateful that their honesty can serve to keep us authentic. They seem to be able to recognize

so readily our empty verbalisms. They probably did in every age, but they are merely more honest and open today in letting us know about it.

Some years ago, Frank Sheed spoke of **resonance** as the essential quality of good teaching. He was referring to a thorough knowledge of subject matter — so thorough that it would add depth to our answers to a student's questions which would, in most cases, only tap the surface of our reservoir of information. There is also a spiritual resonance — whereby the values that we teach are uttered with a voice that has the ring of authenticity, because of the depth of our own faith, of our hope, of our love and respect for the students we are called to serve.

It is this concept of the teacher that gives that added dimension to our schools that we have always advertised. Nothing else can justify our continued existence. The system, of itself, does not produce Christian men and women. We have ample proof of that. Our teachers deserve our prayerful support as they strive to fulfill their redemptive mission.

The Mass and Teenagers

Last of a 3-Part Series
BY FATHER WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, SJ

This "streamlined" or more tightly structured Mass would look something like the following:

a) Sign of the cross, pause to reflect on one's shortcomings and need for forgiveness, prayer for absolution.

Omit the repetitious "Kyrie", even though it is one of the oldest prayers in the Mass. We've already asked for mercy, and the growth of people is more important than the preservation of relics. Omit the Gloria and Creed except for Christmas and Easter. It's not that these prayers are not beautiful and meaningful when one's studied theology, but "absence makes the heart grow fonder". And certainly few Mass-goers reflect on them as they rattle them off. For most, if not all, they are mere forms without function.

b) An opening prayer composed by the celebrant or a member of the congregation to introduce the readings, then two relatively brief readings and a homily.

Three long readings tumbling over one another are too many to assimilate. Any teacher could tell you that. If the reader were to announce before the first reading that, instead of the responsorial psalm, there would be a pause for each individual to reflect and pray over what the reading said to him personally — and then read the passage slowly, the congregation would be better "fed." This silent pause is intimidating at first. A priest may fear the congregation is getting restless just because they're not doing anything or saying anything or singing anything, and he will be tempted to cut it short. He should have faith in the intelligence and prayerfulness of the congregation. After all, that's what the Mass is about.

c) Offertory petitions, open at the end for prayers from the congregation itself.

d) A summary prayer (again composed in the parish) offering the gifts together and asking God once again to change them and us into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Why two separate offerings? Why wash one's hands when they are presumably clean and one has already asked forgiveness at the

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outset of Mass? This repetition of worthless savors of tithes of mint and cummin. And there's also that "spiritual drink" to contend with.

e) The canon.

This is one of the longest repetitious parts of the Mass and, even though there are four options, many priests settle for good old brief Canon II. Even were we to utilize all four, there is still a deadening repetitiveness about them after a few months. There are innumerable other published canons not (yet) recognized by the Congregation of Rites, each with all the essentials but in different phrasing. Could our bishop get or give permission for at least a few parishes to try changing canons every week for about six months and see how the congregations react to the variety? I would wager it would enrich realization of the Mass immeasurably. If the parish feels uneasy when they can't read along, the canons can always be dittoed.

f) Our Father, greeting of peace, Communion.

The prayers between the Our Father & Communion seem otiose to me. One or two sentences would sum up our need for peace in the world and within ourselves. This, too, could be composed weekly by an articulate member of the parish. It would involve the congregation more, and it would avoid, again, deadening repetition while still asking for peace.

g) Pause for private prayer, prayer summarizing the Mass, blessing and dismissal.

It's merely a personal bias, I presume, but I would rather see the priest wash the vessels

in the sacristy after Mass is over. Here the priest is, having taken into himself the Cause of his existence, and he must busy himself doing something as mundane and practical as washing the dishes. The Mass, I grant, is a communal celebration but I fear that our practicality leaves us very little time at Mass for personal reflection and prayer.

What I have proposed here will sound radical to many, and in the "root" sense of "radical", I would agree. It is not a new Mass; it is the old Mass stripped of distracting excess and needless repetition. I believe our norm for Mass should not be "what we used to do" 20 years ago or even 200 years ago. The norm should be the Last Supper and how to re-create that in 1973. And yet I know more than one cynic who left Mass muttering, "Any resemblance between that and the Last Supper is purely coincidental." Cynical, perhaps, since one's faith knows God can work the Great Miracle through even the most unpromising means. But it is our obligation to make the means less unpromising than they were before we came along.

To further this possibility, I would suggest that the bishop set up some forum in which high school and college religion teachers, the diocesan priests and the laity could begin to understand one another, discuss their common problems, and seek communal solutions. Better we work together than against one another. I would also suggest that each parish and high school in the diocese be asked to provide refresher courses in theology and religion for adults at least twice weekly. The people are hungry, and a five-minute homily is not enough food.

I truly pray that no one reads this article as an attack on anybody. The problem is manifest, we all admit it exists, and I believe it would be foolish — even destructive — not to admit it openly for fear of hurting someone's feelings. The Christian life of our young people is more important than anyone's feelings.

In summary, I believe one owes it to God to worship him at least once a week. If that experience enlivens his mind and spirit, so much the better — especially for those of weaker faith or no real faith at all yet. I also say to all the grippers and groaners on either side of the Mass question: if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.