

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Dry Bones Summoned to Life

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Long years ago God gave His prophet Ezekiel a striking vision of his vocation as His spokesman to His people. He transported him to the edge of an immense valley filled with an eerie stillness and strewn from end to end with the bones of men bleached white with death. This is a symbol of the spiritual vitality of my chosen people, He said, and if they had the slightest awareness of their condition, they would cry out, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone, we are as good as dead." Ezk. 37:11

Ezekiel must have first wondered whether he had been called to preside over Death Valley. But Yahweh assured him that he had been called to transform the area into an Eden filled with living things and with men fully alive, and all this renewal would come through the breath of the Spirit of God. The great fulfillment of God's promise and the great epiphany of the Spirit was the phenomenon of Pentecost when life came to the inert, enthusiasm overtook the

bewildered, boldness displaced fear and men who had huddled in fright went forth everywhere to proclaim the Good News.

And Pentecost continues as a daily reality whenever and wherever God's people acknowledge their 'dry bones' and cry out to be renewed and to be alive once more.

Just as the chosen people did not seem to sense their spiritual death, we, too, can be tempted to remain in the valley of inertia. Yes, we need spokesmen of the Lord to summon us back to life. The Church is the appointed prophet to speak to us in these days, and the urgency of the message rings loud and clear at different times.

I view Pope Paul's invitation to celebrate the Holy Year and the annual summons of the Church to the Lenten discipline as the voice of the prophet challenging us to rebirth. The themes of the two messages are identical — "Now is the acceptable time for personal renewal and for reconciliation with our Father and with the members of the human family called to unity under His gentle Providence." Because of this convergence of themes, I have announced our diocesan celebration of the Holy Year as beginning on the first Sunday of Lent.

We need appointed times and seasons to arouse us from our lethargy. We are by nature and by strong temptation disciples of the 'status quo'. Growth is always a painful process which we would prefer to avoid. And even blessed and happy days can dull our awareness of our continual dependence on God's goodness — when they become daily gifts.

Such awareness of the human condition assures us that we will always need times designated for renewal — be it Lent, a Holy Year, or a Year of Renewal. They are all great graces offered to us to restructure our values, to remake our hearts, and to accept the priorities of the Gospel. They offer us the prayerful and reflective climate, needed to break down the barriers that separate us from one another — in the family, in society, in the Church; the time to begin to uproot the prejudices which prevent us from seeing all men as our brothers in Christ; the time to grow to a deeper realization that we cannot exclude anyone from our love and concern.

I pray that all of us will accept with gratitude the Lord's invitation to discard our 'dry bones' and walk again in newness of life.

Returned Missioner Lauds Transfer of San Jose Obrero

By CARMEN VIGLUCCI

Father Edward Golden, just returned to the diocese after more than five years at San Jose Obrero parish in LaPaz, Bolivia, has high praise for the transfer of the mission to Bolivian hands but adds that "Rochester hasn't finished its work there yet."

"I am very confident that the transfer can be effected by the target date of December," Father Golden said, "but for three to five years the parish will need the diocese to continue its economic support and maintained interest."

Father Golden has high hopes for San Jose Obrero when the new Bolivian team takes over.

The mission, begun by the diocese some eight years ago, will be transferred to local control. Father Golden has already returned home; Father Daniel Torney will remain until about June; Father Peter Deckman and layman Tim McCluskey will stay until the transfer is complete.

"The work is very complicated," Father Golden explained. "We were preaching the catechesis and at the same time getting involved in community affairs, trying to better economic conditions. We had religious education programs in the parish but we also practiced the teachings of Christ in our every day life."

"All of this takes time and a big enough team to handle it. The new team will have people involved in catechetics, a person in credit cooperatives, a social worker, and so on, to cover all bases."

Father Golden stressed that by no means is the diocesan mission work finished. In addition to continued support of San Jose Obrero he sees the need for increased mission work in Latin America.

Why should Rochester be involved in work so far away?

"The Church is the whole world," he said. "And those that have a responsibility to those who don't have. We in the diocese complain that we don't have enough personnel but percentage wise we have a lot and should share."

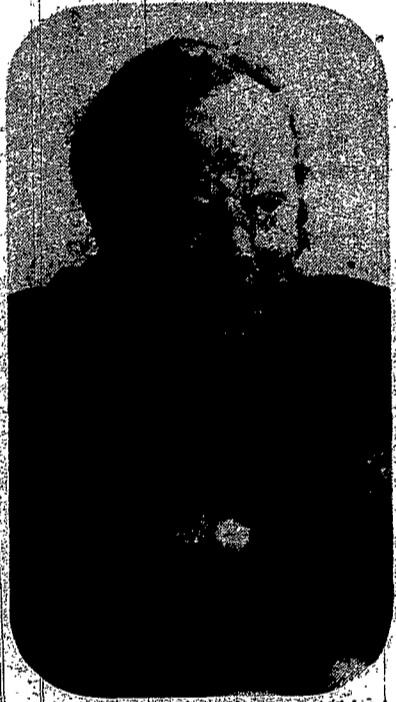


Photo by Dave Writbeck

FATHER GOLDEN

"Involvement is important for another reason — one that was a real lesson for me. Things like American business exploiting South America and the American government attitude should be known by all. It is important for Americans to learn this first hand and then communicate it to the American people."

Should missionaries get involved in political and economical problems in Latin America?

"The Church should be involved," Father Golden feels. "And if the Church should be involved then its members should be. To preach the Gospel is to call for injustices to be corrected. We should be looking for ways to fight such injustices and do away with them. It's part of the redemption, Christ freed the world of sin — we should be doing what Christ preached and practiced."

"As a foreigner, you should do it by educating the people that they have a responsibility to recognize injustices that exist and should fight them. You should conscientize the people to their dignity and rights. But a foreigner should take no part in the fighting itself."

Father Golden, while calling for volunteers, both clerical and lay, also stressed that no one should go "for a lark."

"Volunteers definitely should know Spanish, have something to offer such as educational expertise, and have an understanding of Latin American culture and problems. My biggest problem was with the language. I had studied some Spanish in school and in the seminary but I still had trouble converting to speaking and thinking in that language."

He pointed out that, for instance, if a person makes a two-year commitment, it would take a whole year of that time to learn the language if the person were not already fluent in it.

"Both priests and laymen are needed," Father Golden said. "Priests for spiritual leadership. The people have an innate respect for priests and so clergymen have a special 'in' for reaching people quickly. Laymen are needed, not only for their expertise, but because when the local laity see that much of the work can be done by laymen like themselves it speeds up the process of turning the work over to home control."

Father Golden worked at San Jose Obrero since 1968 and considers it a "really good experience — if I were 33 again I'd do it over."

What about the hardships of mission life?

"It was not all that difficult. I missed my family and friends but I made friends there and LaPaz, after all, is a big city with lots of things to do. It's not all that primitive."

Before going to Bolivia, he was assistant pastor at St. Stephen's in Geneva and Blessed Sacrament in Rochester.

As for the future: "I'm interested in parish work or in working with Spanish-speaking people or a combination of both."

QUESTIONS?

Readers are invited to send their questions and comments to "our Parish Council" column. Send your letter to "Our Parish Council" in care of the Courier-Journal. Please print your name and address clearly for a personal reply.

WORD FOR SUNDAY

Sunday Readings: (R1) 1 Sm. 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23. (R2) 1 Cor. 15:45-49. (R3) Lk. 6:27-38.

The heart of the Law of the Kingdom is love. Christian love is more than a feeling; it is the will acting for the good of others. Love is, consequently, the very opposite of self-centeredness, the law of the world estranged from God.

To show the profundity of Christian love, Jesus commanded, "Love your enemies." Such love means more than a passive acceptance of affronts. It implies positive, aggressive action: "doing good," "blessing," and "praying for" enemies. It is designed to redeem those who offend. It is said of Lincoln that he destroyed his enemies by making them his friends.

The motivation for Christian love is God's love for us. To love in order to be loved, to do good in order to receive good, to lend in order to gain — these are manifestations of self-interest which have no place in the Christian life. We must love our enemies, because God is "good to the ungrateful and the wicked" — to us! "The Lord is kind and merciful — He pardons all your iniquities" (Response). We are to forgive and give not in order that we may be forgiven and may receive, but because we have already been forgiven and have already received God's bounty. Graciousness to others shows that we have been graced by God. Whenever St. Philip Neri saw a criminal go to the gallows, he used to say, "There go I but for the grace of God." We are what we are by the grace of God, therefore ought we be merciful and loving.

The first reading gives us a beautiful example of love of enemies. David, who gave it, enjoyed neither the grace of the New Testament nor the teachings and example of Christ. Yet few Christians ever rise to his grandeur of soul. David's enemy was Saul. Saul tried several times to kill David, for no good reason whatsoever. David had removed for Saul the embarrassment of Goliath. He had put Saul's enemies, the Philistines, to flight. He had done nothing but good for Saul — and yet for all these kindnesses Saul would kill David!

At a time when Saul should have been attacking the Philistines

who were invading Israel, he wasted his time hunting David. Everyone knew Saul was nearly mad with jealousy. Everyone also knew David would make a better king. A coup was in order. David's friends urged it, especially when David had Saul, his murderous enemy, at his mercy. Abishai, David's friend, beseeched him to kill Saul. David refused. He loved Saul, his enemy. He could only forgive him.

David seemed crazy that way. He shocked his strategists and worried his generals by not treating enemies as enemies. Yet forgiveness "paid off." Instead of avenging himself on Saul, David waited patiently till the end of Saul's reign. And with what result? There was no civil war when David became king. There would have been had he killed his enemy, Saul, on the dark night. Because he did not, because he found it in his heart to forgive his enemy, David brought to the tribes of Israel the greatest unity and harmony in their entire history.

There always seems to be a reason, seemingly sensible, for not forgiving an enemy who really has hurt us. To do so in politics, namely to forgive, is considered naive. To do so in private life is considered to be taken advantage of. Yet wives and husbands who won't forgive get trapped into hopeless situations. Parents who won't forgive children lose their trust. Children who won't forgive their parents buy a ticket to the psychiatric office in later life. Business associates can be unforgiving; so can workers over a strike.

The whole forgiveness bit might seem crazy, but it was Christ's way; it is the Christian's way; it is the only way to have His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

RC&E SPEAKER

Canandaigua — The Rosary Altar Society of St. Mary's met recently. Guest speaker of the evening was Mrs. Phyllis Keith of the RC&E. She presented a program on the Consumer Market and the Energy Crisis. Members of the society are also busy planning the annual Card Party. The party will be held this year on Feb. 16. The theme is Mardi Gras, so keep the date open, it promises to be an evening of fun!