

## PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

## Lenten Specials and the Bargain Hunter

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

It never ceases to amaze me nor to annoy me. I refer to the stampede of the Christian Community for the annual giveaway of offerings of ashes, pieces of burlap (offered only in a few select locations), and palm branches. I hate to think of what would happen if we promoted Sundays as days for a piece of the Rock.



I might add that Easter is another great attraction — the giant bargain day of the year. The Miracle of the Resurrection is repeated annually as strangers to the Christian scene rise from their graves to be where the action is. I suppose everybody will always love a winner. Then, for the remaining 362 days, it is business as usual with a faithful remnant treasuring values of proven worth.

I would like to think that this Lent would be different. But years of pastoral experience offer little optimism. Rectory telephones still ring with the usual request for the precise moment of distribution of ashes — and for whatever we have to offer other than the Bread of Life and the Word of the Lord. If ashes only left an indelible beauty mark, and palms offered some assurance of a passport for triumphal entry into the Heavenly Jerusalem, I could understand. But with the first quickly eradicated by, hopefully, daily lavabos, and the latter hastily reduced to braided borders for Christian art of dubious quality, I still wonder.

This message of universal pastoral concern must have reached Pope Paul, for in

1966 he told us it was time to do something about Lent that would make it a celebration worthy of the Lord's blessing:

"We must approach the kingdom of Christ through *Metanoia* and only in this way, which means through a change of the whole man, as a result of which he begins to think, judge and arrange his whole life under the impulse of that holiness and charity of God which have been manifested and fully imparted to us last of all in the Son.

"In opposition to an excessively external observance of penance like that of the Pharisees, the Divine Master Himself expressly condemned any form of penance that would be merely external." (Apostolic Constitution — "Repent" 1966)

For those who are truly interested in shopping for Lent, I offer this consumer's guide stamped with the approval of the Holy Spirit. Call it, if you will, Scriptural Guide for Better Lenten Living.

**1. Prayer** — We can never discover the will of God without prayer. Each believer must frequently put aside the cares of the day and concentrate on the presence of God. Jesus, Who lived an active life, prayed. He learned His Father's will in moments of prayer. If believers today are interested in knowing how to die to self and to make room for the Spirit of God so that they can live, they had better give time to prayer. We are often afraid to invest the time and effort needed to be aware of the nearness of God. In reality, we are enriched when we open ourselves to His presence. We lose nothing — we only gain. For parents to take time to

pray with their children; for priests and religious to pray together; for individuals to give moments of each day to a simple awareness of God — such is enrichment. It is to die, but in reality it is to live.

**2. Love of Neighbor** — Probably the most difficult area in which penance can flourish is in our relationship with others. Our lives are filled with personal frictions. One can either become overwhelmed by such interpersonal irritations and lose self-control, become critical and angry, or rise above them. Concern for others always demands a degree of self-rejection. It often calls for not pushing our own views and our own likes. Control of speech, attitude, posture and gesture in such situations of conflict is a growth in death and resurrection.

**3. Sharing** — Lent is a time for renewed sharing. The traditional practice of almsgiving — part of the Lenten trilogy of good works along with prayer and fasting — must be reinterpreted according to today's needs. Today's almsgiving might well be manifest in the far more precious sharing of the commodity of time and talents offered in the service of others. The care of the elderly, the sick, the imprisoned, the drug addict, the alcoholic challenge us to share each other's burdens and to give of ourselves. For here is self-surrender at its best.

For those who may have interpreted Pope Paul's Decree of 1966 as a mitigation of the importance of Lent, nothing could be further from the truth. It is rather an appeal to the nature to choose wisely from the shopping list of items marked Penance — and look for the label with the + sign. (Plus resembling His Cross.)

## vatican news

## Pope Paul Laments Absence of Prayer

Vatican City [RNS] — "No one wants to pray anymore," Pope Paul lamented during a general weekly audience here, and yet "a Christian life without prayer is like a burnt-out candle, a life without light which has no living expression."

Stressing the spiritual and modern necessity of prayer once more, the Pope deplored the fact that prayer has for many Christians come to be "deliberately banished" from today's life. He said it has happened because "we are too preoccupied with the things of this earth."

## Pope Describes Priest's Virtues

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, speaking as the Bishop of Rome, has urged priests of his diocese to be "detached" from money and economic gains, to cultivate a "transparent purity" of behavior, and to guard against a spirit of hyper-criticism.

Addressing the clergy of Rome assembled in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, the Pope emphasized that the Church's "pastoral work" to be effective, must be "radically permeated with an imminent spirit of sacrifice" after the example of the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep.

In this respect, the pontiff said, priests should above all concentrate on spreading the word of God and administer divine grace,

"Now the silence of prayer is intentional and desired prayer is being willingly extinguished in the souls of our generations," he said.

At the same time, the Pope welcomed the positive "phenomenon" of a growing inclination towards prayer in the new generation and described it as a "promising sign of spiritual renaissance."

"It is a restricted phenomenon, a passing phenomenon, and incomplete and imperfect one," he said of the new initiatives toward prayer by some groups,

and never allow their religious activities to become mere instruments for secular action.

Pope Paul went on to enumerate the virtues which, he said, all priests should cultivate to be worthy ministers of Christ.

Priests, he said, should be "truly detached from money and from economic gains that sometimes result from skillful maneuvering of religious activities."

"There should not be a churchman, who, in his old age, could say, 'I came to Rome without a penny and now I've a home, a car, some property, and a bank account.'"

"but it is a real fact. Prayer is born from humanity, including those who try to force themselves not to speak with God."

The Pope pointed out that this "new generation is bursting forth and saying, 'but where is God? I want to speak to Him. I am made to speak to God. I have been made for You and my heart is troubled until it is joined to You.'"

Pope Paul went on to warn against the ever-present danger, particularly for "our earthly psychology," of coming to believe that prayer is "an easy solution to all our worldly needs."

Religion conceived of in a purely utilitarian context can reduce prayer to "fantasy, superstition and simile." But he said that if prayer, although used to express "our ills and our earthly and good desires" to God, is kept to the level of sincere conversation with God it will not lose its characteristic trust.

"Even when it does not automatically obtain the graces it implores," the Pope declared, "it will reconfirm its optimism by showing that everything is resolved in good time for those who love God."

The Pope said Christians must "listen to Jesus, the messenger of the Good News, and then speak to Him with trust and hope, 'as we cannot remain silent and inactive after hearing the voice of Christ.'"



Gromyko Confers with Pontiff

Pope Paul and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko shake hands at the beginning of their conference on several major world problems, including the status of Jerusalem and the question of Catholics in the Soviet Union. At center is the Soviet Ambassador to Italy, Nikita Rjov. It was the third meeting between the Pope and Gromyko in eight years. [RNS]

## Pope Terms Nuns 'Light'

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, praising nuns for the radiant example of lives "consecrated to God without stint" urged them to reconsecrate themselves to "the good of the whole Church."

The pontiff spoke before a large group of religious women from various parts of the world at a special "blessing of candles" ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica on Feb. 3, the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

(The blessing of candles, probably in commemoration of Christ, the Light to Gentiles — became common about the 11th Century and gave the feast of the Presentation the secondary name of Candlemas. Traditionally, the

rite celebrates virginity.)

"We are close to you — nuns of Rome and of the world — in your daily commitment," said the Pope. "And we humbly thank the Lord for the place you hold in the Church, for the lives you live that radiate the highest human and Christian ideals."

## K OF C BOWLING

The Knights of Columbus will hold their state bowling tournament in Rochester on the weekends of March 23, 30 and April 6. The host council is Webster's Trinity Council #4618. For further information call state bowling director Peter Pellitieri at 671-3321.