

PENANCE

AT THE CROSSROADS

Word of God As Healing Word

Second in a Lenten Series
By the Diocesan
Liturgy Commission

Each Sunday, when we come to Mass, we listen to the reading of the Sacred Scriptures. In fact, the first part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. It is made up of a reading from the Old Testament, an Epistle reading and a reading from the Gospel. The reading of God's Word is followed by the homily. The intent of the homily is to make contemporary the Word of God that has been proclaimed to us. It tries to confront us with the challenge of God's Word and move us to undergo that change of heart to which Scripture calls us.

One of the things we Catholics need to develop is a deep love for the Word of God. When in past years we heard the Word of God proclaimed to us in a language that was foreign to us, it was difficult for us to respond to the Word. This difficulty has been removed, now that the Scriptures are proclaimed in our own language. But the Word of God will not affect us, unless we open our ears and minds and hearts to what He is saying to us each Sunday. The Word of God will not have the unique position in our lives that it should have unless we realize that God Himself is really speaking to us when His Word is proclaimed in Church.

At times the Word of God comes to us as an invitation calling us to be and to act as God's sons and daughters. At other times the Word of God comes to us as a judgment moving us to change our ways. But whether it comes as invitation or as judgment, the Word of God is always a healing Word, for God always comes to us as our Saviour — offering us His forgiveness and inviting us in repentance to accept that forgiveness.

Last week we spoke about the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus exercises in the Church. We said that while this ministry involves the Sacrament of Penance, we must not restrict our understanding of reconciliation to this one Sacrament. Today we want to point out that the Word of God proclaimed at Mass is yet

another way in which God offers reconciliation to us. His Word offers His forgiveness for our sins and calls us to that deep conversion that is the essence of Christian living.

We must develop a deep love for the Scriptures. We must be attentive to God's message offered to us in the Scriptures. We must see the Word of God as a powerful Word — a Word that, willingly received by us, helps to achieve our reconciliation with God in Jesus; a Word, that, consciously reflected upon, helps us to see the ways in which we need to be reconciled to one another.

Jesus once said that if you come to offer your gift to the Father and there at the altar remember that your brother has anything against you, you should first go and be reconciled with your brother and only then come and offer your gift.

It is because of these words of Jesus that some liturgical scholars have suggested that the Kiss of Peace should take place immediately after the reading of the Word of God and before the Offertory, so that we could be reconciled with one another before we offer the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Even though we do not do this in the Mass, the Word of God, proclaimed at Mass, should bring us to the point where our hearts are filled with a love that both accepts God's forgiveness and opens us to offer forgiveness to one another.

Pope Paul

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solidarity with those with whom Jesus particularly identified himself. It will be one of the most significant proofs that we can give to our brothers and sisters that this year is "Holy" for all mankind.

Yes, this is what we ask of you today at the beginning of Lent — a genuine solidarity, a practical solidarity with Christ's poor — and we ask it of you in the name of Jesus. And with deep affection for all of you, our sons and daughters throughout the world, we bless you all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Vatican Denies Big Loss in Bank Collapse

Vatican City [RNS] — Vatican press officer Federico Alessandrini said here that a financial institution in Vatican City had suffered "limited" losses in the collapse, last year, of the private banking empire of Sicilian-born financier Michele Sindona.

Alessandrini denied reports that the institution, known as the Institute for the World of Religion, and commonly referred to as the "Vatican bank," had suffered "sizeable losses" in the Sindona affair.

The Vatican spokesman was replying to a statement attributed to Massimo Spada, a 69-year-old Italian financier, who was once administrative secretary of the Institute for the Works of Religion. Mr. Spada was quoted in the Rome weekly magazine L'Espresso as saying the Vatican had lost about \$56 million, or about one tenth of its liquid assets in the collapse of the Sindona empire.

Alessandrini described such figures as "unconnected with reality."

Sindona, 54, who at one time was in control of the Franklin National Bank of New York, is wanted by Italy on two warrants charging him with fraudulent bankruptcy and forging accounts and other irregularities. He is communicating with court officials in Rome through lawyers at an undisclosed place outside Italy. His empire was estimated to be worth \$450 million, only a few years ago.

Alessandrini said the Institute for Works of Religion, which was set up by Pope Pius XII in 1942 to bank and administer funds, had acquired "small interests" in two banks that later had come under Sindona's control — the Banca Privata Finanziaria, later the Banca Privata Italiana of Milan, and the Banque de Financement, also known as Finabank, of Geneva, Switzerland. Both banks are now closed.

The Vatican spokesman insisted that the Institute was at the service of the entire Catholic Church and was formally distinct from the Holy See.



Karen Boudens, Maureen McDonald and Michele Quinlan (left to right) research the German Lenten tradition of pretzel making for their class on church history at Christ the King school.

Old Lenten Customs Brought to Life

To make the Lenten season more meaningful, the eighth grade Religion class at Christ the King investigated the early traditions associated with Lent and Easter. Along the way they learned how to make pretzels.

blessed ashes on the sinner's head.

In ancient times, the penitents were forbidden to re-enter the church following the dispensing of ashes until Holy Thursday. They would spend Lent apart from their families occupying themselves with prayer, manual labor and works of charity.

The students discovered that the Easter bunny deserves little credit in the establishment of the custom of giving eggs on Easter. Actually, the tradition stems from the strict fast laws of the early Church. The Easter egg symbolized the end of Lenten abstinence from meat and eggs.

"The enactment of the Ash Wednesday tradition gave the actual dispensation of ashes more meaning to the students," Sister Yvonne Blind, school principal, said.

Ash Wednesday was brought to life in a dramatization of the ancient tradition of public forgiveness of sinners by the bishop. Before receiving their ashes, students clothed in sackcloth assembled in front of the church acting the part of sinners desiring to receive penance. The bishop, played by Tom Sweeney, assigned particular acts of penance according to the nature and gravity of each individual's "crime."

One Lenten tradition the students researched — a German one — was the making of pretzels.

During ancient times, Christians abstained from both meat and eggs during Lent, so they made bread dough of flour, salt and water only. This dough was shaped in the form of two arms crossed in prayer. These small breads were called braccellae or little arms. The Germans adopted the tradition, calling the breads brezel or prezel and served the treat with a special Lenten brew of dark beer.

Then, leading a sinner by the hand, the bishop accompanied the penitents into the church, where he conducted the recitation of the penitence psalms. As each sinner approached him, the bishop imposed his hands on the sinner, sprinkled holy water and put

To get into the Lenten spirit, the students held pretzel making sessions following an old German recipe. Approximately 360 pretzels were made for the entire school as a Lent celebration.

Diocese Represented At Pro-Life Meeting

The New York State branch of the National Committee for the Human Life Amendment held a meeting Feb. 14 at La Guardia Airport to update diocesan representatives on the status of proposed pro-life amendments on Capitol Hill.

Rochester delegates were William Polito, chairman of the Right to Life Committee; Father James Hewes, Priests' Council representative; David Germain, representing the Pastoral Center, and Father Robert Collins, coordinator for the Diocesan Human Life Committee.

They hear speeches by Robert Lynch, executive secretary of the national committee; William Cox, a committee staff member, and Mrs. Madden, committee secretary. Suggestions on new action plans were also given to pro-life organizations.

The national committee was formed by the United States Bishops in November 1973 to rally the Catholic community and to assist pro-life organizations in their fight against abortion and euthanasia. Also among committee duties is to spread reverence for life and to conduct pro-life lobbying on Capitol Hill. It has been active in clergy education on pro-life issues and in acting as a mediator between

the Right to Life groups and church officials.

According to Father Collins, U.S. Senator Birch Bayh is planning to conduct a subcommittee hearing this spring on the anti-abortion issue. "There is a good chance that some type of pro-life amendment will come out of this and appear before the entire Senate," Father said. "Whatever action the Senate takes, it will still be a long time before anything solid is achieved."

Father Collins mentioned that concerned individuals can help by writing letters to the New York State Senators. "People should write letters commending and supporting Senator James Buckley for his articulate defense of the pro-life movement and urge Senator Jacob Javits to support such an amendment," he said.

Father Collins said that Congressman Don Edwards refused to introduce the pro-life topic in the House Judiciary Subcommittee this year. "Out of a sense of fairness, the House should conduct a hearing on the pro-life issue. People should write their Congressmen to put pressure on Congressman Edwards to co-sponsor one of the Human Life amendments," Father added.



Putting their pretzel making research to work, Jackie Kosel and Jill De Oude (left to right) prepare to bake the Lenten pretzels.

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