

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Welcome to Lima — It's Home to Me

I am sending this open invitation early so that you can plan to be with me for a celebration on March 25 at 8 p.m. in St. Rose's Church in Lima. It is the annual Chrism Mass and, to me, it is the great diocesan event of the year as we assemble from every region of the Church of Rochester to thank God that He has anointed us in the sign of His Son's Cross and appointed us to be witnesses to His Gospel.



The event this year will have a special personal significance and I want you to help me express my gratitude for the memories associated with Lima and St. Rose's parish. It is the Church of my childhood, my Baptism, Confirmation and my first Mass. Lima, the place of my initial growing pains (hopefully, the process continues), recalls for me the love of my family, schoolboy fun and friendships, dreams that led me to the seminary, priests and Sisters and good friends, and neighbors who encouraged me to have hope that the dream would one day be a beautiful reality.

But, wherever the Chrism Mass is held, it is a significant event for the Church. The oil of Chrism, blessed during this liturgy, is used in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders and is a sign of our consecration. When we gather to bless the chrism each year we acknowledge together that we are a consecrated people — a people set aside and made holy by God for a special task. When we come together we celebrate the fact that God has called us and consecrated us for His work and, even in the act of coming together, we become strengthened for that work. It fills me with an indescribable sense of strength when I know you support me and are willing to share the responsibility and the burdens of consecration for the Church's mission. I know, from the comments of those who have attended these celebrations, that it is strengthening for them too.

When I was a boy in Lima, I certainly never dreamed of becoming a bishop. I did not know any bishops personally at that time, nor did I have any firsthand knowledge of what bishops did. I was not aware, in fact, of the implications of "consecration" though I

had been anointed with chrism in baptism, and later on, in confirmation.

I had a mother and father who taught me a great deal about the meaning of "consecration" though they could never have given me a theological definition of it. Like many of your own parents who were deeply faith-filled people, they knew in their hearts what it meant to be "holy", and to be called to do a special work for God. For them, raising their children to be faithful sons and daughters of God, and to be loyal to the life of the Church, was their special vocation which they took seriously.

My parents created a home where their reverence for each other and for each of us children instilled in us a sense that every human person is of great dignity. Whatever any of us did, even the simplest household task, had significance when it contributed to the good of others. They taught us, in and through all of the children's petty squabbles and the more serious family crises that are inevitable in every home, how to search for real values. Our parents taught us how to "see into" the true meanings of our own and others' actions, and to watch for and nurture the good, the "holy", the most life-giving efforts for one another. They were preparing us for adult life. They were helping us to grow into a mature Christian spirit. I am confident that they never guessed they were bringing up a bishop in the midst of their brood!

When I find myself, in the course of the unfathomable mystery of God's design, the "principal high priest" of the Church of Rochester, I can only marvel at the kind of preparation that I received in my home. When I see, in the course of history, how the Church's understanding of priestly consecration is being expanded so that all of us many appreciate more fully the meaning of "the priesthood of the faithful," I am filled with gratitude for parents who knew in their hearts what they could not put into words: that being baptized was being specially consecrated, specially anointed. They knew that they deeply revered their parish priest and would be consistently loyal to their parish church. They did not perceive as fully as we do today that they participated in the pastoral responsibility of their priests, but certainly they were respectful of what "Father" was trying to accomplish and cooperated with him in whatever ways they could.

In these days of change in the Church, it is difficult to be a bishop. Actually, it is difficult to be a Christian. To be faithful to the values of Jesus Christ is a constant challenge in a time in history when these values are consistently opposed or rejected in many areas of our society. We all have to question ways of acting that we never questioned before. Our responsibilities of stewardship in America, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world, raise complex, even staggering difficulties. What do we have to say to one another and to society at large regarding the dignity of the human person when war, abortion, and starvation are generally considered inevitable for millions? I believe firmly that the scripture readings of the Chrism Mass speak very directly to this dilemma:

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort all who mourn, to give them oil of gladness, instead of a listless spirit."

(Isaiah 61: 1-3)

This message, which I first learned in my family home, and which many of you learned from the special people that God sent into your lives at various times — this message speaks of the tremendous goodness in the life of each one of us. It reminds us that God's creative, anointing Holy Spirit has filled us, enabling us to share our best gifts with all who have need of them. Just as I believe that I, your bishop, have been anointed for my special task by God's Spirit, I also believe that this task is not mine alone. You, too, have been anointed by the Spirit, and you must share my responsibility for the Church of Rochester will not fulfill its mission to be Christ's presence in the world.

And so it is with a sense of urgency that I write this invitation to the Chrism Mass. We all, "Chrismed" people — the Lord's anointed — who need to assemble and express together our gratitude for His anointing, to open our hearts to His Spirit and by our presence confirm each other in our priestly vocation.

Pontiff Explains the Nature of Sin

The following is the text of Pope Paul VI's address given at the general audience held Feb. 12.

The Ashes: this is a significant day in the liturgical calendar and in the spiritual formation of the Christian. The latter is beginning his preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery, by the exercise of penance, prayer and good works, which we call Lent. We will leave to the specific rites of this extraordinary day the exploration of its significance and its application to our souls, called to the severe and great school of Lent.

As regards the effect of this day on the theme which we have fixed for this short talk about the spirituality of the Holy Year, the subject of our religious renewal, our Christian "conversion," we will limit ourselves here to considering the impact, the shock, that the imposition of the ashes, with the funeral sentence that accompanies it, intends to produce, not only to recall the inexorable and ephemeral frailty of human life, by nature subject to death, but also to go back to the cause of this terrible fate, as St. Paul teaches us, in one of his gravest and most studied pages: "death has passed unto all men because all have sinned" (Rom 5, 12).

Thus we come back to a subject that recurs both in preaching and in the general conception of Christian life; and it is the subject of sin. What is sin? It is the conflict of our will, the will of free, responsible beings, but at the same time puny, created beings, with the sovereign, good and fatherly will of God. It is a wrong action, seen from the religious point of view. It is an offence, voluntary and conscious, to the relationship which, whether we like it or not, exists between our lives and God's law.

He who thinks and understands this transcendent repercussion of our actions on the watchful, just and loving presence of God, knows what sin is. He realizes, indeed, its deep, unfathomable gravity; remember the words of the "prodigal son" in the famous Gospel parable, a real mirror of the sinner's drama: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son" (Lk 15, 18-21).

Sin is at once an offence against God and the ruin of the person who commits it (cf. S. Th. I-II, 8, 1 and 2). A ruin that is not complete, as long as we are in this life. Man remains man, that is capable of reasoning, naturally inclined to good, weakened,

however, by no longer being able to pursue it with his natural forces intact. The experience of evil, which so many people, even educators, think is useful for the formation of human conscience, is like an illness which, if we can, we should spare man, especially when he is young, infirm as he already is as the consequence of original sin, and still inexpert in recourse to the resources of moral conscience.

Moral conscience: here is another great chapter of anthropology, the science of man; a chapter, alas, that modern, secular man often tries to leave untouched, when he asserts the claims of conscience in order to evade the extrinsic demands of obedience, limiting consultation of his conscience to the first great chapter of psychological consciousness. The latter, if detached from moral conscience, geared to its religious responsibility, is no longer a good adviser. It records the interior and exterior experience of human actions; it is content with psychoanalytical analyses, fashionable today, but deprived of ethical obligations, deprived of moral conscience. So that the criterion to distinguish between good and evil becomes purely hedonistic, utilitarian, aesthetic, hygienic. Psychological consciousness enjoys a fallacious and dangerous

optimism, similar, in its practical applications, to that of a person who no longer consults, or never consults, real human conscience, and lives without scruples, happy to indulge in everything desirable and possible.

There is a great deal of talk about conscience, as the supreme and only norm of conduct. But if conscience has lost its moral light, that is, its awareness of real good and real evil, an awareness that cannot be separated from the pole of the Absolute, from religious reference, where can it lead us? What experiences may it wrongly authorize? Will the penal code be enough to make men good, honest and just? And will it be enough merely to abide by the law? ("... I'm a gentleman; I do no harm to anyone; I've never been in trouble with the police ...") will this be enough to ensure man his real eternal destiny? And what shall we say of those who have smothered the voice of conscience in obedience to an irrational freedom, freedom of the passions, or freedom to be venal or cruel, or anyhow a licence in conflict with divine law? A sinful freedom and licence? God save us. One day, that inevitable day of our direct and existential meeting with God, shall we not, perhaps, hear our pleas for salvation answered with: "I do not know you?" (cf.

Mt 25, 12).

Our story is becoming dramatic. He who has the wisdom and the courage to look it in the face, with moral conscience, which opens his eyes to the past, will feel a state of sadness, fear and torment creeping over him, a state characteristic of our spiritual school, and well known to great literature (cf. Euripides' Orestes, Shakespeare's Macbeth), remorse. It is a critical, intense moment, at the parting of two decisive ways, leading in opposite directions: despair (cf. Gen 4, 3-16; Mt 27, 3-40); humble and repentant surrender to God's still open mercy (cf. Manfredi, in Dante, II, 3, 120; Manzoni's Innozenzo); the latter is the typical choice of Lent, the choice of the Holy Year. With our Apostolic Blessing.

FATHER O'DWYER DIES

Navan; Ireland [RNS] — Father Michael O'Dwyer, who served as Superior General of the St. Columban Foreign Mission Society (Columban Fathers) for almost a quarter of a century, died here Feb. 13, at the age of 87. One of the last of the pioneer members of the society that was founded in 1918, Father O'Dwyer saw the organization's numbers grow from 40 to over 600 in his term of office which began in 1924 and lasted until 1947.