

PENANCE

AT THE
CROSSROADS

The Laying On Of Hands

Fifth in a Series
By the Diocesan
Liturgy Commission

The new rite for the Sacrament of Penance contains elements of the old, but greatly enriched by additions that will make this sacrament a new experience in our lives. The meeting of priest and penitent may take place in the "confessional box" as of old, or, preferably, in a confessional room where priest and penitent meet face to face. This meeting of priest and penitent is meant to create an atmosphere of joyful anticipation of the celebration of our reconciliation with the Father.

The new rite also intends to create an atmosphere of prayer in which the confession of sins and the granting of absolution take place. Heretofore, we have not thought sufficiently of the prayer-dimension of the Sacrament. We have prayed before the Sacrament in preparation for it or afterwards in "saying our penance." The new rite emphasizes the prayer-dimension of the Sacrament itself — prayer seen as listening to God in His Word and responding to Him.

The rite begins with the reception of the penitent. The priest welcomes him warmly and greets him with kindness. Priest and penitent then make the sign of the cross together. Next, the priest invites the penitent to have trust in God, saying something like the following:

**May God who enlightens
the hearts of all
enable you to recognize
your sins and trust
in His great mercy.**

Notice that the emphasis is on God's initiative; it is God who helps us to know our sinfulness; it is His mercy that pardons us. Then, in keeping with the sacramental principle that God's Word should always precede a sacramental action, and prepare us for it, there is an appropriate reading of the Word of God. Texts are chosen which proclaim God's mercy and His calling us to forgiveness. After the reading of Scripture, there is time for reflection. At this point, the penitent confesses his sins. The confession of sins should be a revelation on the part of the penitent of the state of self-awareness that he has achieved in his relationship with God and with others. After the confession of sins, the priest suggests an act of penance which the penitent accepts to make satisfaction for sin and to improve his life. The priest may then offer counsel and direction to the penitent. This is an opportunity to receive spiritual direction that can help us to live a life of communion with God and others more fully in the future.

After receiving the counsel of the priest, the penitent is invited to say a prayer of repentance — a prayer that he knows by heart or a prayer that comes to him

spontaneously, in his experience of the sacrament.

The prayer of repentance is followed by the absolution. The form of absolution is greatly enriched in the new rite. The absolution is pronounced in two forms: the deprecatory (praying) form and the more familiar indicative (statement) form. The deprecatory form of absolution was the only form used in the Church for a thousand years and is still the only form used in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. It reads as follows:

**May God the Father of mercies,
who through the
death of His Son
reconciled the world
to Himself
and poured forth
the Holy Spirit
for the remission of sins,
grant you
forgiveness and peace
through the ministry
of the Church.**

To this very rich form of the sacramental proclamation of forgiveness (rich because of its references to the paschal mystery of Jesus, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to the Church's ministry of reconciliation), there is added the form that we have been accustomed to in the past:

**I absolve you from your sins
in the Name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

All the while the priest is proclaiming the words of absolution, he has his hands extended over the person or at least toward him. This restoration to prominence of the laying on of hands is something important that we need to reflect on if we are to understand the full meaning of the sacrament of Penance. The laying on of hands is a traditional sign of the giving of the Holy Spirit. This laying on of hands not only signifies the outpouring of the Spirit, it also signifies, in a way that contemporary people can appreciate, the loving concern of God and of the Church in the sacramental healing of Penance. Jesus healed people by bodily touch. The healing Church is she who touches us, as if to say, "Jesus cares. I care. Receive the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins."

Following the words of absolution and the laying on of hands, there is a proclamation of God's mercy before the penitent is dismissed.

In addition to the laying on of hands in the sacrament of Penance, there are other life situations in which this gesture can be meaningful. We can lay hands on each other in prayer — on our children and parents and loved ones — imploring the Spirit to fill them. Jesus blessed and healed by touch, and today it is good for us to feel his touch again through one another.

Chrism

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When we gather with Bishop Hogan at the Chrism Mass, he will bless three holy oils: the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens; and the Holy Chrism.

In the case of the Oil of the Sick, which is used in the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the symbolism is obviously medicinal. According to the Catechism of the Council of Trent, "just as oil is very helpful for lessening the pains of the body, so the strength of the Sacrament lessens the grief and pain of the soul. Oil furthermore brings back health, restores good cheer, and nourishes the light of life; it is especially good for regenerating strength in a weakened body."

The Oil of the Catechumens is also medicinal and purgative, if in a more spiritual sense. In the rite

of blessing of the old Roman Pontifical, the bishop prayed that the person who would be anointed in connection with exorcism prior to baptism, would be given "a purgation of mind and body," so that whatever influence of evil spirits remained, they would depart at the touch of this blessed oil.

Just why the Oil of the Catechumens used to be used in the anointing of kings, and, even more, in the anointing of priests, is not quite clear.

Holy Chrism is the highest and most sacred of the holy oils. The balm or mixture of scented resins is blended with it before the blessing. According to the Trent Catechism, the balm, as a perfume, symbolizes the sweet odor of a truly Christian life; and as a chemical, a preservative against corruption. The oil itself,

penetrating as it is, betokens the penetration of divine grace into the soul. Whenever it is used, therefore, a permanent dedication is implied. When used on persons in baptism and confirmation, it points to constancy in the service of God. When used in the anointing of the head of a bishop and (as is now the case) the hands of a priest, its meaning appears to be a preservation from all corrupting influences in the discharge of grave duties.

Oil, concluded Dom Caspar Lefebvre, represents "at one and the same time the penetrating, enlightening, nourishing, fortifying, relaxing, healing and sanctifying action of the divine Spirit."

We can now see why St. Augustine once wrote: "Oil signifies something great."

Hospital

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only facility located in the inner city and west of the Genesee River. Advocates of St. Mary's say the hospital would lose \$1,497,729 a year if the OB unit was terminated. Without the maternity ward, other departments, particularly the gynecological facility, would suffer patient loss.

Highland Hospital, which lies between Genesee and Strong Memorial, also would suffer a considerable financial loss. Since the beginning of last July, Highland has been in the process of constructing a new OB unit. According to Michael J. Weidner, administrator of hospital operations, in addition to the financial loss incurred with the closing of the maternity ward and the subsequent patient loss from the other departments, Highland would lose another \$1 million as a result of halting construction on the new unit.

Besides declining birth rates in the maternity ward, the committee is weighing other factors, such as cost, related social services, community need, facilities and personnel and additional data on OB units, to help them determine a recommendation.

But a major factor, which Thomas Petrillo, chairman of the committee, admits was not considered by the committee at the onset of the hearings, is religion. St. Mary's, which follows Church teachings, permits no elective abortions or sterilizations. Robert Mulhern, Monroe County legislator, said, "St. Mary's offers a freedom of choice to women who choose to go to a hospital that doesn't perform elective abortions." Because of the religious issue, Mulhern asked that St. Mary's not be considered for closure.

"St. Mary's is the only hospital in Monroe County that has a complete regard for life from the cradle to the grave. There is no reason to close any of the hospitals. And St. Mary's should be the last to be considered if one must be closed," said Gerald Trower, a member of the Citizens for a Decent Community.

John Butler, an inner city citizen, who spoke on behalf of his family, strongly agreed. "St. Mary's is the only hospital in Rochester that doesn't permit abortions or sterilizations. And it also has the lowest per diem reimbursement rate for hospital insurance," he said. "To deprive the people of such an option would be dictatorial, discriminatory and un-American."

Although a majority of the speakers spoke on behalf of St. Mary's, several were there to support Highland. Ellen Grunblatt, a representative of the Women's Health Collective, indicated that Highland Hospital

if it came to closing either St. Mary's or Highland, Ellen Taves, director of Family Planning, believes the logical choice would be St. Mary's.

"Highland offers more than St. Mary's because it performs abortions. Physicians that handle abortions at Highland wouldn't be able to practice at St. Mary's if the Highland maternity ward was closed, since St. Mary's abortion stand wouldn't permit it. But if St. Mary's was closed, their physicians would be allowed to practice at Highland."

"Also, Protestants would have no option in choosing where to deliver if St. Mary's remained open and Highland closed," she said.

Dr. Bernard Soehner, a surgical physician at St. Mary's, disagreed. "From working at St. Mary's, I know that 48 per cent of the deliveries are non-Catholic," he said. "There must be a reason for them going there, tangible or intangible."

He added, "On the problems of economics, speaking off the cuff, here we are quibbling over a few beds and in the meantime we're losing millions on UDC (Urban Development Corporation). This is being penny wise and ton foolish. St. Mary's, in my opinion, is the finest community hospital we can find in this country."

Priests Council

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discussions that involve the priests' lives.

As an introduction to the meeting, Bishop Hogan thanked last year's council along with the Sisters' Council for growing in wisdom and age and sharing the responsibility of helping him govern the diocese. "The challenge of the new Priests' Council is to remain a truly representative body and represent all the priests' opinions. And the task of the council will be to propose matters and urge indicated action which fosters spiritual life," he said.

The bishop added, "This is an age of shared responsibility in the Church as delegated to us in Vatican II. The assembly of priests assists the bishop in governing the diocese. And brotherhood is fostered between the priests as well as a dialogue between priests and bishop in dealing with important questions."

The newly elected age block representatives include: (1) Father Leonard A. Kelly, alternate Msgr. William J. Naughton; (2) Father Paul Cuddy, alternate Father Bernard C. Newcomb; (3) Msgr. Leslie G. Whalen, alternate Father William J. Schifferli; (4) Msgr. Albert H. Schnacky, alternate Father Gennaro J. Ventura; (5) Father James Marvin, alternate Father William M. Hart; (6) Father John Hemple, alternate

was the most responsive to maternity health care needs and the area's innovator in introducing modern techniques. She added, "Since all of the maternity wards have something special to offer women, all should be maintained because of the diversity of maternity care they offer."

Mathra Bond, a spokeswoman for the Child Birth Educator Association, said that her organization was against the closing of any obstetric unit.

"CEA advocates that family members stay together throughout labor," she said. "We investigate the psychological care in each hospital and how the hospital responds to the woman's needs."

"Highland is the most willing to effect modern changes and conform with the patient's wishes. For more than 70 years, they have supported childbirth education. They have pioneered in allowing fathers in the delivery room and sibling visitation."

"All of the smaller community hospitals give a personal type of care," she added. "If you close any OB unit, the hospital's whole facility would decline. It would be a disaster to centralize maternity care."

Father Emmett Holloran; (7) Father Robert J. Kanka, alternate Father John Philipps; (8) Father William Donnelly, alternate Father Richard R. Brickler; (9) Father Daniel F. Holland, alternate Father James Boyle; and (10) Father Ronald Stacy, alternate Father Joseph Hart.

The regional representatives are: (Tompkins-Tioga) Father Kevin P. Murphy, alternate Msgr. William M. Roche; (Yates-Ontario-Wayne) Father John L. Coonan, alternate Father T. Paul Murley; (Seneca-Cayuga) Father Elmer W. Heindl, alternate Father Albert J. Shamoni; (Livingston-Steuken) Msgr. John F. Duffy, alternate Father James F. Baker; (Schuyler-Chemung) Father Joseph W. Dailey, alternate Father James E. Hewes; (Monroe-North) Father Winfried Kellner, alternate Father James C. Burke; (Monroe-Northwest) Father James Lawlor, alternate Father Benedict A. Ehmman; (Monroe-Northeast) Father William Cordinier, alternate Father Robert G. Kreckel; (Monroe-Southeast) Father Robert J. Miller, alternate Father Gerald J. Appelby; (Monroe-Southwest) Father Louis J. Hohman, alternate Father John L. O'Connor.

According to Father Richard Torney, who was acting as secretary prior to the election, the four constituted PC representatives of the religious orders in the diocese were not elected due to the orders' failure to formulate an election procedure.