

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

MIRACLES in the 70's

People always seem skeptical when mention is made of miracles. Yet, I believe that they happen every day. Our life in Christ has always been interpreted as the wonder of growth, transformation and development — and whenever I see people becoming what they were never expected to become, then I believe in miracles.

The Parable of the Talents condemns those who say that miracles are impossible. The servant who buried his one talent to save it receives strong disapproval from the Lord Who assures us that even the seeming hopelessness of entombment behind a sealed and guarded imprisonment of the heavy stone of our selfishness can be but darkness before the dawn of a bright new day if we have faith in Him. And this Easter event happens whenever we believe and hope that we can be resurrected to become what we are not at this present moment.

When we become perfectly satisfied with what we are now, then we can never become someone else — and miracles never happen. Gabriel Marcel, the French existentialist philosopher, said it well when he warned that when a man is perfectly satisfied, he is like an apple that is perfectly ripe. Which means that only one step is left and that is to rot.

Jesus preached that the perfect reign of God over men was **immediately possible** if we would open our hearts to the message of the Gospels. Jesus enumerated practical examples of what would happen to us and to the world through us if we believed in Him. The signs are threatening to those who profit from inequality, privilege and status. But they offer miracles to those who have faith. If you began to see suddenly in this world an equitable sharing of material goods and power, a total respect for all people, a renunciation of all forms of special privilege and status, would you believe in miracles? Of course, you would—because the reality of our human history would have taught you that such a transformation was impossible. Yet, Jesus taught that the perfect reign of God was immediately possible if we but had faith in Him. The miracles which Jesus performed, as recorded in the Gospels, were always challenges to faith. Where He found no faith, miracles did not happen. Nothing miraculous happened in Nazareth because He found no faith in His hometown. (Mark 6:5)

Miracles tell us that God's power is an **ever present reality** because He transferred His power to His disciples, and He sent His Spirit as an assurance that this power would be present until the end of time. (Matt. 28:16-20)

It is a mistake to relegate miracles only to the cures that have taken place at Lourdes and Fatima. There are less pretentious healings and wonders that happen every day

if only we have the eyes of faith to see them, and if we but have the faith to recognize that, as disciples of the Lord, we have the power to perform them.

If the Spirit of the Risen Lord continues to act in His Church, the Body of Christ, in His community of believers, in His disciples, miracles are possible today. Whenever we work to make men whole in the name of Jesus, whenever we make someone aware that God is our Father and Jesus our Brother, whenever we bring someone to the realization that the Holy Spirit dwells within his spirit, then miracles happen. Whenever we touch others with understanding and love, whenever we give hope and comfort to the spiritually maimed, whenever we open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf with the word of the Lord, miracles are happening.

Whenever we use our energies to eradicate bigotry, hatred, prejudice and war, whenever we help people to realize their common fraternity in Christ, miracles are happening. Whenever we work to be a sign of God's peace and love to the lonely, the poor, to broken spirits that cry for healing, then miracles happen and His Kingdom is present in our midst.

The world will only know that God is still alive when it sees the clear signs (miracles) of His presence in those who dare to bear His Name (Christians). Are miracles still possible? It depends on us. If we really believe, let us begin to do something about it.

BISHOP HOGAN ON DPC...

'We've taken our time, we've thought it through ... AND IT'S GOING TO WORK!'

[This is the second of two articles on an interview with Bishop Joseph L. Hogan taken by members of the steering committee of the Diocesan Pastoral Council.]

Bishop Hogan, you spent a great deal of time working with the Pastoral Council Formation Committee. Do you feel that in the light of the present constitution that time was well spent?

"I believe it is an excellent beginning. There can be no argumentation with most of the Constitution because it is so highly documented with Roman documents. There will always be areas that will be subject to review and revision, for example the membership question. I don't have all the answers, but I am willing to learn, as hopefully all those who are a part of it are willing to learn."

Bishop, as you know, some people felt that there should have been further refinements in the Constitution before starting. Why did you decide to go ahead now?

"I feel that we have to see how it works practically and then refine it. We can't find the difficulties until we start working with what we have. We have to go through a process of experimentation. There is no such thing as a perfect document. We will never have a perfect Diocesan Pastoral Council, nor is the Diocesan Pastoral Council an answer for everything. It is an instrument to make the image of the Church as People of God a living reality in the diocese. You have to have structures to make this happen and the Diocesan Pastoral Council is the structure."

Bishop Hogan, you already have a Priest's Council and a Sisters Council. How do you feel that the Pastoral Council will be able to work with them?

"In membership they will always be represented on the Pastoral Council. There is one liaison member for each council on the Diocesan Pastoral Council so they will never be in isolation. The Diocesan Pastoral Council will be informed and receive input from the Sisters Council and the Priests Council and in turn they will get feedback from the Diocesan Pastoral Council. The councils will learn to work in harmony for the sake of building the Kingdom."

The Bishop concluded that if he were to pick the one council that is most representative of the People of God in the diocese "it would be the Diocesan Pastoral Council because it is the most broadly based."

What sort of people do you envision being elected to the Pastoral Council?

"I believe that people are taking the elections very seriously. We are looking for thought-filled people and especially prayerful people as this is the prime ingredient in the Diocesan Pastoral Council. We have to depend upon the Holy Spirit for the efficiency of what goes on in the diocese. Let's not get it overloaded with professional people because no one group has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. In regard to the appointments that the Constitution requires me to make I plan to do a lot of consultation before I choose the appointees."

One of the biggest challenges for the Diocesan Pastoral Council will be to impact the 170 parishes in our diocese. Bishop, how do you feel that the Diocesan Pastoral Council will be able to do this?

"The DPC has to be in touch with the world of reality, so it has to be closely related to the parishes and their concerns. The

parishes, however, must be willing to share their concerns and not just passively wait for the Diocesan Pastoral Council to act. These concerns will come to the DPC from individual parishes through regional conferences. The regions have grown greatly in the past few years under the leadership of the coordinators. I am very enthusiastic and hopeful that both parishes and regions will continue to grow and contribute greatly to the DPC."

Bishop, how important will the diocesan goals be which the Diocesan Pastoral Council will work on with Dr. Felix Lopez?

"Dr. Lopez feels our timing is perfect. The goal setting sessions for the diocese are in conjunction with the beginning of the DPC because the pastoral council would have to be involved in the process of goal setting, otherwise the diocese would be setting goals in isolation from God's people."

Bishop Hogan, what sort of issues would you expect to take to the Diocesan Pastoral Council for input?

"I do not have any specific issues right now. Any issue that has pastoral consequences for the whole diocese should be brought to the council. The spectrum is broad. However, I do not see the DPC as a fund raiser."

How should elected members prepare themselves for the Diocesan Pastoral Council?

"I feel that they must spend time on continuing education in the process of what Church is all about. They must read and meditate on Sacred Scripture. They must know what the Second Vatican Council documents say. I would recommend as important references the books Co-Responsibility in the Church by Cardinal Suenens and Models of

the Church by Avery Dulles."

Bishop Hogan, how would you sum up your feelings about the Diocesan Pastoral Council?

"I don't have all the answers, but I feel very good about the Diocesan Pastoral Council even

though there are a lot of questions and some anxiety. I think we've taken our time, we've thought it through, and it is going to work."

Next: An interview with Dr. Felix Lopez on Diocesan Goal Setting.

Pope Officially Proclaims 'Congress' for U.S. City

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul officially proclaimed that the 41st International Eucharistic Congress will be held in Philadelphia in August, 1976, during the U.S. Bicentennial celebration, and will focus on the theme, "Hungers of the Human Family."

Making the announcement during a general audience on the eve of Holy Thursday, the pontiff declared that the Congress will be an event of "worldwide importance" and a time when Catholics "will open their hearts with new sensitivity and fresh concern to the many urgent needs of their brothers and sisters — the just aspirations and legitimate anxieties of mankind."

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Present at the general audience of some 10,000 Holy Year pilgrims to Rome were Cardinal James Knox, president of the Vatican's Permanent Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses; Auxiliary Bishop Martin Lohmuller of Philadelphia; and Father Walter

Conway of Philadelphia, executive secretary of the forthcoming congress.

Pope Paul tied his announcement of the Aug. 1-8, 1976 Congress to the celebration of Holy Thursday, the anniversary of the Lord's Supper, and the final days of the Easter season.

The congress, the first in the U.S. in 50 years, will include a series of liturgies, theological and liturgical conferences, music and art events and special exhibits. Other denominations have been invited to take part.

St. Helen's Sets Anointing Rite

The liturgy and human development committees of St. Helen's Church have prepared a service for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, to be held at 3 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at the church, 310 Hinchey Road. The ill, the aged and those facing major surgery are invited to take part.

The announcement pointed out that the sacrament formerly applied as extreme unction now emphasizes the healing function; no longer is the anointing reserved for the dying. Further information may be obtained from Father Mark Miller at the rectory, 235-1210.