

**PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# Pauline Perils and Easter's Boast

In his second letter to the people of Corinth; St. Paul at first sight seems to offer a litany of boastfulness about his personal accomplishments in the service of the Lord. Does not this read like braggadocio at its best? (2 Cor. 11:24-28):



**"Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches."**

Were we to conclude here, we might be tempted to say: "Shut up! Enough! You're not the only one with problems. Let me enumerate my own personal litany of woes. I have had my share of troubles and anxieties. Would you care to listen to them? Let's play the matching game!"

But this enumeration of infirmities is St. Paul's way of accentuating the strength that he has received from the Risen Lord: "I will all the more boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For He was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God." (2 Cor. 12:9, 13:4.) And then he adds the assurance of his joy in the Lord's

service, words I have chosen as my own personal motto: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." (2 Cor. 12:15).

St. Paul makes for good reading in this Easter season for he is the great exemplar of what it means to be an Easter person. So convinced was he of the primacy of the Resurrection for the support of faith that he said: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content, and your faith is empty, too." (1 Cor. 15:14) And this is to say that Jesus, by His resurrection, has overcome death, has become a life-giving principle, has poured forth the power of the Holy Spirit, and has made our faith and Christian commitment possible. Without Easter, there is no Church, no Gospel, no sacraments, and no promise of abiding life.

The Gospel accounts of the first Easter are really a portrayal of Jesus prised through the Easter faith of the Early Christian community. St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians wrote about the Easter event some 25 years after it had happened and long before the Gospels appeared in writing. He identified himself with the rest of the Apostles who had seen the Risen Lord before him.

His whole life was transformed by his meeting with the Risen Christ. And his writings tell us what it means to be an Easter person.

1. **Faith became his master word.** If we asked him: What is the greatest blessing in the world, he would tell us, "faith in the Risen Christ."

2. And faith, to Paul, means fidelity to Jesus Christ and a loyalty which nothing can seduce — no matter the

danger nor magnitude of the threat of the opposition.

3. And faith to him means absolute belief that Jesus is the Son of God and the One Who never deviated from the truth. St. Paul had actually met Jesus. For him, Christ was not a person discovered in a book but Someone he knew and saw and Who gave him the strength he needed. St. Paul never said: "I know what I believed." Rather, he said, "I know Whom I have believed." (2 Tim. 1:12)

4. Easter faith meant to St. Paul a willingness to take risks. His great model of a person of faith was Abraham who was living a comfortable and successful life until he was uprooted by God to serve in a strange and unknown country.

5. Easter faith he described some 164 times as a living "in Christ." He believed that his life was in Christ and Christ was in him like the very air he breathed.

If we are to be Easter people, and our Baptism and Confirmation challenge us to be such people, we must believe that Christ dwells in our hearts. We are temples of His abiding Spirit and we reverence our brothers and sisters, for Christ is present in them, too. We face the struggles and anxieties of life without fear and face the future with hope. For what is still to come has been realized in our Risen Christ. And though we perceive now "through a glass darkly," we make our way joyfully in confidence that there is still more to come, as we make our pilgrimage in the manner Paul recommends — "boasting in the Lord," despite our obvious weaknesses.

# Pope on Vocations: Priesthood Indispensable

Dear sons and daughters of the Church,

The harvest is rich but the laborers are few [Mt 9:37; Lk 10:2].

Surely none of you is unaware of the burning relevance of these words of the Lord Jesus.

It is a fact that you all know: the need for priests, religious and consecrated persons is immense. In some places there is a heartening renewal, but in many other places there has been a disturbing decline in vocations — a decline that weighs heavily on the future.

There is no doubt that in some cases the lessening of vocations is evoking a salutary reawakening in Christian communities. Catechists, the members of Catholic Action and many other lay people outstanding in faith and witness are taking on responsibilities and carrying out "ministries" that assist the Christian vitality of their brethren and make the Christian message concrete in the midst of the realities of daily life. Their role is irreplaceable. The Holy Spirit animates them. We are the first to rejoice at this advancement of the laity and to encourage it.

But, needless to say, all this does not replace the indispensable ministry of the priest or the specific witness of consecrated persons. It demands their presence. Without them, Christian vitality runs the risk of being cut off from its sources, the community runs the risk of breaking up and the Church runs the risk of becoming secularized. If the problem of vocations were neglected, there would be a very serious danger for the Church. It would mean diverging from the very clear will of the Lord when

he said to his Apostles: "Follow me, and I will make you into fishers of men" [Mk 1:17] (and they did leave their nets to follow him), and when he said to some of his disciples: "Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" [Mk 10:21].

The call from the Lord is a priceless grace. Let us realize that the Lord continues to make it heard in the hearts of many young people and adults. Through the Church, Christ presents himself, today as yesterday, as the one who proclaims the measureless love of God the Father, as the one who brings pardon, who heals the heart and brings fullness of life, as the one who invites us to build upon truth and love a new world, a world of sons of God and of brothers and sisters. This is the Good News which is in fact proposed to the faith of every Christian.

But when the Lord calls someone in a special way, through an interior illumination and the voice of the Church, to serve him as a priest, as a religious or as a member of a secular institute, he stirs up in him or her and demands an absolute choice for his person and for the work of his Gospel: "Follow me." This choice is enthralling; it can really overwhelm the human heart. It presupposes a very firm attitude of faith.

And here, dear sons and daughters, is the crux of the problem of vocations. In our time, when the serenity of believers is to a certain extent shaken, the willingness to commit oneself totally and definitively to

following Christ seems still more difficult.

This choice also presupposes a willingness to make a break, in the first place of course with sin — deceit, impurity, selfishness and hate — but also with certain human values which are not the satisfactions of human love, wealth, professional advancement, pleasure, success and power.

For a person who is serious, upright, and generous the values of God's Kingdom can win the day: pure and simple joy, the thirst for God encountered in prayer, the service of others, concern for their spiritual needs. An effort must also be made to free oneself from the materialism of the times in order to make this judgment and take this decision.

Thus it is a question of creating a whole new climate if vocations are to spring up and grow strong. This is a matter that concerns those who are called. And it is a matter that concerns the whole Christian community. The Holy Year is truly the favorable time: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" [Mk 1:15].

It is therefore under the sign of this Holy Year, the year of conversion and renewal in faith, that we, the Successor of the Apostle Peter, charged, as he was, with the task of confirming our brethren, address this message to you. It is a serious message for World Vocations Day — a message full of hope.

We address it to you, our Brothers in the Episcopate, who share our preoccupation in face of the abundance of the harvest and the fewness of the laborers.

We address it to you, the

priests, so that, reviving in yourselves the pride of serving Christ, with the tribulations and joys of the apostle, you may stir up esteem and a desire for the priesthood. May your fidelity, your hope and the unity among you bear witness to the fact that it is a priceless grace.

We address it to you, the Religious, that the freedom and free gift of your exclusive consecration to Christ, with the devotion open to all that it permits, may spread far and wide the taste for the Kingdom of God and make the Gospel relevant, credible and attractive.

We address it to you, the teachers, and to you especially, the fathers and mothers of families, that the firmness of your faith, the depth of your generosity and your love for the Church may enable you to prepare strong souls, capable of hearing the call of the Lord.

## Thomas More Parish Census

General information about the religious practices of Roman Catholics residing within the boundaries of St. Thomas More Parish will be sought in a parish-wide census to begin Saturday, April 26.

More than 150 volunteers will be organized to conduct the house-to-house canvass. Father Francis J. Pegnam, pastor, said information will be sought from Catholics only.

Besides basic data on age and marital status, information will be sought on the number of pre-school children and whether there is intent to send them to St. Thomas More School; on other children — what school they attend and whether they are receiving any form of religious instruction; on special skills or

We address it especially to you, the young people, who are attracted by the message of Christ and moved by the spiritual needs of your brethren. Many do not live on bread alone. Question yourselves under the gaze of Christ.

We address it to you too, the children. Christ loves you in a special way. You are already able to give preference to God, a choice that can take up your whole life in following Jesus. Look for him with all your heart, in deeper prayer, in the offering of your lives, in an apostolate that matches your abilities.

Let us all pray to the Lord of the harvest: "Lord, come to the aid of Your Church!" The needs are immense. Much generosity is shown. The Lord's call and his grace never fail. Let us not fail Him. And on our part, we bless you in the name of the Lord.

Co-chairmen of the census committee are Mrs. Ann Matheis and Mrs. Sally Prince.

## Garage Sale At Aquinas

There will be bargains in toys, records, jewelry, dishes, books, furniture and glassware during the garage sale to be held in the Aquinas gym on Saturday, April 19, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday, April 20 from 11 to 4 p.m. Also included in the festivities is a bake sale.