

**PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# You Are Sent, Dear Friends!

[For the benefit of all who were unable to attend the special liturgical celebration at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Tuesday, April 15, during the Spring meeting of the Bishops of New York State, I share my message through this column.]



For me, it is both an honor and a pleasure that we should gather here today for this celebration. It is an honor because we welcome to our diocese and to our Cathedral Church all of the Bishops of New York State who have come to Rochester for the Region II meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Please know, dear brother bishops, that we of Rochester are delighted that you are here and are inspired by your presence. We consider it a great grace. It is also a pleasure for me to see so many people of God here to celebrate with us. Your response to my invitation is most encouraging to me personally. Truly we have gathered here as the Church of New York State. And our faith tells us that the Lord is in our midst. Let us worship and praise him forever.

The Bishops' meeting here in Rochester this week is of a serious nature. In discussing a Catechetical Directory for the United States, we are attempting to provide "modern yet doctrinally sound guidelines for teaching our faith." We hope to produce a document that will prove useful to parents, catechists and writers and publishers of catechetical texts — in short, all Catholics who have the responsibility for religious education in the United States. I think you will agree, therefore, that this is serious business.

It is made even more serious because of the difficult time in which we live. Teaching our faith has never been easy, but today it is an even more complex task. Our time has been called by some the post-Christian age. Our day has seen (and will continue to see) fewer and fewer Catholic schools. This results in a need to develop new and more comprehensive structures for our religious education. It has taken a decline in religious vocations to show us that parents and Christian laypersons must have primary responsibility for religious education. But these people must be properly prepared for that task. We have rediscovered the fact that Christian learning is not only for children, but especially for adults. From birth to death, all Christians must grow in the knowledge and love of God. But here again we must switch gears and find new and effective structures. What we have on our hands today is a real crisis — a crisis which demands that all faithful Christian people — and the faithful leaders of Christian people — face the challenges of the day and risk much to deal with them.

I find it interesting that all three readings

chosen for today's Eucharistic liturgy come from situations of crisis, situations of crisis that have been faced successfully by our forefathers in the faith.

Look at the Old Testament reading, for example. The Hebrews had been taken into exile. They had been without their Temple and without their covenant for nearly 50 years. In fact they were becoming quite comfortable in an alien land; the whole Hebrew tradition was in danger of being lost; perhaps some writer in a Babylonian newspaper might have called it the post-Hebrew age! But the prophet known to us as Second Isaiah heard the voice of God and cried out: "Hark! Your watchmen raise a cry, together they shout for joy. For they see directly before their eyes, the Lord, restoring Zion. Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord comforts his people. He redeems Jerusalem!" There was no crisis of leadership here. The trumpet made a certain sound, and many followed.

Look at Paul's letter to the Romans. Another crisis — this time for the early Christian Church. Many of the early Christians were Jewish by birth and many of their friends and family were still Jews. Why had some not heard the message of Christ? Should the early Christians relate in some way to their Jewish neighbors? How do you live in a pluralistic society? Paul is not afraid to wrestle with this difficult problem. He gives his theological opinion that, even though they had heard the word, some had put more emphasis on the works of the law than on faith in Christ. Faith, Paul argues, and faith alone leads to salvation. Here is a good example of a theological difficulty met with a confident statement of theology. What could have been a crisis was averted because there was no crisis of leadership.

Finally we hear John's presentation of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper — certainly a dark hour for Jesus and for his timid apostles. Jesus knew that on that first Good Friday, all could be lost. If the Apostles lost faith, if they refused to experience and believe in the Resurrection, then all of Jesus' work was for nothing. And so he turns in confidence to his heavenly Father: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. Consecrate them by means of truth." We know that the prayer was answered. There was an Easter and a Pentecost and there is a record of the Acts of the Apostles.

And today? Certainly all of you sitting here have experienced the crisis today. You know that more and more people find it difficult to say that Jesus is Lord; there is much confusion and more frustration; much alienation and little trust; much bigness and less and less personal care. Love and generous service are often missing from a world filled with hate, with poverty, with war and suffering. The question is not "Is there a crisis?" The question must be: "How shall we meet it?"

Let me assure you, immediately, that no

crisis will ever be solved by a document alone. No bishop in this Church today is naive enough to think that a Catechetical Directory will be the answer. No official proclamation can make a dent unless every faithful Christian begins to take his or her role seriously: "How can they believe unless they have heard of Him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? And how can men preach unless they are sent? You are sent, dear friends, you are sent!"


God has called everyone of us to be his disciple. He has said to us "Go you therefore, and teach all nations!" This command is for each of us. But it is not given without the necessary help to carry it out. When God speaks, his word is immediately powerful and dynamic. But our job is to listen. How difficult it is to really listen, to tune in to what God has to say! And so often he speaks in the "still small voice" which can be jammed out by the static of modern noise! But we must persist because from hearing comes faith. And when we profess our faith, the Church consecrates us with the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We are sent forth. Our mission is to shine forth our light in full confidence. It was Frank Sheed who said that a true Christian must have resonance. He must be so in touch with his God that he is capable (like a fine violin) of producing pure and firm sounds of faith.

I think you are now beginning to see what it is — or rather who it is — that will meet the present crisis. If the present generation is ever to know of God — that is, if they are ever to really experience him — it will be because faithful Christian men and women have stopped to listen to God's quiet word and have made it their own in prayer and reflection. When these persons teach, it will be immediately evident that they are authentic, that they are the real thing. They will speak with their lives and not just with their tongues. They will give flesh and blood to the Word of God.

Such persons could never say to their bishops: "This is your problem." Bishops could never say to such persons: "I don't need you." In fact, it is for such people that we bishops are working so hard to produce a useful teaching tool. It will be this kind of team leadership that will indeed avert, with God's help, our modern crisis.

And how will we know that we are moving in the right way toward Jesus, who is the Way? The sign will be joy. The joy that comes to those who hear the message will be ours. And in listening to that message we will find ourselves sent to share our joy with others:

Break into shouts of joy together!  
How beautiful are the ones who are sent  
to bring good news  
to bring happiness  
to proclaim salvation.  
Break into shouts of joy together!  
For in this way all the ends of the earth  
shall see the salvation of our God.  
How beautiful are the ones who are sent!



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