

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Our God Is Unpredictable

On Sunday, June 29, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, I was privileged to celebrate the liturgy for the opening Chapter of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This month of July has meant long hours of hard work for the elected delegates whose activities have been directed to Community renewal. All human growth requires renewal and it is always a painful process. My prayers have been with the delegates each day as they search for ways for the Community to serve the Church in the 1970's in their pilgrimage to the Heavenly Community.



What I said to the Sisters at the opening of Chapter applies to all of us who would choose to be alive in the Church in the midst of the uncertainty that seems so threatening. I found great inspiration and consolation in an article on "Living With An Unpredictable God" written in the April '75 issue of "Sisters Today" by Benedictine Father Jerome Kodell. I share his thoughts with you as I shared them with the Sisters.

All Christian life is filled with risk and uncertainty which until recent times has been camouflaged by stable patterns of thought and practice. We rejoiced in a patterned life when the divine plan seemed wrapped, sealed and stored. And we were grateful for the neat package of personal security where we had all the answers and Our God was removed from mystery.

Yet Scripture reveals to us a God who is imaginative, creative and ever new — who leads us to expect more surprises than certainty in our future. Our God does things His Own way, appearing where we least expect Him, acting apart from our best wisdom and planning. Even His choices in personnel to do His work defy human logic and have left divine election and vocation veiled in mystery.

He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our lives to personify His Own unpredictability and He has challenged us to pray to the Spirit "blow, blow where you will."

How do we live with such uncertainty and unpredictability? Only because our God is predictable in His love. We have lost Him only when we squeeze Him into a box of our own rules for a game called "Playing God." There is only one certainty about our God — HE LOVES US. And that means there is only one way to be at peace with Him — total acceptance, casting ourselves into His arms. St. Paul called this the "obedience of Faith" which all means, quite simply, that we make no points with Him by agenda control nor by evaluation charts but simply by the measure of our surrender in faith as we live as a child sans pretense or conniving. His judgment is not measured by our talent or training, nor by the power of our eloquence, influence or popularity but solely on the depths of our acceptance of His Father's love and the measure of our radiation of that love in our lives.

For one who lives in faith with an unpredictable God, every moment becomes a

precious gift, every person is a revelation and every place a sacred temple.

The child of the unpredictable God is a free person who dares to take risks. With assurances of His abiding presence on our pilgrimage, we need only know the next step and not the complete travel schedule. Confidence in a loving Father allows too for a sense of humor about our weaknesses and failures and makes us patient about the weaknesses of others.

The child of a loving and unpredictable God is sensitive to human cries of pain. He opens his heart and hands to share his goods with others knowing that a provident Father will care for him as he does for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. It is human temptation to collect too much baggage, to seek security in amassing material goods. This is a contradiction for a pilgrim people who must be sandaled and ready to heed the call to move on. Years ago St. Gregory of Nyssa commented on the trusting child-like faith of Abraham: "He left home without knowing which way he was going, a good sign he was going the right way."

So, rather than being "up-tight" about the uncertainties and confusion of the Church in her post Vatican II years of pilgrimage, let us begin strengthening our faith and finding security in the Lord's promise of the Spirit's guiding and abiding presence with us. We do not have to know the future nor can we determine it with our best planning. It is enough to know that God is our loving Father. Let us rejoice in His surprises!

vatican news

Spread of Gospel In Amazon Area Praised by Pope

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, in a message intended for participants in the ninth Brazilian Eucharistic Congress, said he felt particularly happy that it was taking place in a region that was opening "not only to civil progress and social development, but also to the Christian message."

The congress opened July 16 at the city of Manaus in the Amazonas territory of northwestern Brazil, where the government has been promoting large modern development projects.

The papal message was addressed to Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, who is the Pope's special envoy at the Eucharistic Congress.

The pontiff, in his message, underscored "the untiring work of bishops and priests in spreading the Gospel" in the Amazon region. He said that it was a work "to which all the faithful must feel committed, so that the population of this immense region may be strongly incorporated into the Church."

"To reach this objective," said the Pope, "there is nothing better than to increase the cult of Jesus in the Eucharist, a devotion which leads not only to the development of a life of piety, but equally to the strengthening of the bonds of charity among the faithful."

"In fact," he added, "he who worthily and devotedly nourishes himself with the Eucharistic

Bread — how can he not recognize and love Christ in his brothers?"

Roman Catholic bishops, priests, nuns and lay workers from Amazon dioceses, in opposition to official government policies in the area, have recently declared support for the self-determination of the area's dwindling Indian population and the Indians' right to recover and retain their lands.

There have been increasing conflicts between squatters and rural workers on the one hand, and large ranches and mining and agricultural companies on the other.

A government program based on large-scale farming and ranching, has provoked expulsion of Indian squatters and rural workers from their lands and created serious social problems.

Vatican Merges Two Units

Vatican City [RNS] — Two of the 10 Sacred Congregations of the Roman Curia — the central administrative arm of the Roman Catholic Church — are to be merged into one new organization.

In accord with an Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul that was issued July 17, the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments and the Congregation for Divine Worship will, as of Aug. 1, 1975, become a single organization, called the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship.



Pope Greet Pilgrims

A group of nuns from Algeria — some of the thousands of Holy Year pilgrims visiting Rome — grasp Pope Paul's outstretched hand during an open-air general audience in St. Peter's Square (RNS)

Vatican, Hungary in Talks

Budapest [RNS] — Archbishop Luigi Poggi, a papal envoy, visited Hungary for talks with government officials July 8 to 12, Budapest Radio disclosed.

The government broadcast said the Vatican prelate, who carries the title, "Apostolic Nuncio with special portfolio," was accompanied by Msgr. Ivan Dias of Bombay, a member of the Vatican's Council for the Public Affairs of the Church.

The representatives of the Holy

See had discussions with Religious Affairs Minister Imre Miklos and other high-ranking officials of the Communist regime "on current topics of mutual interest," the broadcast said.

The visitors also met with some of the country's Roman Catholic bishops. Relations between the Vatican and Hungary have been building ever since Pope Paul removed the late Cardinal Joseph

Mindszenty as Hungarian Primate in February 1974.

Last January, following negotiations between Budapest and the Holy See, the pontiff named nine new Hungarian bishops, five to residential sees.

Earlier this year, Archbishop Poggi spent a month in Communist Poland as head of the Vatican's delegation in an effort to achieve what is called "a permanent working contact" with the Polish government.