

The Care and Maintenance of a Choir

By Sr. Josepha Kennedy, SSJ

It's nice to know that choirs are gradually recovering from the near-fatal blow dealt them by Vatican II's misunderstood decrees. We surely needed congregational participation but the disappearance of trained choirs which resulted was a sad mistake.

Ten years later, we're seeing a gradual resurrection of those groups of dedicated volunteers whose singing forms a true ornament for the Sunday liturgy. Palestrina, Bach, Bernstein, Hovhaness are being heard in our churches — even Gregorian Chant in Latin is finding its way back, with some rehearsal time spent shining up the rusty neumes!

Reviving a choir — or starting a new one — is on the minds of many pastors and parish councils. So let's line up the major considerations.

* The first step is to find a competent director who is really willing to put time and energy on the project. This person should be paid a just wage for whatever hours are required. A small nucleus of former choir members, or parishioners who sang in school choirs or college glee clubs, must be recruited.

* The important thing is to start; more discouragement results from over-long rehearsing than from a less than perfect start.

* Weekly rehearsals (1 1/2-2 hours) are a must, at least through the winter months, or until the repertoire is adequate to carry through several Sundays without rehearsal. A rehearsal after the sung Mass on Sunday works well where a weekday evening cannot be scheduled; however, an element of relaxation (sociability, camaraderie, going for coffee afterwards,) makes a mid-week evening most effective.

* Selection of music is a major part of the director's responsibility. Workshops or appeals to the Music Commission will supply great quantities of material but only the director will know his or her group (and his or her own ability!) well enough to select music that is attractive, useful and not discouragingly difficult. Don't ignore unison settings; alternation of men and women, solo and chorus, soft and loud, organ and chorus, lends variety and finesse to unison psalm settings, simple hymns, spirituals. Two-part settings are readily available and the soprano-alto-bass texture is ideal where women outnumber the men. A director must be prepared to spend an occasional Saturday afternoon at the nearest music store or going through sample materials at home.

* Order your music well in advance and try to be organized when approaching the pastor or liturgy committee for the necessary funds. Two or three times a year ought to be the maximum of orders since seasonal needs can be foreseen. If you can get a budget, all the better.

* Don't be afraid to use a good solo voice (although my personal opinion is that it should not often be the director's). It encourages the more gifted, and the group should rejoice to hear a real

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talent used reverently. Try to spread the solos around when possible, even using two lighter voices together for an interesting contrast to the group.

* Work with your organist. Ask him or her to experiment with registrations, to give you the color and support each number requires. If you don't know about the organ, ask help from the organist, but remember, it's your choir and your decision regarding volume and tempo. Give a good firm beat to the organist for the introduction. This presupposes, of course, that the organist can always see the director clearly — an absolute necessity.

* Smile! Our worship should be

joyful and for most choirs, the Mass they sing is their Mass of obligation. A "performance mentality," anxiety over the music alone, is a serious misunderstanding of the role of music in the liturgy. Special talents, carefully rehearsed, are offered to the Lord with full awareness of human frailty, including the director's! The most binding force in sustaining a good choir is the shared joy of worshipping through a common gift of music, so smile at each other! A true community sense can result within a group of people who know very little about each other personally but who come together twice a week to give grateful witness to God's gift to them.

Parish Undertakes "We Care" Mission

The church was hung with banners proclaiming "We Care," and parishioners' lapel buttons echoed the sentiment at a special liturgy Sunday afternoon Nov. 2, at St. Margaret Mary's.

Father Raymond Heisel, pastor, commissioned more than 100 men and women as "missionaries," to carry the message through the parish. The ceremony came at Mass during an afternoon of recollection.

The missionaries began last Saturday to visit more than 1,800 homes, in an effort to "create a renewed parish spirit and unity," in the words of one of them, Milton Schmidt. They are distributing the parish directory, and answering questions about

parish activities. "It's a completely non-pressure type of thing," Schmidt said.

Members of the adult education committee and the ministerial staff are helping Father Gary Shaw, associate pastor, and Sister Helen Goschke, pastoral assistant, to coordinate the project. Preparations included homilies by George Walker of the Diocesan Liturgy Commission and training sessions directed by Mrs. Betty Satterwait.

The house visits, which end this Sunday, Nov. 16, will be followed by special mission services Nov. 19 and 20. Two former associate pastors, Fathers William Gordinier and William Trott, will be the homilists.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 25:14-30. (R1) Prv. 31:10-13. (R2) 1 Thes. 5:1-6.

Sunday's gospel is the parable of the talents. A talent was a large sum of money. The word does not refer to a coin, but to a weight. A talent of silver was worth 3,000 drachma. What is an equivalent monetary standard is hard to tell. It would have taken an ordinary working man in the time of our Lord ten years to accumulate one talent.

A man was going on a journey, according to the parable, apparently for a long while. He did not want his wealth to lie idle during his long absence. So he divided it among three servants, according to their abilities. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.

After a long time, he returned home and held an accounting with them. The first two had done well and had doubled the money. The third had played it safe, buried the money, and returned it with no increase. The first two were praised and promised greater things; the third was cast into the darkness outside.

The key to the parable is the unworthy servant. The whole story works up to him. Perhaps our Lord was addressing the Pharisees. They were hoarding their heritage. They wanted things to stay as they were. They abhorred change. They would tolerate no alteration, no development, no progress. They were frozen, locked into their law and traditions. That was why they could not accept Jesus. They let religious practice stand in the way between them and the God of religion.

Change is not a good in itself. Neither is stagnation. Paul Claudel once said that progress is like walking. To go ahead, one foot must be on the ground, the other in the air. If both feet are in the air, one tumbles; if both are

CONFIRMATION

Dansville — Ninth graders of St. Mary's Parish received the sacrament of confirmation last night from Auxiliary Bishop John E. McCafferty.

A service project chosen by the class during preparation for the sacrament involved 50 of the young people in a seasonal clean-up at St. Michael's Mission House at Hemlock. They helped the residents rake the grounds and prepare the house for winter. The candidates were presented to the parish at a Mass Nov. 9.

on the ground, one stands still. Religion is life and life means growth, development. Not to grow is to die. Tennyson makes Ulysses say: "How dull it is to pause, to make an end, / To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!"

What ever would have happened to medicine if doctors were not allowed to take into account any discovery made after the seventeenth century. Likewise, there would be something wrong with the Church if in three hundred years it did not gain deeper insights into the essence and meaning of religion. Also, there is something wrong with us if we too, as we grow older, do not change, grow, mature in the faith.

The parable is a challenge to us not to be afraid, to launch out into the deep, to take the prudential risk. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. It is better to try and to have failed, than not to have tried at all. What an epitaph on an Alpine climber's grave: "He died climbing!" The horizon widens as we climb the heights. To secure that widening, we must keep walking up.

The world is not made up of geniuses. For the most part, it is made up of ordinary people doing ordinary jobs. Yet these ordinary jobs must be done if the world is to go on. God does not want extraordinary people who do extra-ordinary things so much as ordinary people who do ordinary things extraordinarily well, like the virtuous wife in the first reading. I certainly hope "women's lib" will not render this picture obsolete (R1)!

A consoling insight to the parable is that both men who had used their talents got the same reward. The number of talents made no difference. The man who had doubled his five talents and the one who had doubled his two talents — both got the same reward. With God what counts is not what men have but what they are.

The world depends on people with one talent — that is to say, it depends on us.

Dryden Church Sets 'Holiday Happening'

Dryden — "Holiday Happening," a bazaar, will be held by members of the Holy Cross Church Guild this month in the parish center.

The membership has been meeting weekly for a year in preparation for the fund-raising event.

"Happening" will feature two originally designed afghans, a Bicentennial Cookbook, prepared by the guild, called "Good Eatin'" and a wide assortment of Christmas presents.

Tables and booths will be set up in the hall filled with a variety of baked goods, jams, jellies, and relishes. "Holiday Happening" will be held on Saturday, Nov. 22 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 23 from noon to five.

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