

Thoughts from the SILENCE of Notre Dame

I count among our greatest blessings in our diocese the Houses of Prayer and centers for Christian renewal that are available to all of us. In my Pastoral Letter of last November I paid special tribute to our dedicated religious who staff these facilities and who so generously provide opportunities for our spiritual growth.

I write this column from Notre Dame Retreat House on a hill overlooking the beauty of God's nature that we call Canandaigua Lake. I am enjoying grace-filled days that spiritual writers have called a desert experience. There is nothing this night that resembles a desert physically. The snows are blowing and drifting and the wind-chill factor is recorded as 45° below zero, but there is peace and quiet and a sacred oasis removed from the confusion and turbulence of a world that seeks to distract us from our inner self and the Spirit who is the Still Point and center of our being.

For 35 years the Redemptorist Fathers have provided a haven which has proven to be for so many a Heaven on Earth. This is the third location in the diocese for their apostolate which has touched the lives of countless men and women who have come here to experience the love of the Lord Jesus for them and who have returned home to share that experience with their families and friends.

I have before me a report which shows a growing interest and sensitivity among our people for the need to "come apart and rest awhile" as the Lord Jesus did to discern the will of His Father. And He urged His disciples to follow His example if they wished to know what the Father willed for them. For the sixth consecutive year the numbers of men making retreats have shown a steady increase. Last year 1,726 men and 472 women were spiritually renewed at Notre Dame on weekend retreats. And 6,164 people came here for a variety of activities — workshops, seminars, days of recollection, leadership training sessions.

Groups from other Christian denominations

have come in ever increasing numbers for spiritual renewal. And the posted schedule of monthly activities often includes groups from secular college faculties and executives of industries. They appreciate not only the value of a place conducive to serious concentration, away from the distractions of hotel or motel accommodations where they have traditionally held their meetings, but also the value of the spiritual direction offered here at Notre Dame which brings a new vision to their work.

Father Tom Schmidt, the new Rector of Notre Dame, has shared with me his dream for this year of our nation's Bicentennial and Eucharistic Congress. The dream is to reach a new high in retreatants. But he adds "The dream, of course, is not numbers for the sake of numbers, but rather that the life, the joy, and the peace of Jesus will flow even more abundantly in the church — the people of God. I sense more and more today the real hunger among people for the Lord. In a world of seemingly no values, in a world of insecurity, people are confused, depressed, pressured. But there is Jesus and His good news, His love. In the Lord we find peace; in the Lord we find strength; in the Lord we find joy; in the Lord we find security; in the Lord we find values and purpose. And we find this on a retreat."

Father Schmidt views a retreat as "a time to step aside and away from the world, to receive Jesus, to hear His message, to be renewed and strengthened, to advance out into the world so that we can be what we are, and live what we believe. Through many beautiful renewal movements in the church today, such as the Charismatic renewal, Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, the Better World Movement, Teen Seminar, many have found the love of God for them and have experienced their response of love for the Lord. This love and joy is deepened and renewed and strengthened through a retreat."

The 1975 report from Notre Dame is most encouraging. It reflects the basic hunger that is in the heart of all of us. The world offers many promises for joy and peace. All of them are deceptive. I thank God that more and more have begun to unmask this deception. There are many more who need to experience the Lord Jesus through a retreat. I refer especially to the 60 parishes in the diocese who have not par-

ticipated in the blessings of Notre Dame. 1976 will mark a sincere effort to bring the message to them.

I thank God for the grace of these days of peace and silence at Notre Dame apart from the hectic and exhausting pace of daily schedules. I had begun to sense the erosion of my spirit in response to the demands made upon me. Life had seemed to become "sound and fury signifying nothing." All the activity seemed so justified because I became lulled into believing that my busyness was devoted to the business of doing the Lord's work — His will.

I am convinced more than ever that if anyone is to meet God within his heart, he must learn to silence his heart. God has spoken through the Psalmist: "Be still, and know that I am God." Ps 46:10. He calls us into a silence of the heart where all artificiality crumbles and new spiritual powers develop as the Spirit of God lets His light of truth reveal our true selves, our sinfulness and nothingness. It allows us to stand empty before the richness of God; a beggar with nothing to commend ourselves. Silence teaches us that we must learn to listen before God reveals Himself to us. In silence I have been praying this week the words of the prophet Samuel: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" 1-Samuel 3:9.

I want to express my gratitude to all who work to provide the rich experience of Notre Dame for our people. I think especially of the religious staff who have been such gracious hosts to all of us — Fathers Tom Schmidt and Dennis Foley, Art Wyatt, and Brother Larry. I include also those who work behind the scenes in a variety of capacities — the members of the Speakers Bureau and the Parish Leaders who promote the work; Nora Sullivan, cook and housekeeper, who has been with Notre Dame from the beginning; Sophia Hall and Kathleen Vienna (secretaries); June Ingram (chief cook); Neva Mott, Noel Stenzel and Elsie Bartholoma (cooks); Theresa Stasky and Helen Hurley (housekeepers); Howard Sutter and George Hoffman and Bob Abraham (maintenance); and seven teenagers from the area who serve as waitresses. God bless all of them for the generous sharing of their gifts that makes Notre Dame such a splendid reality in the life of the Church of Rochester.

vatican news

Sexual Morality Not an Outdated Norm

We are still in the beam of light which, from the celebration of the Holy Year, concluded at Christmas last month, is projected on fleeting time. It is drawing away chronologically from

that religious and moral event, but it takes with it, not as a fading memory, but as a shaft of light that is widening in a world of shadows and confused glimmers, the new and straight path for our present and future course, to which we have given a title pregnant with meanings and programmes: the civilization of love. Yes, we would like the chronicle of these days following the Holy Year, as well as the history of the years to come, to be characterized by this powerful and animating current of evangelical love, rediscovered, rekindled by renewal and reconciliation, of which the Holy Year has given us some happy experience.

But the moral, social and political conditions in which men are now involved at different points of the world, seem to contradict our candid, optimistic presage, and to dash its hopes at once. The earth is scored by problems, agitations and conflicts which certainly do not foreshadow civilization and love, but rather sentiments and resolutions of hatred and war.

So from the spiritual point of view we must take a stand at once. Shall we renounce our desired civilization of love as innocent but foolish ingenuousness? Or shall we reaffirm it with dauntless will? Yes, we must reaffirm it with a new awareness, a new energy. It is not an

illusory irenicism that guides us; it is a conscious will of the destiny reserved for those who make social love, charity, their priority commitment. The destiny is the Christian battle, it is the clash with persistent and renescent difficulties. The love to which we refer is not a pleasant idyll; it is not an automatic cancellation of difficulties, which the very progress of mankind causes and accentuates. It is certainly not directed to a technical and congenial struggle with the development of human phenomena. It aims at peace, it aims at brotherhood; it aims, we were saying, at civilization. We can repeat the incisive words of the ancient and magnificent Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the Ephesians: "nothing is better than peace, in which every war is dissolved". Yes, but it is a question precisely of an active and courageous peace, such as is the peace animated by charity, not of a static and timid peace.

Remarks made by Pope Paul VI at a recent general audience.

If we have understood this, we can realize the nature of the civilization that we would like to arise from love, a civilization which, precisely because it originates in love for mankind and strives to let it enjoy the blessed experience, will have to aim at seeking and affirming the true and complete values of life, even though that raises incomprehension, difficulty and opposition to the wise and generous undertaking.

Would you like an example? It is provided for us by a very sad and significant episode. The episode of which the papers have spoken these days; the unseemly and sacrilegious invasion, by rowdy people, of the Cathedral of Milan, our famous Cathedral, whose highest pinnacle bears aloft the "Madonnina", the figure of the Virgin Mother of Christ, the symbol of the triumph of the holy Woman "species castitatis et forma virtutis", as St. Ambrose says (De Virginitas, II, 2). What prompted this incredible and deplorable demonstration? It has been said: because the Church is opposed to abortion, because the Church has re-emphasized the norms of her sexual morality. Unbelievable! But this is what is said.

Well, precisely with regard to the logic of the "civilization of love", we will request you to think about one of the aspects of this civilization, which our times needs so badly and generally, austerity of morals. That is, the defense and promotion of the true values of life, love and happiness. This desired austerity of morals is not an outdated moralism, it is not a so-called taboo, intolerable today, it is not an authoritarian and illegitimate repression. Read the document — the butt of certain intractable movements of public opinion — which has been published in these days by our Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the successor of the old Holy Office), and entitled, from its first words Persona Humana. You will see, emerging from it, the wise and provident love of the Church, a true mother and teacher, completely bent on the recognition of the values of life, analysed by science, history and pedagogy, defined by the Bible with divine, ineffable certainty, interpreted and confirmed by the Magisterium of the Church.

The "civilization of love" has in this document a page of human and Christian apology, which holds out good hope for its future.