

# Banners as Art

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

The next time you are at your parish church celebrating the Eucharist, take a good look around you. See how many elements contribute to the atmosphere of the celebration: the distance of the altar, the arrangement of pews, the color of windows, walls and carpet, the presence and placement of flowers. All of these elements, no matter how small, have great power to enhance or destroy the environment. Banners are another such element.

A generous view of the popularity of banners in our own time would say that it is the need of people today to express our experience of God in new and ever different ways. Thus, we have chosen a kind of disposable art that reflects the varieties of our religious experience. At the very least the emergence of banners responds to the need for creating an environment appropriate to the worship of our time.

It would be good to say from the beginning that we refer to banners as a liturgical art form. Banners ought to be a good artistic expression of the human spirit, faithful to their medium (usually fabric and related materials) and to their

function in the liturgy (to enhance the liturgical act).

Banners which are signboards for intellectual and emotional trivia, propaganda for causes, or as one writer has said, holy cards in cloth, do not fall into this category. Neither do banners that are self-contained, that are created haphazardly for any event that comes along, or that point to themselves alone, distracting the worshippers' attention rather than helping their prayer.

Banners (also tapestries, flags, fabric sculpture, weavings) ought to be, above all, mood-setters. By their color, shape, pattern, design, texture and depth, they "light the stage" for worship, adding a kind of visual music to the sense of celebration.

Because of this, they have incredible power. They can excite the participants; they can calm them. They can induce meditation by

their shape and movement; they can create an atmosphere of festivity. And just as easily, they can destroy the liturgy's wholeness.

The first function of banners is to contribute to the whole worship environment, the whole action. They accent the liturgical space so as to bring a meaning to the foreground. In this way they "speak" to us; they give new meaning to a familiar ritual, season, feast, or place in the church building. Such meaning is received in meditative listening and silence, just as any other art form is appreciated.

Banners should also draw us deeper into the mystery we celebrate. The worshipper's confrontation with a banner's color, design and texture ought also to produce much more in the world of soul and heart, a depth of reality that he or she finds triggered within by seeing the banner.

New space can be created by banners. For example, for the simple renovation of a church with a long, narrow nave which has become too large for the present congregation, remove appropriate rows of back pews and hang a semi-circle of monumental banners to create new worship space and new vestibule space. New sanctuary space could also be created in this way.

There are some words of caution about banners.

\* Banners have architectural significance, and great care, possibly professional help, must be taken with placement and proportion. Additional visual clutter or a postage stamp patch on a wall is unnecessary and undesirable.

\* Words on banners are hardly readable beyond the first few pews, unless they are of gigantic proportion. In addition, words rarely convey the meaning we have intended for the banner. For this reason, words and sayings should be used sparingly and only with the utmost care.

\* If the creators of banners have taken seriously the artistic role of this medium, they will try the banners out for a while to contemplate them, digest them, appreciate them. They need not appear on only one feast or occasion, but neither ought they to stay around for ever. New spaces should also be tried out for new effects.

\* Let simplicity be the guiding rule, for it provides a richness and universalism of meaning and expression.



## Down on the Farm

Frank Paolotto of Rochester, left, and Lee Strong of Caledonia, Becket Hall students at St. John Fisher College, spent a week of their Christmas vacation working on a farm near Vanceburg, Ky. Mark Muench of Syracuse, a junior at Fisher, also took part in the Glenmary Home Missioners' first winter service program among the needy of Appalachia. Three hundred men responded to the program announcement, but only 60 could be accommodated, the missionaries reported.

## Rush-Henrietta Clergy Urge Strike Settlement

Clergy representing 14 Rush-Henrietta area parishes have issued a statement calling for a settlement of the strike by the Union of Hospital and Health Care Workers, local #1199, against the Hurlbut Nursing Home at 1177 E. Henrietta Rd.


The group has called for both sides to work for a settlement that would be just for all. Their statement explains that "our duties frequently take us into such health care facilities as the Hurlbut Nursing Home. Some Hurlbut employees, strikers and non-strikers alike, are members of our congregations."

After speaking with both labor and management, "the statement continues, 'we have concluded that the length of the strike, the long negotiations that preceded it and have gone on fitfully since it began, and the questionable tactics of which each party alleges the other to be guilty, have unduly hardened the positions of each side. Such an impasse creates a situation where settlement comes only after one or another side has been brought to its knees — hardly an atmosphere in which justice can be served.'

"We ask each side to agree upon an expert, impartial third party to guide them in reaching a settlement." Father Roy Kiggins of Good Shepherd parish, spokesman for the group, reported last week that to his knowledge, no negotiations were taking place. While he feels that the patients in the home are receiving adequate care, he hopes that the strike can be resolved as soon as possible.

Among those signing the statement are Father Robert Miller and Sister Judith Morgan of Good Shepherd; Father Richard Hart, Guardian Angels; Father Robert Kress, St. Joseph's; and 11 clergy of Protestant and Jewish congregations in the Rush-Henrietta area.

**WORD FOR SUNDAY**



Fr. **Albert Shamon**

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mk. 1:40-45. (R1) Lv. 13:1-2, 44-46. (R2) 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1.

Leprosy in the Sacred Scriptures has always been the frightful symbol of sin. Leprosy literally eats away the health of the body, its wholeness; so sin corrodes the health of the soul, destroys its inner peace, and ultimately erupts into outward discord. No disease so separated a man from his fellowmen as leprosy did — he shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp. Likewise nothing so fractures human relationships as does sin — it too estranges, alienates man from his fellowmen.

For all practical purposes, leprosy was incurable. The leper in the Gospel, however, had one hope — in Jesus. He approached Jesus — a thing forbidden by law and which no leper would ever do in regard to a Rabbi, for he knew he would be stoned away. But this leper not only came to Jesus but he knelt down before Him, as though he sensed the presence of God here. He believed with all his heart. Jesus could cure him. The only question that seemed to trouble him was, would He? Would he bother with this mass of ulcerated flesh, this decaying, dying, diseased thing? Jesus, who had come to destroy sin, leapt at the opportunity to destroy that which best symbolized sin. He did an astounding thing: He touched the leper, and said, "I do will it. Be cured." Instantly, the dread disease departed.

Once Catherine of Siena was walking down a country road with her brother. They met a leper by the roadside begging. The sight of the leper so repulsed the lad that he skirted around him through a field. Catherine, on the contrary, not only greeted the leper, but embraced him and ministered to his needs. When she had finished, she resumed her walk until she caught up with her brother. He upbraided her for her strange action, but Catherine said nothing. As they proceeded down the road, they met

a nobleman, regally dressed, on a richly caparisoned horse. This time Catherine took flight, whereas her brother graciously saluted the nobleman.

After the two had come together again, Catherine's brother once more rebuked her for her strange actions: "Why," he said, "did you embrace a leper, so ugly, and fly away from a nobleman so attractively dressed?"

Catherine then told her brother that she could see the souls of both. The leper, she told him, was in the state of grace, and had she not known there was only one God, she would have thought that the leper too was God. But that nobleman, she went on, was in serious sin and the loathsomeness of his soul was such that she could stand neither the sight nor the stench.

Would that each of us could see sin as it really is! Then would we avoid it? I think not. For we are weak and sin-bent. But we would, I think, be more prayer-oriented and more sacrament inclined than we are. The leper saw his disease and he saw one source of hope — Jesus. He went to Him.

We too, afflicted with the leprosy of our sinfulness, also have one source of hope — Jesus. All we need do is go to Him in the sacrament of reconciliation. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble. And sin is trouble — worse than any disease.


And how do we turn to the Lord? "I confess my faults to the Lord." It is simple as all that — just go to confession. And what happens? "You fill me with the joy of salvation... and you take away the guilt of my sin."

It really is a shame today to see the decline in going to confession. No wonder there are so many neuroses and psychoses and so much sadness. If you screw off the cap from a tube of toothpaste and squeeze it, the paste glides out smoothly. But if you keep the cap on and squeeze it, the paste will break out. God knows where. So with sin: Keep it in, suppress it, and it will break out in violence, sex, drink, drugs, feverish activity, and so on. But go to confession, the normal outlet for inner guilt, and joy and happiness will be ours. "Happy is he whose fault is taken away."

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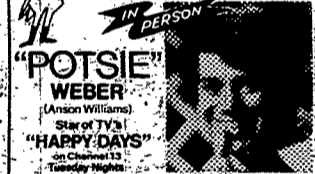
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