

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

A Saint Who Came to Rochester

You and I have known many Saints who have moved and still move among us. We are soon to be notified of the canonization of one of them who exercised his pastoral ministry in this, our area of the world. Bishop John Neumann will be our next new American saint.



The history of our first hundred years as a diocese, written by Father Robert F. McNamara, makes two references to this saintly priest who once visited Rochester:

"A native of Bohemia he had crossed the Atlantic to enter the service of the Diocese of New York. Bishop Dubois ordained him to the priesthood on June 25, 1836, and assigned him forthwith to the German farming community at Williamsville near Buffalo. He likewise told him to stop over at Rochester on a missionary visit. (We did not become a Diocese with a resident bishop until 1868.) When his canalboat, the Indiana, approached Rochester on July 4, he was welcomed by the sound of cannons saluting Independence Day. He spent from the 4th to the 11th in Rochester. Here he performed his first pastoral functions of his priestly life. On July 7 at St. Patrick's Church, he baptized the infant Caroline Koch. On Sunday, the 10th, he delivered his first sermon at two Masses. He went on to Buffalo the next day."

The second reference recalls the presence of Bishop Casey and several priests of the diocese who were attending the second session (1963) of the II Vatican Council at the beatification ceremony of the saintly priest and bishop on Oct. 13, 1963.

He was born and baptized on March 28, 1811, in Prachatz, Bohemia. He was named John Nepomucene, after the Bohemian martyr-saint who had died in defense of the seal of Confession. His family background provided fertile soil for his response to God's call. As he read the letters of missionaries in America he sensed the critical shortage of priests to meet

the needs of the thousands of immigrants who had come to our shores. God's Providence works in mysterious ways. An oversupply of priests in his native diocese led the authorities to decide that no one in his seminary class would be ordained. Rather than dash his hopes, this decision only confirmed his desire to do missionary work in America.

In May of 1836 he arrived in the New York harbor after a forty-day voyage from France. He immediately turned to Bishop Dubois of New York who accepted him as a candidate for the priesthood. Since his formal studies had been completed at home, he was ordained in June of 1836. It was to be 18 years before he would see his family again when he returned after being ordained a bishop.

After serving for four years as a missionary priest of the Diocese of New York, which covered the entire territory of our State, he sensed a quiet voice deep within him urging him to enter a religious order of men. He was attracted to the Redemptorists through personal contact with a priest of the order and through a love for the main aims of the Congregation founded by St. Alphonsus Ligouri some one hundred years earlier to give missions to the most abandoned and to help those most in need. With permission granted by Bishop Joseph Hughes, successor to Bishop Dubois, he became the first novice of the Redemptorists in the United States. He took his vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity as a Redemptorist on Jan. 16, 1842.

His talents and his tireless efforts were soon recognized by his community and by 1847 he was the Superior of the Redemptorists in America. He was instrumental in putting his Congregation in the forefront in establishing parochial schools.

He became the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia in 1852, an honor and responsibility he accepted because of the insistence of Pope Pius IX. His territory covered 35,000 square miles (about five times the size of the Diocese of Rochester) with 170,000 Catholics (about one-third of our population). His list of accomplishments is enormous, especially con-

sidering the short span of time allotted to him. He died at the age of 48 after only seven years as bishop. History records that:

1. he was the first to organize a Catholic diocesan school board in the country
2. the number of parochial schools in his diocese increased from two to a little less than one hundred
3. he founded a Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis
4. he established ninety parishes
5. he introduced the Forty Hours devotion to the U.S.A.
6. he was the first to propose Dec. 8 as a holy day of obligation

But it was, above all, the spiritual renewal of his people that remained his chief concern. His whole life was to be busy about His Father's business. And now the Church, after 90 years of investigation begun in 1886, is ready publicly and solemnly to declare that a man of heroic virtue has walked among us and is worthy of our imitation.

One hundred and forty years ago he dreamed of coming to America as a missionary. He came and worked as an ordinary priest with the ordinary problems of aching limbs, tired steps and loneliness and frustration. We priests especially need a model of the ordinary priest sustained through the pain of pilgrimage by the ordinary satisfactions of the joys experienced by the ordinary priest — who is confirmed in vocation by the shining eyes of those who sense that a Christlike person has stood in their midst to heal and console and to love.

May his special intercession as one who has found favor with God shower bountiful blessings upon our people. We rejoice especially with the Redemptorist family whose fraternity brought special graces to his life, and for all these years of our history, a unique blessing to the Church of Rochester which they have served so faithfully.

A Black Priest Reflects on the Bicentennial

By Fr. Jerome R. Robinson, OP

A year ago, Johnson Publications' Ebony magazine devoted its entire August issue to "The Bicentennial: 200 Years of Black Trials and Triumphs." The opening article, "Should Blacks Celebrate the Bicentennial?" was interesting and insightful. It presented the responses given to that question by three renowned and highly respected Black American leaders.

Each of the replies represented a distinctive segment and constituency within the larger Black Community. Of course, none of the respondents could be expected to exhaust the gamut of possible viewpoints. Nevertheless all three of their perspectives were challenging and worth serious consideration.

Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc. and pastor of the historic Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago, offered the first reply in the controversial debate. His article was titled, "A Resounding Yes." Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, headed his contribution with the title, "A Qualified Maybe." Lerone Bennett, Jr., author, noted historian-lecturer, and senior editor of Ebony, termed his contribution, "An Adamant No."

States Jackson, "There remain with us the evils and the curse of racial discrimination and

segregation. We can rejoice, we do rejoice, that our nation has put aside many of the evils of segregation and discrimination, and we believe she will subdue them, and fulfill her mission in a world of imperfect human beings."

He goes on to emphasize that Negro Americans are able to participate in America's historical celebrations because their achievements and growth have been a vital part of this nation for the past 200 years.

Jordan, however, declares that America's 200th birthday, though filled with gaudy affairs, noise and clamor, has little substance. "Bicentennial celebrations mirror to some degree the hypocrisy that was not absent from the Revolution itself, a revolution that saw slaveholders proclaiming universal equality and rights. He concludes that while slavery is gone, discrimination remains. Nonetheless, we should understand that America is a process — continually changing and in constant motion. Consequently, a constructive Black presence in the Bicentennial is necessary to insure a meaningful national experience that keeps pressing our moral claims and ideals while deepening the hopes and aspirations of the future.

On the other hand, Lerone Bennett articulates emphatic opposition to the Bicentennial. "200 years have passed and we're not free!" "We have no time," he

says, "for fun and games." He pleads for continued effort: "I speak here as an American. We—black people, white people, red people—have work to do before we can celebrate. We've got to make that America which was dreamed, which was promised, which was written down on a piece of paper, and which has never existed anywhere, except in the hearts of a handful of men and women."

Apart from reacting to the sentiments of these three men, you who read this column may at first be inclined to quip, "Why bother offering these criticisms? The major bicentennial celebrations are already behind us." True. Yet the significance of any commemoration, in its deeper existential reality, is both an abiding recollection of the original events and the meaning these experiences have subsequently, in the present time. Most bicentennial festivities may be over, but their importance canotes (hopefully) cherished memories embodying something of the character of the American heritage.

Without hesitation, I can earnestly accept the stance of each spokesman I have quoted. Indeed, their observations are both sensitive and well-founded. They accurately substantiate their points of view while simultaneously affirming a clear openness to the potentials and possibilities of all Americans in the future. They manifest an honesty and a genuine

love that uniquely undergirds their capacity as part of a people to keep striving toward integral healing and unity. Surely, our call to be Christians asks nothing less of ourselves than to do the same.

In other words, the expression of our dissatisfactions, disillusionments and disagreements, when justly due, does not mean total rejection. Nor, on the other hand, should the assertion of positive elements and accomplishments be allowed to jeopardize the honest assessment of our national shortcomings, however embarrassing.

Our desire to be persons of integrity and ceaseless charity suggests that we not only admit the

way things are, but commit ourselves to continue working for those essential improvements that strengthen the presence in this country of justice and liberation. Unmistakably, the choices about our faith, our lives, our yeses and noes, remain basically within our control through God's grace.

I would pray that our growing awareness and supportiveness of one another in mutual and common endeavors be rooted always in Gospel values and in the truths which inspired the founding of this nation.

Father Jerome is executive director of the Rochester Diocesan Office of Black Ministries.

School Group Meets on Aid

Sister Roberta Tierney, Superintendent of Diocesan Schools, Timothy Leahy, deputy superintendent, and diocesan secondary school administrators recently met to discuss the June Federal District court ruling, which rendered unconstitutional the 1974 law that guaranteed funds to private schools for the cost of rendering mandatory State services.

The purpose of the meeting was not only to express concerns as a diocesan group, regarding the ruling, but also to establish

recommendations that will be presented at the meeting this month of the State Council of Catholic Superintendents.

The diocesan group feels strongly that positive action must be taken by state Catholic administrators, as a whole. The feeling was voiced that this action must not jeopardize students, but must emphasize the importance of organizing and taking a forceful position against the continued financial discrimination against non-public school students.