

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

# Who Wants to Kiss a Frog in 1977?

People in rural areas have a wonderful way of remembering the years. Back home in Lima, New York, they still talk about 1934 as the winter that the temperature dropped to 35 degrees below zero and "all the apple trees froze so hard they cracked" and there haven't been any apple tree orchards in Livingston County since.



Every year has its own unique characteristic, something distinctive to set it apart from every other year - such as 1916. I'll never be able to forget that year. It was the year I was born.

Our bicentennial year 1976, just completed, will have its own deep personal memories for many of us, but it will be remembered especially as the year of our nation's 200th birthday celebration. Not for another one hundred years can there be a year quite like it.

Parades, exhibits, concerts, religious ceremonies, all these reached their high point on Sunday, July 4, and called us back to the ideals which brought our country into being back in 1776 and reminded us of the heroic men and women who were willing to sacrifice their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor for the sake of liberty, justice and freedom for all.

These are memories we must never lose.

But a new year rushes in upon us. What will 1977 be like? What will be its special characteristic?

I read a story recently which perhaps gives us a clue to this new year.

Wes Seeliger tells about frogs - they feel slow, low, ugly, puffy, drooped and pooped. Sometimes people get frog feelings too. You

want to be bright but you feel dull. You want to share but act selfishly. You want to be thankful but you won't say a word. You want to do something great and all you do is something petty. You really want to care but wind up saying, "What's the use?"

At one time or another each one of us finds himself on a lily pad floating down the great river of life - frightened and disgusted, but too froggish to budge.

Fairy tale? Once upon a time there was a frog. But he wasn't really a frog. He was a prince who looked and felt like a frog. A wicked witch had cast a spell on him. Only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. So there he sat, the un-kissed prince in frog form. But then one day a beautiful maiden grabbed him up, gave him her kiss and there at last he was a handsome prince as he should be. And the two, of course, lived happily ever after.

But that's just the end of the story. What does it mean?

That Christians should kiss frogs, of course!

We are called, not just in 1977 but in every year and every day, to reach out in love to the ugly, the unwanted, the rejected, the sad and lonely people in our world.

"Where there is hatred, let me sow love," said St. Francis, "may I seek not so much to be understood as to understand."

There are so many people who feel, maybe even look and act, like frogs today, low, drooped and pooped. But there lies down deep inside each one of us that image of the beautiful God, God who is love, God for whom there is nothing that is impossible.

Cardinal John Henry Newman, that great scholar and saintly gentleman of a century ago,

once wrote: "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in the chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good... if I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; if I am perplexed, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirit sick, hide my future from me. Still He knows what He is about."

St. Therese once remarked, "We don't know what the future holds but we do know who it is that holds the future."

We enter the new year, therefore, with confidence because we know that God Who is eternal is already there awaiting us, inviting us and most assuredly will be with us.

We enter the new year also with awareness that a task awaits us. There will be people we would rather ignore, bypass, perhaps even condemn. But as Christian people we must touch even the untouchables - as Jesus reached out to touch the lepers, to comfort and to heal.

We enter the new year, finally, with our memories - of blessings given us year after year, of trials overcome, victories gained, disappointments borne. And what has been, it shall be so again. The Bible tells us, "Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, the same forever." He will open our eyes to our task. He will give us the grace and strength to achieve it.

So, Happy New Year. May it bring you many blessings. May you also be a blessing to many people in 1977...and every year.

## If You Want Peace, Defend Life

Following are excerpts from Pope Paul VI's message to the world for the celebration of the Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 1977.

At the dawn of the new year 1977, we stand at your door and knock. Please open to us. We are the usual pilgrim travelling the roads of the world, without ever growing weary, without ever losing the way. We are sent to bring you the usual proclamation: We are a prophet of Peace! Yes, "Peace, Peace," we cry as we go along, as a messenger of a fixed idea, an ancient idea, but an idea ever new through the recurring necessity that demands it, like a discovery, like a duty, like a blessing! The idea of peace seems to have taken hold, as an expression that equals and perfects civilization. There is no civilization without peace. But



in reality, peace is never complete, never secure. You have seen how the achievements of progress can be the cause of conflicts.

After the last World War, on the clockface of the human mind there struck an hour of good fortune. Upon the vast ruins - widely differing, it is true, in the different countries, but universal - peace alone was seen to be victorious, at long last. And immediately there sprang up the works and institutions proper to peace, like fresh spring leaves. Many of them still persist and flourish; they are the conquests of the new world, and the world does well to be proud of them and to preserve their efficiency and development.

They are the works and institutions that mark a step up in the progress of humanity. Let us listen for a moment to a voice both

authoritative, paternal and prophetic, the voice of our revered predecessor, Pope John XXIII:

"And so, venerable brothers and dear sons and daughters, we must think of human society as being primarily a spiritual reality. Through it enlightened men can share their knowledge of the truth, can claim their rights and fulfil their duties, receive encouragement in their aspirations for moral goodness, share their enjoyment of all the wholesome pleasures of the world, strive continually to pass on to others all that is best in themselves, and make their own the spiritual riches of others.

"These are the values which exert a guiding influence on culture, economics, social institutions, political movements and forms, laws, and all the other components which go to make up the external community of people and its continual evolution."

But this healing phase of peace gives way to new challenges, whether as the aftermath of reawakening contests, only provisionally settled, or as new historical phenomena stemming from social structures in continual evolution. Peace once more begins to suffer, first in people's feelings, then in partial and localized disputes, and then in frightening programs of armament, which coldly calculate the potential for terrifying destruction - destruction greater than our capacity to imagine it. Here and there most praiseworthy attempts to ward off such conflagrations appear; and we hope these attempts will prevail.

Peace is a duty. Peace is possible. This is the message we keep repeating, a message that makes its own the ideal of civilization, echoes the aspirations of peoples, strengthens the hope of the lowly and weak, and ennobles with justice the security of the strong.

Peace and life. They are the supreme values in the civil order. They are also values that are interdependent.

Do we want peace? Then let us defend life!

How many times in the drama of human history the phrase "Peace and Life" has involved a fierce struggle of the two terms, not a fraternal embrace. Peace is sought and won through conflict, like a sad doom necessary for self defense.

The close relationship between Peace and Life seems to spring from the nature of things, but not always, not yet from the logic of people's thought and conduct.

It is not only war that kills peace. Every crime against life is a blow to peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of the people, as often happens today, with horrible and often legal ease, as in the case of the suppression of incipient life, by abortion.

The suppression of an incipient life, or one that is already born, violates above all the sacrosanct moral principle to which the concept of human existence must always have reference: Human life is sacred from the first moment of its conception and until the last instant of its natural survival in time.

What gives to life - over and above the ordered tranquility of peace - its dignity, its spiritual fullness, its moral greatness, and, we would also say, its religious finality? Will peace, true peace, perhaps be lost, if in the area of our life citizenship is granted to love, in its highest expression, which is sacrifice? And if sacrifice really forms part of a plan of redemption and of meritorious title for an existence transcending the temporal form and measure, will it not regain - on a higher and eternal level - peace, its true, hundredfold peace of eternal life?