

His Greatest Achievement Role in Education

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Meanwhile, the program of charities expanded. The Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester evolved into a multi-service organization with affiliates in Auburn and Elmira. All four hospitals within the diocese embarked on building projects: St. Mary's Rochester; St. James Mercy in Hornell; St. Joseph's in Elmira; and Mercy in Auburn. Holy Angels Home for Girls, in Rochester, was enlarged; and in 1963 St. Ann's Home for the Aged, originally located on Lake Avenue, moved into a new, modern plant on Portland Avenue.

In the ordinary discharge of his pastoral and administrative duties, James Kearney showed a sure hand. An able executive, he was ready to trust those whom he appointed to office as competent to carry on their work without his interference. In his dealings with the Catholic laity, he was from the outset a popular figure. In some respects he seemed closer to them than to his priests. But with laymen or religious or priests, he could be friendly and sociable without sharing his counsel or sacrificing for a moment his sense of episcopal dignity. Bishops consecrated more recently usually prevent those whom they meet from kissing their episcopal rings. Bishop Kearney expected them to kiss his ring—not out of pride or vanity but because it was the traditional symbol of the relationship between a Catholic and his bishop. For the same reason, the Bishop enjoyed pontifical ceremonies, and performed them with grace, although he did not hesitate at times to improvise a "liturgy of the heart." Among the ceremonies he introduced was the "Red Mass" for Rochester's lawyers (1945). Five years earlier he had inaugurated family Communion on Holy Family Sunday; and its popularity over the two subsequent decades showed his fine pastoral sense of the popularity of such devotions. He was a great champion of Mary. He dedicated the diocese to her on Aug. 22, 1948; he advocated the practice of the Rosary; and on all occasions when opportunity offered he praised and honored the Mother of God.

In keeping with his duty as religious teacher, the Bishop preached often and well. His voice was good, though a bit nasal. His material was more often literary than deeply scriptural, liturgical, or scientifically theological. What made his sermons outstanding was his ability to put across a thoughtful point in an inventive and imaginative manner that captured his audience and gave them something to take away with them. In this type of preaching he had a remarkable facility. He could take part in three or four different celebrations in the same day and deliver a completely different but equally worthwhile address on each occasion. At public events he usually "stole the show" by his skillful combination of wisdom and wit. ("Always leave them laughing" was a guiding rule.) While he was not a controversialist—his optimism and his gentlemanliness made him ill-fitted to that role—the Bishop could nonetheless speak out clearly and strongly when a rebuttal seemed in order.

One subject on which he spoke strongly in his later years as bishop of Rochester was the extremist drift of thought that followed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. He had attended the opening session, 1962; but having reached the age of 78, he was content, in the subsequent



When the St. Bernard's Seminary alumni had their reunion in 1972, a cake was baked noting Bishop Kearney's 40th anniversary as a bishop. Presenting the first piece to Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, Bishop Kearney quipped characteristically, "Our bishop takes the cake." At left is another St. Bernard's alumnus, Bishop Francis Harrison, recently named ordinary of the Syracuse diocese.

sessions, to have the diocese represented by his auxiliary, Bishop Lawrence B. Casey. As the decrees of the council were issued, he naturally accepted them. Personally, he found some of the liturgical changes a little difficult to adapt to. What distressed him more was the theological turmoil that broke out, not according to the intention of the Council Fathers, but as an unexpected byproduct. He voiced a strong reaction to these trends in his pastoral of January 1965 in which he dedicated the year to Mary, Mother of the Church. Some extreme ecumenists, he said, were asking that we soften the concept of heresy; some extreme theologians were advocating a softening of the concept of sin; some liturgical extremists were minimizing devotion to Mary and the Saints. "The opening of the windows," as Pope John expressed it, has had," he said, "some weird results." The pastoral was commended by Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, papal Secretary of State, and by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Vatican's Holy Office. Friendly critics in the Rochester Diocese were a little surprised at such vehemence and sarcasm from a man who usually dealt with public problems firmly but more positively. However, when he quoted Hamlet's complaint, "The time is out of joint, O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right," they sensed the deep anguish of a Master in Israel who saw his duty to speak out as their official teacher but did not quite know how else to address the problem.

When he was 68, Rochester's fifth bishop had asked the Holy See for an auxiliary bishop. Pope Pius XII chose the rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Lawrence B. Casey. Consecrated and named vicar general in 1953, Bishop Casey took over many of the administrative duties of the diocese. The appointment was well timed, for in 1956, Bishop Kearney had to undergo a serious operation and a long convalescence. Fortunately, he made a good recovery. On Oct. 27, 1957, the eve of his silver jubilee of consecration and of the 20th anniversary of his coming to Rochester, 12,000 Catholics from all over the Rochester Diocese gathered to do him honor at a special reception in Rochester's War Memorial hall.

Nine years later, however, things had changed. The Bishop was now in his 81st year. On March 9, 1966, Pope Paul VI took his loyal auxiliary, Bishop Casey, from his side, to become the new bishop of Paterson. That same year the pope issued a decree requiring that all heads of dioceses submit their resignations after they reached their 75th bir-

thday. Not because he so desired but out of faithful obedience to the Holy See, James E. Kearney sent the required letter to the Holy Father. Pope Paul accepted the bishop's abdication, and appointed as his successor Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. In keeping with tradition, the pope transferred Bishop Kearney to a titular see—that of Tabaicara in Africa. He was allowed the option, however, of styling himself simply as the "Former Bishop of Rochester"—an option which he found more acceptable. The "Former Bishop" was permitted to continue in residence at the official Bishop's House, 947 East Ave. Bishop Sheen preferred to occupy an apartment at the diocesan building, 50 Chestnut St.

Still in good health on his retirement, Bishop Kearney did not remain idle. He agreed with the poet Tennyson, "How dull it is to pause, to make an end; To rust unburnished, not to shine in use." For three or four years he was able to go about as he chose on ceremonial visits: confirming; presiding at the Seton Ball, at graduations and alumni banquets; leading the radio Family Rosary for Peace on feasts of Mary; attending dedications and funerals; and so forth. He took a daily drive to some specific destination Nazareth College was a favorite goal. The sisters and the students enjoyed his visits and his solos. Occasionally he would dine out, at the residence of the chaplain of St. Mary's Hospital or some other priest, or with one of a few lay friends. Even when failing eyesight and strength made it necessary for him to move to St. Ann's Home on March 28, 1975, he continued to preach at the Home and go out calling a bit.

It must have disturbed him in these later years to see the Church still beset with problems of loss and readjustment. Some of the schools he had dedicated or specially favored were obliged to close; some of the priests he had ordained and the sisters he had veiled had returned to secular occupations; some of the religious orders he had welcomed to the diocese had departed; the pontifical and devotional celebrations that he had presided over so gracefully had been largely discarded. He continued to live through the whole Rochester episcopate of Bishop Sheen and several years of the episcopate of Bishop Joseph Hogan. Did he agree with the solutions they offered to current questions?



Bishop Kearney, of course, presided at many graduations. Here he is with Father Charles J. Lavery, CSB, president of St. John Fisher College.

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