PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Parish is Called to Servanthood

Jesus Christ, with his beautiful unity of humanness and divinity that we celebrate, could also be blunt, plain spoken, loving and honest.

His words have a clarity and a keenness to them which can touch our hearts and at the same time make us wince. Most of the time He spoke in the Scriptures, the Lord spoke to big groups of people. In reading the New testament we tend to take the words as addressed to us personally as individuals. As a general suggestion to parish staffs, and parish councils, it is useful to hear Jesus' words today as addressed to groups, that is leadership groups in the Church. It is quite a shared experience because Christ used strong language.

Let me give an example. In the Diocese of Rochester we are blessed with many parishes that strive for excellence. They search for programs and approaches which will make the People of God in the parish outstanding in the Diocese. Listen to what Jesus said when the question of pre-eminence came up among his followers:

> "Among you, whoever wants to be great, must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to surrender his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)

Christ makes it clear that the parish is not there to be served, but rather it is called to serve, to be the humble servant of all. Believe me, that is a profound truth and one that is hard to grasp. We say glibly that the Church is not the kingdom, but it still seems somehow wrong to say that the parish is not there to be served but rather is called to be servant. When one "helps out" in a parish, the reason that there is merit and goodness in this action is because one is helping the parish in its role as servant of the world. We have to return to this truth often because there can be a danger that the parish itself, its buildings, its beautification, its glory can become "the be all and end all" of our work — in short an idol.

Lovingly, Christ calls the worshipping community in our parish churches to love the world as He loves this world. I believe that the vitality of a parish flows mysteriously from its service to humble people in trouble, people who feel themselves shunned and alone, outcasts, those without merit in the eyes of the world. Although I believe this fact, it is impossible for me to trace out the way in which this generates life in a parish. Just as the individual Christian is called upon to become self-sacrificing in love if he or she wishes to be holy, so must the parish be self-sacrificing in love if they wish to be a holy people.

The parish that wants to be great in the eyes of God must be the servant of God above all, the handmaiden of the Lord. With great patience and dedicated alertness, it must seek the will of God. Mary, the Mother of the Church, is our example because of the way that she "treasured up in her heart" all the events of her life, the life of her Son, and the needs of those around her like Elizabeth or the people at the marriage feast of Cana. Her wisdom in action flowed directly from her prayer life. The parish is called to a wisdom in its service that is hidden in God and its service of all people will be fruitless unless it is born of a profound love of God, a closeness that is born of prayer. This is the unique character of the servanthood of the Church in society. The parish aids in the building of God's kingdom because its actions are forged in the Spirit of God. The parishioners on the Human Development Committee or in the Legion of Mary may be liberal or conservative in the eyes of the world, but it is before the Scriptures and in prayer that actions must be chosen. Prayer is the beginning of our servanthood.

The leadership of the parish has to create a climate where people in trouble know they will find understanding. Jesus was intensely holy and yet prostitutes, sinners and outcasts all felt at home in his company. What an atmosphere of welcome the parish is challenged to create. The suffering should feel free to ask for help because of the great respect and reverence the parish must have toward all people, especially the humble and the sinner. The climate in a parish will ultimately be a gift from God, but leaders of the parish can begin to take steps to purify their own hearts.

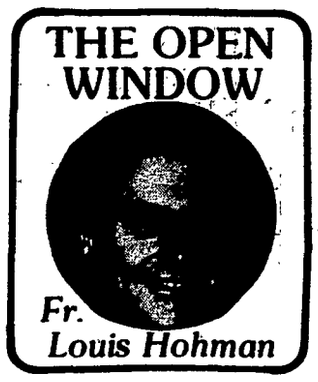
The climate of understanding cannot be simply verbal. St. James tells us in his letter that we cannot simply say (or pray) "Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat." We should know well the ways that society has established to help those in need. Likewise, the parish itself should set up regular methods of helping people that are not provided for by society. Often the parish will feel like the widow with only a mite to give, but that mite should be offered generously, willingly, and with faith. Our caring should be sustained and consistent, always warmly personal. Further, just as Jesus had the gift of spotting people in trouble and going out of his way to help, the parish should strive for the same gift. This active and real "face to face" helping is a needed building block which helps to put a firm base of reality beneath some of the more sophisticated ways of giving assistance to the needy.

Often, person to person ways of helping are more characteristic of the mandate to "love our neighbor as ourselves." Entering into public debate on a current political topic seems almost wrong to some people since it seems to breach the separation of Church and State. Some would say that this separation implies that the State should leave the Church alone and the Church should leave the State alone. Isn't that the fair way of doing it? Public opinion is formed by those who participate in public debates. I have long felt that one of the sources of American strength is the participation of deeply moral and religious people in the public debate of our country. Christ was not silent about the suffering of elderly parents, the manner in which business was conducted at the temple, or the hatred that had existed between the Jewish people and the Samaritans.

With great reflection on the many facets of public debate, and reflecting those values that Christ has revealed to us, we are called to speak when speaking out is appropriate. We cannot be pretentious in the way that we participate. Of course, our opinions are fallible. But a community that is in love with the world, that longs to see a world where there is peace, love and reverence for all must speak up.

In this column today I have attempted to hint at some of the questions that parishes who struggle to fulfill their role as servant find themselves addressing. The role of servant is not easy at all. The temptation to apathy is everywhere. Remember, the word 'apathy' comes from the word pathos or suffering. Just as an atheist is one who does **not** believe in God, so an apathetic person is one who does not believe in suffering. Certainly suffering for the sake of others is not currently in vogue. We must continually remember that it is the way of love, the way of the cross that Christ calls us to. The servant parish is no greater than its Master.

THE OPEN WINDOW



Fr. Louis Hohman

Dear Father Hohman,

First, I want to say that I have seen you celebrate Mass on Channel 10 on different occasions. It is done beautifully and you always have an inspiring homily which I know the shutins much enjoy.

Secondly, Father, I must disagree with you in your criticism of Father Cuddy's article on intercommunion. I feel he is right. I am aware that there are exceptions, following certain guidelines.

"The Teaching of Christ" — the Catholic Catechism for Adults — states on P. 430: "Fully participating in the sacrificial banquet is itself an act of faith; through it Christians confirm and strengthen the belief that unites them to God and to one another."

Then on P. 431 it states, "It is because of this signification that non-Catholics may receive Communion in the Catholic Church only under exceptional circumstances. The local Catholic bishop is to pass judgment in each case."

I feel that Father Cuddy fills a real need by his articles in the Catholic Courier. He helps confused Catholics who need to read his columns in order to stabilize their thinking. I know many people, not only in my parish, but throughout the diocese who value his ideas very highly.

With blessings for the New Year!

Signed, A.B.

Dear A.B.,

Sometimes it is so very difficult to get one's real point across in a short article in the paper. The fact is that I have no quarrel with Father Cuddy about the extraordinary nature of the reception of Holy Communion by those who are of other Christian denominations. There are certain very definite conditions which must be met and I am not quarreling with those conditions.

The only thing I was quarreling with was the fact that Father Cuddy was making judgments about people whom presumedly he did not even know since he merely heard about these "Mod Priests" who were doing this. I was rejecting the idea that he would know or be able to decide from a distance whether the "others" did truly believe, whether they did truly desire the sacrament, and whether they met the other conditions. It was therefore not the concept but rather the judgmental approach which came under my criticism. I hope this is clear since very often my disagreements with Father Cuddy are far less on a doctrinal basis then they are on an interpretation of how the Church is meeting the problems of the 20th century in the area of pastoral practice. I sympathize fully with the fact that Father Cuddy and people like yourself enjoyed the old approach to pastoral practices much more than you do the new, but that does not necessarily say we differ in any important doctrinal matter.

Kearney Kin Sends Thanks

The family of Bishop Kearney wish to express enduring gratitude to Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, Bishops Hickey and McCafferty and all the people of Rochester and the diocese, of all creeds, for their loving farewell to him. He said in the Rochester War Memorial in 1957 "I came to you with my hopes and my dreams and you made them all come true!" We, his family knew all along how much he loved you all; it made us proud and pleased to see that your love for him followed him, after retirement, right on to the gate of Eternal Life, and we thank you all. — Donald L. Kearney.

IFCA MASS

The International Federation of Catholic Alumnae will observe its monthly memorial on Saturday, Feb. 1 at 12:05 p.m., in Corpus Christi Church. The Mass will be said for May Buckley and other recently deceased members of the organization. The public is invited to the rites.

OPPORTUNITIES IN MINISTRY
PASTORAL ASSISTANTS
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Applications and further information may be obtained by contacting the office of:

BISHOP HICKEY
1150 BUFFALO ROAD
ROCHESTER, N.Y. 14624
328-3210

Applications must be returned to Bishop Hickey's office by:

FEBRUARY 16, 1977