

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Search for Common Values

The election process for the Diocesan Pastoral Council members has begun, giving rise to the following thoughts.

"We fled Him down the nights and down the days,

We fled Him through the arches of the years,

We fled Him through the labyrinthine ways of

our mind,

And still He followed after."

Before you rush to your bookshelf to see if it is "I" and not "we" who flee, stop. You are right. It is "I." Still, the Church seeking God's ways, or

avoiding Him, is a "we."

To miss this point is to

remain caught in the

isolation to which many

Catholic people are

vulnerable, especially

those who strive to lead.



We can look today for a hint at the meaning of leadership by noting one of the purposes for which Diocesan Pastoral Council

was formed: "to search for common values and to recommend priorities." It is nothing less than a central purpose of all our councils today, whether parish, regional or diocesan.

Let me say what the search is not. It is anything but the directionless rambling illustrated in the Sufi parable — "Why ask me?"

"Masrudin was riding along one day when his donkey took fright at something in its path and started to bolt. As he sped past them at an unaccustomed pace, some countrymen called out:

'Where are you going, O Masrudin, so fast?'

'Don't ask me,' shouted the Mulla, 'ask my donkey.'"

Nor is the search the distant and detailed analysis of the observer, so far removed from the maddening crowd that he hears no voices at all.

It is not the house divided against itself by resentments, bitter accusation and caustic labels, which generate so much heat and so little light.

Rather, it seems very close to what Henri Neuwen describes in a recent article as "compassionate participation." He writes — "That is the vital source of all authority. This is hard to learn since our defenses against this type of leadership are so great. We are terribly afraid of losing face by showing our vulnerability. We are constantly preoccupied with staying in control when confronted with confusion and chaos, and we are always tempted to keep a safe distance from those who ask for directions.

"But when compassion no longer is the source of our leadership, we become authoritarian instead of authoritative, manipulative instead of guiding, oppressive instead of liberating."

Neuwen goes on to point out: "The secret of spiritual leadership is hidden in the astounding words which Jesus spoke to Peter, immediately after he had called him to be the shepherd of His flock: 'When you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you are old you stretch out your hands and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go.' (Jn 21:18)."

The journey of the Church today must not be a flight from the Hound of Heaven. It cannot afford to maintain academic distance from the voices of those who suffer. Nor can we afford to destroy ourselves with accusations against one another as we struggle along the way to serve the Lord who leads us.

We are plunged together into the Paschal Mystery. We know now many more joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties than we have known in a long time. Let our mission together be one of compassionate participation, and may the Diocesan Pastoral Council, as it approaches another election time, be blessed again with leaders who teach us the meaning of our common search for Gospel values in today's world.

Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled

The following is from the text of Pope Paul's general audience given on Jan. 26.

The short but moving meeting with such a numerous, varied and representative assembly of visitors, as the one we have before us at this weekly audience, fills our heart with feelings that we

never succeed in expressing adequately. On the one hand they are many, various and strong, so they hinder rather than facilitate our talk, which wishes to be short and simple and bracing for you all, and on the other hand we would like to say something important, worthy of being remembered by you all.



We open our heart to the exhortation repeated several times by Jesus, our Master and our Savior: "Let not your heart be troubled." These words often return to Christ's lips. Beautiful reassuring words, which we will do well to keep in our

hearts, and have recourse to them confidently; but words that warn us at the same time of the far from happy and tranquil conditions in which we find ourselves. If the Lord urges us not to fear, it is a sign that we are in danger; and if we consider above all his comforting exhortation, we are not misrepresenting his words when we realize at the same time that we are in an unpropitious and difficult condition. It is so: we are not humanly speaking in a period of normality, tranquility and ease, that is to say, we Christians.

We must open our eyes. We live in difficult times. That Jesus who instills courage in us and wishes us to trust in his assistance and his divine art of turning our spiritual and superior advantage to all things, even those which we perceive as contrary to us and painful, when, through the voice of the Apostle Paul, we know that "in everything God works for good with those who love him," is the same Jesus the Master who warns us repeatedly to be vigilant; who wishes us to be attentive to the signs of the times, who announces to us in advance the unhappiness that is, so to speak, innate in the Christian profession, and who again by means of the Apostle himself, exhorts us to life defended

by the armor of God in order to be able to resist evil.

The Christian life is a struggle. The condition of those who have chosen Christ as their model, their guide, their redeemer, cannot be fearful, or comfortable or uncertain.

Well, if it is so, our vocation today is fortitude. The times are difficult. We must be prepared to live them in a personal and generous spirit of testimony of faith, moral energy, preference (above any calculation of selfishness, fear, cowardice, opportunism) to our personality as real men, made "supermen" by our baptism, as loyal and sincere temporal citizens, who are aware of the simultaneous citizenship of which they belong to that City of God which we now call the Church, our "participation in the spirit": one, holy, catholic and apostolic. We must live them as Christians who do not need to borrow philosophical and social concepts opposed to the religious concept which we know is true and inexhaustibly fruitful in the spirit of sacrifice and love, the really inspiring and fundamental principles of history and progress. Take heart, therefore, Sons and brothers, gathered at this fatherly conversation; take heart! With our apostolic blessing.

Catholic Schools Week Exhibit

Photo by Ben Susso

The Catholic Schools' Week exhibit at Midtown Plaza attracted interested passers-by all last week, including these fifth-graders from St. John the Evangelist School on Humboldt Street. Sister Virginia Mahoney and her class were there to view a volcano display produced by Miss Antelli's third-graders. The large panels, filled with photographs, reports, and drawings, were on display all week. Various schools sent students to display their artistic talents, gymnastic abilities, and musicianship, to name just a few of the events that took place. Looking over the exhibits are: Michael Truglio, Mark Lodato, Tagg Mangus, Kevin Lamark, Gina Lipa and Michele Kielkiewicz.

