

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

A New Springtime in the Church

We have been talking about how the new perception of the Church as put forth in the Constitution on the Church in Vatican II is being implemented. One of the things the document stressed is that the Church is collegial (a community of communities) as opposed to being monarchical.



The Council proposed that conferences of bishops be set up in every nation for the purpose of determining the needs of that particular nation and acting to meet those needs. Although there are many who would say that the Conference of American Bishops is dragging its heels, a realistic overview of its work since the 60's indicates it has come a long way.

Africa are giving us an example of vital collegiality in their stand against apartheid in South Africa and in the letter of the Ugandan bishops to Idi Amin on behalf of freedom and justice in their own country. And all the while they are giving the lie to the idea that the Church's domain is the sanctuary and the sanctuary alone.

message which Christianity brings to the secular world is this — humanity is possible. Humanity is possible in Jesus Christ; but if it were not for the fact of God's promises, we would not even be aware of this potentiality.

The "Call to Action" Conference in Detroit had many critics and no doubt had many faults. But one thing is to its everlasting credit, and that is that it brought to the light of day so many vital social issues — issues involving basic liberties and justice — which cannot be ignored.

A corollary of this in the process of renewal is the gradual changeover from the idea that there is a spiritual elite (the professional religious — priests, brothers and nuns) and the "common people," who somehow or other hover around the borderlines of minimal morality and never are required to aspire to anything better.

We are seeing a profound emergence of recognition that the call to holiness is for all people. We see this in one instance in the charismatic movement, very dramatically. Not everyone can find renewal in it but many others can and it is a very beautiful thing to behold.

One of the most exciting areas of seeking for personal spiritual renewal is the study and prayerful reading of the Bible. I find people everywhere thirsting for a greater knowledge of the Bible, willing to attend study sessions week after week — all for one purpose, to get into closer touch with God's own word.

Another sign of hope in spiritual renewal is the widespread participation in sacramental preparation programs on the part of parents all over the diocese. Met at first with some degree of reluctance by parents bogged down in numerous community activities, these programs have now become not only a starting point for renewal but a positively exciting addition to their lives.

vatican news

Vocations: Someone's Knocking at the Door

In the spirit of Christian joy we are celebrating the 14th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. We are celebrating it in the serene certainty that the Risen Christ is the Living One, the Teacher, the Shepherd, the Friend, who is with us always (cf. Mt. 28:20), speaking to us and calling us: "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in" (Rev 3:20).



It is like the morning that the Risen Lord appeared on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias, spoke as a friend with his disciples, and again called Peter to follow him. The evocative Gospel for the Third Sunday of Easter provides the theme for this affectionate and earnest message to noble and generous souls, a message of faith, love and self-sacrifice.

One point in particular at once strikes us in this Gospel. After the miraculous catch of fish, "the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.'" And as soon as Peter hears the words "It is the Lord", he jumps into the water to go to him. With the light of faith John recognizes the Risen Lord: with the strength of faith Peter rushes forward to meet him. The Lord rewards that simple generous faith with the loving invitation to the Apostles: "Come and have breakfast: (Jn 21:12). Note how kindly he offers them his friendship. This invitation is a loving expression of his offer. We tell you in the council's words: "Faith throws a new light on everything and manifests God's design for man's total vocation" (Gaudium et Spes, 11). Yes every true vocation springs from faith, lives by faith, and perseveres with faith. This faith is felt and lived each day, with simplicity and generosity of spirit, in trusting friendship with the Lord. Nobody follows a stranger; nobody offers his life for one whom he does not know. If there is a crisis of vocations, is there not perhaps first of all a crisis of faith? What a sacred duty pastors, parents and Christian teachers have to guide modern youth to the deep knowledge of Christ, to faith in him, and to friendship with him!

Then the Lord asks from Peter a repeated profession of love: "Do you love me?" "Do you love me more than these others do?" You know how he replied: "Yes, Lord you know I love you". Every vocation is an act of love, of twofold love: the love of the Lord who calls and the love of the one who responds. Very great is the love that God gives in the case of a vocation to special consecration to serving him and his Church: a vocation to the priesthood, the diaconate, the religious life, the ideals of the secular

institutes, or to dedication to the missions. There should therefore be a specially great capacity of loving on the part of those who receive this privileged and demanding call. You who aspire to the priesthood will one day hear the ordaining bishop exhort you: "Do your part in the work of Christ the Priest with the unfailing gladness of genuine charity." You who aspire to the profession of the evangelical counsels know that you must "leave all things for love of Christ." You who aspire to the life of a missionary know to what extent you must commit yourselves: in unaffected love you must bear witness to the Lord, if need be to the shedding of your blood. Therefore, foster love within yourselves. Learn to love the Lord more, to love his Church more. To love her "just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her" (Eph 5:25). To love her in her inexpressible mystery, her visible structure, and her present-historical reality. Perhaps there is a crisis of love rather than a crisis of vocations. We urge you, pastors, parents and teachers: help good and generous young people to foster love for Christ and his Church.

The Gospel has yet another surprise in store of us. The Risen Lord is not afraid to disturb the joyful and friendly atmosphere of his Easter encounter: he foretells to Peter a future of sacrifice and martyrdom: "Somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go" (Jn 21:19). We too have no hesitation in saying to you: a vocation also means sacrifice — sacrifice from the moment you begin your serious seeking, for even this demands that you give up certain things. Sacrifice at the moment you make your decision, a decision conscious of the consequences of your vocation. Sacrifice during the long journey of the necessary preparation. And sacrifice for the rest of your lives, since the whole of your existence will be simply the consistent putting into practice of a God-given vocation that you accept and live freely and intimately. Does the crisis of vocations perhaps conceal a fear of making this sacrifice? Pastors, parents and teachers, may you also know how to guide young people and other generous souls to accept sacrifice freely and joyfully.

Let our reflection on the Gospel now take the form of prayer.

Let us pray in the words the Apostles used that the Lord may increase the faith of our Christian communities, and particularly the faith of those individuals he has chosen and will choose to call to his service.

Let us pray in the words of the Apostle Paul that "the love of Christ" (2 Cor 5:14) may stir up God's call in many fine young people and in other noble and generous souls, may move the hesitant to make a

decision, and may sustain in perseverance those who have already made their decision.

Let us pray that all may be strong and ready, like Christ in his sufferings, to do the Father's will, not their own when he wills or permits the weight of sacrifice to be united with the ennobling gift of his call. May they always find strength in the Easter joy of the Risen Christ.

As we extend to you this now customary invitation to prayer, we are very confident that the whole ecclesial community will share our apostolic concern and will take this favorable occasion to reflect earnestly and deeply on the value, the significance and the necessity of vocations in the Church and for the Church. Let none of the faithful feel that this question has nothing to do with him or her. All should examine themselves and consider the extent of their own responsibility. And praying that the Lord may answer our supplications and those of all God's people, with all our heart we impart our Apostolic Blessing.

Resurrection Mystery Pope's Easter Theme

Vatican City (RNS)—Pope Paul in an Easter address to some 200,000 Romans and pilgrims in St. Peter's Square said today's youth was "particularly disposed" to understand the message of hope inspired by Jesus' resurrection.

Spirit, and raises up in us a new heart in order to renew our life and our love.

"Great is the mystery of the resurrection at work in the world today, in expectation of another world to come."

The address culminated a grueling Holy Week celebration for the 79-year-old pontiff. He spoke in a strong voice despite a recent bout with flu and an arthritic condition.

The pontiff went on to speak of Christian values weighed in the scale of Christ's victory over sin and death and called for a "transformation of our way of thinking about life... a program that gives direction to life itself."

Speaking at noon from a balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square, the pope, dressed in white robes and holding a shepherd's crook, proclaimed the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of "a new world, a new mode of existence."

"We believe," he added, "that the young people of today are particularly disposed to understand and welcome this good wish, which is full of hope and energy."

"Today," he said, "the risen Christ is very close to each of us who are believers and who are baptized: He makes us sharers in His resurrection, gives us His

"To young people we address it with stimulating deliberateness: life is beautiful if it is new, if it is good, if it is wise, and if it is strong — in a word, if it is Christian."