

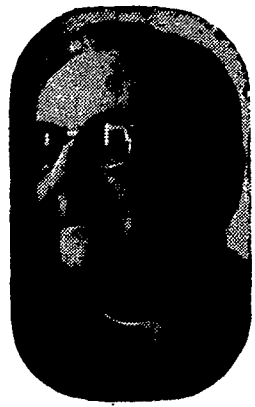
PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Mission and Ministry

(This column initiates a three part series on contemporary pastoral ministries. It is good to pause and reflect on the basic mission of the Christian people and the place of pastoral ministers in enabling the People of God to do its work in the world. In this series we will also reflect on changing forms of Church leadership and on some concerns as we look to the future.)

Any leadership or pastoral ministry exists for the sake of the more basic mission of the whole Church to the world. Pastoral ministers are internal leaders who serve the primary purpose of the Church — being the healing presence of Christ in today's world. They are people active in parish and neighborhood and diocese and region. They are priests and deacons and religious education coordinators and pastoral assistants and liturgy consultants and human development staff. They are men and women whose specific work is to help Church people to be Church.



There is a permanence to the mission of the Church in its three aspects of word, worship and service. The Church has devised different forms of ministry to carry out this threefold mission; we will talk about this variety next week. But there is a discernible pattern and stability in the three areas.

1. Word: The Church receives a teaching mission from God. We are called to help others to know Christ, to discern his call in our day, to announce Good News or Gospel. Pastoral ministers lead this learning and teaching Church through programs familiar to all. They include religious education, adult education, family religious education, sacramental

preparation, etc. Ecumenical education programs and information classes enable Christians to understand their common heritage and denominational differences. Pastoral leaders coordinate all these activities, however, so that the real and most basic teaching can and will occur. This ministry of the Word occurs in the everyday life of the People of God; lives characterized by truth and justice, gentleness and patience, a deepset peace and joy, are the best Christian teaching.

2. Worship: Jesus taught us to pray in The Lord's Prayer and at Eucharist. Pastoral ministers prepare and lead the Church in prayer. The Eucharist is the focus of the Church community and Sunday Liturgy is perhaps the first thing which comes to mind when we speak of the praying Church. This formal worship, however, gathers up many forms of prayer, liturgy and sacrament. Among these everyday and basic prayerful times are occasions of family reconciliation, national crisis, bereavement, natural disaster, personal decision-making, elections, birth, marriage, etc. Pastoral ministers work at helping Church people pray together about these times of our lives.

3. Service: When Jesus was asked whether he was the Messiah, the one we should all follow, he pointed to his work among the suffering as a sign of his identity. (Luke 7 - Matthew 11) He also announced his mission one day in the synagogue of Nazareth in these terms:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor. (Luke 4:18)

Certainly this mission is ours, too. If Jesus is what God means by human person, the Church is supposed to be what God means by human community. We are

called to demonstrate by our own community life that each person is called to help other persons to grow and develop fully. The Church community must reach out to help other communities to grow, especially those groups which have such an impact on quality of life. Institutions, such as prisons, schools, hospitals, social services and nursing homes must be transformed into places of healing.

Pastoral ministers have many styles of enabling the Church to be servant to the world. Often they support and initiate volunteer groups whose efforts are an initial step toward renewal of the helping institutions. They may train and support human development committees who act as a table for receiving and responding to community needs in the name of parish or region. They preach and teach the gospel of liberation and challenge their listeners to shed narrow mind-sets and renew their commitment to the mission Jesus shares with us as Church.

This three-fold mission then describes the call of every member of the Church. Within the Church, there are persons called to enable Church members in their mission to the world. These internal ministers help other Christians to perform more and more effectively the basic Christian work in the world: word, worship and service.

Father Eugene Kennedy, a Maryknoll priest-psychologist, writes about this new Church with an old mission. In the June 12, 1976 issue of AMERICA he describes the call to all believers as a call to servanthood. The question, he says, is not WHETHER we are called, but HOW. Christians are persons who realize the dignity of their calling and who are open and obedient to the needs of their brothers and sisters. One sign of the renewal of ministry is increasing use of the words "gift" and "need" in speaking of evolving ministries. Truly, we are one in our call, and in need of the different gifts of each, if we are to be Church in our world.

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Baptism the Key to Be a Christian

Following is the text of the Holy Father's address during the general audience on April 11.



To be Christians: what does it mean? The first meaning, in time and importance, is given by the fact that we are made worthy of bearing this name, not as a mere sociological title, but as a vital relationship with Christ. It signifies admittance to the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself taught this: to a "notable," a timid but then faithful supporter of his preaching and his Messianic influence, Nicodemus: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Baptism, this innovating sacramental sign, was announced in this way. Subsequently it was to be the first exterior act, but not without the interior expression of sentiments of faith and repentance, required of, and conferred on, the first followers of the apostolic preaching immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit, after Pentecost. At once this indispensable and characteristic rite is declared to be connected with the Lord's Passion, with his passover. The first, essential, saving relationship of our life with Christ, who died and rose again for us, is established by means of baptism: Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed!" St. Paul explains as if reaffirming the fundamental canon of the religion which takes its origin and name precisely from Jesus Christ.

This fact is of such importance in the field of our faith that we will do well to devote special thought to it, if we do not wish the Easter just celebrated to pass like another feast without lasting effect on our way of conceiving Christian life.

symbolism of the baptismal rite, the meaning of which introduces us to the theological, that is the essential, meaning of the sacrament. First: baptism is a cleansing. How is it that a new-born baby, in fact every human creature, needs to be purified to be admitted to the kingdom of God? To be called a Christian? Here comes the deep story of original sin, a sin that was such specifically in Adam, and that was handed down as a sad inheritance to the whole of mankind, not as a personal fault, but as the personal and characteristic state of every son of Adam, helpless to redeem himself on his own from the fatal consequences of the first man's sin. This is a fundamental point in the religious plan of Christianity and of the whole of humanity, from which there can be inferred both the necessity of redemption and the very great fortune granted to us by means of baptismal purification.

And the second symbolism of baptism: mystical participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord. Let us reread St. Paul: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life."

St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, who lived in the Fourth Century, explains at even greater length, an admirable pioneer of systematic ecclesiastical catechetics, which, moreover had had its masters even previously. We cannot fail to mention St. Ambrose.

This tells you how indispensable it is for a Christian conception of life to be imbued with the teaching of our faith with regard to our Easter, which is Christ sacrificed for us, and which is communicated to us by the sacrament of regeneration, which is our Baptism. Let us never forget it.

We will limit ourselves here to recalling the twofold

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