

Insights in Liturgy

The Local Church

By FATHER BENEDICT EHMANN

Now at the end of the summer doldrums and vacations, our parish Masses return to their normal attendance. It is good to feel the local church come alive again and rouse itself for action ahead. However, even at best, most parishioners have experience of only one segment of the whole parish. Because they usually attend the same Mass each Sunday, there is no solidarity between them and the people who are at the other Masses. Unless they happen to be relatives or neighborhood friends of these others, they are strangers. Never, except on the rare occasion of a jubilee or ordination, is the entire parish together to praise God as with one voice, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY.

For this reason, each Mass congregation might be called a mini-parish; and the whole parish, a confederation of these mini-parishes. It is a grave pastoral problem to find the ways and means of getting these mini-parishes into communication -- not simply that all may know what the others are doing, but much more, that all may sense their solidarity in parish worship and action.

After all, it is the whole parish, with its legitimate pastor, which is the local church. It is the whole parish which is the community of Christian faith and love, mercy and caring. It is the whole parish as a united family, which is the community of witnessing to Christ before the world.

Catholics are not some kind of stockholders in a worldwide conglomerate with headquarters in Rome. They are the Body of Christ with all its cells which gather together in the local churches around the baptismal font and the eucharistic altar, in peace and union with the Holy Father and their lawful bishop and pastor. It is here, in these local churches, where we find the "cutting edge" of the Universal Church.

It was to such local

churches of the first century A.D. that St. Paul wrote his Letters. The Corinthians, the Romans, the Philipians, the Ephesians, the Thessalonians -- these were local churches, smaller than most of today's parishes. Paul called them the Church, the Church at Rome, at Philippi, etc. Christianity is not some cloudy abstraction in outer space on which the true believer is bidden to fix his gaze. It touches down to earth and is incarnated in a myriad geographical acreages which we call parishes.

Of course, we are also Roman Catholics -- because we are linked with the Bishop of Rome, successor to St. Peter, the rock and ground of Christian unity. But at the same time, the Church for each Catholic has a "local habitation and a name", depending on the place he calls home. For us here, it is the Church of Rochester; for others, the Church of Buffalo, or Syracuse, or wherever their bishop has his cathedral. Among them Christ moves today, as among the seven Churches John the Divine saw in his vision like seven candlesticks.

Today's Churches, or dioceses, are enormously greater, most of them, than the Churches of John's Apocalypse. For their proper governance they are subdivided into "parishes". Ideally, these ought to be small enough for one pastor to gather his people into one congregation each Sunday. When a parish exceeds a manageable size, it becomes imperative to subdivide it. The larger a parish is, the less coherent it is bound to be, the less incandescent in its worship, the less impressed by the Gospel proclamation, the less involved in active witness to Christ.

For the time being, can we do anything for the improvement of the local church, to make it less cumbersome, more dexterous with the Christian energy it has?

I. Keep harping that we come to Sunday worship not simply as a duty, but as a

sign and source of oneness with God and with one another. Communion should be what it really means, a sharing with all the brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. Make one of the intercessory prayers on behalf of our fellow parishioners who are at the other Masses.

3. Even at the cost of some inconvenience, come occasionally to a different Mass from your usual one, and so assert your kinship with the people of the other congregations.

4. The Parish Council, as the spearhead of corporate Christian action, and representative of the total parish, might annually attend all the Masses on a given Sunday, to build a bridge of awareness of unity and solidarity for all the parishioners.

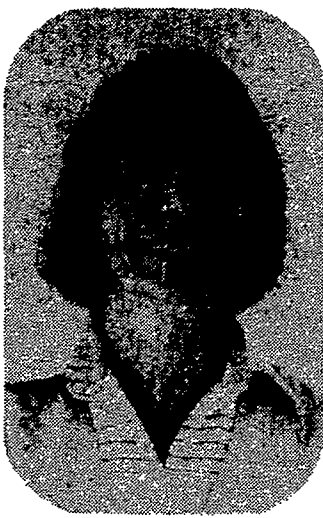
5. To bring about less fracturing of the total parish, consider the feasibility of reducing the number of Sunday Masses as far as possible without creating a congestion of people.

VOLUNTEER FORUM

Next week, by official proclamation, is Volunteer Recruitment week in Rochester and Monroe County. The Volunteer Forum will have an information booth in Midtown Plaza and will launch a new handbook detailing a wide variety of tasks that can be done for more than 200 service agencies. The Forum, set up last November as a clearinghouse, has placed more than 500 volunteers. It can be reached through the Red Cross at 275-9800.

CLOTHING

The Genesee Settlement House at 10 Dake St. is setting up a clothing room and needs donations of good used clothes as well as volunteer help. The telephone number is 288-1830.



Appointee

Dr. Sandra Rasmussen has been named chairman of Nazareth College's re-established Department of Nursing. Dr. Rasmussen will join the faculty on Sept. 1 with the rank of professor and immediately take over leadership of the new upper-division baccalaureate program for registered nurses, according to Robert A. Kidera, Nazareth president. She currently is chairman, division of nursing studies, Curry College in Milton, Mass.

Bishop Rausch To Head Farm Panel

Washington (RNS) -- Bishop James S. Rausch of Phoenix has been named chairman of the ad hoc committee on farm labor of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, succeeding Auxiliary Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly of Hartford who died June 30.

The farm labor committee, established by the bishops in 1969, has been involved in the efforts of farm workers, particularly in California, to organize and participate in collective bargaining with growers.

Bishop Rausch, 49, is former general secretary of the NCCB and the U.S. Catholic Conference and chairman of the Spanish-speaking committee of the U.S. bishops.

More Opinions

Rosaries Needed

Editor:

The Block Rosary, whereby groups of people in villages and towns of Eastern Nigeria gather together nightly and say the Rosary and Litany of Our Lady, has spread like wildfire! They say the prayers before a statue or picture of Our Lady of Fatima; it has episcopal approbation.

They need rosaries. I would be very grateful to groups who make rosaries if they would send them to me. I will forward them to Nigeria.

Apart from Nigeria, I have requests from many of our Mission Dioceses for rosaries.

Father Patrick Kinnerk, CSSP Holy Ghost Fathers of Ireland Inc. 48-49 37th Street Long Island City, N.Y. 11101

More Soap Talk

Editor:

For the past month I have been reading and hearing about the new fall program Soap. Each year I keep hoping this year's shows will be better than last year's. If Soap is any indication, we are in for even worse moral trash in prime time. According to advance stories, Soap's stars are: a homosexual teenager, a shell-shocked grandfather, a philandering husband, an unfaithful wife, an impotent husband, a pornography-loving teen, and a boy who desires to become a hit man for the Mafia. In further episodes it is purported a Jesuit priest carries on an affair with the unfaithful wife, they have a son, and

then he exorcises the mother. He also will consecrate Oreo cookies at Mass.

Soap is planning to be aired at 9:30 Tuesday nights on ABC. Locally this is Channel 13. A protest may be sent to Jerry Carr, program manager; WOKR-TV, 4225 W. Henrietta Road, Rochester, N.Y.

If, the viewers, want decent programs, we are going to have to make our viewing preferences and objections known to the program managers of our television stations.

Bernadine Moles Route 1 Shortsville, N.Y. 14548

Editor's Note: The upcoming program has been much in the news in recent months. In addition to reader Moles, the U.S. Catholic Conference has lodged protests. Writing to program managers will not be as effective as writing to sponsors of programs. Their addresses can be learned by calling the Rochester Public Library, as Courier-Journal columnist Pat Costa advised in the Aug. 24 issue. Letters to the presidents of sponsoring companies, whether complaints or plaudits, are the most effective means of influencing programming, she pointed out.

Has the Catholic Church changed Her teaching?

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October 12 7:45 p.m. Msgr. George Kelly, Ph.D. Dir. Advanced Education St. John's University

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