

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Living Christ of Advent

I often step back from this COURIER-JOURNAL column and ask myself, in the privacy of my own prayer and reflection: "What, of all the topics I might choose, should I, as Bishop, be preaching to my people through the means of this newspaper column?" This is a very serious question and I do not ask it lightly.



The words of the Vatican II DECREE ON THE BISHOPS' PASTORAL OFFICE IN THE CHURCH are constantly before me: "Bishops should dedicate themselves to their apostolic office as witnesses of CHRIST before all men . . . In exercising their duty of teaching, they should announce the gospel of CHRIST to men, a task which is eminent among the chief duties of bishops . . . They should expound the whole MYSTERY OF CHRIST to them, namely, those truths the ignorance of which is ignorance of Christ."

I realize in a very profound way that the reality of who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done and means for us, His people, is the central word that I should always preach to you.

And so, during this Advent season may Christ, Himself, help me to speak of Him to you, and may He enable us all to come to know Him more fully.

Advent is not a liturgical season which calls us to return to a time before our Christian faith, as if Christ had not yet come. Nor is it a time for going back with Jesus Christ to the womb of His mother. It is above all a time of holy remembering and realization that Jesus Christ, the Man-God, is NOW alive and active in the midst of our adult lives with all their failures, confusions, needs, struggles, mistakes, and longings. It is a time for understanding and believing more fully the extraordinary mystery of Christ with us.

We look forward to Christmas, not as the Feast of a Baby, but as the celebration of the mature Christ, the

continuing gift of God, our Father, to His people: the Christ who has already entered our lives, who is now risen and working in the heart of our human history, who journeys daily with us, and who will come again to complete the promise which God has made to us.

So let us together enter again the holy season of Advent with humble eagerness to know our Christ: hoping with a deep religious hope that we may receive the fullness of God's promise, and desiring with an ardent desire that we may be taught by the Lord.

As we kneel daily before the Lord our God during this liturgical time, He asks of us only two demanding attitudes: receptivity and teachableness. He does not ask us to come to Him with our projects, our plans, our good deeds, our tidy lists of spiritual or material goals. He asks us to drop our arms, to lift our human eyes to Him, to let go of our inadequate analysis of things, and to let Him teach us His ways, to let Him guide us, to let Him instruct our hearts.

In a word, He asks His people — of all things! — to receive Him in the person of the living Christ who is even now with us. We could spend our whole lives trying to grasp this astounding reality: that our God desires us to receive Him, to accept His gift in the person of Christ.

The season of Advent is, therefore, a time for grateful receptivity and joyous willingness to be taught. It is a time for saying: "Teach me," "Show me," "Guide me," "Instruct me in your ways," "Help me to realize who you are and what you have done for me."

The heart of what God would teach us during this time is the heart of the Christian faith itself: namely, that He has already given us Christ, that Christ is now alive and active in our behalf, that He is with us this very day — no matter where we are, how we feel, or what we are experiencing.

Oh, yes, we think we know and believe all that. But do we, really? We say words like "Christ is risen," or "Christ is with us" over and over again, week in and

week out, but do we really see and live our lives in the fullness of this central reality of our faith? Is the living, mature and risen Christ really alive and central in our consciousness, or is He simply the Baby who was born long ago, or the Man who once died for us?

Many times we have heard the prophet Jeremiah proclaim: "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah." Advent is not a time of waiting for that to happen. It is a time for realizing more fully that it has happened, that God has visited His people, that Christ has come, that He has risen to new life, that He is now with us, raising us also to that same new life.

To realize this is to experience the Advent of God. But to experience this Advent we must be teachable, receptive people and the whole Church, herself, must strive to be a teachable, receptive Church.

To be teachable means to be able and willing to learn new realities and to understand anew; to be teachable means to be open, listening, docile, obedient in the way in which Jesus, Himself, was. It means that we must lift our hearts and minds and daily lives to God. It means that we must pray, which is not so much "telling things to God" as learning before Him, learning from Him — receiving Him. Advent is a time for appreciating, perhaps as we have never done before, the wonderful mystery of the living Christ. Indeed it is a time for living to the fullest our Christian faith.

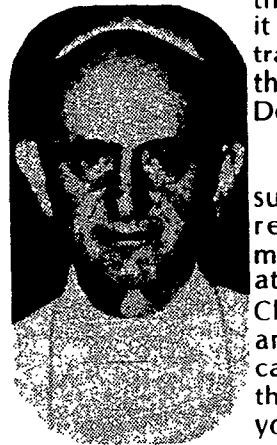
So, my dear friends, let us together take time each day in this Advent season to let the reality of our Christ dawn on us. Let us pray with and for one another that we may in these precious weeks ahead come to know more fully who Jesus Christ is and what He has already done and is now doing for us and with us.

I pray that Christ, Himself, will teach us to know Him and that He will help me to speak to you of Him so that I may in some frail but true and apostolic way "expound the whole mystery of Christ" to you as He commands me. Please pray with me in this Advent effort and desire.

Mystery of Death and Hope of Resurrection

Pope Paul VI delivered the following address at the Nov. 2 general audience.

Religion today, the day dedicated to the memory of the Faithful Departed, regards our existence in such a way as to oblige us to dedicate our short address of the weekly audience to the liturgical subject. At once we all feel almost overcome by the twofold thought that seizes upon our mind, and fills it with fear and hope to an extraordinary extent. The thought is that of death and of the Dead, our Dead.



As for the first aspect of this subject, that of death, we remember having already meditated on it, in its tragic reality, at the beginning of Lent when the Church intimated to us, as if to arouse us from a habitual carelessness: "remember, man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return."

The seriousness of the announcement referred to the present life, overhanging which is the inexorable fate of its destruction. Today, on the contrary, the message challenges the future and tries to penetrate the mystery of the beyond. This mystery assumes a tremendous, but absolutely reassuring aspect; it is the mystery of the resurrection of the dead, which is placed in the epilogue of human vicissitudes almost like a victorious challenge to the dissolution of human existence. Our faith with incomparable vigour, with authority that admits no doubt, with prophetic vision, which sees the omnipotent and recreative divine power committed in the final palingenesis, assures us of the resurrection of the dead.

Reread, oh Faithful, the famous fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, and you will feel the strength of the divine word throbbing in yourselves: " . . . Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive . . . So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (I Cor 15, passim). "Hope does not disappoint us" (Rom 5,5). And our present life, prosaic, suffering,

perishable, must be illuminated by this hyperbolic hope, the reality of which we cannot even imagine: "O death, where is thy victory?" (I Cor 15, 55).

We are intoxicated by this mirage, which does not disappoint us, of the final triumph of our life in Christ, as we bend over the tombs of our Dead. We penetrate into the darkness of the "other world"; a world of which we lack precise images, and which, therefore, we cannot represent to our present way of knowing and thinking. But we know, however, some truths, which instruct and comfort us. We know in the first place that our Dead are still alive! The human soul is immortal! Even if separated from the body, of which it was the living form, it survives. We know also that a divine presence envelops them: the judgment of God! We tremble!

But we know that the Lord is kind and merciful; he knows human infirmity; and he is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2, 4). And we know more! That some good and beneficial action of ours can be useful to our Dead, in the mysterious calculation of merits before God! It is the teaching of the Church with regard to suffrages, and extremely consoling teaching! The "communion of the Saints" can be operative even through the celestial cosmos: prayers, alms, penance, good works can be carried out by us and accredited to our Dead.

An ineffable consolation enters our grieving hearts! Let us accept, as if from beyond the grave, Dante's message: "that here great progress can be made for those in the other life" (Purg. 12, 24); and let us repeat it as if addressed to ourselves, proposing to us the charity of suffrages.

The Bishop's Public Appointments

DECEMBER

- 1—St. Bernard's Seminary Board of Trustees Meeting — 10:00 a.m.
- 1—Stewardship Program, St. Mary's School Canandaigua — 7:30 p.m.
- 2—Finance Committee Meeting — 9:00 a.m. — Pastoral Office
- 2—GEM Luncheon Meeting, Denomination Executives, Rochester Club — 12:00 Noon
- 3—Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, 10th Anniversary of Diocesan Cursillo Movement, Mercy High School — 5:00 p.m.
- 4—Confirmation, St. Michael's Church, Newark — 3:00 p.m.
- 5—Priestly Spirituality Meeting, Becket Hall — 12:00 Noon
- 5—Patronal Feast Day Celebration, McQuaid Jesuit High School 5:00 pm
- 6—Priests' Council Meeting, Becket Hall — 10:30 a.m.
- 11—Concelebration of Eucharist and Homily, Fortieth Priestly Anniversary of Reverend Monsignor Richard K. Burns, St. Thomas the Apostle Church — 12:15 p.m.
- 13—Ministerial Review Committee Meeting, St.

- Stephen's School, Geneva — 7:15 p.m.
- 15—Confirmation — St. John the Evangelist Church, Spencerport — 7:45 p.m.
- 17—Pre-Christmas Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Auburn Correctional Facility — 10:30 a.m.
- 17—Radio Message, Family Rosary Network — 7:00 p.m.
- 18—Pre-Christmas Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Monroe County Home and Community Hospital — 3:30 p.m.
- 19—Pre-Christmas celebration. Eucharist and Homily, Cedarwood Towers, 10 a.m.
- 22—Pastoral Office Staff Meeting — 10:00 a.m.
- 22—Pre-Christmas Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Pastoral Office Chapel — 12:00 Noon
- 23—Eddie Meath Show — WHEC, Channel 10 — 7:00 a.m.
- 24—Family Christmas Mass, Sacred Heart Cathedral — 5:00 p.m.
- 25—Christmas Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, St. Ann's Home — 10:00 a.m.
- 29—Concelebration of Eucharist and Homily, St. Stephen's Church, Geneva — 12:10 p.m.