

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Lent and Christian Freedom

Today the ceremony of the ashes bids us to set out on the journey of Lent. A journey is meaningful in terms of its goal. The goal of the Lenten journey is Easter. It is fitting, therefore, that, as we begin the forty-days' journey which is Lent, we reflect on its goal which is Easter. What does Easter mean for us? It is above all else a celebration of freedom: the freedom of Jesus from death and mortality and our freedom in Him to respond to God's call. It Lent then is to be a meaningful time in our lives, it must involve an ever deepening experience of the freedom whereby Christ has made us free.



There are people in the Church today who do not prize freedom enough. They are like the Grand Inquisitor whose story is told by one of the characters in Dostoevsky's great novel, the Brothers Karamazov. The setting of the story is in Seville in Spain. It tells how one day Christ came to earth. He came softly and unobserved. He moved silently in the midst of the people, radiating love and compassion. He blessed the people and their children. He healed their sick. The children spread flowers in his path and sang hosannas. It was a scene of happiness and joy.

Then all at once the Grand Inquisitor comes out of the cathedral. Just the day before he had condemned hundreds of people to death for heresy. At the sight of him the people are cowed into submission and trembling obedience. There is a sudden death-like silence. In the midst of the silence the Grand Inquisitor orders the guards to lay hold of Christ and lead him away to prison.

That night the Grand Inquisitor visits Jesus in prison. "Why have you come?" he asks. "Have you come to hinder us in doing your work? You are making a great mistake. People want religion to direct their lives and tell them what to do. But instead you offer them the empty promise of freedom. In place of the ancient rigid law, you want man's free love. You want him to decide with a free heart what is good and what is evil, having only your image before him as a guide."



Freedom for Paul is a new power given to man by the Risen Jesus — the power whereby man is enabled to say "YES" to God.

"I am here to tell you that it will not work. Men do not want freedom. With freedom they will destroy themselves. Nothing is more seductive of man than freedom of conscience. Nothing has caused him more suffering."

The feast of Easter, as we celebrate it year after year, continually reminds us that Jesus really calls us to be free men and women. He enters our lives as the

risen One to make us free. Easter tells us that the Grand Inquisitor was wrong.

No one has written so eloquently as St. Paul of the freedom which the Risen Christ has brought us. It is the recurring theme of his two great epistles, GALATIANS and ROMANS. It is to be found in one way or another in all his writings. There is a passage in the Epistle to the Colossians where Paul talks about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He says "(God) has taken us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves and in him we gain freedom" (Col. 1:13-14). Notice carefully what Paul is saying. You would expect him to say, "God has brought us out of the power of darkness and in Christ we gain LIGHT." Instead he says, "God has brought us out of the power of darkness and in Christ we gain FREEDOM." It is Paul's message that the Risen Christ enters our lives to deliver us from unfreedom and to make us free.

What is this Christian freedom which Jesus gives us? We need to answer this question with care. For oftentimes we think of freedom as the power we have to do good or evil. Paul has a very different understanding of the freedom that is Christ's gift to us. For him Christian freedom is not the power to say "NO" or "YES" to God, that is, the power to sin or not sin. In Paul's mind the power to sin is the essence of unfreedom. It is the state of man untouched by the transforming presence of Christ in his life. Sin is not so much the power to do evil as the inability to say "YES" to God. That is why sin for Paul is darkness of the human spirit. It is a state of unfreedom, wherein man cannot do what his very being cries out to do, namely, to speak his "YES" to God. Freedom for Paul is a new power given to man by the Risen Jesus — the power whereby man is enabled to say "YES" to God. Without this power which comes from the Risen Lord, man is unfree. He can commit sin, but he cannot commit himself to God.

Lent is our journey toward an ever deeper Christian freedom. It is a time when we prepare for Easter, while already experiencing in our lives the transforming power of Him who rose from the dead. It is the Risen One who walks at our side, as we journey toward our annual celebration of His freedom and ours, the celebration of the Easter mystery.

We Must Be One

Following are excerpts from Pope Paul's general audience on Jan. 18, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, and the opening of the Christian Unity Week.

We feel the obligation to invite all of you to join in considering this ever pressing question of ecumenism, that is, the recomposition of the real union, in faith and discipline, of those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is, in fact, a duty, a constitutional one, we may say, for all Christians to be united with one another, to be, according to Jesus Christ's will, "one single thing." It is a duty that the centuries of division among Christians do not weaken, but make more appreciable, while our times impose with even clearer awareness the necessity that Christians be united!



The first thing to do is to be aware of this duty! It is Christ's solemn will! We have become accustomed to a paradoxical situation, that of thinking we are real Christians, even though the divisions among those who call themselves Christians exist in fact, and are serious, multiple and deep-rooted.

If we are concerned to be true and faithful followers of Christ, we must feel uneasiness, sorrow, anxiety for the state in which his followers, his Church, still find themselves today. But the difficulties to reestablishing a real unitarian fusion of the various Christian denominations are such as to paralyze all human hope that it can be realized historically. The ruptures that have taken place have ossified, solidified and organized themselves in such a way as to characterize as Utopian all attempts to reconstruct independency on the head, which is Christ, "a body," as St. Paul writes, "joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly," so that it builds itself in charity.

The problem of the unity of Christians seems insoluble, moreover, also because of the fact that it is a

question of real unity. It is impossible to admit any unauthorized pluralistic interpretation of this sacred word "unity," which is illustrated by the example of the ineffable unity of the heavenly Father and the divine Son. The unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, admits, nay more demands, a multiplicity of functions, but always in the organic unity of one faith and one charity.

And this requirement, compared with the concrete and historical conditions of the various segments of faithful belonging to the various Christian denominations, seems to discourage all ecumenical hope; history does not turn back! Yet this cannot be so. Christ's saying: "Let them all be one!" is not only a precept for us, but it is also a prophetic promise. It was spoken by the Lord in his supreme prayer before his passion; it cannot remain unfulfilled!

And therefore two positive conclusions for our week of prayer for the unity of Christians. The first is prompted by the very subject fixed for this present week. It says to us, "You are no longer strangers." This is another saying of St. Paul which teaches us that there is already in progress a communion, a charity, which enables us to call "brothers" also those Christians who are, unfortunately, still divided from true Catholic unity. They are baptized, they believe in the Gospel; they too, we think, aspire to the unity of all Christians. That is, there already are bonds of union that we cannot ignore or underestimate, bonds that are not perfect, bonds which still show the laceration suffered by the whole organic structure of the Mystical Body, bonds which demand from the mother Church that they should be rejoined with immense patience and exemplary humility, but which are still capable of new and worthy vitality; shattered bonds of which must not be, today, a motive of inextinguishable polemics, but motives of increased love if they still favor a return to the ancestral house.

So here is the second conclusion: we must pray! Prayer for unity is, seen against the light, a confession that it is impossible for us to attain with human means alone the aim we have in mind.

can do nothing." It is the opportunity to think over the Lord's words in order to address our prayer to him all the more confidently. What can prayer not obtain? Here is the secret hope for the establishment of unity among Christians!

Courier Calendar

- Lenten Talks** — At St. Boniface, 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays, beginning Feb. 15. Guest speakers on such topics as the family, the single adult, women's place in the Church.
- St. Thomas Singles Club** — For people 18 to 35. Membership dance, 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 10. Wishing Well restaurant, \$1.
- Irish Night** — Saturday, Feb. 11, 9:30 p.m., Sacred Heart Hall, Flower City Park, sponsored by Hibernians.
- Valentine Celebration** — At Rochester Museum, Sunday, Feb. 12, 1:15 p.m. Samples from the museum's collection of 8,000 antique valentines on display in Country Store; materials provided for guests to make similar valentines.
- Bowling Party** — At Empire Lanes 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 18, with buffet sponsored by St. Philip Neri Women's Club. Tickets through 262-2240, 288-0693, 342-6549.
- Antiques** — Show and sale sponsored by Clover Montessori School Friday, Feb. 10, 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 11, 10-5; at Unitarian Church, 220 S. Winton. Meals available.
- Plants and Crafts** — Show and sale at Temple Beth David, 3200 St. Paul, 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 12, sponsored by Temple Sisterhood. Foliage plants, gardening supplies from Joseph Harris Seed Company, 30 area handcrafters, snack bar. No admission charge.
- Piano Teachers' Recital** — Local members of National Guild of Piano Teachers, rescheduled for 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 12, at Cutler Union University at North Goodman Free.
- Natural Family Planning** — Information session 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16, at St. Columba's, Caledonia. Doug and Nancy Osborn, instructors. All welcome, no fee or registration. Details 716-464-6705.
- Crime, Justice and the Community** — Talk by Dr. Harold DeWalt, Professor of Theology and Ethics and dean emeritus of Wesley Seminary, 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 13, Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 S. Fitzhugh. Sponsored by GEM Judicial Process Commission and ALCI Council of Church.
- Effective Living Seminar** — Conducted by Sister Muriel Brennan of Chicago Feb. 10-12 at the Cenacle, 693 East Ave. Open to men, women, older teens. Reservations: 716-271-8755. Coming up weekend retreat for women, Feb. 24.