

THOUGHTS FOR LENT

A Drama of Conversion

By FATHER ALFRED MCBRIDE

No one likes a phony. Unmasking a hypocrite gives everyone satisfaction. To a certain extent, everyone has a cover story that should be stripped away so that the real person may emerge and grow. In next Sunday's readings we hear how Jesus helped the Samaritan woman remove her mask and achieve the honesty that brought her salvation. There are three acts in the story:

I — In the first act Jesus attempts to put the woman at ease. She has at least two reasons to be nervous. She, a Samaritan, alone at a well in a remote place, faces a Jew whose religion she dislikes. Secondly, she is alone with a strange man. Jesus spends time alleviating her fears and creating trust. He comes

across as a friendly stranger asking for a drink of water. He offers her the first step of salvation. Think of the words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, "Whoever gives a cup of water to one of these lowly ones will not want for reward."

Jesus moved the conversation to the topic of living water. In the parched landscape of Palestine, living or running water was like gold. In a sense the soul of the woman was arid and in need of the refreshing and healing waters of Christ. He has no rope or bucket. Does he think he is better than Jacob — patron saint of her religion — who built the well by which they sat? Jesus tells her plainly he can do even better than that with water that slakes the deepest human thirst.

II — She now seemed

sufficiently relaxed. But she was missing his point. Jesus confronted her with the story of her five broken marriages. He removed her mask and disclosed the five disappointments in love behind that cool exterior. Never had she felt such embarrassment. The subject was too painful. Rather than stay on so personal a matter she switched the conversation to a matter of worship. She had been calling him Sir. Now she calls him Prophet, hoping with the compliment to put him off. Jesus defends the purity of Jewish tradition against the heretical Samaritans. He offers both peoples a new and united worship flowing from the Holy Spirit of Truth.

III — The trust has been created. The mask ripped off. The superficial laid aside. She feels accepted and senses forgiveness. "I seek a savior." Once she

had expressed her profoundest thirst Christ was there to respond. Once she died to her fears and shed her masks, she was able to welcome unconditioned love and absolute forgiveness Jesus says to her, "I AM." Divinity, full of love and hope suffuses her. She leaves her jar, not needed for the waters of salvation. The charms she once used to seduce five husbands, she puts to the work of evangelization. She moved from sin, to Prophet, to Messiah.

The apostles return and find Jesus pondering autumn wheat. The tips were white with gold and ready to harvest. They urge him to eat his lunch. But he is too full of the joy of having healed and saved the woman. And too full of sorrow for those not yet harvested. In this scene he asks them to pray for evangelists. Another time he



will tell them that the grain must die that the wheat may grow.

The scene ends with the local villagers coming to see Jesus. They ask him to preach and then say, "We

have heard for ourselves. This is really the savior of the world." We all have our masks and our fears. By the grace of this story may we lose our masks and shed our fears and drink of the living waters.

The Dimensions of Holiness

By SISTER M. JUDITH HEBERLE

St. Paul tells us: "He chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless — to live through love in his presence." In Timothy, we read, "God has saved us and has called us to a holy life."

For Christians, every new day provides us with opportunities and experiences which lead to this call of deepening our spiritual

freedom and our responsibility to grow in Christ's love of the Father.

By our reflecting and discerning and making free choices to be prayerful, to fast and to give alms, Lent can become a truly religious experience — a time of conversion, of renewal, of deepening our awareness of responding to the message of the Gospel. Our responses can lead us to experience God, who will indeed give us the light, the strength and the courage we need to fulfill our desires

growth. At various times during the Church year, we are mindful of our call to renew, to preach the "Good News" and to be holy people.

Lent in particular is one of those times. As a time for Christians to reflect on their call to holiness, a call to pray, to fast and to give alms. Lent is a time when the Church reminds its members to renew themselves in order to be holy. The Church, through its members, must be holy so

that it can witness the presence of Christ to the world.

In the past, the Church had obliged us to fast and abstain — some of us were happy to fulfill the Church's law; others of us did this with a bit of unwillingness. Today, the Church imposes very few obligations on Christians during Lent; but most certainly there are choices we must make if we wish to be holy people. In many ways we are challenged to exercise our

- to love our neighbors with deeper concern,
- to care for the suffering, the poor, the hungry, the oppressed,
- to be more compassionate and courageous,
- to live more deeply the message of the Gospel

If we strive to live as holy people during this season of Lent it will indeed be a time when we "live as children of light," coming from darkness to light. In the words of Paul, "There was a time when you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then, live as children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth."



Sister Judith is superior general of the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester.

Blow the Trumpet in Zion

By FATHER FOSTER ROGERS

"Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly. Gather the people, notify the congregation."

"Return to me with your whole heart... Rend your hearts and return to the Lord, your God."

These words of Joel proclaim the beautiful season of Lent in the second reading of Ash Wednesday.

Now is the time to return to the Lord with our hearts, with the innermost part of our being. How wonderful the Lord is to lead His Church in setting apart these 40 days of Lent that we may ponder the Lord and become fully reconciled to Him. How wonderful the Lord is to annually provide a time to lead us to full reconciliation with our neighbor. How wonderful the Lord is to give us these fleeting moments of Lent that the peace and love of Christ may dwell deeply within us as we are made whole through reconciliation with God and neighbor.

When we stop and think of it is Lent so much a time to give up this or give up that as a time radically to change our life-style and take upon ourselves the



Father Rogers is coordinator for the Northeast Region and also serves as associate pastor of the Church of the Assumption in Fairport.

complete, whole way of Christ? Now is the time to make that change, to change our hearts and see in the Lord an invitation to fullness of life, to see in our neighbor an image of the goodness of God, to see in our lives the unlimited opportunities to incarnate the presence and activity of Emmanuel, that is, of the God who is with us always.

Now is the time to get rid of anything, any desire, any thirst that is foreign to Christ, that weakens our relationship with Him and make Him our life: to make

Him our values, to make Him our truths, to make Him our ways. Now is the time to learn to truly trust the Lord, to take Him at His word, to realize that what He said and did, He said and did for our happiness, to realize that His promises will be fulfilled. Now is the time to love the Lord, to find Him in one another, to welcome Him in everyone, including our enemies.

In these 40 days there is God-given time to become personally aware that the God of love and peace, the God of truth and compassion, the God of power and light is always with you. In fact, He resides deeply within you. Speak to Him; listen to Him. Become mindful of His words, "Fear not, I am always with you."

Explore and ponder and pray over the wonders of the sacrament of reconciliation (confession). Do not hesitate to explore the wonders, the love, the forgiveness and the healing power of Emmanuel in this beautiful sacrament. Experience fully the love and power of God as He not only forgives but heals in reconciliation. Let your heart and life experience in such a powerful way the God who loves you, who always loves you no matter who you are or what you do.

Let us pray for true sorrow for our sins that we may totally be reconciled to God and neighbor with love.

Holy Spirit, teach us the beauty and wonder and life that is found only in Christ. Guide us into a more intimate union with you. Bring us all — priests, religious, married, single, baptized and confirmed — bring us all into greater unity with one another. Help us, guide us, mold us that we may truly manifest and celebrate the wonder of Your love as expressed in Your passion and death, in Your resurrection to a new life and in the pouring forth of this new life into our minds and hearts in Your coming on Pentecost.

We trust You, Lord. Teach us to trust You more. We know You, Lord. Inspire us to know You more intimately each day. We love you, Lord. Increase our love for You and our neighbor.

Blow the trumpet then in the Church of Rochester! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly in our churches. Gather your relatives and friends, notify the congregations. May we rend our hearts from our old ways and return to the Lord with our whole heart. Let us listen now to the voice of that trumpet and return.

ATTENTION!!!

PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS AND PARISH STAFF

The Diocesan Office of Pastoral Ministry wants your help in planning for the next Parish Council Congress (slated for September, 1978.)

This diocesan-wide educational event for council members and parish staffs is intended to provide a vision of ministry the parish councils face and an understanding of the personal challenge council ministry makes to you. It's an opportunity to become more aware of the special ministries your parish must carry on and some skills you need to work effectively as a group.

With this in mind, let us know how we can best meet your present needs by responding to the questions on the form provided or by calling us (716/328-3210) no later than Monday, February 27, 1978.

What topics should be addressed by major speakers? _____

What skills or areas of concern should be addressed in workshops? _____

RETURN TO: Office of Pastoral Ministry, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624 by Monday, February 27, 1978.