

THOUGHTS FOR LENT

Lent Offers Us Its Human Face

By HILDA STEBBINS

Lent presents us with a multiplicity of symbols, each in its own way expressing the richness of meaning of a very special theme. To experience this richness we have to view the many points in Lent one at a time, reflecting upon each one separately and within our own perspective that its meaning may become more personally ours.

Those who truly perceive the beauty of the human story have a definite advantage when recalling the true meaning of particularly poignant experiences. For human experience is the story that endures, the meaning of which remains and is retold with the nuances of different cultures and generations and times. Such is the reality of the human experience of Jesus in the desert, those days of fasting and praying, those days which heralded for us the soon-to-be actualized reality of His ministry!

Those days were the preparation, the prelude to the realization of a time longed for by the people of Israel. Yet, when it happened, some could not see it for what it really was. As it often happens with us, they were unable to appreciate the fullness of meaning of a "now" moment, because it was too close, too intimate a reality. We are forced to wait and interpret its meaning after we have lived that fleeting moment and it

has become part of our own life experience.

For Jesus those 40 days were the days of self giving that preceded liberation. They tested His human endurance, sharpened His perception of the mission entrusted to Him and strengthened His unconditional "yes" to serve a humanity that pained and was bound, did not know and could not see.

The ministry of Jesus was characterized by His concern for the whole person. When interested friends brought the paralytic man, Jesus forgave his sins, then cured him of his physical affliction, making him whole in mind and body.

Consciously at least, not all who were lame expected to be made whole, nor all the lepers cleansed, nor all the blind to see. Yet, in the interior of their heart there was a desire, a need Jesus would perceive and minister to.

There were those in need to be set free from ignorance and into a fuller knowledge of the truth, of themselves. Set free to know of the Father's love and theirs for one another, of forgiveness of sin, of being responsible to act in justice, to care for others regardless of their status—indeed the least of the brethren. Set free to know that the gift of life is a call to a completion the depth and breadth and height of which we can not readily comprehend, the acceptance of which is a

recognition of the mystery of ourselves.

Whether physically or otherwise, humanity was touched, never to be the same again in spite of all the difficulties accompanying our journey in faith.

Not much different than then are the human needs of today and they have multiplied. The poor of the Lord are of many kinds and we are still here. We, because we are the poor Jesus has compassion for and ministers to. At the same time, we are those Jesus has called into the responsible freedom of acting in His name. We are those who, like Him, require a time of preparation that we may be able to meet the needs around us and to continue His mission across the hallways of our time.

Jesus was reassured by the abiding presence of the Father. We too can be confident that, as He promised, Jesus remains with us. We need to believe that His words also are a reassurance: "I tell you the truth: whoever believes in me will do the works that I do—yes, he will do even greater ones." This assurance in faith allows us to remain confident and sensitive, open to the truth Jesus gave us.

By reason of God's wisdom, there is in us a capacity to activate, to energize so to speak, inner resources given to us. We have received the power to give, even to ourselves, a

measure of faith, a measure of hope, a measure of love.

If we choose the freedom of faith we choose being among those who in Jesus' name speak the words that console and heal; are present when loneliness and grief overwhelms; attempt to alleviate the many thirsts and hungers we all experience and bring a loving touch when death approaches.

Could we follow the leadership of the Lord Jesus to love and serve one another were it not for our belief in the fulfillment of His words?

These thoughts on Lent are a look upon times past, special ones, a glance at the expansiveness of the frontiers of our faith, and a step ahead into a two fold perspective. Lent seen both as a season and a disposition.

Lent as a season can be a time of quiet, of reflection, of thankfulness for the abundance we have received. It can be a time for a keener appreciation of our resources, our energies, our capacity to give.

Lent as disposition becomes a preparation, an attitude of heart and mind that creates in us a continual readiness and capacity to perceive emerging needs, to reach out and minister to them. It

is a movement in hope, a going forward.

Hilda Stebbins is a parishioner at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads, has been a member of the

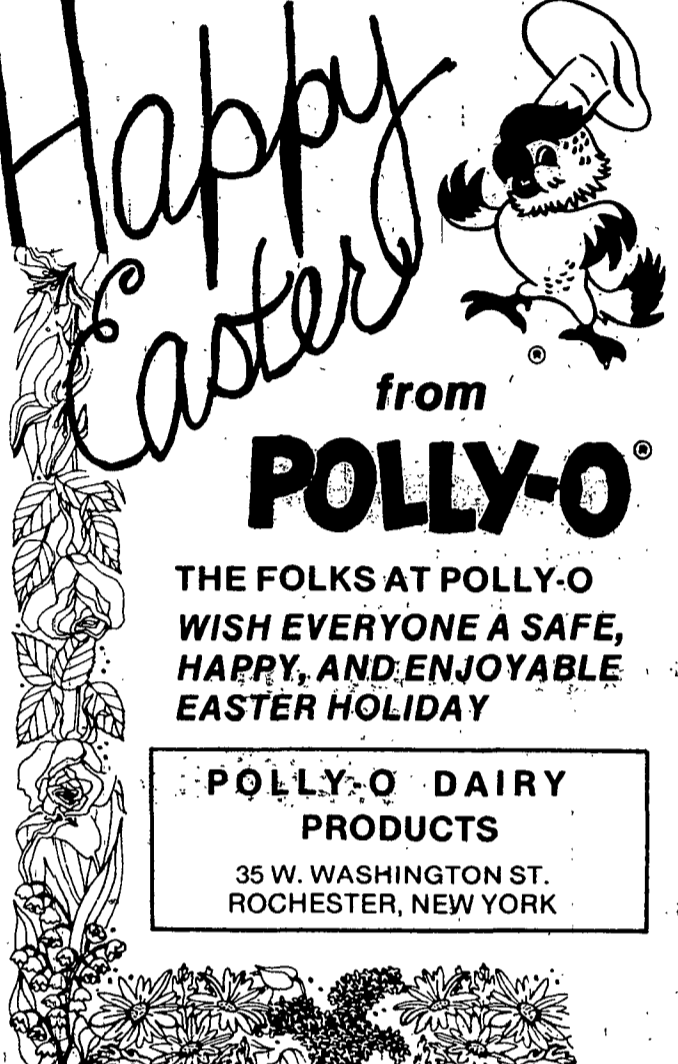
Diocesan Pastoral Council since its foundation, currently serves on that body's executive committee and is also active on her region's education committee.

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Easter in Sacrament Robes

By FATHER ALFRED MCBRIDE

Recently some have tried to explain Easter in rational and common sense terms. All they have succeeded in doing is to explain Easter away. One should approach Easter with a faith enveloped in love. It is the "beloved disciple," John, who is quick to sense the reality of the Resurrection. We deal here with the mysterious link between love and knowledge. Augustine proclaims, "Give me a lover and he will understand." The German poet Goethe insisted, "We learn to know only what we love. The depth and fullness of our knowledge are proportionate to the strength, vigor and liveliness of our love." Love is blind only to the obstacles of love. Love has the sight of a hawk when the truth is to be seen.

What are some of the things love sees at Easter? That Jesus is frequently seen in sacramental or liturgical events. The Emmaus disciples perceive Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread. So too, we see our Easter Lord at Eucharist. Similar to this is the number of times Jesus appears to the disciples when they gather for shared prayer or meals. He shows himself to those who have gathered together in his name for prayer. He discloses himself to the apostles as they gather at the lakeside for a breakfast meal.

In John's gospel we see a strong connection between the Easter appearances and the forgiveness of sins — the first intimations of the sacrament of reconciliation. On Easter night Jesus appears to the disciples. He breathes upon them the Spirit of peace and imparts to them the ministry of reconciliation. "If you forgive men's sins they are forgiven them. If you hold them bound, they are held bound." Something more than a mere physical movement is meant when Mary Magdalene "turns around" to see the Risen

Lord. Her conversion of heart — turning around — is now complete and so she perceives her Lord.

And who can forget the splendid Easter scene by the lake when Peter who has sinned by denying his Lord three times, now makes a triple confession of love and faith. Thus from John's accounts we can conclude: "Where you experience the forgiveness of sins, there you can know the Risen Jesus to be present."

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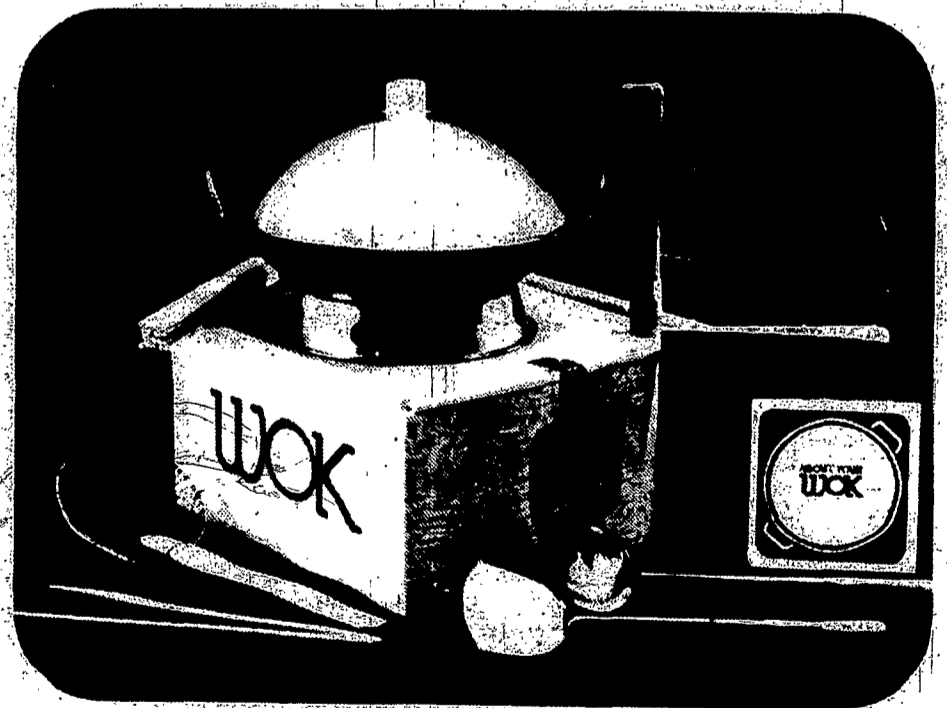
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