

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

In Memory of Our Spiritual Father

Homily preached by Bishop Hogan August 9, 1978 at the Memorial Mass for Pope Paul VI

I thank all of you from the depth of my heart for coming here this evening to pay public tribute to our beloved Pope Paul who for the past fifteen years has been our spiritual father — singleminded and pure of heart in his dedication to his responsibilities of office and to his fatherly concern for the whole human family.



I am grateful to all who have prepared the Liturgy for this Memorial Mass and to all the journalists of the area who have given such generous coverage of the life and times of Pope Paul. I am especially grateful to the management and staff of our COURIER-JOURNAL who labored all night long on Sunday to meet the printers' Monday noon deadline. The result of their labors is an excellent edition of the paper with its splendid tribute to our Holy Father.

What is the spirit of our Liturgy this evening? As every Eucharist it is a great celebration of Thanksgiving to God for His gifts to us through His faithful servant Paul. We celebrate a Liturgy of the Resurrection in accord with a directive which Pope Paul, himself, gave us on December 4, 1963. On that day he signed his approval to the Constitution on the Liturgy, the first document emanating from the Second Vatican Council. This document tells us: "The rite for the burial of the dead should evidence more clearly the paschal character of Christian death." This simply means: Let not our sorrow or pain of loss overwhelm us and consume all of our energies — for we are a people of hope. Joined to Christ in Baptism we follow Him in His Passion and death living in the sure hope that His Easter victory gives us.

Such was the pilgrimage of Paul — whose Calvary is completed, whose death released him on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Risen Lord to dazzling splendor of a full Revelation of the Gospel and the glory of Christ whose Vicar he was on earth. My faith hears his voice echoing the words of Peter from the Mount of Transfiguration: "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

Christ gave the charter for His children's progress in the Kingdom. There is abundant evidence that this was the Creed to which he had adhered steadfastly

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throughout his life. I speak of the Beatitudes just read in the Gospel.

The chroniclers of this moment of history have referred to him as a Pope of Controversy. A good leader is one who provides a climate in which tensions can be creative. Paul, I believe, did this admirably. His contribution, as one reporter mentioned, "was a product of his superior intellect applied in the delicate application of the many reforms initiated by Vatican II.

"His contribution was felt, too, in his humble and unassuming presence which made many world leaders feel comfortable.

"He was a progressive exponent of human rights as he championed the cause of the poor, the hungry and the oppressed.

"He performed the arduous and often thankless role as caretaker over a Church that was in the midst of tumultuous change. His pleas for the downtrodden and capacity for self-sacrifice won him a spiritual following that included all elements of the Church."

To those of us who travel the road of pilgrimage in faith as did our spiritual father, Pope Paul, his death meant that he had been called home by the Lord whom he had served so faithfully. He who had been Christ's vicar on earth for fifteen years had been summoned to give an account of his stewardship. We believe that the only accurate judgment on his life has already been rendered.

Meanwhile, countless voices will be rendering personal appraisals and judgments on his work. The opinions of today will surely be modified in the light of subsequent history. It will always be so. Some of his

sharpest critics may be forced to say: "Indeed a Prophet walked among us." We need distance and time to render a sober and equitable human judgment.

I saw the Holy Father as a man of deep prayer, as one who accepted most seriously his awesome responsibilities. Leadership in the Church is not an easy task. If it weighs heavily at times on me as Bishop of a diocese, what must it have been for Paul, the Bishop of Bishops and of the whole Church. As his years advanced, his worries and anxieties began to take their toll. He suffered much from divisions in the Church and from dissident voices that spoke openly their opposition. His best efforts to promote peace and justice in the world seemed to be fruitless. And his own physical condition for the last several years were a daily reminder of the Cross of Christ.

I am sure he will always be remembered for his efforts for peace. How can we ever forget the historical visit to the United Nations and his anguished cry: "War — never again!" How can we forget his many journeys of thousands of miles beyond the Vatican — visiting South America, Uganda, Australia, Asia and the Philippines and we cannot forget that the work of Vatican II initiated by John XXIII whom he loved and admired was brought to completion under his personal guidance. As Bishop McCafferty said — IT IS ONE THING TO INITIATE A REFORM — QUITE ANOTHER TO COMPLETE IT AND PUT IT INTO PRACTICE.

He presided over the final three sessions of the Council and signed all sixteen Council documents. How can we forget his ecumenical efforts reaching out to the Anglican Church, World Council of Churches, Leaders of the Orthodox religions, Jewish brethren and the non-Christian world.

Pope Paul meant much to me personally. I spoke with him on three occasions and was near him for the canonization of Bishop Neumann and Mother Seton. I have two treasured photographs taken with him just this past April 20. The occasion was the 'ad limina' visit of the Bishops of New York State. He was warm and friendly and spent almost an hour with us, greeting each of us personally. I can never forget the clasp of his hand and his penetrating eyes focused on me, as if to say: "I love you, Joseph, with a father's love." I hope I conveyed to him what was and always will be deep in my heart: "I love you, Paul, with the love of a devoted and grateful son."

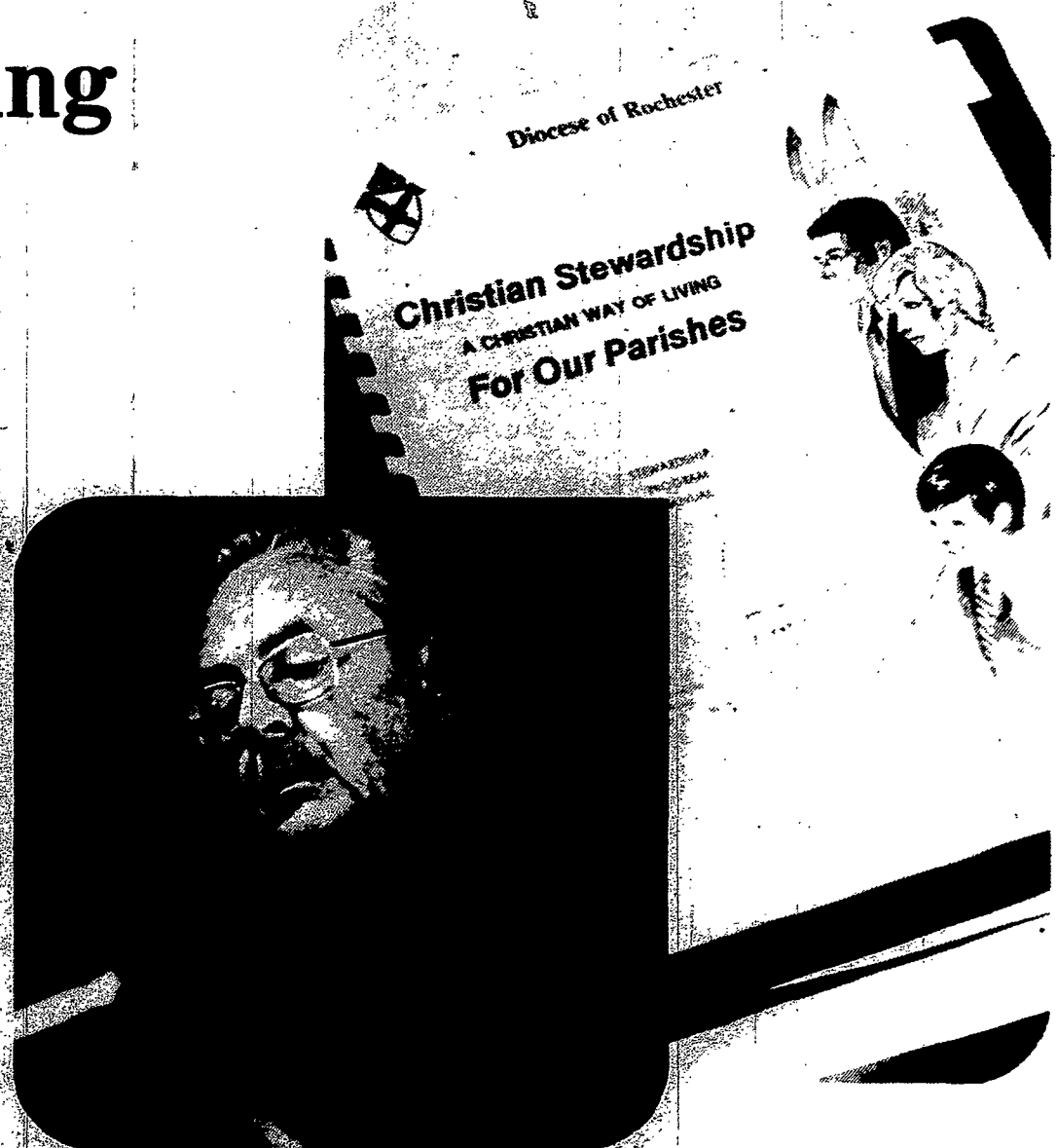
May the Lord grant eternal rest and peace to his noble soul!

Stewardship Meeting



Photos by Susan McKinney

Members of the audience, photo above, listen as Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, center photo, discusses the stewardship program. Some of the materials given out during the stewardship workshop which was held at Nazareth College's Otto Schults Center, Saturday Aug. 19, are at right.



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