

On The Right Side

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

A Letter About Retreats

To Father Heisel, Dansville,

On Oct. 9 I went to the Trappist Abbey at Piffard for retreat. Auriesville and St. Benedict's Center in Massachusetts seemed so far away. Piffard is only 30 miles from Rochester.



While settling in I recalled the days when you and our classmates, Fathers Bill Gaynor, France Hester, Jimmie Land, with Frank Kleehamer would assemble for retreat, and I would pop in one of the evenings for supper and a pious reunion.

The only retreat I had made there was nearly 20 years ago. The stone retreat house for priests was just opened. It was a freezing February, just before Lent. Father Ambrose was the Retreat Master. There was only one other priest, a Father of Mercy from Williamsville.

Retreat began Monday morning in the little chapel. Fr. Ambrose sat in the petite sanctuary, gazed at the two of us as if he were to address a multitude in an amphitheatre. He beamed benignly and began: "While the congregation

does seem small, two priests, when I address a priest I always feel I am speaking to thousands." What a humbling observation for us who are such unworthy mouth-pieces of Our Lord. Father Ambrose and I have kept in regular though infrequent correspondence over the years. He always has some useful thought, and often some little joke. In a letter in 1973 he enclosed an advertisement for the Gary, Indiana, Abp. Sheen cassette conferences, with the simple comment: "We have found these very helpful." I sent for a set, became enthusiastic about the conferences, advertised them to others, and have sold, personally, nearly 600 sets of conferences. And continue to sell them. "When I am addressing a priest I feel I am speaking to thousands."

The week before retreat I asked a pastor friend to join me. He said: "No. The retreats are for a mixture of priests and laymen. Tell the Abbot that many of us still feel badly that he closed the priests' retreat house to us." I did not meet the Abbot, and did not transmit the message; but brassy as some repute me to be, I am not about to make even a good suggestion to Trappist Abbots!

Our retreat was composed of Fathers Balagh, Lyons and Noga of Cleveland Diocese; Father John Morgan of Caledonia; Brother Fidelis, a Brother of Mercy in Buffalo, and four LaSalle

Christian Brothers — Brothers Leyden, Reese, Finnegan and Florias. Father Lyons had a heart attack at 1:30 a.m. Tuesday, and is now in Park Ridge Hospital, Rochester.

The four Christian Brothers, from 28 to 35 years of age, were an inspiration. Thoroughly unconcerned about their ego, they are deeply concerned about their vocation and their charges. They reminded me of Mother Teresa's Brothers of Charity. They work at Albany Lasalle School for boys from broken and disturbed homes. Their novitiate is in Skaneateles.

I like Auriesville for the three conferences a day. The Trappists give only one, though the monks are available for consultation. Many priests bring the Sheen or Basset tapes to supplement the minimal conferences. The great thing of Piffard is the liturgy: sext, vespers, compline, and of course, The Mass. On bread-baking days Mass is at 5 in the morning. I avoided that hour, conscious that the blood of martyrs does not flow in my veins. But on Wednesdays and Thursdays, vespers and Mass are at 4 in the afternoon, and we priests concelebrated with the Trappists.

Experiencing the sublimity of the Trappists' liturgy moved me to realize how much we have lost of the transcendence of God. In the monks' liturgy, the rhythmic chant of the psalms, the eloquent silence in the church, the deliberate beauty of the ritual, the grace of symbolic gestures, the significance of the religious

habit, the strong bond of community all work to elevate the soul to God, Our Creator.

Just before vespers one night, I met a Syracuse priest shepherding two young parishioners. They had come for the liturgy and were on the return home. The priest said: "From such as these come vocations. That's why these young men are with me." Might it not be good for you to bring a busload from Dansville to experience the holiness of the Abbey? One liturgical service there may be better than a thousand posters or ten thousand words on vocations, be they to the religious, the married or the single state.

Greetings to the Dansville people, many of whom I knew from my assignment at St. James Hospital in Hornell. And let's break bread together and soon.

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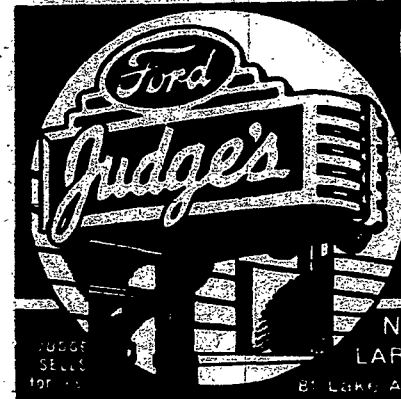
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Retreat Weekend

Scouts and leaders from Holy Cross Scout Troop 222 discuss the annual retreat weekend they spend recently at St. Bernard's Seminary. The event draws together scouts, seminarians and clergy.

Continuing Education at St. Ann's

The Continuing Education Department of SUC Brockport is conducting two programs at St. Ann's Home, one for residents and one for staff members. The residents' Thursday afternoon series will cover such topics as Psychology of Everyday

Living, Legal Rights of Older Citizens, and Current Issues Relating to the Elderly.

A series of eight Thursday evening lectures for professional employees is entitled The Social Context of

Aging. It deals with theories and myths, biological and psychological processes, current research in gerontology and strategies for assisting the aging. Both programs were designed on the basis of a survey made last spring at St. Ann's.

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