

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Pre-Christmas Reflections

What do you think of this year's Christmas stamps?

The U.S. Postal Service offers two for the Christmas season. One is a picture of a teddy bear. The other is a Botticelli Madonna and Child. The teddy bear is almost twice the size of the Jesus and Mary stamp. Can you figure the reasoning back of that? A friend of mine in St. Cecilia's Parish buys the religious stamps for the whole year. She says: "We might as well remind people of Jesus and Mary in July as well as December." Happy thought.

Do you think Advent means much to most Catholics?

No, excepting in religious houses like the Piffard Trappists, the Carmelites on Jefferson Road in Rochester, and the Dominican Sisters and the Benedictine Mt. Saviour folk, both in Elmira. I don't think most Catholics are liturgically moved. Most I know are more taken up with studying the Christmas ads to buy gifts for people who already have plenty.

Oh! Are you against gift giving?

No. They usually are symbols of affection and appreciation, though it gives me the heebie-jeebies to see those ads on TV where some woman's soul dissolves over some shimmery gift. I rarely give gifts to anyone excepting needy people. I do receive many gifts which I like to share with others whose need is greater than mine. It would seem fitting at a religious feast that there be more emphasis on spiritual things: rosary beads, medals, good books, statues, subscriptions to Catholic periodicals — and, of course, religious tapes, especially the edifying Sheen tapes.

On our recent safari to Kenya I brought along 50 cassettes of Archbishop Sheen's talks, to give to the missions. The first was to Bishop Raphael S. Ndingi Mwana 'aNzeki, Bishop of Nakuro. He was graduated from St. John Fisher College in 1969 and was made a

bishop the same year. As our safari group of 17 was leaving him, I gave him three Sheen cassettes, produced in Hackensack, N.J. In November, he wrote: "The Sheen tapes are so inspiring that the three you gave me have been borrowed and are in great demand. When I see someone going to the U.S.A. I shall ask for some more from you. I hope his Eminence (Cardinal Otunga, Archbishop of Nairobi) will give me some too."

That last reference is to my sending 200 cassettes to Cardinal Otunga "to distribute among the missions." A priest at a seminary in Kenya told me that Archbishop Sheen's books confirmed him and other seminarians in their vocations to the priesthood.

Anything special coming for Christmas on TV and radio?

I was looking up coming Christmas specials, but like the teddy bear stamp twice as large as the stamp for Jesus and Mary, the religious offerings are meager. Handel's Messiah of course will be offered over several stations. Karl Haas of radio WXXI-FM in Rochester has a Christmas special at 9 a.m. Dec. 24. He is always good. Over the same station at 10:05 a.m. Robert Dwelley, once music master at St. Bernard's Seminary, will conduct a Christmas concert performed at Kilbourn Hall. Christmas Day seems more teddy bear than Nativity in its offerings. However, the Cultural Information Service records this: "December 20: 'From a Far Country: Pope John Paul II' NBC 9-11:30 p.m." It offers a portrait of Poland over the past 35 years and gives viewers a substantive overview of the significant role Christianity has played in the strife-torn country. Director Zanussi says, "I am concerned with showing the environment and the life of the Pope's generation, the historical background of the culture to which I belong. I see a quite obvious logic in Wotyla's attitudes, and so do most Polish people." It is not a Christmas offering but anything pertaining to the Vicar of Christ is of interest to committed Catholics as well as world-observing non-Catholics.

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