



Diocese Afar

Bishop Matthew H. Clark visits with diocesan seminarians studying at the Theological College of the Catholic University of America. The bishop visited the men when he attended the national bishops' conference in Washington, D.C. The seminarians are Richard Farrell, Patrick Connor and Dennis Sewar.

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

Wear A Christian Smile

As I think back over the many turn-of-the-year columns I have written, it seems I was almost always breathing a sigh of relief. "Thank God, these events are behind us; I hope the coming year will be better."

We end 1981 with sadness and anxiety over the situation in Poland; with concern for all the people who are hurting from economic pressures in this country... and with no clear sign of relief from these pressures.

We look back on a year, which saw another president shot; we remember the shock and disbelief at hearing that an attempt had been made on the life of the pope.

From a distance, without really being able to grasp the reality, we are aware of people in Afghanistan who are fighting tanks and jet bombers with rifles. We are aware of the continuing anguish of people in Central America, an anguish which also offers no sign of resolution.

And looming above all these concerns is the mounting fear of those nuclear weapons whose threat seems to grow in a cancerous life of its own.

We think: In a world which sees the absurdity of a young man shooting the president in order to impress an actress, how can we rule out the absurdity of someone using one of those weapons?

But I can review those columns I did at the end of other years. They dwell on other experiences and worries which troubled us just as much. The frustration, hopelessness and guilt of our involvement in Vietnam. The poisonous effect of that war on our nation. The memory of cities in flames and troops in the streets as the anger of racial slums exploded.

But, somehow our life has gone on.

Children have been born. Many of those weird-looking youngsters of the 60s have become surprisingly

respectable in their middle years. We have seen and shared the ordinary joys and sorrows of many ordinary people.

I try to look back on all these years with a perspective of faith. What light does this faith cast on these experiences? Does my belief in the Father, as revealed by Jesus, make any difference in the way I look on these year-end concerns?

Two insights emerge from this faith.

First, if we really want to be followers of Jesus, we can't despair. We can't surrender to the apparent hopelessness of many of the problems which face our society. We can't lock ourselves behind the doors of our homes — or behind the doors of our churches — and hope that somehow our home and our church will survive whatever happens out there.

As Christians, we must be concerned about the needs and sufferings of our neighbors — those who live across the street, or in Poland, or in Afghanistan. We must do what we can to relieve those needs even if our help offers no hope of a complete solution.

The Lord whose human efforts ended on the cross taught his followers that they could not count on experiencing the sweet smell of success.

But he also taught that through the cross, his and ours, the final outcome is victory over everything associated with death. The victory is not ultimately dependent on our skills and strategies. It comes from the power and providence of a God who loves us as parents love their children.

In spite of all the real worries and evils in the world, the faith we proclaim does not allow us to be gloomy Christians.

We would witness far more effectively to this faith if we were constantly smiling, when there seems to be nothing to smile about.

Those who see us might think we are crazy... or they just might think we really believe what we profess.

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