

Sarah Child



All in the Family

Cancer: It Is Not Unspeakable

I did not grow up dreading cancer. In the 50s it was polio which killed our friends and crippled the rest of us with fear.

Not until later did I become aware that the people in our small town were being plagued by cancer — in epidemic proportions — or so it seemed to me. And certainly that's how it seemed to my mother who lost one friend after another in a 10-year span.

She lived in abject, if silent, fear of the disease and we spoke quietly among ourselves of her "irrational" fear, all the while harboring some of our own. When she was diagnosed as having the thing she dreaded most, it seemed like the ultimate irony.

And yet, now that cancer has touched our family, I find a rather strange thing has happened. My fear of it has diminished somewhat, if not considerably.

Part of it is the apprehension versus reality factor. Nothing, I sometimes think, is ever as bad as the anxiety that comes in the night when the rest of the

world is asleep and we are at our most vulnerable.

Secondly, we learned a little about cancer during the two years we tried to deal with it.

We learned that it has had a "marvelous" press, has acquired perhaps a reputation that no other scourge has ever attained. To many people, I dare say, the word cancer is even more feared than the word death.

Some people cannot say it aloud. Others whisper it as if it were some kind of evil spirit which will spring to life by virtue of its being uttered.

So strong is society's belief that cancer is an automatic death sentence that nothing — not even the neighbor alive 20 years after being stricken — seems to diminish the belief that cancer and doom are synonymous.

Recently, experts announced that between 45 and 51 percent of all cancer patients are now being cured. I have a feeling that most people do not believe that. I am not one of them.

During my mother's illness, the number of people (and I love every one of them) who made it a point to relay stories of friends and relatives who had beaten the disease was overwhelming. Slowly I began to realize that, human nature being what it is, most of us dwell on the people who don't survive, not those who make it.

I also learned that cancer patients fight two diseases — and the physical one may be the less dangerous. Society's attitude seems by far the more lethal.

Because of this attitude many, who are stricken give up before they begin to fight.

Scientists have told us that there is no medicine as potent as that of the mind and the spirit, the fighting will to live. I firmly believe that in the years to come we will see even more astonishing proof of the effect the mind has on the body.

Every cancer patient should — MUST — have psychiatric help along with other accepted therapies. I can think of no one who would not benefit from counseling.

But, perhaps even more important, society's attitude must change. Our collective fear may be the downer that makes a patient give up. Hope must be in our voices and in our minds.

To harbor hope is not a vain exercise. To be a Christian, after all, is to be an optimist. What better place to parade our faith than on this particular battlefield?

Mary Hunt To Speak at Shults Center

Mary Hunt, a nationally known theologian and author, will speak at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 16, at the Otto Shults Center, Nazareth College.

Her talk is jointly sponsored by the Nazareth College Campus Ministry, the Rochester Regional Task Force on Women and the Women's Ordination Conference.

She will speak on her working and teaching experience in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and its influence on her perspectives of feminist theology.

Deadline

The deadline for submitting news to the Courier-Journal is noon on Thursday preceding the following Wednesday's publication.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

My Uncle? Oh, He's Just A Priest

Considering the shortage of priests, what do you think of priests being retired at the age of 70?

Evidently Headquarters does not consider that we have any great shortage since 12 pastors will be retired this coming June. The decision has been made so we dutifully say "Amen."

What is a priest's work?

Recently I supplied at Good Counsel parish, Rochester, for Father Paul Wohrab. For one week a delightful altar boy named Matthew Hill served my daily Mass. He is 10 years old, in the fourth grade. He has neat red hair and is precise and devout in his sanctuary service. He is the nephew of Father James Schwartz, one time chaplain of Rochester General Hospital. Father Schwartz has a kind of nebulous assignment coordinating activities to strengthen the morale and spirituality of our diocesan priests.

One morning I said to Matthew, "What does your uncle do?" He replied, "He doesn't do nothing (sic). He's just a priest." "Oh. And what does he do when he is doing nothing?" "Well, he just says Mass and sometimes he has a wedding or a funeral. But he's just a priest."

I was delighted with Matthew's exposition. Even if he did not grasp the ramifications of his reverend uncle's work, he does grasp the essence of the priesthood: viz. to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass. As a reward, I gave him a big volume of "Lives of the Saints" for his inspiration.

Aren't you simplifying the idea of priesthood?

Not greatly. The progressive jargon emphasizes priests as "ministers," and tends to equate the priesthood with the ministries, valuable as they are, of dedicated laity and of religious women: ministries of the Eucharist or ushering or bingo workers or visitors to the sick. The term "ministering" can be as stuffy as calling freshman high school religion courses "Theology." By vocation the priest is primarily the offerer of the Sacrifice of the Mass. By virtue of his calling, he is also a special teacher in union with his bishop. He is a forgiver of sins. And he is involved in ministries related to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. One problem today is that some erroneously consider the corporal works of mercy as important as the sublime Sacrifice of the Mass.

You seem terribly strong on that Sacrifice idea.

No stronger than the Church. Convert Evelyn Waugh, whose novel "Brideshead Revisited" was made into a \$4 million TV production, wrote a good life of the Jesuit martyr, St. Edmund Campion. I was struck by this. Campion traveled England in disguise to give the Mass, outlawed by Elizabethan hatred of the Mass, to Catholics who were trying to preserve the ancient faith at the cost of impoverishment or imprisonment or even death. Campion was finally captured, tortured, and hanged because of his essential work: offering the Sacrifice. Which brings us back to young Matthew's pithy analysis of the priesthood: a vocation essentially concerned with celebrating the Sacrifice of the Mass. The ministries in which the priest is involved are accidental. The essence is the sacrificial banquet from which the accidentals flow.

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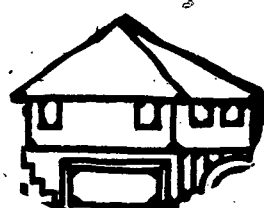
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