

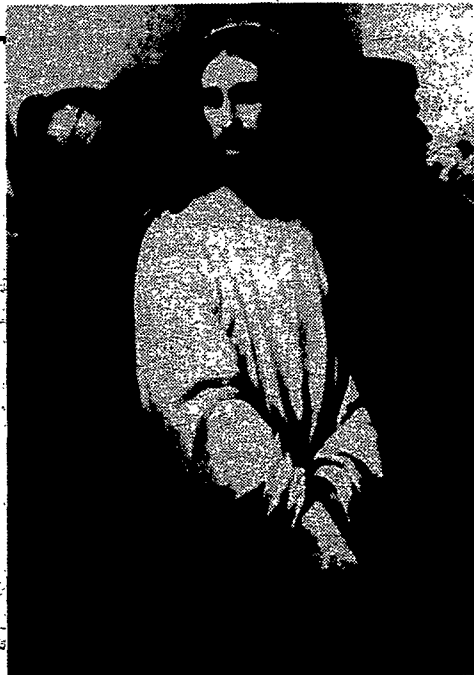
# COURIER-JOURNAL

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## The Seven Last Words

“*Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.*”



Known as the "Seven Last Words," the final utterances of Christ as He hung on the cross provide a fit and interesting Lenten meditation. Each week during Lent, a different diocesan priest will discuss each of these "last words" in the Courier-Journal. The first writer of this special Lenten series is Father Benedict Elmann, noted liturgist and writer.

By Father Benedict Elmann

It would be akin to heresy to suppose that his sufferings were anesthetized for Jesus by his divinity. The Docetist



Fr. Elmann

heretics in the early years of the Christian Church taught that the Son of God did not really take on a human nature, but only the appearance of one. According to this, he was simply play-acting a human role, in a visionary way.

The faith of the Church was quick and firm in rejecting this reduction of the reality of Christ. Jesus is not only "true God," "God from God;" he also is "true Man," "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), "taking flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary."

Jesus is fully human, "tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned." (Hebr. 4:15) He truly suffered. He bore pain and anguish as really as any human being does, as keenly and deeply as any sufferer. To him, the agony of the scourging and the nailing to the cross were as horrible as to any of the numberless victims of brutality.

This we must take into account as we ponder the price of our redemption, even though the four accounts of the Passion seem to underplay the physical aspects of the torture inflicted upon Jesus. Father Donald Senior, CP, puts the matter pointedly in his book "JESUS: A Gospel Portrait."

He is the just man who calls out to his God in the midst of agony and defeat, a man who trusts that even death cannot nullify God's promise." (Page 156)

It is in this perspective that what we call the Seven Last Words of Christ blaze out. It is these which the evangelists highlight, more than the physical sufferings. We on our part, however, need to hear them as coming out of awful depths of pain and anguish. Most of us know to some degree how enveloping is the experience of pain. It rages through a person like a sheet of flame, drowning all thought and feeling except its own. When we hear these remarkable utterances of Christ in his agony, it must come home to us with what a tight grip he is holding on to his trust and love. The only response worthy of so profound a mystery is adoration.

The Seven Last Words are a compilation from the four Gospels. One of them, the cry of abandonment, is found in both Matthew and Mark. Three others of them are in Luke, and still three others in John. The sequence in which they are usually assembled comes close perhaps to the actual timing of them during the three hours on the cross.

The first is: "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34.

It is indeed marvelous that such a word should be the first during those initial moments when the pain must have been all but intolerable. What overwhelming gentle love toward his enemies, and toward all of us whose sins were the real executioners! The verb St. Luke uses is translated "He said." Actually, it is not in the past but in the imperfect tense, and a more correct translation would be "He kept on

Continued on Page 8

## Church Heats Up El Salvador Stand

By John Dash

The question of U.S. military involvement in El Salvador heated up in Rochester last week as an estimated 800 persons, many of them Catholic, demonstrated their opposition to the Reagan administration's policies toward that Central American nation.

The occasion was a rally at Old St. Mary's Church and a march to the Liberty Pole.

Earlier in the week Bishop Matthew H. Clark and a still growing number of other community religious leaders signed a letter to Congress scoring the push for more military aid to El Salvador.

According to Allison

Clarke of the Rochester Peace and Justice Center, an organizer of the protest, that open letter has now been signed by more than 38 diocesan priests and an uncounted number of women religious.

Ms. Clarke also expressed surprise at the turnout for the rally. Nearly the entire central portion of the church was filled.

Diocesan addressing the rally included John Walker, executive secretary of the Office of Black Ministries; Sister Janet Korn, RSM, former missionary to Latin America, now a member of the Central Administration of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy; and Father John Podsiadlo, SJ, pastoral

assistant to the Office of the Spanish Apostolate.

In a Page One story in Sunday's New York Times, Kenneth Briggs cited Church sources as saying that Deane R. Hinton, U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, "has privately singled out the Church's opposition as the main obstacle to the administration's effort to increase military aid to the Salvadoran government, which is fighting leftist guerrillas."

The nation's bishops last November called for an end to all "outside military assistance" to El Salvador. They further urged the administration to press for a

Continued on Page 15

## DeSales School Drive Exceeds Its Goal

Geneva — It was a joyous day at DeSales High School last Friday, Feb. 19. The school's 1981-82 Annual Support Campaign was hailed a success, going over its goal of \$75,000.

Frank Caravita, president of the DeSales Board of Trustees, announced that the school's drive exceeded \$77,000 with additional donations expected to come in as friends of DeSales, parents, alumni and members of the business community respond to the appeal. In a press release, Caravita stressed that this magnificent job was achieved because of the joint efforts between people with

direct affiliations with DeSales as well as people and businesses throughout the entire Wayne County/Finger Lakes area.

Edward Tracy, DeSales principal for the last six years, pointed out that more money received this year was "first time" contributions from businesses and people who had not previously participated in a DeSales Support Campaign.

"I have never seen a time when the DeSales spirit and evidence of broad community support has been greater," Tracy said.

Although gifts have been

received from alumni as far away as Europe and Bolivia, South America, the communities of Geneva, Waterloo and Seneca Falls were most supportive, the release stated.

"The results indicate that the people really want to keep DeSales healthy and strong. We go into the eighth decade of service with every confidence," the principal said.

Caravita stated that the money raised will enable the school to meet all of this year's annual expenses which could not be covered by tuition revenues alone, and at the

Continued on Page 15

## Fr. O'Brien Dies; Honored Chaplain

Auburn — Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated this morning (Wednesday, Feb. 24) at St. Mary's Church for Father William J. O'Brien who died Sunday, Feb. 21, 1982, at the age of 72.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark was principal concelebrant.

Father O'Brien, who saw extensive and valorous service as a World War II Army chaplain, died at Northbrook Heights Nursing Home.

An Auburn native, Father O'Brien attended St. Mary's School here and St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Edward Mooney on June 15, 1935.

His first assignment was as assistant pastor of Corpus Christi in Rochester.

On March 13, 1942, he was

commissioned a chaplain and was to serve in England, North Africa and Italy, spending 33 months overseas.

In 1944, he received the Silver Star for gallantry while serving with an infantry regiment attached to Gen. Mark Clark's Fifth Army. His mother received the medal and citation as a Mother's Day surprise in 1944. The citation revealed that Father O'Brien had braved enemy fire and uncharted mine fields to rescue the bodies of American soldiers who had fallen in action.

He was the first priest of the Rochester diocese to receive the Silver Star.

He arrived in Rome on the second day of its liberation by the Allies in June of 1944. That same day, he was received in audience by Pope Pius XII.

Father O'Brien also par-



FATHER O'BRIEN  
1956 photo

ticipated in the Anzio Beach-head battle and in the final weeks of the war was hospitalized for treatment of arthritis. He was returned home on a hospital ship and received further treatment in Dallas, Tex.

In 1946, he returned to Corpus Christi and in 1956 was appointed pastor of St. Patrick's in Moravia where he served until his 1968 retirement.