



## The Fire in the Thornbush Dialogue

### Woman As Stranger

By Sister Mary Sullivan, RSM

Today, the Diocesan Task Force on the Pastoral Letter on Women begins a series of bi-weekly reflective commentaries on "The Fire in the Thornbush," the pastoral letter on women in the Church which Bishop Matthew H. Clark wrote to all the people of the diocese, April 29, 1982.

The purpose of these columns is to encourage careful reading of the pastoral letter, thoughtful understanding of its contents, and loving dialogue of the attitudes and actions to which Bishop Clark calls all men and women of our local Church. In these articles we seek to call attention to important themes and key instructions presented in "The Fire in the Thornbush."

The title of the pastoral letter refers to an important theological concept of the Church: the pilgrim Church. At Horeb in the wilderness, Moses encountered God's spirit in the thornbush filled with the flame of God's own living presence (Exodus 3). By this holy paradox — of a thornbush that was still a thornbush and yet was the dwelling place of the fire of God's life — Moses received his awesome vocation to a new mission and a new way of life.

Theologians have repeatedly used this beautiful biblical image to explain two simultaneous truths about the Church: the pilgrim Church has not yet reached the fullness of the holiness to which God calls her, and yet the fullness of God's love and salvation is already present in the dry branches of the Church. The thornbush is our human weakness and our human, historical journey toward the fullness of God's will for us: the fire is the divine presence of our already achieved redemption in Christ.

The pastoral letter on women in the Church is called "The Fire in the Thornbush" because Bishop Clark wished, I think, both to call us forward on a common journey we have yet to travel and to encourage us by reminding us of the power of God's sanctifying presence already aflame in the Church.

The specific topics we will discuss are articles of the pastoral letter itself. The writers will try to elaborate on views expressed by Bishop Clark and to offer explanations and examples of what his words might mean.

The keynote for this entire year of diocesan-wide reflection is Bishop Clark's own explicit call for open, sensitive evaluation and dialogue: "We all need to evaluate our ideas and attitudes toward women in the Church. Further, we

Sister Mary Sullivan is dean, College of General Studies, Rochester Institute of Technology, and chairperson of the Diocesan Task Force on the Pastoral Letter on Women.

should be willing to share our thoughts with others." (Article 22) The goal of these columns is the same as the goal of the pastoral letter itself:

"What I do hope is that this pastoral letter will offer us, as the local Church of Rochester, an opportunity to reflect, pray and act upon many questions in light of the faith which makes us one. In this way, through God's grace, I pray that we may be able to build up the love and unity of our local Church, promote deeper faith in individuals and in the community, and preach the Gospel with fresh vigor. If we do this we shall engage in maturing and correcting conversation. We shall give hope to faithful women within our Church. And, that is my purpose." (Article 6)

As we begin this series, the Task Force invites readers to contemplate the biblical story of Ruth, the Moabitess. This wonderful parable in the Old Testament does what all biblical parables do: it asks us why things might not be other than we have presumed.

In contrast to Hebrew expectations, "Ruth" sets before us the powerful example of a foreign woman's holiness and proclaims Yahweh's surprisingly providential care of His people Israel through the vocation of this extremely kind, courageous stranger.

In this story, Ruth, an unlikely one because a foreigner and not an Israelite, is presented as the chosen ancestress of David, the greatest king of Israel. She, a Moabite woman and not a Jew, is presented to us as a splendid embodiment of absolute trust in Israel's God.

The parable confounds us by giving what we do not at first think we can expect: Yahweh's approval — even more, His extraordinary blessing of a foreign woman and of her mixed marriage with Boaz, an Israelite.

Like Moses before the burning bush whom God asked to remove his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy, may we all come to this reflection on the contributions and roles of women in the Church with reverent openness. Like the Israelites who represented in the story of Ruth, their realization that the ways and graces of God are neither exclusive nor predictable, may we all come to our study of "Women in the Church" with receptive minds and hearts.

## Corning Parish Plans Three-Day Jubilee

Corning — St. Patrick's Parish has scheduled a parish jubilee for this coming weekend.

The event will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the parish's current church, and the 80th anniversary of the parish

itself.

The celebration will begin on Sunday, Oct. 31, with a healing Mass with the Sacrament of Anointing at 5:30 p.m., with an informal social following the Mass in the school hall.

On Monday, Nov. 1, All Saints Day, the jubilee Mass will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., with Bishop Matthew H. Clark as the principal celebrant. The music will be provided by the Cantata group, and a reception and dinner will follow in the school hall.

On Tuesday, Nov. 2, All Souls' Day, the Mass for deceased members of the parish will be celebrated at 7:30 p.m.

All eighth-graders and their parents are invited to attend the

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**Sunday, Nov. 7**  
 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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