Little Rock Bible Study Seen Growing

The program of Bible study started in Little Rock, Ark., eight years ago, and brought to St. Paul's Parish in Webster last September, has spread to St. Lawrence in Greece and St. Anne's on Mt. Hope Avenue.

Program spokesperson Georgette Ermatinger also noted, "Several other parishes have not firmed up their dates as yet, but seem interested enough to begin similar studies before year's end."

"St. Paul's in Webster," she said, "was the first to try it and it proved very successful in an age where adult education is usually a disaster."

The Little Rock program consists of several weeks of small-group discussion on particular books of the Bible. Promotional literature stated, "The study is geared to the average layman. It is not primarily a technical study of scripture, but rather its aim is to facilitate the application of God's living word in the daily life of each person. Thus it is an opportunity for both educational and spiritual growth. It will culminate in leading the individual into a deeper understanding of self and his personal relationship with God."

The St. Paul's Parish group will study the Gospel of Mark, on Thursday evenings from Jan. 6 to March 10. Acts will be covered at St. Lawrence beginning Jan. 14, and the same book will be studied at St. Anne's beginning Jan. 19.

Study materials for each program cost $3.50. Preregistration and further information is available by calling today, Dec. 15: St. Paul's, Georgette Ermatinger, 671-5389; St. Lawrence, Klaus Schulz, 392-6118; St. Anne's, Anne Stehle, 424-1841.

Fr. John Reedy

Looking for the Lord

The Gentle Call of Christmas

Like a great teacher or a gentle parent, the God of the universe is extraordinarily sensitive to our human fears and uncertainty.

I have been thinking about the universal appeal of the Christmas story ... contrasted with some of the other responses I find in my own life.

During Advent, we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!" We proclaim our anticipation of all that is involved in Christmas, but basically we are expressing a yearning for God to break through into our lives, to be immediately present to us.

I think of the way I respond to the various opportunities and inspirations which occur in my religious life: the challenge to get serious about efforts to pray, the recognition of patterns of inertia and habit which take the edge off of the religious tone of my life, my unwillingness to confront some of the comfortable patterns in the things I have and do.

In these moments of honesty, I find myself very nervous, very tentative, very reluctant to extend an open invitation to God to break through into the patterns of my life.

When I read the Old Testament accounts of God coming to the patriarchs in clouds on mountaintops, in pillars of fire, in burning bushes, I recognize that such an encounter would terrify me. I would have a lot of trouble singing, "O Come, O Come ..." if I thought He were going to come in that way.

But He came as an infant, born into a poor, humble family. He lived a simple life, so simple that most of it wasn't even preserved in the recorded memories of his followers.

He assembled a group of disciples, whose qualities and performance — while He was with them — were not very impressive even when compared with the pattern of my life and the lives of most of the people I know.

All the circumstances of that first Christmas seemed designed to say to us what Jesus said so often to his followers: Be not afraid. Fear not. Have no fear. Have faith in Me.

Young children are attracted to the manger scene. The tremendous mystery of our own redemption comes about in a family relationship similar to their own. The tales of shepherds and wise men and angels singing on the hills remain as part of an appealing tradition, with links to happy moments in our own lives.

The God of heaven and earth seems to have shaped the details of the first Christmas in recognition of our tendency to be cautious about getting too close to the divine.

If we recognize this gentleness and sensitivity, the conclusion is not that we are free to sit back and remain comfortable.

Rather, we are encouraged to place our trust, our faith, in a God who calls us with such understanding and tenderness. Though we can't know where He will lead us, we should realize that He calls us with love and with a profound understanding of all our limitations.

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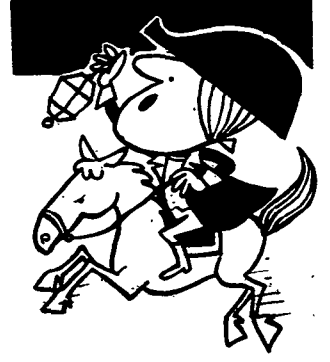

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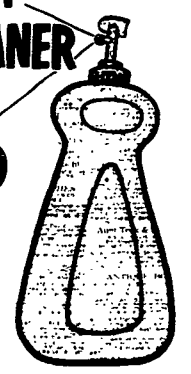

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