

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

Archbishop Breaking The Law

Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee is a churchman I admire.

He is also a lawbreaker.

He has given his support to parish groups which are violating the law by giving help to illegal refugees from Central America. They claim that they would be imprisoned or killed if they were sent back to El Salvador or Guatemala.

Three of these people were recently offered symbolic "sanctuary" in a ceremony at the cathedral in Milwaukee. Archbishop Weakland was present to support them in their efforts to remain in this country.

The United States, of course, does grant refugee status to people it judges to be in danger of political persecution in their homelands.

However, for many of those coming from Guatemala and El Salvador, our immigration officials have ruled that they are not true political refugees. The officials claim that these people are emigrating because of social unrest and for the sake of economic opportunity.

This law, itself, is not unreasonable. The problem comes in the judgment of fact — refugees or immigrants.

For government officials, this judgment is muddled by our national support for the regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala. It would be politically embarrassing — and morally outrageous — for our country to continue arming and financing governments which so victimize their own citizens that we offer these people political asylum.

I believe — and I'm sure that Archbishop Weakland believes — that we have an obligation in conscience to respect the legitimate laws of the land, even though we may not agree with all of those laws.

But if a careful, serious investigation convinces us that our government is wrong in a matter of grave moral importance, then each one of us must follow his or her own conscience. We cannot accept the justification offered by those who carried out the atrocities of Nazi Germany — that they were "simply following orders."

Really I don't expect Archbishop Weakland to end up behind bars, though the punishment for harboring illegal aliens can bring imprisonment for up to five years.

However, I am sure that his act of civil disobedience has upset many Catholics in Milwaukee. It's very dif-

icult to communicate all that goes into a decision of this kind, and most of us were trained to respect the law, even when it is far less than perfect.

I share that respect for the law, but I honor the archbishop for taking a stand in defense of human life, even though he knows that his position will generate a lot of criticism.

If, after checking the facts as carefully as I could, I judged that deportation would endanger these lives, I would feel obliged to join him in his protest against the implementation of the law.

The Catholics of Milwaukee should be able to respect this witness to his own conscience. That's the kind of testimony religious leaders are supposed to give.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Spending A Week In Owego

St. Patrick's Church, Owego, is 20 miles west of Binghamton, and has a successful co-pastorate. Father Albert Cason had an opportunity to spend 10 days in Florida after Christmas, and asked me to supply. Father Thomas Watts, his co-pastor, would be there the two weekends, but would be home in Sayre with his mother during the Christmas week. That made me the priest-in-charge during the week. As I drove into the church parking lot in the darkness, a half-hour before the 5:15 Christmas evening Mass, the church windows sent out a warm glow and a beautiful home

across the road was ablaze with lights and decorations which bedazzled the whole neighborhood. It was a warm welcome.

St. Patrick's bustles with activity: rural ministry with Sisters seeking the poor, and the poor seeking them, with many parishioners and non-Catholic churches sharing in the aid. The parish has enough meetings to match the Pentagon: a school of 160 students 1 through 6; Bible study groups; Legion of Mary; etc. Father Watts is High Priest of charismatics in the Southern Tier. The monthly charismatic Mass on Jan. 1 filled the church with devout people, much prayer and hymn singing. Music is a big thing in the parish, and several competent groups, folk and traditional, serve.

The congregation sings exceptionally well.

A special thing is the weekly radio broadcast of the Sunday parish Mass at 9:30 a.m. over Owego station WEBO. It has a radius of 40 miles, and an estimated listening audience of 30,000 souls. An IBM personnel executive, James Raftis, is the engineer and general spark plug for the broadcast. With Father Leo Matuszewski, he initiated it in Advent 1968 and has lost only one Sunday in 14 years, when he was hospitalized. Then his son, Jim Jr., who began working with his father at the age of eight, took his father's place. A specially prepared choir sings, and the congregation participates well. Raftis, who has a virile but mellow voice, announces and interpolates where needed. The costs of the program are paid by donations. Father Watts assigned me to give the homily for the radio Mass, so now 30,000 people know about Padre Pio, and of his new biography written by Lutheran Pastor C. Bernard Ruffin, published by OSV Press in 1982.

A sensational event comes Jan. 23. Gertrude Olbrys, a widow who has been housekeeper at the rectory for 14 years is being married to a widower, Jerry Ferrier, at the 12:15 p.m. Sunday Mass. The whole parish is invited, and a dish to pass dinner in the parish follows.

As I studied the congregations during the nine different Masses, I was agitated to see so many fine young men, teenagers and those in their 20s, and not one of them headed for the priesthood. With some exasperation I declared at Mass: "There are one billion Chinese who never heard of Our Lord. And there are dozens of fine young men in this Owego parish. Shortly, priests like me will die. Who will take our places in the diocese and throughout the world? There is no greater calling than the priesthood, bringing holy Mass to the people. I ask you young men to ponder over this." These are the kind of men we need: virtuous, virile, intelligent, idealistic, from good homes. And there are tons of them in Owego's parish.

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