



Crossroads Journey Nearing the End

As the Lenten season draws nearer to closing, so does the Crossroads journey of Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Left, members of the Newman Community at Monroe Community College greet each other with a sign of peace during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Clark last Tuesday afternoon. The Mass was followed by a wine and cheese party during which the bishop invited those interested to join in an informal discussion below left. Later that same day, the bishop presided at the evening prayer service at St. Agnes Church, Avon. Below, some of the more than 300 who attended.

Photos by Terrance J. Brennan



Insights In Liturgy

By Jim Lund



Crossroads In Liturgy And Social Justice

Isaiah's 58th chapter offers a paradigm for considering the interconnectedness of our liturgical celebrations and our mission to act on behalf of justice. There the God of Israel speaks through the prophet, and soundly repudiates the empty rituals of Israel, sacrifices and fasts made hollow by the people's failure to fulfill the Covenant's call for justice. In its place, God says:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.

Isaiah 58:6-7

The importance of this prophetic denunciation and correction for Christians in manifest by Jesus' own echo of these words when confronting the scribes and Pharisees, the heirs of those addressed by Isaiah. In one of the many Gospel passages where Jesus rebukes them, he says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you frauds! You pay tithes on mint and herbs and seeds while neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy and good faith. It is these you should have practiced without neglecting the others." (Mt. 23:23)

In both these passages it is clear that worship must be integrated with lives committed to justice. The challenging implication is that worship or liturgy may be executed with precision and artistic beauty, but will nonetheless be unacceptable to God if the community that offers it fails to manifest a commitment to justice, mercy and love.

Liturgy therefore cannot be a mere spiritual haven that is estranged from our historical reality and responsibility. Instead it

should provide the community, gathered by faith in Jesus Christ, the vision and the grace needed to carry on its mission to transform the world in the image of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

To act on behalf of justice, and to set free the oppressed is, however, especially difficult. North Americans, especially white males, are wittingly or unwittingly the beneficiaries of injustice and oppression. Like those castigated in Isaiah, it appears that we have the most to lose if justice prevails. Equality for women, for blacks, or for the poor who comprise more than three-quarters of the world's population, inevitably means the loss of power and privilege for those who now possess an unequal share.

Our liturgy and sacraments, however, call us to transcend the narrow self-interest that perpetuates injustice and oppression. Their grace helps us to see the world, as Jesus did, through the eyes of the poor, and empowers us to challenge the sinful social structures that may benefit some of us, but that cruelly oppress others.

If our liturgy and sacraments fail to do this, it is a sign that we, too, like the Israelites addressed by Isaiah and the Pharisees addressed by Jesus, have failed to heed the Word of God.

CROSSROADS TO LIFE

The Bishop's Journey

Fifth Week of Lent

March 21, 7:30 p.m. Northeast Region Confirmation Prayer Service
23, 1:30 p.m. Auburn Correctional Facility
7:30 p.m. St. Mary's, Auburn Evening Prayer

"Renewal"

Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11.

Reflection: "I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him..." The season of Lent blossoms in a dramatic call for renewal. Isaiah speaks of a new order of creation, Paul calls for a new order of social values, and John calls forth a new awareness of sin.

Suggested Action Response: This is a week for true awareness of our lives as Christians. As we approach the Paschal Feast, we become increasingly aware of its warming influence. Parishes may do well to schedule a mission, a week of prayer, a week of reflection, giving the community an opportunity to gather and renew itself!