

Encourage Penance, Pope Tells Bishops

By Father Kenneth J. Doyle

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has urged a group of U.S. bishops to give special priority to the Sacrament of Penance, including making it available during the days of Holy Week.

In recent years, some bishops have adopted a practice of not scheduling confession periods on Holy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday, in order to establish a "liturgical quiet" for contemplating the death and resurrection of Christ.

The pope spoke to 23 bishops from eight dioceses in New York and from the Military Ordinariate on April 15. It was the first group of U.S. prelates to make its "Ad Limina" reports to the pope, required every five years so bishops can report on the status of their diocese.

During April 14-15, the pontiff spent several hours meeting individually with each of the 23 bishops before addressing them together in a 20-minute talk which focused on reconciliation with God through penance.

The pope invited the bishops "to go in search of those who have sinned, so as to invite them to return to the fullness of the Father's love," and said that the hierarchy should "concentrate the attention of the faithful on the person of Jesus the Redeemer, who personally forgives and reconciles each individual."

The faithful should be encouraged to confess their sins during Lent in advance of the Sacred Triduum as a spiritual preparation for the final events of Holy Week and in order "to diminish the heavy pressure on confessors," the pope said.

"Nevertheless, I would ask that bishops urge their priests to do everything possible in their pastoral generosity and zeal to make confessions available also during the last days of Holy Week," he added.

"There will inevitably," said the pope, "be people who, in spite of everything, will need this opportunity of grace."

On Good Friday of this year, Pope John Paul for the fourth year in a row heard confessions for an hour and a half in St. Peter's Basilica.

The pope noted that the themes of the current Holy Year and of the forthcoming Synod of Bishops focus on reconciliation.

"We are truly called to proclaim the reconciliation of humanity with God. This means reviving a sense of God, of His Word, of His commandments — of the need for accepting His Will as the real criterion for human action," he told the bishops.

This means "reviving a sense of sin among our people," he added.

"Proclaiming reconciliation," the pope continued, "means insisting on the greatness of God's pardon and on His compassionate love."

The pontiff also asked the bishops "to help ensure that the norms" on general absolution and on First Confession be "understood and properly applied."

The Vatican requires that people receiving First Communion should first receive the Sacrament of Penance and requires that general absolution be limited

to special circumstances and not be used as a substitute for private confession.

General absolution, observed the pope, has an "exceptional character" to it and "is not envisioned solely because of large numbers of penitents assembled for a great celebration or pilgrimage."

Of First Confession, the pontiff said: "The treasures of Christ's love in the Sacrament of Penance are so great that children too must be initiated into them."

Along The Way With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



Continued from Page 3

How is family life in the region? Some of the pressures mentioned above were part of our conversation. I was pleased also to be able to tell him about the six regional conferences on family life we held during the Lenten season.

What about religious life in Rochester? I named as best I could from memory all of the religious communities we are privileged to have in our twelve counties.

In addition to naming them I told Our Holy Father that our religious were a great presence among us and that as a church we stood much in their debt.

Any problems with religious life? Yes, we are working on the problems posed by the conditions I mentioned earlier (few vocations, aging membership, etc.). We are also aware that we need always to help our people to understand the changes which have occurred in religious life since Vatican Council II.

After responding to a few statistical questions at the end of our meeting I told the Holy Father of your love and support for him and thanked him in your name for three of the major contributions he has made during his ministry: his leadership in the struggle for peace, his insistence on the God-given dignity of every person and the great encouragement he has given to our young people.

WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE REGION

Following his visit with me the pope asked the other bishops of Region II to assemble in the same room.

When we had all greeted him and were seated, Cardinal Cooke addressed the Holy Father, thanking him for his leadership and sharing with him some of the basic pastoral concerns and efforts of our eight dioceses. Most of those I have mentioned above so I shall not repeat them here.

Pope John Paul in his turn spoke to us about the Holy Year of Redemption we are now celebrating.

His theme was reconciliation with a particular call to the local Churches to make every effort to rekindle in all of our faith communities an active appreciation and practice of the Sacrament of Penance.

That text will be reported in another place (and I do not have it with me at this writing) so I'll say no more about it just now.

We concluded our meeting by praying the Marion Prayer for the Easter Season and by getting together for a group picture.

AT TABLE

By gosh, it happened.

We did have a delightful meal with the Holy Father. You can't call it lunch because in Italy the principal meal of the day is at midday.

But gather we did in his dining room — the Holy Father, eleven of us bishops (the four originals from the private visits of Friday with seven others who were not at a similar on Thursday) and two priests (one from Poland and one from Zaire) who serve as private secretaries.

The conversation was wide ranging and altogether informal. A fair amount of time was spent talking about the mass media of communications and their impact.

We told him of the coverage of his trip to Central America and about the program about him shown on Easter night on ABC.

If there are many more immediately recognizable people in the world, I don't know them. Yet the Holy Father seemed genuinely surprised to hear some of the bishops talk about how closely people in the United States follow his activities.

The other principal topic of conversation was parish life in our country — and especially our ways of preparing for and celebrating the sacraments.

If you are an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, you should know that our Holy Father was particularly touched by your loving ministry to the sick and those who cannot leave their residences.

Before the meal concluded the priest from Poland left the room for a moment and returned with copies of the Revised Code of Canon Law for each of us. The Holy Father signed and dated each one.

So, dear friends, that was our audience — and a moving experience it was. I know that I shall remember it for a long time and take great encouragement from it.

Some concluding comments:

- We had meatless lasagne (eggs, cheese), breaded fish, vegetables, potatoes, salad and fruit. (I'd want to know too!)

- The Holy Father looked to be in excellent shape, if a little tired.

- He has determined that he will receive all of the ad limina groups in this way. Where he gets the strength I do not know.

- The language for the audience was English with some Italian. The Holy Father may miss an idiom now and then but his understanding is excellent and his speech is confident and clear.

- I remember the day in 1960 that I welcomed Howie Hubbard to Rome. Little did I know that 23 years later we'd make an ad limina visit together. That gave it all an extra happiness.

SOME FRIENDS

Alexander Bradshaw and Stanley Kacperzak were ordained deacons for our diocese at Saint Peter's on Thursday. Because the four of us bishops had our audience on Friday instead of Thursday, I had the great joy of concelebrating with Archbishop Jean Jadot who ordained the new deacons.

Ordained were 39 candidates from 32 dioceses in 19 states.

It was a joy to be a part of that expression of Easter life in the Church. Alex and Stan are outstanding individuals and were a reminder to me that day that we are blessed with some wonderful seminarians.

It reminds me also to tell you (and very happily!) that we may have as many as 10 students entering the first year of theological studies in September. Thanks for your prayers. Please continue them.

Fathers Mike Mahler and Kevin McKenna are looking fine and doing well at the Casa Santa Maria, the graduate department of the North American College.

Mike is there on a sabbatical program this semester and Kevin is finishing the first year of his degree work in Canon Law.

We had several chances to sit and talk and I bring their regards to you all.

Fathers Jack Hedges and John Walsh, Father Tom Valenti and his mother and two cousins took vacation time to celebrate with Alex and Tom. Rochester was very well represented in Rome during the week.

Thanks for your kind attention to all of this. If you've come this far, you are very generous.

But take consolation. This happens only once in five years!

MOVIES

'Cowboy' Gets Silly

New York (NC) — "Cowboy," airing on CBS Saturday, April 30, at 9-11 p.m., is the kind of made-for-TV movie that gives made-for-TV movies a bad name.

James Brolin stars as Ward McNally a former teacher who has suffered much during a career in an urban ghetto. Determined to get away from it all, he buys the small cattle ranch on which he lived for two happy years as a foster child nearly 30 years before. He "comes home," then, content to stay there for the rest of his life.

How a former public school teacher, who was an orphan to boot, would get enough money for such an undertaking is one of the many arcane points of this movie clarified neither by Jerry Jameson's direction nor the script by Stanley and Carole Cherry and Dennis Capps (beware of any movie written by more than two people, especially if an ampersand occurs in the credits).

As soon as he arrives in the small town he remembers so fondly, McNally runs into the kind of xenophobia that

Hollywood writers, most of whom have probably never been close to a cow, traditionally ascribe to rural life.

The pert owner of the local eatery, D.G. (Annie Potts) — no, we never find out what D.G. stands for — is downright friendly, but some other folks, notably the sheriff (Michael Patacki), a prosperous rancher (Randy Quaid) and the local banker (George Di Cenzo) are considerably less so. The banker advises McNally to cut his losses and move on at once.

When McNally lets everybody know he intends to stay and, with the help of an unemployed ex-convict (Ted Danson), sets to work to put the ranch in operating order once more, untoward things start to happen, just as you were probably thinking they might.

Danson and Miss Potts make valiant efforts to inject some life into things, but even performers as talented as they can't work miracles. Avoid this unless you want something to slow down your biorhythms before bedtime.

Thornbush

Continued from Page 1 in the Church. Planning the liturgy are task force members Mary Kay Boylan, St. Stephen's; Margaret Brennan, SSI, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality; Ann Fertig, Catholic Women's Club; Nancy Giordano, St. Ambrose; Denise Mack, St. Rita's; Sara McLaughlin, co-chairperson of the Task Force, St. Louis; Ann Miller, RSM, Corning Catholic schools; Alice Pempel, co-chairperson of the task force, Immaculate Conception, and Mary Sullivan, RSM.

The Call to Worship, on behalf of the task force, will be given by Nancy Giordano at the celebration in Rochester and by Alice Pempel in Horseheads. Lectors have been chosen from various areas of the diocese. They include Jacquelyn Dobson, Office of Black Ministries; Joanne Facci, St. Rita's parish, and Clare Reidy, Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Elmira, and Patricia Beiswinger, St. Mary's parish in Corning. Laurence Van Etten will be

deacon of the liturgy in Rochester and Raymond Defendorf will be deacon in Horseheads. Bishop Clark will give the homily for each celebration and he has invited Margot Van Etten, pastoral assistant, St. Mary's Church of the Deaf, to participate in his homily.

During the liturgy, a collection organized by Helen Stefano, St. Paul of the Cross, Honeoye Falls, and Helen Snyder, Immaculate Conception parish, Ithaca, will be taken for the poor of the diocese. Many other men and women will have principal roles in the two liturgies.

Karen and Lee Degnan of St. Vincent de Paul parish, Churchville, and Carol Murzin of St. Mary-on-the-Lake parish, Ontario, are planning the reception to follow the Cathedral celebration; Elizabeth Yushinsky, Dorothea Watts and Betty Nelson of St. Mary Our Mother parish are planning the reception in Horseheads.

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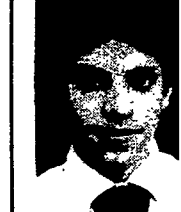
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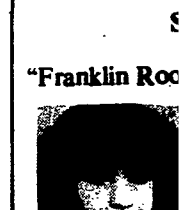


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