

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Tour of Duty At St. Gabriel

Father James Cosgrove is the pastor of St. Gabriel's, Hammondspport and St. Patrick's, Prattsburg. He phoned: "Could you help me April 24 and May 1? Capuchin Father John Prope used to help, but he is with the V.A. in Canandaigua. Msgr. James Cuffney used to say Mass for me at Prattsburg but he has bought a house in Auburn and has gone there. And I am alone. We are having First Communion, and if you could say the last Mass, it would leave me free to spend some time with the children and their families."

"I can come for April 24, but not May. I'm off to Ireland May 3-14 and should be home in Webster for the last Sunday." "Well, that will be a good help."

Saturday at 10:15 p.m. I pushed open the kitchen door of the Hammondspport rectory some 90 miles away, and was greeted by Fechan (pronounced fee-an), an immense Irish greyhound, big as a pony but gentle as a lamb. Father Cosgrove welcomed me. We chatted for an hour. Then he brought me to a guest room, but a slat fell out of the bed when I sat down, so he moved me to the other guest room.

On Sunday I had little to do: only celebrate 11:45 Mass. Father Cosgrove said the 8 a.m. Mass and went off to Prattsburg, 14 miles away, for the 9:30 Mass and First Holy Communion there. I was alone, so at 8:30 I got my breakfast: three thin slices of wonderful home-made bread, coffee and grapes.

Since Mass was more than two hours off, I mugged over to the church and checked on the accoutrements for Mass, the lights and loudspeaker. Then decided: "This is a good time for a Holy Hour with the Blessed Sacrament." I used Father Joseph Egan's prayer book "Alleluia," for the hour. In the introduction he had written: "Most of the laity have not so far advanced in the spiritual life that they are able to pray independently, without following the thoughts of another. Yet most of the faithful know comparatively few prayers by heart. . . The present manual, spreading its prayers over the span of a week, brings the blessing of variety and the good habit of daily prayer."

As I began the doxology and moved on to the prayers of St. Ignatius and St. Thomas Aquinas, onto the litanies and other familiar prayers, I was impressed by the wisdom of Father Egan's observation: "There are many avenues to God and it cannot be denied that the

prayers contained herein are those which have proved their appeal over decades and centuries." With the Holy Hour completed I set up tables with my "warehouse:" Treasury of Prayers, Alleluia and Sheen tapes, at the entrance, available to the parishioners. Now more than 100 Treasuries and several Alleluias are bearing fruit in this beautiful area of vineyards, boats and Keuka Lake.

Saint Gabriel's is one of the most beautiful churches in the diocese. It seats around 250 people, but it was only half filled. Except for one lady, every person sat from the middle pew to the back. I remarked on this to Father Cosgrove. He laughed: "The summer people will be coming soon, and the church will be flowing on to the church steps, to the amazement of our non-Catholic friends."

After Mass, Father Cosgrove returned for a Baptism. Then we had a good, liesurely dinner, spread by housekeeper, Mrs. Ruby Bearer, who made the wondrous home-made bread, and her daughter, Carol, who is part-time secretary. Both are avid devotees of St. Mary's, Bath, bingo party on Saturday nights. As I was leaving, Father Cosgrove set two bottles of wine in my bag, saying: "These are from the famous wine maker, Dr. Konstantin Frank." I remember him as a great friend of Msgr. Joseph Sullivan. He came from Odessa in the Ukraine and proved that wines as fine as any in Europe can be produced in the Finger Lakes Region. I drove back home thinking: "St. Gabriel and St. Patrick parishes make one of the choicest sets of parishes in the diocese."

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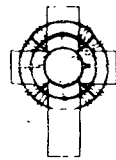
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Father Bruce Ritter

A GREAT MOTHER'S DAY STORY

About 48 weekends a year. I'm on the road, preaching in a different parish each week, preaching at all the

Masses, telling people how great my kids are, and asking for their help. You know, it's pretty costly keeping our UNDER 21 centers afloat. Add to that our plans for opening centers in Houston and Boston and in other cities and...

I enjoy preaching, I really do. But it's, quite frankly, a pretty brutal way to spend every weekend—like for ten years. Especially when you have to face a long trip back to New York after your tenth sermon. No hearts and flowers please, and I'm not looking for sympathy (not very much anyway) because I really do enjoy it. Honest. But sometimes you can get too much of a good thing...

Two years ago, I preached in this great parish in Ohio. It was the first really warm Sunday of that Spring. I had just finished my eighth sermon and was cutting back across the parking lot of the Rectory for a quick cup of coffee before dragging myself into the pulpit again. It was a really gorgeous day. As I walked around, I noticed this young teenager standing in the middle of the parking lot.

As I got closer, I noticed how beautiful she was. And, then, even closer, the tears in her eyes. She was obviously waiting for me. I stopped. "Hi," I said. "I'm Father Bruce." "My name is Rebecca," she said. "Do you have a minute?" "Sure," I said.

We stood in the warming sun. She didn't cry but the tears flowed faster. "I'm a senior in high school," she said, "and I'm three months pregnant. I'm not going to marry my boyfriend—we're too young and I don't think it's really love. My parents don't know. I'm thinking of having an abortion. What do you think I should do?"

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House/UNDER 21, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway youth.

"Do you love your parents?" I said. "Are they good to you? Do they love you?" "Yes," she said. "I love them very much and they love me." "Talk to them," I said. "They'll help you. Don't have the abortion. You can never bring the child back to you. Talk to them. They won't turn away, not now when you really need them." The girl suddenly smiled and said, "I'll talk to my father today. Thank you." I noticed again how beautiful she was.

"She didn't cry but the tears flowed faster."

That was all. I had my fifth cup of coffee and forced myself back into the pulpit for my ninth sermon of the day.

The memory of that beautiful child stayed with me quite a while, but other memories crowded in and blurred and then buried it.

Last month, almost exactly two years to the week, I returned to that same parish. Another great spring day and as I was cutting back across the parking lot...She was there! Honest and no fooling and not a word here of poetic license. She was there and she had the most beautiful kid in the world in a stroller...I mean, he was gorgeous.

"She had the most beautiful kid in the world in a stroller."

"My parents were super," she said. "They took me and my baby in. They wanted to. My father set me up in business—I have this little flower shop and I'm making it just fine." The little kid was just really beautiful. He had this enormous smile on his face. I made some dopey remark about how happy I was too and when the kid grew up and ever wanted to run away, well, I had this really great place and she smiled and I smiled and I went back to the rectory for another fix of coffee before I could face another sermon...

What a great story. Right? I was happy about it for days. I still am.

It's one of the reasons—there are many—why it has been a great Spring for Covenant House/UNDER 21. I couldn't begin to list the people I'm grateful for and to, and all the great kids who gave us the chance to love them and care about them, and my great staff, and our friends and benefactors, whose compassion and generous hearts really do keep our UNDER 21 Centers in existence.

Won't you consider helping our kids as well? We really do need and appreciate *anything* you can give us. We need your financial help very much right now. And more than that, we need your prayers.

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