

Our Pilgrimage Church Holy Year 1983-84

By Father Robert F. McNamara

Before World War I, a certain number of people from the Near East settled in Rochester. By 1925 there were about 500 Arab Christians here, Roman Catholics in that they were united with the pope, but belonging to two of the ancient eastern rites of the church. About 350 of these were members of the Syro-Melkite Rite, who came principally from Jerusalem. The rest were of the Antiochene Syro-Maronite Rite, mostly from Lebanon.

In Holy Week 1925, the Rochester Melkites had a Eucharistic liturgy celebrated by one of their own priests in the Lady Chapel of the old Rochester Catholic Cathedral of St. Patrick's on Platt Street. That same month, the lay leaders of the group decided it was time to have a church of their own. Father Mathias J. Hargather, pastor of the Latin Catholic Church of St. Michael's, offered them a church lot at the corner of Remington and Leo Streets. They accepted and built St. Nicholas Church at 370 Remington Street. It was dedicated in 1927. The local Maronite minority joined forces with the Melkites in building this church and its small rectory and both groups made up the congregation. Syrian priests were assigned, who celebrated the liturgy in the Greek (Syro-Byzantine) rite. The pastors were under the successive bishops of Rochester, however, for there were then no Melkite nor Maronite bishops in this country.

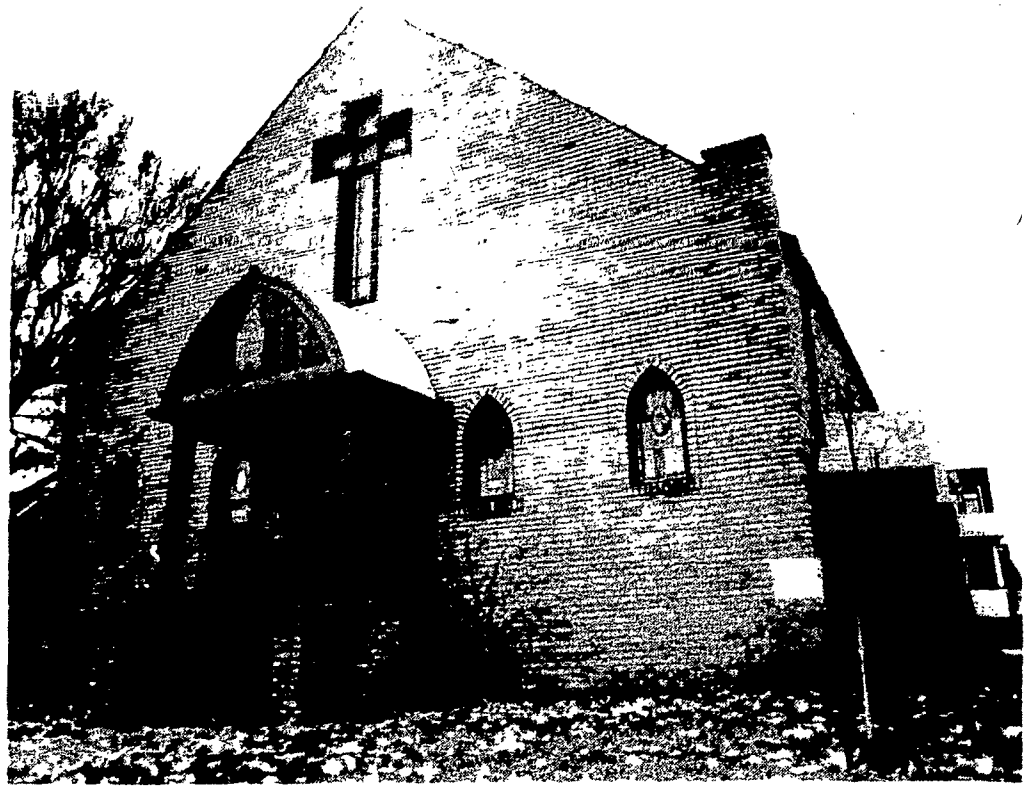
In 1965, however, Pope Paul VI set up the Greek Catholic Melkite diocese of New-Norton, Mass., to take care of the 20,000 Catholic Melkites in the whole United States. St. Nicholas Church in

Rochester automatically became a part of this new diocese or "eparchy."

The present eparch of the Newton Diocese, Archbishop Joseph Tawil, has lately designated St. Nicholas as a pilgrimage church of his diocese for the Holy Year of the Redemption. As in the case of the churches so designated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark for the Latin Diocese of Rochester, St. Nicholas now qualifies as a church that can be visited by any Holy Year pilgrims. Those who make the devotional visit, pray for the pope's intentions, make a private and contrite confession, receive Holy Communion, and (as the pope recommends) perform some "act of mercy," can earn the "gift" of the jubilee plenary indulgence which remits all the "temporal penalty" due to their sins.

Latin rite Catholics of the Diocese of Rochester may therefore also choose St. Nicholas as their pilgrimage church. Even if they have other pilgrimage plans, they should know that they are welcome to attend at any time the beautiful Eastern liturgy celebrated at this church. Participating in its Sunday Mass fulfills their Sunday obligation. They are also entitled to receive Holy Communion under both forms according to the customs of the Melkite rite. It could be a good object lesson in this Year of Redemption to take part in a Eucharistic celebration which reminds us that Catholics across the world have different ways of saying thanks to Jesus for redeeming us.

Remington Street runs south off Norton Street at Silver Stadium. For arrangements, call the pastor, Father Salem Faddoul (716/467-8925).



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Father Bruce Ritter

GOD'S MERCY

I am sadder than usual. It has not been a good week. Monday I buried one of my kids. His name was Danny and I loved him a lot.

And there were bunches of girls in deep trouble in the Center: Lisa, 14, kidnapped by a pimp in Baltimore and sold to another pimp in New York, was being returned to a foster home. She didn't feel wanted there but she had no other place to go. Maryann, 19, and both happy and scared, was about to get on a plane to Los Angeles and her mother whom she hadn't seen for three years. Julie is 17 and too scared of her pimp to talk much. There's no way she wants to go back on the street, or, right now, even outside. I mean she's that scared.

And then I got this anguished letter from a woman that bothered me a lot. I've read it a dozen times. If you don't mind, since some of you may feel the same way, I'll quote from it:

Dear Father Ritter,

I promised myself that if another letter arrived from your House to my house, I would take the time to write a letter. So, here it is. I have taken the time in the past to read all of your letters. All that I ask is that you take the time to read my one letter. I would like you to know "where I'm coming from."

I am the mother of ten children, ages 8 to 25. We have eight boys and two girls. My husband and I are teachers. Through the years I worked to help pay the bills. However, I either subbed or did part-time teaching. For many years I taught reading from 9 to 12. I was able to be home when the children were sick, go to their plays and games, etc. and was always home when they came home from school. We sent our first five children to Catholic elementary and high schools. Out of that number, we have one who continues to pray and go to Mass.

The next two had eight years of Catholic elementary school. One of them, our 16 year old daughter, is currently in complete rebellion. She is the kind of child you talk about in your letters. She is on pot, alcohol, contraceptive pills, and is totally disobedient.

Do I sound bitter and fed-up? You bet. My marriage is in ruins, my mental health is in jeopardy, and my Faith is held together by a string. I am not alone. The city, suburbs, and even this lovely country, is alive with abused parents.

I am sure you are doing much good work. I'm sure you've been told how great you are. We were sending you money long before you became so famous and vocal.

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

However, your words annoy and bring to tears those of us who still read your letters. Let me just quote a few from this most recent letter.

"Never mind that you never knew your own father, that he was never there for you." Really? You want to bet on that? How many fathers have you seen who are reduced constantly to tears by rebellious children? Open your eyes and give men like my husband equal treatment. You've been blinded and deafened by the lies of many of these youth.

"His major experience in life is to have been an exploited sex object..." Why Father? Oh, you believe his story. Well, if our daughter comes, please don't believe her story. She destroys with her tongue. At 14, truth became an alien concept.

I do not contribute to your home, so please remove my name from your list. I find your mail too upsetting. We give to the poor in our parish. Pray for me, and my husband, and our kids. I will pray for you.

What can I say? Nothing that will bring this anguished mother or father any comfort. The prodigal son delighted his father because he returned home repentant. Magdalene was forgiven because she loved much and repented and the Lord rejoiced. But if the prodigal does not return? The Magdalene not repent? What then, except to mourn them—and forgive them.

Let me tell you an allegory:

The world's greatest sinner was to appear before the throne of God for judgment. He was an unspeakably vile sinner. No greater sinner had existed or would exist in the history of the world: No man was ever more alienated from God, no man more deserving of divine repudiation. His vileness was such that the angels standing before the throne of God fled in fear before the face of this sinner. As the man approached to be judged, the very stars in the heavens fell and the sun and the moon trembled in their orbits, planets exploded in horror and the mighty cherubim standing before the throne hid their faces. The man did not sink into the presence of God; he did not crawl up to the throne of justice. He strode through the courts of heaven unafraid, his head held high, and looked God right in the eye. God looked back at him and said in a terrible voice, "Do you have anything to say before I condemn you?" The sinner lifted his head higher and looked right back at God and said, "I appeal."

The seraphim and cherubim were startled and cowered at this insult to God and stood forth to defend God's honor. The archangels angered. Even God seemed somewhat surprised. His face darkened, and God said, "To whom do you appeal?" To what do you appeal?" and the man said, "I appeal from Your Justice to Your Mercy."

We may not be the world's greatest sinners, and surely we hope the heavens will not tremble when we stand before the throne of judgment and see God. But I think our

prayer will be the same. I think we will appeal, all of us, from God's Justice to His Mercy. I think we will all say then as we have said all our lives, Lord, have mercy on us.

Blessed are the merciful, Jesus said, for they shall obtain mercy. Sometimes our minds reel and sometimes we don't want to understand because we are afraid. And sometimes we ask dumb questions of God, like saying, Jesus, what did you really mean when you said that? Jesus said, well the answer is simple. If you are pure of heart, you will understand. Blessed are the pure of heart, for you will see God. And if we continue to pursue the Lord with dumb questions, we say, Well, God, we really still don't understand: When did we see You, so that we can tell if we are pure of heart? And Jesus will tell us: You will see Me when you are merciful. When you feed the least of My brethren when they are hungry, and you clothe the least of My brethren when they are naked and shelter the least of My brethren when they are homeless, and when we forgive our children for their sins against us. I mean, if God commands us to forgive our enemies, why surely, too, our children...

And still unwilling, we might argue with God and say: God, what comes first, a merciful heart, or a pure heart? And Jesus will say: Mercy. Before understanding, before sacrifice, before justice, that very simple, elemental gift of ourselves in love to those who need us, through an act of mercy. Blessed are the merciful, Jesus said, they can appeal from My Justice.

Thanks for helping our kids. We sure need it. Thanks for your faithful prayers, too. We pray for you—and your kids—all the time.

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