

A Man of God Comes In Assorted Colors

From 'Relaxing Blue-Green To Go Gettem Orange'

Following is the homily given by Father Alexander M. Santora at the Nov. 13 ordination of Father Rob Bourcy at Holy Ghost Church. Father Santora was a classmate of Father Bourcy at Darlington Seminary in New Jersey. The Courier-Journal prints the homily because it touches on some of the emotions involved when St. Bernard's Seminary closed and candidates for the priesthood joined those in study at Darlington.

Do you believe, like I do, that first impressions are important? Can you recall your impressions of Rob when you saw him for the first time? I can.

When St. Bernard's Seminary closed, those of us at Darlington Seminary in New Jersey awaited this exodus of Rochesterians, Albanians and other assorted Northerners.

The first day of that school year I was standing at one end of the formal gardens. On the other side, I noticed this bright green. A new shrub, I thought, or perhaps the brilliant leaf of a large plant. No, it was Rob's pants. As he came closer, I could hear a strange kind of talking -- his accent -- more pronounced than regular Rochesterese.

And he was speaking very loudly to a walking companion -- another older seminarian from Bernard's who just suffered a frightening hearing loss. So Rob spent the first days of that adjustment period helping Dick get settled into the new seminary by going around with him to the different offices and literally being his ears.

Contemplate this odd sounding, loud talking, green-clad movement.

Colors are direct, definite, distinct. They can be bold or blended. They evoke. Rob is color. Up front with his person, honest with his emotions, clear with his intentions. His colorful personality can be that enlivening yellow, that relaxing ocean blue-green, an angry red, a somber gray, go-gettem orange. Just the right touch couched in the right tempo, relating to longtime friend, pastoral associate or new acquaintance.

His accent is community. Not a nebulous term. A bringing people together to share good times. Rob is adept at transforming any event into a party. His air is festive, frequently flamboyant, always sincere. And it comes from a prayerful conviction that the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls

us to communion. Rob's life is Eucharistic. Always be thankful, tell your story, share some bread and wine (and a little brie), feel the blessing of Christ among you. In God's Kingdom which the Gospel tells us will be like a banquet feast, Rob will be the caterer or at least the maitre d'. Though for all Rob's preference for some of the finer things in life, his real presence is founded in prayer. Prayer which comes from the struggle with the guts of life, moments of silence contemplating the transcendent, letting his aesthetic sensibilities soak in all God's creations.

Which leads to people, all of us. Meeting us on our turf, accepting us as we are. If you want to find Rob's heart, search each of us. It's right here. We, his family and friends -- actually we've all become his family. He'll dote on us, write us long letters in chic cards, help us, console us, cheer us and even call us to deeper sensitivities about the human journey. All because he cherishes his friends as much as his own life and breath.

So, knowing Rob, we see what a priest is called to be. Someone, who in knowing his own needs, strengths and weaknesses, can free others to minister the Gospel more fully and faithfully.

A builder of community. Helping us realize that we need each other on our human journeys -- that Dow Jones averages, quarterly profits, mortgages can separate us into money mountains. The love of Christ embodied in the Church can move mountains.

Because a priest ministers to people. All we do, all we are centers around the human who in Jesus showed us what the divine can be.

First impressions are important because they communicate essences in a most profound way. Rob is colorful, Rob is unifier, Rob is friend. Rob is now full priest. First -- impressions will last a lifetime.

that's the normal state of most practicing Catholics) is a special gift and the normal way for the remission of mortal as well as venial sins. Why not use it as Pope John Paul II instructs us to use it?

These rigged general absolutions remind me of a mob wanting to get cleaned up by a fire hose instead of by the gentle, personal cleansing from a private shower. When I was in Europe as a military chaplain, I sometimes gave general absolution when a battle was coming and I could not hear all the confessions. But it was no casual thing.

Our men understood that for mortal sins they had to go to confession privately when and if they returned. They were glad to have the general absolution, and they were conscientious about seeking private confession afterward.

In the 40s, I think our men were less concerned about mortal and venial sin, and just sensitive about any sins. And they prized absolution and God's grace. I think they were far better instructed in doctrine and in practice than are our youngsters today -- many of whom have little idea about examination of conscience since they have

St. Agnes

Avon -- Rosary Society meeting opens with benediction 7:30 p.m., Dec. 14, followed by a meeting and cookie swap. Participants are asked to bring three dozen Christmas cookies with recipes. Dolores Meath and her band are in charge.



Father Alexander Santora, left, with Father Robert Bourcy.

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On the Right Side

Answering Questions

As part of our day of prayer and praise at Holy Trinity, Webster, we had a question period which brought out puzzlements from several people. Here are some:

Q. May women wear pants suits when they have an audience with the pope? Do U.S. nuns dress as nuns in Rome?

A. I think that for large audiences in St. Peter's Basilica that they are acceptable. But for smaller and more special audiences with the pope there is a dress protocol and pants suits would be out of place. Regarding what nuns and sisters wear, that would depend on the type of nuns and sisters.

Q. Some churches have general absolution and everyone receives absolution. Is this OK?

A. The enthusiasm for general absolution mystifies me. I wonder what the mobs who go to these well-publicized

general absolutions think is happening spiritually; and if they understand they must be properly disposed, i.e. on the level in complete honesty.

General absolution is for exceptional occasions -- when there are not enough priests around to hear individual confessions. Some parishes deliberately plan not to have enough priests, although they are available in the neighborhood; and no priest I know is swamped on any ordinary Saturday confession time.

In fraudem legis they use a planned necessity. If one is in mortal sin, he has to go to private confession within a reasonable time, and he may not use the general absolution again until he has made his private confession to a priest. If a tooth has some decay, it seems more to the point to go to the dentist and have it repaired than to take pain-killers, knowing that eventually one has to go to the dentist anyway.

If one has only venial sins, he does not have to go to confession at all, though he ought to go for devotion and grace. The Church has always taught that, and Pope John Paul II keeps emphasizing it. We know that perfect contrition, Holy Communion, charity, all are instruments to remit venial sins. But the Sacrament of Penance or confession, or as is said today, the Sacrament of Reconciliation (a term I wonder about since one not in mortal sin is not in a state of unreconciliation -- and

vague concepts about sin. Many of them don't know the Act of Contrition, or how to compose one of their own. And most of them do not go to confession unless they are led to the confessional for a special event, like Confirmation or a group Communion.

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