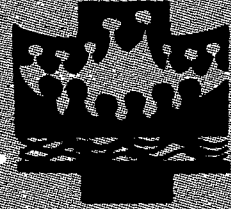


CROSSROADS II

RENEWED HEARTS RENEWED CHURCH

Insights In Liturgy



By Pam Schaeffer

Renewed Hearts: A Commitment

Some readers of this column may remember a childhood game called "Giant Steps." For the uninitiated, this game was played by any number of participants and one leader. The leader called out one player's name and gave a command (e.g. "Sally, you may take three giant steps forward!") Sally would then gather up all her

strength and plunge forward in three, deliberate giant steps.

If, however, the leader didn't use the word "may" in the directions, Sally would have to ask, "May I?" Permission was usually granted and Sally could plunge forward. But, if Sally forgot to listen, and the word "may" wasn't used in the command, her error in plunging forward was rewarded by loss of ground. She would have to go back three giant steps from her original

position. And, of course, the object of this little game was forward progress.

But, what does all this reminiscing about childhood games have to do with the fact that this is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent 1984? Lent, after all, is a serious and solemn time and should not be likened to a silly, childhood game!

While in the deepest sense of the meaning and value to Christians of today and the 39 that follow, this is true; I always feel there is much value in the experiences of life, and this includes our childhood games. It is always possible to learn something new or to see something in a "new" way. In this particular game we learned the importance of listening before committing ourselves to action.

Today, as we attend Ash Wednesday services, each will hear the words: "Turn away from sin and return to the Gospel." With these words, blessed ashes will be applied to our foreheads in the sign of the cross. Listen well! "Turn away from sin and return to the Gospel!"

Unlike Sally, we don't have to listen for a certain, permissive word. We don't have to ask, "May I?" Nor do we have to worry about being tricked into losing ground! We know that we not only have God's permission, we have God's encouragement, direction, support and love to fulfill the command. But like Sally, we do have to listen! In fact, our listening must be deeper than Sally's. We must open ourselves to hear with our whole selves and commit

what we hear to our lives. This kind of listening goes beyond our ears, it challenges our very being and finds its center in our hearts.

"Turn away from sin and return to the Gospel."

The ashes we bear on our foreheads are a reminder of our innate sinfulness. They are an outward sign of an intent to make repairs for hurts we have caused, and if we have listened well, they represent our need to respond to the challenge still ringing in our hearts, "Turn away from sin..."

Our response to this challenge becomes a commitment to renewal. It is a personal commitment carrying far-reaching ramifications. "...return to the Gospel."

Gathering all our strength, we plunge forward to meet the

challenge. The way will not always be easy and our momentum may be slowed to "baby-steps" instead of "giant-steps." There will be times when it seems that we are losing ground, only to find that we are lifted along by companions traveling near-by. And, it is at times such as these, when we are too busy to notice how we measure-up, that real progress is being made. If our commitment was authentic, our progress will be realized in a growth that is immeasurable.

The challenge is personal, our progress is open-minded and immeasurable, and our commitment is heard from within. We must listen deeply and well day after day, year after year until we grow into full stature in Christ.

Why the Cross? A Holy Year Meditation

By Father Robert F. McNamara

During this Holy Year of Redemption 1983-84, Lent is the ideal time to ask ourselves what is meant by "Redemption."

Basically, Redemption is a "buying-back" from the enslavement to sin. So the best way to come to an understanding of redemption from sin is to come to an understanding of sin itself. As the liturgy says, "Christ is our peace and reconciliation...who took away the sin of the world by His blood."

Sin is an "about-face" turn from the God who made us and atoned for us. It is the act of a "prodigal son" who voluntarily turns his back on his Father. (How destructive of peace, to turn away from Love! How ungrateful!)

Of course, we are speaking here of mortal sin. "Deadly" sin, as St. John the Apostle calls it. It is mortal or deadly in the sense that by it we cut the life-line that connects us with God, the giver of divine life. I presume we all know that for a sin to be mortal, it must involve three factors: a serious matter; a realization that such a sin is a grave offense against God; and, nevertheless, a deliberate choice to do the sinful act. If any of these three factors is absent, sin it may still be, but not mortal or deadly sin.

All this means that most people who try to lead Christian

lives do not commit mortal sins on a daily basis. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to conclude that only a few people ever commit "deadly sins." That is why checking our conscience carefully is so important.

Maybe the best way of understanding what God thinks of mortal sins is to see what he thinks of venial sins.

Venial sins are not "about-face" actions. They are more like an "offside" in football. The player runs in the right general direction, but with blameworthy zigs and zags. The trouble with zigging and zagging is that they are not straightforward. The venial sinner, who is supposed to be serving God with all his heart, is serving Him only half-heartedly when he yields to venial sin.

God showed His great displeasure with zigzagers in the case of Moses and David.

Moses led the Israelites on a years-long, twisted route to the Promised Land through the desert of Sinai. At one point, the people grumbled because they had no water. God told Moses to strike a certain dry rock and water would come forth. Moses struck the rock with his staff, not once but twice. That indicated a certain lack of trust on the prophet's part. It was as if he thought he himself was working the miracle, not God. For this sin, which we would normally consider venial, God punished Moses by denying

him the joy of finally entering the Holy Land.

David was first made king of Israel, then Judah. After he had won the crowns of both nations, he ordered that a census be taken there. A normal administrative act, we would probably say. But God saw that it was an act of vanity on the king's part: he wanted to see how many subjects he had, how powerful he had become. God therefore reproved David, who admitted sheepishly that his census had been "very foolish." Choose your punishment, said God: 1) a three-year famine; 2) flight for three months before your enemies; or 3) a three-year epidemic. David chose the epidemic. It took off 70,000 of his people! We would have considered this act of vanity a rather slight sin. God did not take it so lightly.

You may say that these were Old Testament days when God ruled sternly. Yes, but even in New Testament times spiritual Christians have expressed great alarm at venial sins. For instance, St. Ignatius of Loyola said he would rather face a firing squad than commit a single, deliberate venial sin.

Cardinal Newman writing just a century ago, spoke even more forcefully: "The Church," he said, "holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony, so far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one willful untruth, though it harmed no one, or steal one poor farthing (penny) without excuse."

If God indeed detests deliberate venial sins so much, what must he think of mortal sins?

When Pope John Paul visited Lourdes in 1983, he said that today "many no longer know what sin is, or do not dare to know it, as though this knowledge would deprive them of their liberty."

Does that statement fit us?

The answer to "Why the Cross?" is therefore a single word: sin. Lent is ahead of us. In his "Crossroads II" outreach, Bishop Clark joins Pope John Paul II in calling us to renewal. May we then fix our eyes during this Jubilee Lent on the image of the Christ whom sin crucified before the world. Some of His wounds were death-dealing (the wounds in hand and feet). Some were slighter -- "venial" (like the thorn-punctures and the abrasions). None of them was deserved.

Which wounds have you and I afflicted? And what are we going to do about it? Unless we first put off the old self, we cannot put on the new.

St. Christopher's Sets Lenten Lecture Series

Father Sebastian Falcope, scripture scholar and dean of St. Bernard's Institute, will present a series of Lenten talks on five consecutive Wednesday nights, beginning March 14, at St. Christopher's Church, North Chili.

"The Person of Jesus Christ as Presented in the New Testament Gospels" is the title of the series.

Each session will begin, at 7:30 p.m. with Mass and

homily by Father Falcope. His presentation will follow at 8:15 p.m., ending with a question-and-answer period at 9 p.m.

The topics that Father Falcope will address are: March 14, "Jesus as Prophet"; March 21, "Jesus as Suffering Servant"; March 28, "Jesus as Savior and Redeemer"; April 4, "Jesus as Son of Man"; and April 11, "Jesus as Son of God."

CROSSROADS II



RENEWED HEARTS
RENEWED CHURCH

FIRST WEEK OF LENT

March 11	2:00 p.m.	Sacred Heart Cathedral	Rite of Election
12-14		Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua	Priest's Renewal
14	7:30 p.m.	St. Mary's, Corning	Rite of Election
16	7:30 p.m.	St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls	Rite of Election

Reading: "If death began its reign through one man because of his offense, much more shall those who receive the overflowing grace and gift of justice live and reign through the one man, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5: 15)

Reflection: The Sunday readings present the reality of evil present in the world. St. Paul pronounces the power of Jesus' act of redemption has overcome the power of evil. Matthew speaks of temptation and sin, and points to the power Jesus has over them. Today's readings invite the assembly to reflect on the reality of the world around them. We cannot hide our heads in the sand, we must be conscious of sin and its effects on everyone's life. Empowered by the power of the Spirit, we are initiated through baptism and nourished in Eucharist to witness the power of God present in a world still tempted by sin.

Lent Series

St. Anne's parish will present a Lenten program based on the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," beginning Thursday, March 15, in the school hall on Mt. Hope Ave.

The format calls for a series of lectures followed by discussion periods.

Msgr. William H. Shannon, professor emeritus of Religious Studies at Nazareth College, will speak on "Highlights of the Bishop's Pastoral Letter," 7:30 p.m., March 15. He will speak again, on "Approach to Peace: Deterrence or Non-Violent Love," 7:30 p.m. the following Thursday.

Thomas Driscoll, director of religious education at Church of the Transfiguration and St. Louis Church, will discuss, "The Pastoral Letter and My Conscience," 7:30 p.m., March 29.

Deacon Daniel and Mrs. Sheila Kinsky will present, "Parenting for Peace," 7:30 p.m., April 5.

Sister Barbara Moore, RSM, director of the Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, will discuss "Being Peacemakers in a Violent World," 7:30 p.m., April 12.

The public is invited to each of the programs.