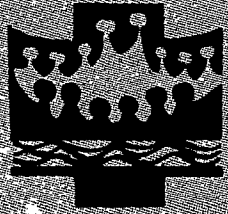


CROSSROADS II

RENEWED HEARTS RENEWED CHURCH

Insights In Liturgy

By Helen Halligan



Renewed Hearts: Witness As Gift

Being chosen as a sponsor in the RCIA process gives witness to the fact that other people see this person as having a renewed heart — that this person's life is witness to the faith we are all striving to perfect. Hopefully, the

parish community gives witness to the power of God present in a world still tempted by sin, and welcomes all who wish to become a part of their community's faith journey. Having people look to us as witness and guide for their own spiritual journey should challenge us to a fuller and deeper commitment on our own journey.

In the very early Church there was no specialized

ministry of sponsor because the Christian community was very conscious of its mission to invite others to meet the Lord. It is a sad fact that many members of our present-day faith communities are at the level of the catechumen, that is, they do not see themselves as part of a mission and witness to others.

The special ministry of sponsor can be summed up as friend, witness and guide. The sponsors, along with the whole community, are called to lead the catechumens to pray more easily, see Christ in all things, be inspired in all their deeds, and be charitable to the point of self-renunciation. This is a far cry from what

in our lifetimes was expected of sponsors for baptisms! The sponsors are asked to witness to this type of life, and as you can see, are also challenged to live it out ever more deeply.

The sponsor witnesses to the catechumen what it means to believe in the Lord, and also witnesses to the community regarding the spiritual progress of the catechumen — especially at the Rite of Election.

The sponsor and catechumen are expected to develop a close relationship, both as part of this process and in their every day life. The sponsor should be able to help the catechumen discern what the Lord is

doing in his/her life, assist the catechumen in decision-making about membership in the community and give witness of these things to the rest of the community.

As guide, the sponsor helps the person enter and become active in the work of the community. The sponsor sometimes has to assume the role of a catechist on a one-to-one basis. In this way, questions can be probed more in depth than in a group situation. The guide (sponsor) stays with the catechumen through baptism and after, helping the person to become integrated into the life of the community.

Every member of a parish community should

feel challenged by the role of the sponsor, and using this example seek to draw others to the faith. As members of the Christian community we all possess this gift of witness that is given to each of us on that day when we were embraced by the Church in full membership. It is the same gift that St. Paul describes in his letter to the Corinthians: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels, to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

Confession and the Holy Year

By Father Robert McNamara

One of the special events of this Holy Year of Redemption was the canonization of St. Leopold Mandic on Oct. 16, 1983. In his homily at the Mass of canonization, Pope John Paul II called St. Leopold a "heroic servant of reconciliation and penance."

St. Leopold Mandic was born in Yugoslavia in 1866 and died as recently as 1942. Had you ever heard of him before his canonization? I hadn't. But that would have been quite all right with the saint, since he strove all his life not to be noticed. His case is another beautiful illustration of how God (as the "Magnificat of Mary" states) has "raised the lowly to high places."

Leopold's life was externally humdrum. He entered the Capuchin Franciscans in 1884 and accepted whatever assignments his superiors gave him. Even within that rather austere order he achieved note neither as a theological writer, nor a cultural leader, nor a social activist. In fact, his field of operation was severely restricted. He couldn't preach because of a speech impediment. At heart he was a burning missionary and ecumenist; but poor health excluded him from these types of apostolate. Where he did excel, however, was as a confessor. For 52 years, his confessional became a veritable Mount Sinai where, with him as a spiritual catalyst, man and God met face-to-face.

Pope John Paul was happy to canonize such a man in this Holy Year. One of the pope's main emphases for the Jubilee is the need of a return to more frequent confession. All of us who remember the days before Vatican II will recall what crowds of Catholics used to receive the sacrament of Penance. Especially before the great feasts, and during parish missions, priests had to hear confessions for many hours. Yes, we priests grumbled now and then at being confined and cramped for such long periods. But there was no greater consolation to a priest than to know he had been part of some penitent's wholehearted reconciliation with God.

After Vatican II, the Church revamped the rite for confession, in order to make it more convenient and (it was hoped) more meaningful. One of the new formats for the Sacrament of Reconciliation was general absolution. But this was designed to be used only in "emergency" situations, and then only according to the best judgment of the local bishop, corresponding with the criteria of each national hierarchy. The "unique ordinary" way of receiving the Sacrament of Penance was to remain associated with confession to a priest.

The reason for this rule is not hard to understand. A parallel case may clarify it. Our daily papers carry health columns, usually written by physicians. They can tell us much that is applicable to our own physical ailments. But when it comes to prescribing precise remedies, we must go (as the columnists themselves remind us) to our own physicians. Even an epidemic virus must be treated in the context of each victim's own physique. So unless a doctor has thoroughly examined the individual patient, he cannot reach a proper diagnosis or prescribe a proper remedy. So, too, it is only when we reveal our individual state of soul to a confessor that he can guide us to a proper cure.

When confession is well used by both penitent and confessor, it can really help us to become better persons. Alexander Dziuba furnishes us with a case-in-point. This Polish tailor was imprisoned during World War II with St. Maximilian Kolbe the "Saint of Auschwitz." He had the rare privilege of being frequently counseled and absolved by St. Maximilian. In later years Alexander observed, "I can say that after each confession I was not only relieved but I saw the world differently."

It is true that confession was established primarily for grave sins. But as the pope said last June, "The Church hopes...that even beyond this case of necessity, Christians will have recourse to the sacrament of forgiveness with reasonable frequency in order to foster in themselves even better dispositions... It is an irreplaceable sacrament in Christian life; it cannot be disregarded or neglected if one wants the seed of divine life to mature in the Christian and produce all the desired fruits."

In 1981 the bishops of Texas issued a joint pastoral letter along these same lines. The Sacrament of Penance, they wrote, is not only for those guilty of mortal sin, "but for all who experience the weakening effect of lesser or venial sins in their lives." How often should it be received? "The spiritual needs of the individual penitents should determine the approximate frequency of confession, either on a bimonthly, monthly or seasonal basis."

Two years later, one of the Texas bishops reported that in those parishes where the pastoral letter had been read and seriously discussed, the number of confessions had risen significantly.

Now, some may say, "I'm ashamed to confess my sins." The reply to this must be, "Shame is part of the therapy. Only when we recognize and are ashamed of the wrong we have done, can we begin to do what is right."



Ash Wednesday



350 Attend Cathedral Service

Some 350 diocesans attended Ash Wednesday services last week at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Above left, Bishop Matthew H. Clark distributes ashes to one of the smaller members of the congregation. Left, Bishop Clark blesses the ashes with incense. The bishop began his Crossroads journey in Elmira earlier in the day at St. Patrick's Church, where nearly 700 attended the 11:30 a.m. service.

The Journey

March 18	5:00 p.m.	St. Bridget's, Rochester	Parish Visitation
20	10:00 a.m.	Northwest Region	Ministers' Day of Prayer
	7:30 p.m.	St. Augustine's (Southwest Region)	EVENING PRAYER
21	8:30 a.m.		Aquinas Institute
	7:30 p.m.	Assumption Church, Fairport	Challenge of Peace Discussion
24	9:00 p.m.		Antioch Visitation

Reading: "All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." (Genesis 12:36)
Reflection: The Sunday readings paint a picture of faithfulness and enrichment. Genesis tells the story of Abram as he placed his faith in God and leaves his homeland for the land the Lord will give him and his descendants. St. Paul encourages Timothy to bear the hardships of the Gospel faithfully — to do so will allow a new, unimagined experience. Matthew recounts the Transfiguration. In the glory of the vision, he reminds the listeners that there is a struggle to reach the reality of the vision.

We are called to struggle. At times, the unanswerable questions are asked (why? why do children die? why do I feel so alone? why has God forgotten me? why does everything go wrong for me?). And yet, we find security in our faith. We discover renewed strength in the faith which is already present within us.