

Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



Ministry of the Priest in the Diocesan Church

(This is the first part in a three-part series of Bishop Matthew H. Clark's speech to the clergy conference.)

Once again we have the chance to come together under the guidance of God's Spirit to re-appreciate and grow in our priestly identity and fraternity; and to be strengthened for our service among and for God's people.

I welcome you with brotherly love and tell you in all truth that I consider these meetings with you a life-giving charge to my own ministry. Your love for God's people and for one another always leaves me the more anxious to serve.

My hope is that in these hours as we come together around the deep streams of life which find us together, you, too, will be strengthened and encouraged to continue your own ministry.

Much has happened since we met here last year. It is good for us to remember some of those events, circumstances and celebrations. Whether they make us smile again or awaken hard memories, they help us to realize, when we remember them in the Lord's Spirit, that we are a people with a past for which we can be grateful and a future in which we can place our hope.

We remember:

- a Holy Year of Redemption, now almost complete. A generous central committee and strong cooperation from parish communities has made that a year of grace for many.
- A Lenten season under the theme of "Crossroads To Life".
- the resurgence of life brought to us by the restored Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- the establishment of our mission in Tabasco, Mexico; the thoughtful and daring extension of their Brazilian mission by our Sisters of St. Joseph.
- the decision of these same sisters and our Sisters of Mercy to establish programs of formation for Brazilian and Chilean candidates respectively.
- the exciting celebration of our Evangelization Day in Geneva.
- our Diocesan Service Corps now in its infancy and full of promise.
- the ordination of five priests and 16 permanent deacons.
- the passage to eternity of five of our brother priests.
- the end of the Nestle's Boycott.
- a large number of parish renewal programs, retreats and missions.
- the work done in so many parish communities on our pastoral letter on women.
- all that the pastoral letter, "The Challenge Of Peace," and our effort to respond faithfully has meant to us.
- the efforts made by the presbyterate to revise the Constitution of the Priests' Council, so that we will be in harmony with the Church in our corporate mission.
- the thoughtful work done to make our vocations program more responsive to the pastoral realities of the day.

• the renewal enjoyed by six of our brothers in sabbatical programs.

- the fruitful beginnings of review for growth in ministry.
- March Fourth to Ministry and the joyful experience of being with our young people.

These are some I remember. It is not a total list by any means. I am sure that you could mention others of this kind important to you and add countless experiences of daily ministry which abide with you in a heart-changing way.

If all of these memories remind us of the beauty of priestly service in the community of faith, they also bring to us here the holy people of God, a priestly people, of whom we are called to be loving servants.

It is with a common and explicit awareness of them that I would like to develop my theme, priestly ministry in the local Church.

Somehow we all want to be spiritual leaders. That is altogether consonant with the commission of the Church at ordination and with the deepest wishes of our people. They, too, want us to be leaders.

That we want to be spiritual leaders and that such leadership is expected of us, are not questions at issue. But what spiritual leadership is and how it is most fruitfully exercised in the contemporary Church are other matters.

I have tried to think and pray and read about that question and want to share with you some of the fruits of that activity. I do not share them with you because I think they are the last statement, or even my last statement on the matter. I offer them to you with the conviction that it is my responsibility to be one with you in our common journey and search; and with the hope that together we will respond to the profound challenge to renewed leadership the Church places before us today.

There is no doubt that changing social conditions, the ongoing renewal of the Church's life, the challenging reality of a decline in the number of vocations to the priesthood, the exciting and inexorable development of the theology and practice of lay ministries have come together to reshape and remold ordained priestly ministry and will only continue to do so in the years ahead.

Although we might differ in opinion about the details or even the desirability of some elements of it all, we would all agree, I think, that things have changed. One cannot live priesthood today in the same way it was lived in 1945 or 1965.

A sense of history tells us we should not be surprised or frightened at that because it has happened again and again throughout the ages; a sense of realism will keep us alert to the inevitability of the need for further change and adaptation in the days ahead. Of that I think there can be no doubt.

But are there constants which provide a reliable base from which to work and the strength with which to effect these changes? Or is everything up for grabs? My own response to that is to locate and try to sort out those questions in the

context of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the summit and source of our life together. There, everything which is God-given, God-touched or God-seeking, is offered back to our loving Father in the perfect love of Jesus. To this event people can bring their profoundly human search for meaning, life and truth. In this event they can rightly seek to draw strength and nourishment from Christ present in the proclamation of the Word, the breaking of the Bread, and in the holiness of the assembly. In this event they come to know and draw strength from the powerful, humbling dignity of their own priestly mission.

If the Eucharist is all of this, and we believe that it is, then a prayerful consideration of our presidency at the Eucharist should draw us to an ever deepening appreciation of some of the ministerial streams which converge there. For example, I mention: (1) the need to appreciate ourselves and to be perceived by our people as pilgrims graced with saving life, yet still searching, vulnerable and incomplete; and (2) the reminder our presidency should be to us that our preaching mission is at the very heart of priestly ministry; and (3) with a particular emphasis, our place in helping to identify, support the development of and call forth the mission-gifts with which the Lord so lavishly endows His people.

It is from this kind of reflection on the Eucharistic Liturgy as the paradigm of God active among His people that I try to reflect on my own ministry. I know it relates not so much to doing good for others as to helping them discover the goodness in and around them. It becomes more apparent to me each day that I am not and cannot appear to be someone who "has it done" and is now very generously sharing with others how to do it.

Rather the realization grows that the heart of my ministry lies in sharing as fully as I can the human condition of our people, faithfully and constantly reminding them of God's love for them in Christ and affirming the irreplaceable personal and apostolic importance they have among their brothers and sisters. It is searching with them and offering the fruits of the search. It means giving when I can and receiving when that is for their good or mine. It is laughing with them and crying with them. It means being silent when speaking would mask my sense of inadequacy; it means speaking when my fears would keep me silent.

That developing sense of ministry in light of the needs in today's world makes me prize the more deeply my priestly call to be reconciler. I meet people every day, as you do, who long for reconciliation and healing. Like you, I know that there is "no greater human fulfillment...than touching human hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of the merciful and compassionate redeemer of the world." (John Paul II, "Address to U.S. Bishops," Ad Limina Visits--September 9, 1983) And like you, I am sure, I am freed by their open hearted, humble search for God to be simpler and more myself in my own search.

CFC Seeks Foster Homes

Catholic Family Center, last week issued a call to diocesan for foster homes for a number of young people under their care.

Catholic Family Center will often receive a telephone call from a young, single, pregnant teen who needs a home away from her family for a short while during her pregnancy and perhaps for a time after her baby is born, a CFC release stated. "Often these young girls may have few financial resources and are most grateful when Catholic Family Center is able to offer her a temporary free home."

"However, we presently

do not have enough foster homes available in the city and suburbs. These teens are going through a very difficult time and some need to be away from the pressures in their homes in order to make a responsible decision regarding themselves and their expected baby.

"Very often a foster family can help a young teen by being good role models and also by giving her the incentive to finish school," the release said.

In addition to helping pregnant teens, CFC also runs a program for young refugees. The program, unique in the Rochester area

is called the Unaccompanied Minor Program.

"We are in need of many foster families who are willing to open their homes to older teens from Vietnam and Laos. These teens (ages 14 to 17) have left their homelands without their parents, hoping for a better life for themselves.

"Several of these teens who first came to Rochester through this program in the Fall of 1979 are now in college and doing excellent work. Many have become gainfully employed and are living independently. A few of these young men have great musical and artistic tal-

ents and have received recognition in the annual Scholastic Arts Award Exhibit locally," the agency said.

"In addition, we have recently received several requests to place Amerasian children, that is, children of American fathers and Asian mothers. All of these children range in age from 11 to 17. We currently have 42 children in placement and hope to find homes for eight more due to arrive this month.

"Some of the Amerasian children may become legally available for adoption once their status is clarified," the agency noted.

The agency singled out "a very special urgent need" for a foster home for four siblings, a male 13 and females 14, 16, and 17. The children need to live together, the agency said, to "give each other the much needed emotional support after leaving their parents."

"We are also in need of a foster home for an 11-year-old boy who needs a father who will become involved with him. He is a cheerful and good-looking boy who needs love and affection," the CFC said.

"We offer Foster Parent Training for our new foster parents to help them prepare

for this most satisfying experience. All of the children's medical and clothing expenses are covered and foster parents will also receive assistance with room and board," the release noted.

"Of course there are problems just as there are with raising any child," the CFC admitted, "however our agency has the expertise of two capable caseworkers and a sensitive interpreter to help during these difficult times."

The agency asked any persons wishing further information or offering help to contact Joyce Daley or Bernadette Slater, (716) 546-7220.

Bishop Asks Religious to Aid Quinn Study

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has extended an invitation to the women and men religious of the diocese to meet with him to continue participation in a nationwide effort, headed by Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco, to study religious life in this country.

The study was initiated through a letter from Pope John Paul II to the United

States bishops in June, 1983, and was accompanied by a document from the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

In his letter of invitation to the religious, Bishop Clark articulated a twofold purpose of the gatherings:

- to contribute to the short-range purposes of the Quinn study;
- and to take another step

in deepening the existing spirit of understanding and collaboration among the religious and himself.

He also stated that four themes drew considerable comment at the November meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and are central to the study.

These include:

- The public witness of women and men religious;

- The relationship of religious to the Church;
- Apostolic spirituality;
- And the decline of vocations to the religious life.

To prepare for the meetings, religious were asked to respond to questions developed around these themes.

Bishop Clark will use these responses in his preliminary report to Archbishop Quinn, and as a basis for his own

comments and reflections at the gatherings.

Planning the meetings are Sister Muriel Curran, SSND, and Msgr. Gerard Krieg, vicars for religious, and a committee of religious representing eight congregations.

Dates and sites for the meetings include: 7-9:30 p.m., March 23, Cardinal Mooney High School; 5-7:30 p.m., April 1, St. Stephen's

School, Geneva; 5-7:30 p.m., St. Patrick's School, Corning.

Deadline

Deadline for news in the Courier-Journal is noon on Thursday, preceding Wednesday publication. The Courier-Journal address is 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

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