

CROSSROADS II

RENEWED HEARTS RENEWED CHURCH

The Holy Year and Religious Vocations

By Father Robert F. McNamara

My priest-classmate Joe is the son of a French-born chef who operated a restaurant in California in the early decades of the century. Joe grew up proud of his French ancestry. After finishing college at the University of California, he decided to do graduate work in French at the University of the Sorbonne in Paris. The University of California had promised him a job in their language department on his return.

Joe reached Paris before classes started, so he took time out to visit his uncles in southern France. Then he made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Lourdes, not many miles from where his relatives lived.

While at Lourdes, he went to confession -- in French, of course -- to one of the shrine confessors, a man whom he had never met before. Towards the end of the confession, the priest said to him, "I don't know why I feel this so strongly, but I feel that I should tell you to study for the priesthood."

Joe was stunned. He thought he had misunderstood, so he asked, "S'il vous plait, repeat slowly what you said." The priest obliged.

Joe went straight from the confessional to the grotto where Our Lady had appeared to St. Bernadette. For an hour or more he prayed very intensely.

What happened then? He cancelled his arrangements at the Sorbonne, returned to California, and entered the seminary. Ordained to the priesthood in 1937, he has had a long and successful career as a seminary professor and pastor. Though now officially "retired", he is working actively among senior citizens. Wherever he goes, he recommends devotion to Our Lady at Lourdes, and he always has at hand some water from the miraculous spring of Lourdes. It has effected some notable cures among the people he serves and prays with.

God calls each one of us to a special state of life. Our

life-setting is the vocation (or calling) to which God has appointed us. Some have a vocation to the married state, some to natural celibacy in the world; others to the priesthood or the religious life as sisters or religious brothers. There are many types of vocations because God needs many types of services.

The story of Joe's calling is the story of a religious vocation to the priesthood. I fancy that every priest, every sister, every brother who receives this relatively rare vocation, could tell you an equally fascinating story of how he or she received the "call". But each would be a different tale. Religious vocations are custom-made. As Jesus summoned each of the apostles in diverse ways, so he summons in a personalized manner each person called to this special way of life. He said as much himself: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (John 15:16).

In recent years we have witnessed a vast drop-off in the number of religious vocations. Along with that, a large minority of those who had once (it seemed) been called and had accepted the call, have chosen to return from the priesthood or religious life to the lay state. Why this drop in religious vocations and this departure from religious life? God alone knows. But the practical consequence is that we have, and will continue for some time to have, far less priests and religious than we had before 1960.

Of course, Our Lord implied that religious vocations would at times be scarce. That seems to be hinted at in His statement: "The harvest is great, but laborers are scarce. Beg the harvest master to send out laborers to gather his harvest" (Matt. 9:37-38). The remedy remains the same as it did in His day, faced by a scarcity, we must pray until the quota is again filled.

Nor is just praying enough. "Promotion" is also necessary. A religious calling will come from God, but others must prepare those called to listen, accept, and follow through. In its decree on the training of priests,

Vatican II reminds us that all Catholics, but particularly priests, parents and teachers, must be encouragers of religious vocations -- encouragers, not pressurizers. A question, then, to priests: How many of us have done enough to encourage such vocations? (A priest or religious, happy in his or her calling, is the best advertising of that calling. Perhaps I should add that, for Joe and myself, our 47 years of priesthood have been most happy!) How many parents have spoken well of the priesthood or religious life in the hearing of their children? How many teachers or counselors have boosted religious life as a career to be considered along with butcher, baker and candlestick maker?

We should bring the matter into focus during the Holy Year of Redemption, 1983-84. Pope John Paul himself planned a special international celebration at Rome for members of religious orders on Feb. 1-2, 1984. This was followed on Feb. 21-23 with a "Jubilee of the Clergy" in which priests and deacons from all over the world took part.

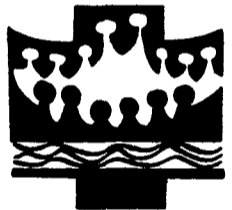
When he talked about religious vocations on those occasions, the Holy Father went back to the motto he gave to the Holy Year, "Open the Doors to the Redeemer!" As he said last Christmas, "We must truly open ourselves to the Christ who comes. May the doors of our hearts not remain like those of Bethlehem -- coldly, agnostically closed."

It stands to reason that God is still calling. Therefore, some of those called must not be listening. How about you? (I venture to ask likely candidates who happen to read these lines.)

Ah, you think yourselves unworthy? Of course you are! That is exactly why He is calling you.

You think you may fail? With Him to help you? Nonsense!

Insights In Liturgy



By Father Thomas P. Mull

A Personal Journey

A friend of mine recently said to me, "It's Lent and time to start my penance." Being curious, I asked her what that penance might be. She said to me, "I fast, and try to pray a little extra each day."

"Not bad," I thought. Then, I asked her why she found fasting and prayer helpful.

She said, "It helps me lose weight, and I feel better about myself; also, when I pray, I seem to feel more at peace with myself and the world."

Wishing to pursue this topic a little further, I questioned why she might feel more at peace with the world through prayer. She replied, "Everything

seems to look different when I take a little time to start my day with God, or take a breather with the Lord midway through the day." Our conversation ended soon after that -- probably to her relief that I would ask no more questions.

Lent, for many people, is a season for personal undertakings. I think about what I want to do with my time during my Lenten season. Why? Because the Church gives us this special time to turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel (as we heard on Ash Wednesday). But is there more to the Lenten experience than what happens to me?

In the conversation quoted above, a very curious idea developed. Part of this person's Lenten exercises would be

felt at one with God and consequently with other people. Others were benefiting from the increase in her personal prayer life. I would be willing to bet that because she felt better about herself, through fasting, others found her a more pleasant individual. Now, I am not one to suggest that Lent becomes the latest diet fad. Nor am I one to point out that the success or failure of prayer will rest upon the types of relationships in which we find ourselves. But, I feel that this type of activity indicates the community purpose of the Lenten experience.

The bishop's Crossroads II message this year is to work to renew our hearts that the Church might be renewed. This invites each Christian to enter into the Lenten mysteries with eyes, not one him/herself, but on the community. It is the community, the Body of Christ, who is ultimately to share in the renewed experience of individual members. That is why the above conversation highlights the importance

of Lent being a personal journey. Personal in the sense of growing with a purpose. Each of us is invited to grow. But in all the struggles of our Lenten penance we must not become selfish. There is a goal to our activity. Our personal renewal, growing closer to the Lord; and, because of this, a deeper realization of the Lord's presence within our community.

Our personal journeys, then, become so many diverse paths which travel, twine and intertwine with the paths of others. As they weave the tapestry which becomes expressive of Lent 1984, our community identity begins to emerge.

If we are to truly hear the words of the gospels for the first two Sundays of Lent, we are going to

hear challenges to experience the Lord deeply (as did the disciples at the Transfiguration); and to gaze deeply at ourselves to search out temptation to sin (as we witness Jesus' experience in Matthew's gospel). To face these challenges, and to gaze within ourselves fully aware that personal renewal has a positive effect on the entire community, allows the deeply spiritual essence of this holy season to invite individual growth and communal development. "Renewed Hearts... Renewed Church" is not only a motto, it is an invitation to journey and a challenge to exemplify.

Many days of Lent lie before us. May they be days of personal fulfillment and communal victory.

The Journey

| March | Time | Location | Activity |
|-------|------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 25 | 12:30 p.m. | St. Francis of Assisi Hispanic Community | Parish Visitation |
| 26 | 1:00 p.m. | Craig Developmental Ctr. | Visitation |
| | 3:30 p.m. | Groveland Facility | Visitation |
| | 7:30 p.m. | St. Salome's. | Challenge of Peace Discussion |
| 28 | 5:15 p.m. | Church of the Annunciation, Rochester | Parish Visitation/ Soup Supper |
| 30 | 9:00 a.m. | St. Stephen's, Geneva, St. Francis DeSales, Geneva; DeSales High School; Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry. Finger Lakes Office of Religious Education. | Visitations |
| | 7:30 p.m. | St. Stephen's, Geneva (YOW Region) | EVENING PRAYER |

Reading: "...the water I give shall become a fountain within him, leaping up to provide eternal life." (John 4:14b)

Reflection: Water is the symbol of this week. The Sunday readings provide magnificent examples of the meaning of this natural symbol. Moses calms the people's fears by giving them drink. Paul focuses the importance of baptismal water when he says, "...while we were still sinners Christ died for us." The Samaritan woman speaks for all in asking for "living water."

The tradition of the Church allows for constant use of the symbol of water. It calls forth such images as refreshment, washing, redeeming, cleansing, enriching, and quenching among them. As a renewed people, we are called to be water for others. We are to be the living reality of Jesus present in the world. By reaching out, we quench the thirst of poverty. By loving, we enrich the dryness of loneliness. By caring, we cleanse the evil of apathy.

Lenten Regulations

All Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat.

Only Good Friday is a day of both fast and abstinence.

The fast is defined as one full meal a day, with two lighter meals. It is required of those 21-59 years of age.

The prohibition against meat on Fridays applies to those 14 years of age or older.

A Catholic should not lightly excuse oneself from these practices.



700 Attend Ash Wednesday Service in Elmira

More than 700 attended noontime Ash Wednesday services two weeks ago at St. Patrick's Church, Elmira. Left, Bishop Matthew H. Clark gives ashes to Debbie Farran.

Photo courtesy Elmira Star-Gazette/George Lian.