

# Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



It's good to be at this column again this week. I have missed doing it because it is a specific way of sharing a word with each of you almost every week.

I am excited on this Monday morning -- and not only because the sun is shining for the first time in several days. The excitement comes from the renewal of the Lenten season and the joy which is mine at seeing so many signs of life in our faith communities these days.

By way of catching you up on some events of these last weeks, let me mention some of the places I've been and people I've met.

● In response to our Holy Father's request for a deepened pastoral relationship between bishops and the religious of their respective dioceses, we have had a series of three meetings with our religious men and women. These were held in Rochester, Geneva and Corning. Each lasted 2 1/2 hours.

Each was a graced time because men and women who have devoted themselves to God and His people in beautiful vocation shared with me and one another their experiences of religious life.

Did you ever get to know someone and begin to grow in admiration of that person and his or her work? When that

occurs in my life my next bit of curiosity is to know what makes that individual tick. When another person freely tells me something of her or her inner life that is always a great gift.

That's been the joy of these meetings. People I have grown to know and admire very much have kindly told me about their love for God, His people, the Church and one another. You often ask me if I get tired of meetings. Meetings can be tiring, of course, but meetings like the ones I have just mentioned are life-giving and invigorating.

● Thus far in Lent we have gathered for Evening Prayer with regional assemblies at St. Augustine's in Rochester, St. Stephen's in Geneva and St. Mary's in Bath.

For many in attendance, the celebration of this kind of common prayer is a first time experience. The reaction of many participants is a very positive one. The reasons for that positive reaction vary but among them are the quiet and relaxing atmosphere of the prayer, the faithful presence of sisters and brothers from other parishes, the opportunity to learn and enjoy some new liturgical music and the opportunity to meet new friends and old over refreshments after the service.

This evening I'll be joining the people of the Tompkins-

Tioga Region for Evening Prayer at Holy Cross in Dryden. On Friday, St. Alphonsus in Auburn will welcome the Seneca-Cayuga Region to their beautiful church.

● We hosted delegations from each of the eight dioceses of New York State at a Provincial Assembly last weekend.

Our theme was "Penance and Reconciliation." The event is well-covered in the Courier-Journal but I mention it now to share one insight which I have taken from our days together.

It is that healing and reconciliation are gifts which we all need to receive and they are gifts which we are all able to offer. During these closing days of Lent, please be especially mindful of ways, even very small ones, in which you can bring healing, reconciliation and peace to someone else.

● I make an out-and-back trip to Chicago on Thursday for the first meeting of the committee charged with preparing a pastoral letter on Women in the Church for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. I ask the prayers of all in the Diocese of Rochester for this project from its beginning to its ending.

● While I enjoyed a couple of weeks without a deadline, I must say that I am glad to be back with you in this column today. It's like a reunion with old friends.

Peace.

## Abortion

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on the responsibilities of office . . . who take on the burdens of helping human life."

Both he and Bishop Clark stressed that the Church was concerned with the "continuum of life." They emphasized that the Church worked for the sanctity of all human life, as Bishop Clark put it: "We support life at every stage, at every moment it is precious."

Archbishop O'Connor set the tone when he said, "We feel concern at every level but there must be particular concern for the unborn. If an unborn baby is not safe in its mother's womb, then if not ludicrous, it becomes very questionable that we should be addressing" the other great issues of the day, such as nuclear warfare, homelessness, racism.

A reporter asked the archbishop if he discussed the statement the night before when he met with President Reagan in New York City. He replied that he didn't but "we did talk about the rights of the unborn. In my public remarks I had to laud all the president does for positions held by the Catholic Church, that he took a forthright stand even before his election."

But, the archbishop went on in obvious reference to Reagan administration cutbacks on social programs, "We can't concern ourselves merely with the rights of the unborn but with human life at every stage. Recently, I visited the Bowery -- the Catholic soup kitchens and those of many faiths with which we cooperate. The private sector can't do this alone. Far more is needed from the public sector.

"I would be happy to see this administration do more and more for all human life."

The archbishop was asked if a candidate realistically can take an anti-abortion stand and still be successful.

"Reagan took this position and he was elected president," he replied. "Second, this is a matter of values. Whether a person wants to be 'president or King Tut,' he should address the moral implications of abortion honestly.

Bishop Clark was asked what could local officials, "such as Mayor Ryan," do.

"We ask that they support the kind of legislation that supports this statement," Bishop Clark said. "We merely invite public officials and citizens at all levels to read what we have to say, judge its consistency. . . We ask that they please consider that life is the most precious gift we have in common."

Probably, the strongest statement elicited from Archbishop O'Connor was in response to a query on whether he disagreed with the U.S. Supreme Court 1973 decision legalizing abortion.

"I categorically, unquestionably think the 1973 rulings were very, very poor decisions -- even legislatively." Pointing out that he is not a lawyer, the archbishop said nevertheless people "far more versed in jurisprudence feel that the decisions are very poor legislation," but he would not throw bombs at abortion clinics.

"Violence is never an answer to violence," he continued. "Violence has been done to the unborn . . . Genocide has been practiced by other governments. Millions of people -- Jews, Christians, clergy and laity -- were put to death in Germany and Cambodia. We believe millions of people have been put to death in the U.S. And it was done with the support of the Supreme Court. We have a profound obligation to have such laws reversed. The Church tries to work within the law. But we will never accept an unjust law."

And he pledged that the nation's bishops "supported by millions of others, will work to the last breath, no matter what public opinions are held, to right this wrong."

In a return to the presidential political race, Bishop Clark was asked whom he is supporting. He said he hadn't decided for whom he would vote but added, "If anyone had a consistent position (pro-life) across the board (on abortion, armament, nuclear arms race), I think he would be extraordinarily successful."



Clockwise, from above, Father Joseph Champlin of Syracuse was among the concelebrants at Friday afternoon's liturgy; Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York was the principal celebrant, assisted by permanent Deacon J. Gregory Doyle; Sister Hilaire Gaelens, RSM, and Father Louis Vasile welcome Father Anthony Sherman of Brooklyn at the registration table; a guest panel that included local Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, far left, diocesan director of religious education, also included Brother Anthony Quinn, standing, of the Archdiocese of New York.

Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

