



The tales of fellow travelers

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

Sometimes people feel alone — even afraid — as they pursue the Christian life. If their feelings were put into words, they might say something like this:

"No one has ever experienced the difficulties, the temptations that I encounter. I am lost on a strange, uncharted island."

The fact is that millions of quite ordinary human beings have responded to God. Each is just one person in a long line of those in history who have set out on the same path and stumbled bravely ahead in spite of every imaginable obstacle.

But on second thought, each of us is not only one or as alone as we may sometimes feel.

All followers of Jesus — past and present — are one in Christ. They are bonded in his life-giving vitality.

St. Paul put it this way: "All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3).

In another place Paul wrote: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf" (I Cor. 10).

This union among Christians is intimate and vital — so much so that it can be described as an organic union, the same kind that joins the various parts of a body together, all of which derive vitality from one life principle. In this case the life princi-

ple is the risen Christ himself.

And Christ lives forever. So we are one all times, who were as human, as weak,

This is a reason why Scripture offers so many tales of our fellow travelers, stories which do not dwell on our and shortcomings but portray them as successful — by the grace of God. Their victories are ours.

Paul expressed that idea movingly: "Everything that was written for our instruction, so that we might have hope from the lessons of patience and endurance in the Scriptures. May God, the source of all encouragement, enable you to live in peace with one another" (Romans 15).

The author of Hebrews urged Christian leaders, "who spoke the word of God to you, whose lives ended and imitate their faith. Join them, yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:7).

Human beings too are the same yesterday and today. So there is encouragement to be found in the stories of the past — and not only encouragement but also strength.

For they still are one with us in what is the better term, the communion of saints.

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's School in Mich.)

Sainthood on earth and beyond

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

The "communion of saints" is a grand image for the bond among Christians, Lawrence Cunningham said. "It reminds us that every Christian is striving to be a 'saint' — a word packed with more meaning than people suspect.

The term reminds Christians that they "live in solidarity with a whole Christian tradition, with those who lived before us and those living now," he said.

"It shows we are part of a bond larger than our life in a particular parish, in a particular town, at a particular time," said Cunningham, a religious studies professor at Florida's Tallahassee State University.

He pointed out that in the early church "saints were living Christians." The terms "saints" and "believers" were almost identical in meaning. For St. Paul, the "saints" meant "all believers true to the person of Christ."

Jesuit Father Karl Rahner liked to say the "saints are people who teach us that Christianity can be lived out in this or that particular way which hadn't been thought of before," Cunningham said. He then related the story of Franz Jagerstatter, an Austrian peasant. During the early part of World War II Jagerstatter refused to be inducted into the German army. He considered Hitler's cause immoral and was jailed.

Partly because of his responsibilities as a married man, the whole village was against him, Cunningham said, "and many peo-

ple tried to change his mind." But Jagerstatter persisted and eventually was executed.

Jagerstatter "is impressive, someone the ordinary guy in the pew" can identify with, Cunningham said. Having received a genuine insight from his reading of the Gospels, Jagerstatter stood firm. "That's kind of rare," the Florida professor commented.

Cunningham contrasted the example provided by Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the late Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero. These two leaders are considered by many to be modern saints, he explained.

Mother Teresa "shows that you can lead a beautiful life doing very traditional things," Cunningham said. It "wouldn't have made a darn bit of difference to her if she lived 500 years ago or today. She'd still be doing the same thing," he said. She would nurse the dying and care for outcasts.

Archbishop Romero "was much more political and shows a different way of reaching sanctity," Cunningham said. The archbishop took "risky" stands to promote the cause of social justice. But the price he paid was high, the professor commented.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying Mass one day in 1980. Today people in El Salvador revere "him as a martyr for the faith," Cunningham added.

Cunningham remarked that the term "communion of saints" in the Creed dates back many centuries. He thinks that the words of the Mass can help Christians

discover the depths of meaning in the communion of saints.

In the Mass we "pray for our individual needs, for the needs of the universal church, and for the needs of the living and the dead," Cunningham explained. These prayers remind us that our Christian ties embrace all followers of Christ, on earth and beyond.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

Why I need s

By Father Joseph Kenna
NC News Service

Have you ever wondered what Jesus would have been like if he had been born of Italian parents in New York City? Or what effect he would have had if he had been born a woman, a black, a Hispanic? What if he had lived on earth as a married man or as a senior citizen?

Obviously there will never be

