

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Trumansburg Memoirs

When Father Robert Kanka, one of the kindest priests of our diocese, invited me to care for St. James, Trumansburg, ten miles from Ithaca, I was pleased. It would be a quiet season, Monday through Saturday, Aug. 6-11. His annual religious vacation school had just finished, with its two weeks of intensive, varied, interesting and substantial religious learning and experiences, and a valuable intimacy with religious Sisters.

The religious vacation school was run by three IHM (Immaculate Heart of Mary) Sisters from Philadelphia. Interestingly enough, the three were also blood sisters. The IHMs carry on much of the religious traditions, including a dedication to Catholic education, for which Sisters everywhere were held in reverence.

Bishop Raphael Ndigni sent a native Kenyan Sister to them in Philadelphia for training, and she returned and is the mother superior of his indigenous Little Sisters of St. Francis. Fathers Heisel, Wohrab and I visited them last January in Kenya and were edified by the size and stability and devotion of this quite new Franciscan community.

A few years ago, Mrs. James Leisenring of Sodus, whom I knew as a youngster, Rose Forjone in Clyde, tried to get a summer religious vacation school for the Sodus parish. She phoned me, asking what to do, saying, "I learned more during those two weeks of summer school than through the whole year at the weekly instruction."

I anticipated six quiet days, so it seemed fitting to have an adjustable program: for prayer, for meeting with priests and other friends in the area. (I was stationed in Ithaca from 1938 to 1942.) And, of course, for witnessing to the faith by being visibly present and available. Father Kanka had specified only: bring Holy Communion to some house-bound patients; visit the parish patients at Tompkins Memorial Hospital; celebrate daily Mass at 9 a.m. -- "and the rest is up to you." Here are a few notes on "the rest."

Daily Mass: Expecting a small congregation of five or six, I was delighted to find 14 to 20 devout persons each day. Most were senior citizens, excepting young Dave McLellan who has a sister who joined the IHMs a few years ago, and is now in Peru. Also there was a young matron who sat

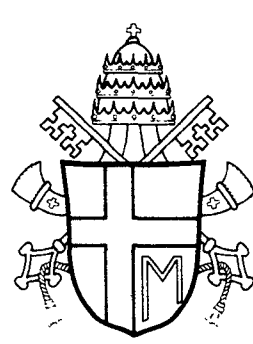
toward the back, and the local people knew her not, saying: "Probably one of the cottage people on vacation." So I asked her: "Who are you? No one seems to know you." "I'm Ruth Johnson from Salt Lake City." "I'd expect you to be a Mormon." She laughed: "I was born in Provo, Utah, also a Mormon stronghold, but I went to a Catholic grade and high school. My husband is from Trumansburg, and we are visiting his mother who is a wonderful person, and she is a built-in baby sitter, so I can come to daily Mass, which I can't do back home. It has been wonderful to be able to come to daily Mass." I in-

troduced her to the congregation. She and they were pleased. Two of our daily Mass people, Steve Craig and his wife, had taught her husband when he was a high school student in Trumansburg. Witnessing: I know good and holy priests who wear neckties and plaid pants, and I know priests who wear clerical clothes and are less holy. A Kempis comments: "The habit does not make the monk." However it does seem to me that in witnessing to Christ and the Catholic Church, a religious is more likely to be effective by being visibly a consecrated priest, sister or brother. Were we angels, invisible to the human eye, clerical un-

iform would be superfluous. But by our clerical vesture people recognize us as priests. Tuesday night, since we had no cook, I went to the restaurant at the Trumansburg Bowling Alley. A worried man from California accosted me. "Father, can I ask a question?" It was a complicated marriage problem and I gave him some general information, concluding: "When you go home find an understanding priest and ask his guidance." (Next week: the finale -- with visitations to Ithaca, to the Capuchins in Interlaken, senior citizenry, and the surprising number of homes for sale in the Ithaca-Trumansburg area.)

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