

Expressions of trust

By Suzanne Elsesser
NC News Service

I never did learn the woman's name, but her eyes caught mine as she stood in the center aisle of St. Catherine Church in Riverside, Conn. I was moving down the aisle in the communion line and she was standing to the side looking once again at the coffin that nearly filled the aisle close to the altar.

We were both there to be part of the Mass of Resurrection celebrated for the mother of a friend of mine and, I learned later, for a friend of many, many years of the woman standing near me. It was the season of Christmas.

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Our eyes met as the choir, softly singing "Silent Night," reached the words "sleep in heavenly peace." She smiled at me as if to share the quiet poignancy of the moment. I returned her smile and for a brief moment we both seemed locked into a wonderful experience of God's love.

Her face revealed her trust that God's promises would be kept for her friend. I cherish the trust in God's love that I saw reflected in the face of that woman. I wondered how much she had experienced over the decades that might have shaken her trust.

For it can be difficult to trust, can't it? I suspect many people have experienced times when

their ability to trust was tested: a close friend's deception that introduced tension into the relationship or dissolved it; the disappointment of a child when a parent did not come, though he had said he would; a broken promise between husband and wife that required months of healing.

On a wider scale, there's the lack of trust that can develop on the part of different ethnic or racial groups that experience discrimination. And there's the lack of trust among the poor who often feel betrayed by society.

Another image comes to mind as I think further of trust — where it is and where it isn't.

I spent New Year's Eve in Minneapolis. Toward midnight, I walked in a new downtown mall that was alive with excitement about the approaching new year. Families with snowsuited little children, laughing teen-agers, handholding couples, old people, walked about the area as music came over loudspeakers.

A film of Snoopy ice skating with his buddies was projected high onto a brick wall, and real-life skaters drew everyone's attention, circling an ice rink.

Opposite the mall, people were climbing the candlelight steps of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church. Inside, some people sat in silence. Others knelt and some slowly circled the church admiring its beauty.

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The church was part of these people's celebration. For some that meant a quiet place away from the showmanship of the mall; for some it may have meant Mass or the sacrament of reconciliation.

I would say these were people who trusted that the church was there for them. Their trust was more than a matter of leaning on the church; it was a matter of hope or confidence or expectation, expressed in a simple way.

For trust, even though it can be difficult, is a virtue expressed in simple ways. It is expressed in the faces of people like the woman in that Connecticut church, who trusted that God's promises are kept. It is expressed in the simple actions of people who trust that the church is a community that is here for them — mixing the divine promise with the frailties of those who comprise the people of God.

(Ms. Elsesser is on the staff of the South Bronx Pastoral Center in New York City.)

life

basic trust.

Without trust life becomes an agony of uncertainty, suspicion and insecurity.

But if it is difficult at times to trust even in God, how can human beings trust each other? People so often disappoint us, let us down, betray our trust.

That is true, but we still have to trust. It is that essential. And trust in God is basic.

If we cannot trust him, we can trust no one. For trust is a virtue, an attitude without which life is a house of horrors; it is a habit.

Trusting God enables us to develop this habit, this attitude, to be genuinely trusting persons. And our trust eventually calls forth trust in others.

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)

FOOD...

...for thought

For some time the 25-year-old man had not felt up to par. Despite initial medical reports that nothing much was wrong, the final diagnosis was cancer, a type that has about a 65 percent rate of cure.

Going into chemotherapy, the young man's spirits and those of his parents were surprisingly high. He told his mother he was confident he would recover, given the support of his family and friends and his trust in God.

That family is a "marvelous example of optimism and courage and a deep faith commitment" in a very difficult situation, religious educator Neil Parent said during a recent interview. They are approaching the youth's ordeal "out of a context of faith, with hope and trust."

One of a group of friends the family can turn to for support, Parent first met the family 15 years ago. They got to know each other through friendly gatherings in each other's homes as well as during more formal activities in the parish where Parent formerly served as director of religious education. Now Parent is the representative for adult education at the U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington, D.C.

Talking with the youth's mother, Parent said he sensed that even if the outcome is dif-

ferent than the family hopes, they won't feel their trust has been misplaced. "Their faith will say our trust is not in vain," Parent said.

"Their trust in God is the basis for their courage and optimism," Parent added. And that trust will set them to "discovering the meaning in what has happened."

The kind of trust in God and in other people that family is displaying doesn't come about overnight. It is built up slowly, Parent said. Building trust can't be hurried along.

Trust among people begins when a risk is taken — the risk of a willingness to disclose oneself to another individual.

When this initial risk "is met in a faithful way," Parent adds, a person takes the next step in a trusting relationship: deciding that "this individual is trustworthy." A person begins to trust that the other will be there when needed for support or comfort or advice.

But trust also involves a willingness to overcome momentary lapses in trust or an occasional less-than-perfect response from another person one relies on, the adult educator says. For human beings are fallible. And their trust develops in the context of their actual lives — with the possibility to grow in trust always before them.

...for discussion

1. Often a troubled or upset person seeks out someone to talk with, trusting that a friend, family member, teacher or co-worker will make himself or herself available to listen or to express compassion. What does this say about the purpose and value of trust?

2. Is there a kind of trust that you do not admire or that you consider unhealthy or naive? What is it?

3. Why can trust be considered valuable for Christians? During Lent, when the accent is on Christian growth and change, why is it valuable for Christians to ponder the role of trust?

4. What steps can people take to improve trust in a personal relationship?

SECOND HELPINGS

"Still Proclaiming Your Wonders: Homilies for the Eighties," by Jesuit Father Walter Burghardt. The Mass "is not an escape from living, a quiet hour away from the muck and grime of the week. Liturgy should shape our Christian existence," writes Father Burghardt. In one of the homilies in this 246-page book, he links the Passion of Christ to the daily lives of Christians, stating: "The profound meaning of your Christian priesthood lies in this: You are given — given to others for their life. God changes into Christ not only bread and wine; He changes you into Christ — for the life of the world." The 34 homilies provide a good sampling of Father Burghardt's lively and thoughtful preaching at different seasons of the liturgical year. (Paulist Press, 545 Island Rd., Ramsey, N.J. 07446. Paperback, \$9.95.)