

FOOD...

...for thought

•Desire — clarifying what is most important to a person — is "the beginning of change" for Dolores Leckey, director of the U.S. bishops' Laity Secretariat. Desire is vital when it comes to promoting growth as a Christian. She pointed out that Jesus in his healing ministry often asked people: "What do you really want?"

Mrs. Leckey said that assistance in discovering how one wants to change can come from spiritual directors or a small group in a parish. She told of a woman who was convinced she had no gift for church ministry.

In talking with a spiritual director, it gradually became clear that the woman had a gift for interior decoration. But, Mrs. Leckey explained, the woman never had considered this gift in terms of a ministry.

Through prayer and discussion, the woman finally saw that "creating beautiful spaces for God" could be a Christian gift, Mrs. Leckey said. Now the woman uses her gift to create peaceful environments in special group situations where troubled children are living temporarily away from home.

•Skill at listening is a key factor in Christian growth, according to Suzanne Elsesser of Larchmont, N.Y.

"When I became a Catholic," Ms. Elsesser said, "I listened a lot to what others said about the

church and about what they were doing in the church." From listening she discovered "what I was looking for — a community of people trying to accomplish something together. That was very attractive to me," she commented.

She added that "listening in prayer" is helpful for growth too. She often prays without using words. "Something happens in the quiet," Ms. Elsesser said. "I get new thoughts and make connections. Somehow God is communicating with me."

•Developing a positive outlook on the possibility of personal change is an essential skill in Christian growth for Theodore Hengesbach. A theologian, he is a teacher and administrator at Indiana University in South Bend, Ind.

Making changes is very difficult for most people, he said. It is all too easy for people "at a crossroads to look at the negative side of change," Hengesbach added. "This can make them feel apprehensive. Yet growth comes when people begin to believe it is possible to improve the status quo" for the benefit of all concerned.

Those are some skills and characteristics important for people who want to grow as Christians. What are some others?

...for discussion

1. It is easy to see that young people grow and develop. But what kinds of growth are possible for mature adults?

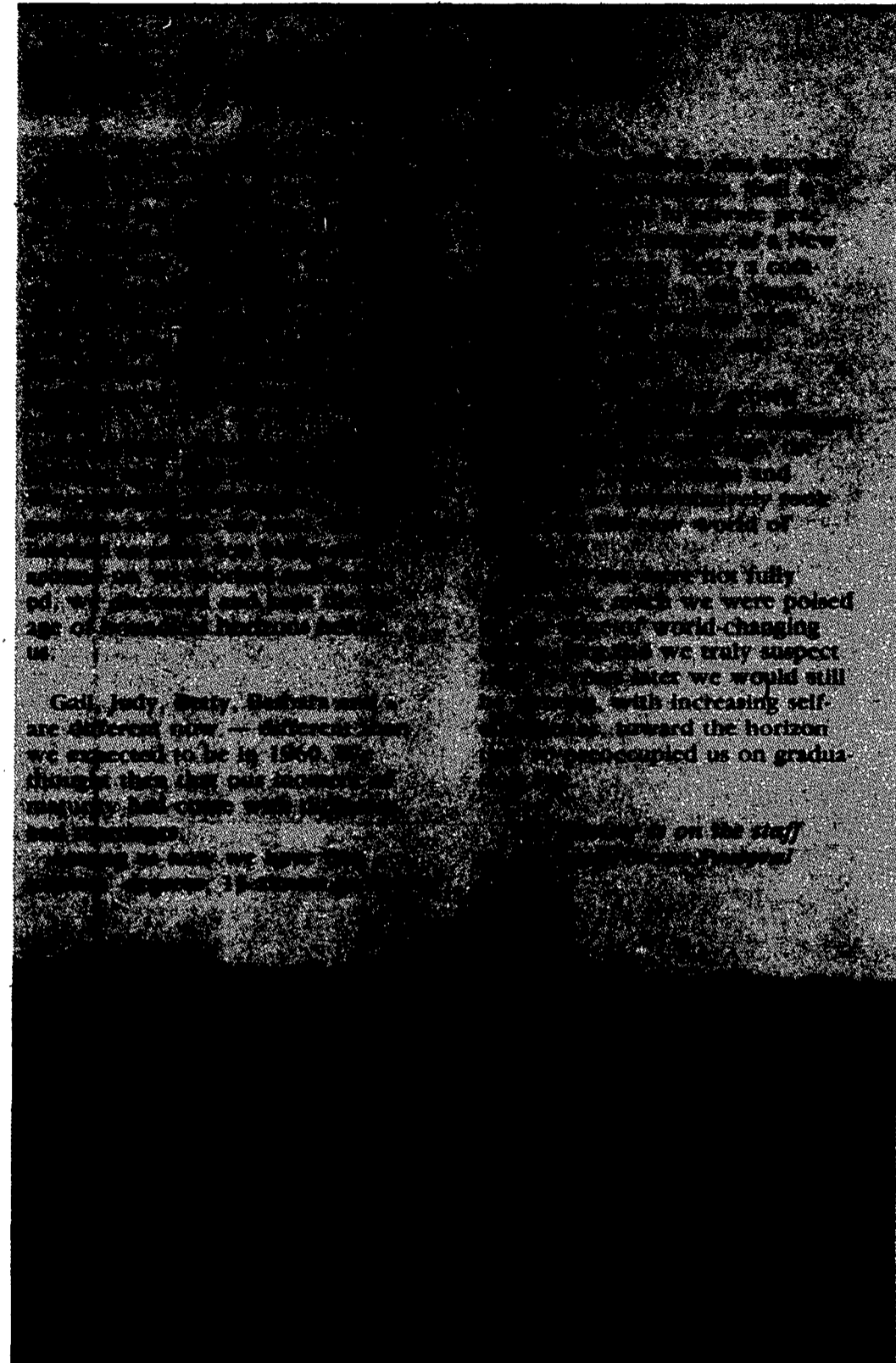
2. Adjustment to change can be a special challenge, Father Walter Burghardt suggests in an interview with Katharine Bird. He says that for him the answer has been to adapt creatively to changes taking place. What are some changes in the course of ordinary home life, or life at work, that challenge a person to adapt creatively?

3. Suzanne Elsesser recalls goals set 25 years earlier in her life, goals still being pursued, though in fresh ways. Are there goals that have run through your life like threads, goals you're still pursuing, perhaps in fresh ways?

4. As you look back over the weeks of Lent, what do you see as the purpose of this season? What can this season mean for you?

SECOND HELPINGS

"If I'm a Christian, Why Be a Catholic? The Biblical Roots of Catholic Faith," by Holy Cross Brother James Hanson. "This book is born of personal pain and pastoral concern for those who struggle to integrate their experience of being human, their experience of being Catholic and their experience of reflecting on the Bible," Brother Hanson writes. His book, in question-and-answer form, is a "biblically based statement of Catholic faith." Some of the many questions posed in the book are: "What does the word church mean?" "When was the New Testament written?" "Can we still know the risen Lord as the first Christians did?" Brother Hanson writes that "Scripture, church teaching, liturgy and human experience" all can be seen in faith as signs of Christ in the midst of human life. (Paulist Press, 545 Island Rd., Ramsey, N.J. 07446. 1984. \$4.95.)



ing restored

was greater.

Jesus then applied his little parable to the present situation, explaining that the woman's tears were a genuine expression of gratitude for God's forgiveness of her sins.

In contrast to her behavior, that of Simon was deplorable.

One scholar, Frederick Danker, sums up Jesus' comments to Simon in his book, "Luke" (Fortress Press, 1976): "And so (Jesus) said of the woman, whose sensitivities the rude host had punctured with hypocritical volleys, 'Look at all her kindnesses. As a hostess she has done better than you. As for her sins, I grant you, they are many, but she has already received forgiveness.'" (7:48).

Jesus' comments were not the polite thing to say but the kingdom took precedence over

the socially "correct things," said Danker.

Jesus gave this woman a new perspective on life and opened up the future for her. Before the encounter with Jesus she had lost all self-respect and had given up hope. Now she was rid of guilt and self-hatred.

Previously she had felt like a non-person, a thing, despised by those who used her and by those who didn't. Now she was a person, with a potential for growth and achievement.

Something similar happened repeatedly in Jesus' ministry. He had a way of giving people a new perspective, of showing them that their lives had meaning and undreamed of potential for future growth.

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