

Turning Homeward with Deacon Joseph Holleran

This issue marks the debut of a semi-weekly column by the Rev. Mr. Joseph P. Holleran, titled "The Way Home." Speaking from the multiple perspectives of a husband of 17 years and father of three children, a Catholic school teacher for 13 years, and numerous other ministries and vocations, Joe's eloquent and faith-filled voice is a welcome addition to the Courier-Journal.

Joe's name will be familiar to readers from Blessed Sacrament, where he will begin his third year as a teacher and where he is currently assigned to ministry for young adults. In the past he has taught at Christ the King and Our Lady of Lourdes schools as well. In April, he celebrated his first anniversary of ordination to the permanent diaconate.

A native of Elmira, Joe is a graduate of St. Patrick's Grammar School and Notre Dame High School. He has earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell University and a master's degree in education from Nazareth College.

Joe includes three years of active service in the U.S. Army in Germany among his experiences, as well as three years of reserve duty. His former ministries include music ministry at Our Lady of Lourdes and St. John's on Humboldt Street; prayer group at Holy Trinity in Webster; a Eucharistic team at Blossom Nursing Home; counseling and visitation at the State School in Industry, N.Y., and Monroe Community Hospital in Rochester.

Summer has come, gloriously.

Long days give us times to re-create and to recreate, while cool nights have become gentle reminders of seasons past. They begin to flow one into the other, a stream of moments and sunsets, popsicles and Kool-Aid, sunburn and fireworks.

Bursting with children, the neighborhood is never still. School is a background memory and not yet a sigh, despite the ads. The children ... how they revel in the summer, playing long past dark. They echo for us our own need to be refreshed.

On one occasion, Jesus spoke thus: "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to you I offer praise; for what you have hidden from the learned and the clever, you have revealed to the merest children. Father, it is true. You have graciously willed it so." (Matthew 11:25-26). He said "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

I am intrigued by these words of Jesus. "What you have hidden from the learned and the clever, you have revealed to the merest children."

As a parent and teacher, I spend most of my day talking, listening, and interacting with children. These words made me wonder.

What do they know that we don't? Shouldn't we be the ones who are more knowledgeable? Don't we have more experience and wisdom? Aren't we the learned and the clever? What do they know that we don't?

After some reflection and thought, I found out.

They don't know more than us. It's the way they see and live life that's different.

Children have an openness to life that most of us have somehow lost. While we build up walls and defenses to protect our images and the rules we play, they are very good at just being themselves. Children have an uncanny ability to sense our true feelings. Maybe it's because they laugh or cry without worrying what others might think. When they are hurting, they show it, and there can be anger too, but soon it is forgotten. Children are naturally playful, even if they look foolish in the eyes of others. For the most part, they



Rev. Mr. Joseph Holleran

don't let the troubles and trials of growing up weigh them down too long.

Unless taught differently, children are not afraid to show love and affection. They naturally give away what God has given them.

What He has given them most of all is an undivided heart. A heart that is without enclosing walls and not divided by fear and mistrust, excessive stress and unrest.

Once we had that kind of heart. The words of Matthew's Gospel are an invitation from Jesus to make our hearts whole again.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you." That is, I will make a fresh you. I will make you new again. If you allow me in, I will remove the weight upon your heart; the heavy load of trouble and trials that you have been carrying; the unhealed memories of broken relationships and cruel remarks; of forgotten promises and unfulfilled hurts.

His words are spoken as an invitation, not a command. Through His glory and Godliness, Jesus could have overpowered our hearts and forced His way in. Instead, He chose to melt our resistance with His gentleness.

A heavy heart may feel that a heavy hand is the only way to get things done, but being gentle does not mean being powerless. For the most powerful force in the world is the gentleness of love.

A divided heart has a hard time with being humble and gentle. It sees it as weakness, that to rely on the Lord, on His Word, is a sign of weakness on our part. It makes us too dependent and hurts our pride.

My three-year-old son is a little like that. Everything now is "I'll do it! I'll do it!" Tying shoelaces, pouring milk — he has to try everything on his own. When he realizes that, in fact, he can't tie his shoelaces, without any hesitation he cries for help and trusts that we will help him. Children are full of that kind of trust, but much of ours has been replaced with skepticism at the intentions of others and the intentions of God.

So we struggle on, getting nowhere and soon we begin to fall. We begin to fall into the cracks of our own hearts, frustration by frustration, hurt by hurt, burden by burden. Yet the yoke He promises is easy and the burden light.

Are we willing to let God lift our troubles and tiredness and to replace them with His gentle touch? Are we ready to learn from Him? Are we willing to trust Him to give us the undivided heart of a child?

Answer His invitation. "Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome."

This could be the summer of your heart.

Muscular Dystrophy Benefit

Gardner Hill Campground in Elmira will be the site for the Muscular Dystrophy Country Western Show on Sunday, August 25. Featuring country-music star Karen Taylor-Good, the show's proceeds will be presented to the Muscular Dystrophy Association during its Sept. 1st telethon. In

Elmira, the association supports a muscular dystrophy clinic at St. Joseph's Hospital.

Tickets are \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children. Call (607)732-9827 for advance tickets or buy them at the door. Showtime is 1-8 p.m.

Revelation On Video

St. Paul's Church in Webster will offer its sixth bible study course beginning this September for ten weeks. Based on the Little Rock Bible Study Program, sessions will be offered twice a week at the parish center — on Wednesdays, starting Sept. 18, from 9:30-11:30 a.m., and on Thursday evenings, starting the 19th, from 7:30-9:30 p.m.

The format includes a 30-minute video presentation explaining the reading of the week and small-group discussion. The success of the course centers in these small groups, which work together for the entire 10 weeks.

Reservations for study materials should be made as soon as possible due to extent of interest in this mysterious book of the Bible. The entire cost is \$10. For further information or reservations before Sept. 1, call Georgette Ermatinger, (716)671-5389, Laura Quigley, (716)872-1647, or Claudette Looney, (716)872-6591.

Aquinas Plans For Fall

Excitement is mounting at Aquinas as the opening days of the 1985-86 school year approach. Meanwhile, a new opening schedule has been announced. Freshmen and parents will have orientation on Tuesday, Sept. 3 at 7 p.m. Books and schedules will be available at that time homeroom teachers will be available.

Sophomores and upperclassmen will have orientation on Wednesday, Sept. 4 at 8:30 a.m. and the entire school will begin full sessions on Thursday, Sept. 5. The summer reading test is set for Thursday and school ID pictures will be taken Friday, Sept. 6. The dress code will be in effect starting Wednesday.

Other events already scheduled include: Sept. 17, 9:40 a.m. — the Mass of the Holy Spirit, celebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark; Sept. 18-25 — annual magazine drive; Oct. 12 — Homecoming; Oct. 22 — Aquinas Open House.



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