

Turning Homeward

With Deacon Joseph Holleran



This month our parish will have six new members. They are refugees from Vietnam: two adults and four teenagers. The teenagers are Amerasians, children of American servicemen and Vietnamese women. They are considered outcasts and non-persons by their own country.

They come searching: They search for what most of us have already found.

They come hoping: They hope to find a home — not a house or just a shelter, a place to live — but home, a place to belong to, to be part of.

Deep within us is that same longing for acceptance. Perhaps our first home was like that. We think of it with warmth and fond memories that cause us to pause and smile. Hopefully, it was a place and time where we were given room to grow, were nurtured and cared for.

Maybe those early years were not pleasant: We had a house, but it was always a struggle to find and make the home in it. Good or bad, we carry those experiences with us now.

Home might not be where you grew up or where you're growing up now. Because of the memories attached to it during my college years, the city of Ithaca always feels like home to me when I return to it. It's a feeling tied in with experiences and trust, familiar things and a sense of peace.

We can take those same feelings and thoughts and find them in each other. There are a few people that I really feel at home with. When I'm with them, I know this is where I can be myself. I've found the place of my belonging.

You see, home is really a place in your heart. A sense that with my worst moods and craziness, my mistakes and stubbornness, I will still be loved for who I am.

Much of the Old Testament seems involved with that call to be at home. The rebellious Israelites are called, again and again, to bring them back where they belong. Even though they had often revolted against their God, were obstinate and just plain stubborn, Yahweh still had the chosen place for them in his heart. Perhaps like them, our pride and sense of importance keeps us away from God, from relying on His mercy and love. I'm glad that He is more accepting of me than the "pious pointers." They always have one finger pointing in the Bible and the

other pointing at you. But the Lord's hands are open to welcome, calling us to greater love and less sin, wanting us to feel that we can be at home with Him.

Jesus knew a lot about being at home. He went back to his own hometown once — Nazareth, Matthew 13:54-58. But the reception went from warm to cold. When Sabbath came, He fulfilled His right and responsibility as an adult male of the village by reading Scripture in the synagogue. The reading was usually followed by a brief teaching and it is at this point that the crowd became amazed. "Where did he get all this? Who does he think he is? Don't we know his family?" Their skepticism soon became opposition and disbelief. Though He was in His own village, they did not have a place in their hearts for Him.

He could not be at home with them. He was rejected.

How do you deal with rejection? My reaction would have been quite different than His.

Anger would have been first because my pride was hurt in front of all those I grew up with. Maybe I would change my manner, my message to make it more palatable to others, water it down some. I would have a need to prove myself, to let them see who they were dealing with, or perhaps just go into hiding. I wouldn't risk that kind of scene again.

How do we deal with rejection?

Jesus acts with humility and understanding. Though distressed over their unbelief, He does not get angry with them. He doesn't back off and change His words or perform a mighty miracle to gain favor and followers. He does not go into hiding, but He takes His message to the surrounding villages where it will be heard and believed. Jesus continues to search for those who will accept Him in their hearts.

Jesus could have used His power and proved Himself by raising the dead, but He chose not to. He realized that power is control of others and you cannot force others to be at home with you. Strength is control of yourself. He approaches us as we should approach each other, with the strength of humility and understanding, as He asks...

"Can I be at home with you?"
"Do you have a place in your heart for Me?"



Along the Way

with Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Sunday evening.

I have just said goodbye to two friends with whom I had supper and some good-hearted conversation. The evening was pleasant not only because both are delightful and encouraging company but because I had the pleasure, supported by their sense of adventure, of preparing our meal.

That is always a relaxing experience for me, in part because it's an activity quite different from the ones that fill most of my days. If you cook every day, you may take similar pleasure sharing a meal prepared by someone else.

In any event, it strikes me as I remember this evening — and some of the events of the week — that food and friends often go together. I hope that the friendships joined at table tonight were deepened as we shared both the food and the Lord's love placed before us and the events that shaped our lives since the last time we met.

Two more pleasant memories of friendship and food this week:

At St. Margaret Mary's in Atalchin I shared a spaghetti supper with more than 300 parishioners. Father Dave Simon's usual creative touch made that a memorable time for me.

He suggested that we join in serving the food as a way to say hello to all present and to symbolize in some way our desire somehow to be one in service with the many who had worked so hard to make the gathering possible.

So Dave, Mary Decker and I, rigged out in natty aprons, formed a service team. Dave served the spaghetti, Mary ladled the sauce, and

I shoveled out the 817 meatballs so lovingly prepared by the Santa Croce family. It was a most engaging experience to be able to offer food to and to have that brief moment with each person there.

At St. Mary's Elmira on Saturday we celebrated 110 years of parish life. As part of the celebration, there was a picnic on the spacious grounds of the church. It was bright and warm, music filled the air, and the people were obviously having a marvelous time.

Hamburgers, hot dogs and beverages were provided, and each family brought a dish to pass. In the array of food prepared and offered, I found a symbol of our community: gifts of wide variety, lovingly prepared and shared for the common good without any thought of recognition. Our communities are richly blessed with persons wishing to witness to Christ's love in that way.

When the time came to share the Eucharist with the two communities, I know that in each case the earlier experience of the meal helped me to appreciate better who we were to one another in our assembly of worship. We are meant to nourish one another with love and to feed the bodily and spiritual hungers of our sisters and brothers. Perhaps above all, we need to be sure that we freely share what we have been freely given.

If you paid attention to this column last week, you read that this Sunday's Reflection Forum on Women in the Church and Society will be held at St. Mary's in Geneseo. Wrong! It will be at St. Mary's in Dansville from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Come, if you can.

Peace to all.

Obituary Sr. Mary Pierre Van Vliet

Sister Mary Pierre Van Vliet, a Sister of Mercy for 64 years, died Wednesday, Sept. 4, in the Mercy Motherhouse infirmary. She was 83.



Sister Pierre came to the infirmary in 1984 because of heart ailments. She had been a parish visitor to the sick, elderly and homebound at St. John of Rochester parish in Perinton, and continued her visitations from the infirmary as long as her health permitted.

"She loved to go out to the homes of sick people, taking them Communion," recalled Sister Mary Beth Teddy, a staff nurse at the infirmary. Parishioners typically drove her on her visits and one driver noted that she also took food and clothing to the needy.

Before beginning her ministry at St. John's in 1980, Sister Pierre was a visitor at St.

Andrew's Church for 10 years and a teacher for nine. The major portion of her life was spent as an administrator and teacher in diocesan schools.

For 18 years she was a teacher at the junior high-level and for 27 years served as teacher, principal and convent superior at St. Patrick's, Oswego (1951-58), St. Patrick's, Elmira (1958-60), and St. Salome's, Rochester (1933-51). Sister also taught at St. Mary's in Rochester, Aquinas Institute and St. Joseph's in Penfield.

Born in Wellsboro, Pa., Sister Pierre moved to Victor, N.Y., with her family. She entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1921, and professed her final vows on August 23, 1927. She was a graduate of Nazareth Academy and Canisius College in Buffalo, where she received a bachelor's degree in Latin.

Sister Pierre is survived by step-sister, Mary Normaly, and several nieces and nephews. A prayer vigil service was held Friday, Sept. 6 and the Funeral Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated Saturday, Sept. 7, by Father Bernard Dollen.

Mercy sisters celebrate jubilees, Mercy weekend

Nineteen Sisters of Mercy celebrating jubilees this year will be honored by the Mercy congregation on Sunday, Sept. 22, at the motherhouse on Blossom Road, Rochester.

The celebration is part of the Mercy Weekend events, held annually on or near the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24. Saturday, Sept. 21, will be a quiet reflection on Jesus question to Peter: "Do you love me?" Sister Mary Sullivan will be the keynote speaker, and Sister Maureen Servas will offer a potter's reflection. On Sunday, the Eucharistic liturgy will incorporate the annual commissioning service, which seals each sister's ministry for the coming year.

Celebrating 60th jubilees this year are Sisters Mary Imelda Corrigan, Mary Celine Frank and Mary Evangelist Meyer. Golden jubilarians are Sisters Mary Finn-Bar Bartley, Mary Corine Cimineri, Jane Frances Hauser, Mary Valerian McGraw, Mary Dominica Petocchi, Mary Ambrose Rogers and Mary Regis Straughn.

Silver jubilarians are Sisters Marie Catherine Cain, Rita Kaufman, Jane Kenrick, Joanne Lappetito, Kathleen Mary O'Connell, Roberta Rodenhouse, Jane Schur, Shiela Sentiff and Marlene Vigna.

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