

On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy



A Military Christmas

There is something wrong that the voices of honest pacifists like the Berrigan brothers speak with such beauty, literacy and frequency, while the men and women who serve our country and citizens have no comparable spokespersons.

Some years ago, Father Albert Shamon wrote with feeling of the place of soldiers, guardsmen, and policemen in American society. It was a light of Christian reason to give renewed confidence and understanding to parents, wives and grateful citizens puzzled by the declaration of a starry-eyed Bishop Gumbleton that we should unilaterally disarm and just have a nice, confident honest talk with the Russian communist government. Think you that the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Afghanistans and other oppressed people are much impressed by unilateralism or honest discourse with determined communist Politburo?

Let me narrate a Christmas event which manifests the good hearts of our military men and women.

In 1955, I was assigned to Biggs Air Force Base, El Paso, Texas, which was part of Strategic Air Command (SAC). Before Christmas, Lilly Cruise, the Swiss wife of Master Sergeant Toro Cruise, and Captain John Speasman, a B-56 pilot and a man of great compassion, phoned me. They wanted help with a Squadron project — the Christmas Party for Mexican orphans.

The orphans were the poorest of the poor — Spanish-speaking little Mexicans, cared for by the poorest nuns who shared the poverty of their charges. I had visited their place in El Paso — dumpy buildings, stark rooms, monotonous food, and a vegetable garden in the back. Yet, the children were happy. They suffered from the loss of parents and home, but they had security and exuberance from nuns whose whole lives were centered on being permanent mothers to Christ's little ones.

The nuns were not highly trained in theology or in social sciences, which threaten to make people more efficient and less Christian. They were magnificent in their evangelical simplicity. The children knew genuine love, as Mother Teresa's orphans do.

It was arranged. The committee con-

cluded that before Christmas dinner, the children should come to Mass at the base chapel. Now I am convinced that just giving to the poor can be a dehumanizing act. Whenever possible, I have expected and accepted from the poor a contribution in return. This preserves their personal dignity. So, as preparations were being made, I said, "Lilly, the children and Sister must make a contribution. It seems wrong to give and not let the poor give in return. The kids don't have material things to share, but they have their talents. So, at Mass, we'll have them sing Mexican hymns — their gift."

I blush to recall that after Midnight Mass I button-holed Mrs. Dillon, wife of Colonel Steve Dillon, as she came out of the chapel. "Carol, what are you doing about 11 o'clock this morning?" I did this with full knowledge that her often-absent husband and their eight children would be home together. Her answer was simple. "Why Father, nothing I can't rearrange if I can be of help," she said. I stammered, "The men of Squadron X are having a bunch of Mexican orphans as guests. They're coming for Mass at 11 o'clock, and I want them to sing. But we need the organ accompaniment. Would you play?" Her reply was unhesitating. "Of course, Father, and I'll bring Stephanie. She can help with the singing." Stephanie was a beautiful 13-year old.

So it was done. I recall that crisp Texas Christmas — Lilly Cruise; Captain Speasman, my good assistant; Jim Brown, who later became assistant to Father Pat Ward in Newfoundland. Oh, so many who planned the day out of love. I recall the orphans who gave their gift of song, the simple sisters in their complete vocations, the Dillons (an Air Force family for 14 years) the gifts of clothes and shoes and toys, the tour of the base, the children's delight.

Father Shamon wrote, "We hear so much propaganda against the military today ... John the Baptist did not denounce the military. He said, 'Be good soldiers.'"

So, a Christmas blessing to all of good will, with a special salute to those good men and women in the military who on this Christmas day are safeguarding our country so we can enjoy security and peace this Christmas day and the days that follow.



A Word for Sunday

Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 2:41-52; (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

Sunday is Holy Family Sunday.

One of the great insights of Vatican II was the re-discovery that the Christian family is "the domestic Church" — the Church in miniature.

A rabbi once said the synagogue is a school where "people are taught how to make their homes into sanctuaries ..."

There are only two high holy days when Jews traditionally gather at their synagogues. All other holy days are celebrated in the home with the family. Jews have made their homes the focal point for their religious celebrations. That explains in part the great strength and tenacity of the Jews for their religious beliefs and practices.

What Catholic homes need today is a return to being "Catholic" homes. Parents and families must start placing the religious emphasis on the home and then branch out from there, rather than the other way around.

By word of example, parents ought to show children the worth of reading and studying about God, the value of frequent confession and Communion, acquaintance with their spiritual heritage. The home must be the one place where children receive authentic catechesis. There are three sources of religious education for a child: religious instruction classes, the family, and the parish.

Of the three, the most important is the family. You can take the child out of the home, but you cannot take the home out of the child.

Listen to Paul VI's appeal to parents: "Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers? Do you prepare them with the priests for the sacraments they receive when they are young: confession, Communion and confirmation? Do you encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ suffering, to invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the saints? Do you say the family rosary together? And you, fathers; do you pray with your children ... at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in

thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life, ... of singular value. In this way, you bring peace to your homes." (This appeal was quoted by John Paul in his encyclical on the family.)

Parents must protect the young from forms of aggression by the mass media and seek wholesome forms of entertainment for their children. Especially they must educate them for chastity. They must see that sex education given in educational centers is given in a spirit consonant with their own moral standards, that it is not solely clinical or biological and disassociated from moral principles.

Education for chastity is not a rejection of sexuality or lack of esteem for it, but a defense of love against selfishness and aggressiveness, and an enablement of it to advance to its full realization.

As a man, Jesus was greatly influenced by His home life. As man, He developed a deep sense of the worth of domestic and social relationships. He got this especially from His mother. At Cana, she was the first to become aware of the crisis about the wine failure. And he helped. He could weep at the womb of Lazarus and over Jerusalem because He had learned to love others and His country at home. He could be so tender to the widow of Naim, for His mother was a widow with an only Son — so compassionate to lepers as to cleanse them.

He could move among men: calm, unruffled, unresting, unhurried, because of His home training. He knew how short was His time, how great was His work to be done, and how much. Yet, He did not panic. Rather, He moved as a skilled physician does among the sick, knowing what is to be done and what remedies to use. Whence this wisdom from a human viewpoint? From His home and from His family.

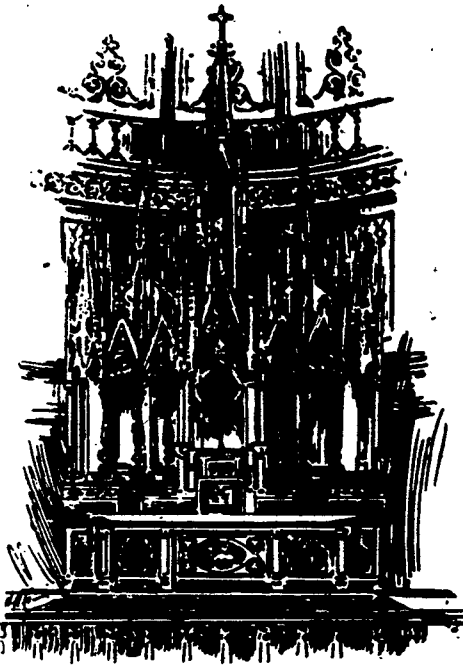
In other words, the domestic Church must do on the family level what the Church does on the societal level. Only when families become loving communities will our churches become loving families. Then, and only then, will our Church become a light to the nations (Lumen Gentium) and the joy and hope of the world (Gaudium et Spes).

Christmas duties

There is one feature of this holy Christmas time, now almost upon us, that cannot be too long dwelt upon. It is the spirit of love and forgiveness which should fill the hearts of all Christians. It should be a time of peace and good will among men in reality as well as in name. If we have enemies we should be reconciled with them. Hate and envy and revenge should be banished from the mind. They are not in harmony with the spirit of this blessed time. On Christmas day we should be able to say, truthfully, that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and that we forgive from our hearts all those who have in any way injured or wronged us. It may seem hard, in some instances, to do this, but the harder the battle the greater the victory.

Christmas, moreover, should find us in a state of grace. When we bend in adoration before the altar on Christmas day, we should be free from mortal sin; purified by a good confession, and strengthened by the Holy Eucharist. Then will our Divine Lord and Savior look more kindly upon our offerings of praise. Then will we feel that He has indeed come into our hearts.

Still another duty, too often overlooked, is that of contributing to the happiness of



those in humble circumstances. There are many families in which Christmas will be a cheerless one, unless some kind neighbor comes to their assistance. Want and poverty are masters of many homes, even at this joyous time. Those who can remember such families, and bring a ray of light to their sunless lives, will be sure of enjoying Christmas themselves.

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Best wishes for a Happy Holiday Season



Congressman Frank Horton

29th Congressional District