

On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy



Questions for Youth

To the Spencerport "Reality Youth Group:"

I have just read thoughtfully your letter to the editor of the Courier-Journal (January 16), written in response to the question: "What would you suggest for youth troubled about their religion?" The Lord blesses you for your concern. May I use your suggestions as a guide for observations?

1) "Get involved. It's your (the youths') Church, too." Question: With the many non-religious activities (sports, high school programs and plays, jam sessions, interminable telephone conversations with other teens) vying for time and involvement, how do you suggest weaning secular-oriented youth to an enthusiastic religious orientation? Seminars, Antioch, etc., are fine, but reach only a few. How do you propose to draw the youth?

2) Have youth "ask questions." Splendid. But my own experience seems to be that few questions are asked, because young people generally don't think about religion. In my own apostolate, I often do the asking, expecting neither a correct answer nor a clear one, but, rather, hoping to stimulate thought and interest.

For example, try these on your Reality Group: Often, the Old Testament speaks of "raising the horn." What does the horn signify? Could you explain Purgatory correctly and concisely? Why are bells used at Mass in some parishes, and not in others? Why does having female "altar boys" arouse such a revolution in parishes? What are the pros and cons of clerical celibacy?

3) "Priests should aim homilies toward the younger crowd occasionally." Amen to that. A homily or instruction given to children brings great profit to adults. Not all priests, however, are adept at talking to children or

youth. Others are so anxious to please the young that they sometimes water down the doctrine, banalize the Liturgy, and make fools of themselves, hopefully for the sake of Christ.

4) "Parents shouldn't force children to make confirmation." Amen to that. In fact, some candidates should be bounced out of class for indifference to the sacrament, and an unhealthy casualness toward the faith.

6) "Parents should not force teenagers to attend Mass." Here we part company. I dislike the implications of the term "force." Why not say "reasonably expect?" If teenagers are accepting food, clothing, lodging, laundry, money, concern and love from their parents, the parents have a right to expect their children to conform to normal house rules, including attendance at school, curfew, care of the home, paying bills, chemical substances, and the worship of God. Parents have a right to expect responsibility from their children.

You say, "It's our Church, too." Now I ask you: Do you have church envelopes and do you use them? Sunday bulletins indicate that young people are not sharing in the costs of the Church. Some time ago, I stopped into a record shop and was stunned to see teenagers with wads of money: \$5, \$10, \$20 and even more, buying rock 'n roll records and suchlike. I wondered if they were also shelling out so generously to their Church.

Does Father Murá touch on this subject in the seminar and Antioch sessions? If he does, what are the reactions? When people get involved with cold cash, they often become very cautious.

Well, more power and blessings to you for your zeal for Our Lord and His Church. Prosper!

A Word for Sunday

Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 2:22-40; (R1) Malachi 3:1-4; (R2) Hebrews 2-3.

In her stirring poem, "America," Katherine Lee Bates has written two profound lines: "Confirm thy-soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law."

The guardian and guarantee of liberty is law. Law is the levee that holds back the surge of human passion. That is why He who came to set us free was so law-abiding.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary obeyed imperial law. Forty days after His birth, they obeyed Mosaic law. In the gospel of the Presentation, St. Luke has entwined two separate ceremonies.

One law decreed that every first-born Hebrew child had to be presented to God in the temple and be redeemed by five shekels (Nehemiah 3:47f). This ceremony was held to remind the people of Israel how God had spared their first-born sons on the night of the Exodus, when He had destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians. Thus, "every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord" and be redeemed (Exodus 13:2, 12-13). (First-born, incidentally, refers to the preferential status of the eldest son; it does not imply that there were other children.)

A second law regarded the purification of the mother. Forty days after the birth of a boy, a mother was required to go to the temple and offer for her purification a lamb and a dove, or, if she was poor, two doves. Mary and Joseph made the offering of the poor.

Rather than emphasizing the purification of the mother, Luke underscores the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple, where He is given official recognition as the promised savior of the world.

In Jerusalem, the only two who recognized the Holy Family were an old man and an old woman. Simeon was a Judean; Anna, a Galilean. Simeon blessed God and prophesied, while Anna thanked God and evangelized. Both were just and pious, open to and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Together, Jesus, Simeon, and Anna present a study in contrasts: age and childhood; the gentle shoot and the full, ripe corn; the sapling and the full-grown oaks ready for heavenly transplanting;

the closing of one age, the opening of a new one. Simeon blessed God, for the old man saw the end of the old Israel and the beginning of the new: "the glory of your people Israel." And since the new Israel would be "a revealing light to the Gentiles" — a universal Israel — then the old Israel could be dismissed in peace.

Turning to Mary, the Child's mother, Simeon then foretold that the cross would be part of the Child's salvific mission. "His winning fan is in his hand," was the prophecy — meaning, in other words, that Jesus would toss the wheat grains into the air and the breeze would blow the chaff away while the weightier kernels remained, purified and cleansed. Or, to further develop the metaphor, his gospel would be like a detergent, separating the dirt of sin from the polluted fabric of humanity. Sin flees, but the soul remains, purified and cleansed. Thus, as Simeon foretold, "this Child is destined for the downfall and rise of many in Israel."

But the chaff will chafe. Evil people hate two classes of persons: the very bad (such as the two thieves crucified on either side of Christ), and the very good (like Christ crucified between them). The very bad are reviled because they destroy the peace of society, and the very good, because they destroy the peace of one's soul. And so the child was to be "a sign that will be opposed," and His mother, one pierced with sorrow.

The old Romans used to hold the faces of their newborn infants toward the sky, to denote that they must look beyond the world to heavenly glory. At baptism, children are dedicated to God. Since life is short and uncertain and we are meant for immortality, parents seriously ought to train their little ones for heaven. Simeon and Anna found the Lord in their old age, because they had first begun looking for Him in their youth.

In his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, Dr. Scott Peck wrote that parents are godlike figures in childish eyes — and therefore, role models. What parents are, the children will be. The apple does not fall far from the tree. Jesus loved the law, because His mother and Joseph did.

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Capacity crowd expected at rally

Unity in diversity will be the message when an expected 9,500 students from 46 diocesan schools gather at the Rochester War Memorial next Thursday at a rally to celebrate Catholic Schools Week.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will be among the special guests at the rally, scheduled to begin at 10 a.m.

Entertainment will be provided by Nazareth Academy's Perisian Choir and concert band, the Nazareth-McQuaid Show Choir, McQuaid High School's Glee Club, marching bands from Aquinas and Bishop Kearney high schools and the Aquinas Jazz Band. Our Lady of Mercy High School will offer its Show Choir and voice class as well as a piano solo. The chorus from Notre Dame High School in Elmira will travel to the rally as well as the Jazz Band from DeSales High School in Geneva. St. Augustine's Gospel Choir will also perform.

Sister Donna Marie Cucci, who is organizing the entertainment, is not worried about the age differences in her audience. "Some people think you have to stand on your heads for little kids ... but they've always been a great audience for us," she said.

"This is not a political demonstration," said Sister Virginia Steinwachs, assistant superintendent for urban education and public affairs and an organizer of the event. "It's a celebration of the heritage and future of Catholic schools."

Publicity for the rally is appearing all over the diocese. Television viewers in the Southern Tier have seen an advertisement for the rally carried by cable television and featuring composer Mary Lu Walker. Walker's commercial will also be run by radio station WHAM, 1180-AM.

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