

HOLY WEEK a) the first four days

Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22: 14-23, 56.

With Isaiah, we might say: "The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that would rouse them." That word is the message of the cross, the message of salvation.

The message of the second reading summons all believers to humility: "Your attitude must be Christ's..."

Certainly the readings of Passion Sunday give the central focus for the week: the CROSS. The cross becomes for us the unique sign of reconciliation. Look at how often we use the cross symbol: before and after prayer, blessing people and objects, as building and room decorations, pieces of jewelry that speak of Christian commitment



— the list is endless, depending upon culture and/or family traditions. This sign of ignominy and defeat has become for us a sign of victory and triumph: it is a true sign of triumph/divine reconciliation.

During these days prior to the celebration of the Triduum, a real effort should be made to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation in its many forms. These "reconciliation times" should be published early and included as part of the Holy Week schedule. Planning in this way not only encourages immediate preparation for the celebration of the Triduum, it also gives confessors an opportunity to spend adequate time with each penitent, and may even prevent the "Good Friday rush."

CROSSROADS IV

Saints: Our Connecting Link to Heaven

By Victor Bartolotta Jr.

City magnet school teacher Kenny Sarkis was devastated when, during a return visit to Rochester from a sabbatical year, he suffered an apparently irretrievable loss. Thieves broke into a borrowed car and stole his precious manuscript. Kenny had just returned from Brazil where, walking along the beaches of the South Atlantic Ocean, he had written what he considered his most inspirational poems.

His story hit the papers, and the Democrat and Chronicle did a front-page article expressing the hope that somehow the manuscript might be returned or recovered.

Months passed, and still nothing happened, except that Kenny's mother claimed she kept seeing images of railroad tracks when she prayed about the manuscript. Amazingly, some time later, a railroad worker discovered Kenny's checkbook which had been stolen at the same time as his manuscript. The worker also claimed he had tossed aside what appeared to be a bunch of waste paper.

While Kenny worked toward completing his sabbatical year in California, his sister, Ann Sarkis Nealon, entered the picture. Ann returned to the spot where the railroad worker said he had tossed the manuscript, but she found nothing. Determined, she dragged along her friend, Mary Cortina, for a second look during an unusual January thaw. Hope quickly turned to discouragement. The manuscript was simply nowhere to be found.

On their way back to the car, Mary mentioned to Ann that if one prays to St. Anthony, he will help the petitioner find what is lost, at least according to Mary's mother.

"Your mother is such a wonderful person," said Ann.

"Oh, St. Anthony, please help us find the manuscript," added Mary, ignoring Ann's comments.

The next moment, the two women looked

down at the ground. Before them lay the soaked but retrievable manuscript.

This example is but one of countless experiences that believers say can happen to those who petition saints for help. The relationship of us, the living, to those who have passed on into the next life with God, is a confusing and often controversial matter. The controversy regarding our relationship to the saints has lasted through the ages and is still with us.

The experience of the Sarkis' manuscript and similar stories so intrigue us that they are often considered newsworthy. Last year, of course, there was considerable publicity when a destitute woman, after praying to St. Jude for help, found \$10,000 inside a Catholic church.

We may wonder what is a common-sense approach to the saints for the contemporary Catholic: why should we bother communicating with saints at all? Or, how much is true about what evangelical fundamentalists have to say on this issue? Finally, how valid is the wisdom of the church regarding the saints, and can devotion to the saints be a part of our spiritual journey in the Lord?

The Church has traditionally taught that praying to the saints for help is a valid act for a Christian. Saints are merely those men and women who have had the experience of living on this earth and now commune fully with God. But why bother praying to saints at all?

Perhaps the best way to understand why we ask saints to help us is to understand how in this life we implore the help of other people who might be closer to a situation or person than we. A personal example serves to point this out.

Recently a young man came to my office for help. He had gotten into trouble with the police, and because of that, his father had forced him to leave the house. The young man said that his father now wanted nothing to do with him. I immediately suggested to the young man that he might try asking his mother to talk to his father for him. The



Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

You know from following this column that I spend time with a great variety of persons and groups. We meet for a range of purposes — to work out problems, to plan projects and events, to worship or celebrate, to mourn, to think about the pastoral demands of the day and how best to meet them.

There is a dimension of hard work to that. Such gatherings demand planning and follow-up work. Meetings themselves, if you are present in spirit as well as in body, also require a substantial investment of energy.

But the work is only a part of the story. The other part is the life to be experienced in gathering with others with whom we share values and convictions that really mean something to us. I mean values and convictions which relate to such things as life, service, self sacrifice, commitment, compassion, peace making, integrity and our relationship to the Lord.

I am aware of both the cost and the fruit of such gatherings as I devote these quiet moments to a review of recent days. I feel tired from them just now, but am very much aware in the midst of the tiredness of how loving the Lord has been to me these days in the people I have met.

Our Sisters of St. Joseph exemplify that. I had the pleasure of sharing in their celebration of the Feast of St. Joseph at the motherhouse on Saturday. We enjoyed a meal, celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy and shared dessert and entertainment with the sisters at the Saint Joseph Convent and Infirmary.

The sisters laughed when I used the word "electric" to describe their gathering, but I think the word was apt. There

was a great charge of life there. It was collected, celebrated and strengthened in and by that gathering, and I had a great sense of being gifted by my presence among them.

I enjoyed a similarly life-giving experience earlier in the week at a meeting with a group of pastoral ministers in Chemung County. Among them were pastors, pastoral assistants, principals, directors of religious education, parochial vicars, permanent deacons, parish secretaries, justice and peace workers and music ministers.

Our theme that day was reconciliation and the pastoral implications of my statement about Father Charles Curran. What so impressed and inspired me was the care for the life of the community expressed in so many different ways by those present. From a gathering of different persons around a complex issue there emerged a common and strong pastoral concern for the people — and that was a wonderful gift to receive.

During Holy Week the readings call us to a contemplation of the Lord's ministry as He comes to that hour in which He surrenders to the Father all that He has for love of us. We'll meet him among the crowds who praise him and among those who call for his death.

We'll encounter him at the supper, in the garden and on the cross. We'll be a part of Him as he is betrayed and as He forgives. We'll know the strength of His words and the power of His silence. In a special way He'll teach us how to live this week. He'll teach us how to treat one another.

Peace to all.

young man tried this and eventually was allowed to return to his home.

Prayer to the saints can take the same basic form spiritually that we participate in as humans. Since saints share in the Beatific Vision, and since they share with God in a face-to-face way, it would seem that their prayers for us would certainly be effective.

The concept of saints praying for us as we pray to God with them is what is commonly known to Catholics as the communion of saints. Through prayer, brothers and sisters in this life are joined to those in the next in the love of God, our loving parent, and Jesus our Lord.

St. Francis de Sales wrote in his *Devout Life* in 1609 that "the saints who live in heaven with the angels and who our Lord says are as the angels, share their work by inspiring us and interceding for us."

Therefore, the prayers of the saints are an integral part of our walk with God on this earth and are a help to us even though we may not be aware of it.

Some evangelical or fundamentalist Christians take issue with this concept. They have preached that there is only one mediator or intercessor between humanity and God; namely Jesus Christ, the savior and redeemer of the world. It has been a digression, and it has bordered on idolatry, when Christians have prayed to saints, say these Christians. Through Jesus and through Him alone are our sins forgiven and, therefore, we have no need of others.

Certainly, Catholics can have no quarrel

with accepting Jesus as their Lord and savior. He who redeems us from sin and assures us of salvation. At the same time it makes sense, I think, for Christians who journey toward God to enlist all the help possible from those in this life and in the next. For if we ask our brothers and sisters in this life to pray for us, why must we stop

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Diocesan Appointments



Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following diocesan appointments:

Father Paul J. Freemesser from special diocesan assistance to parochial vicar, Church of the Annunciation, Rochester, effective April 15.

Father James E. Wilsey from priest intern, St. Ambrose, Rochester, to Department of Chaplaincy Services, Strong Memorial Hospital, effective June 24.

Father James T. Wolfe from parochial vicar, holy Spirit, Penfield, to parochial vicar, St. Pius Tenth, Chili, effective March 21.

Also, **Father Elmer J. McDonald** is transferring from assistant chief of chaplains, V.A. Medical Center, Bay Pines, Florida to chief of chaplains, V.A. Medical Center, Canandaigua, effective March 30.

THE HOLY SHROUD OF TURIN

Once, an insignificant religious artifact
Now, a noteworthy 20th Century phenomenon
For skeptic & believer, a Holy Week Event

A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION & SLIDE/SOUND PRESENTATION

Midtown Plaza Mall
(main level)
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