

A parish servant

Q: After the priests, who do you think is the most important person in making the parish run smoothly?

A: I should say that for the rectory, for the care of the priests, it would be the cook and housekeeper. But for the general workings of the parish, there are many: the school people, the maintenance people, the CCD folk, the parish council, the pastoral assistant, the committees who carry on many apostolates. But I should place at the top of the list the parish secretary.

Q: Why?

A: Few realize the number of things involved in her work, and how intently she has to be concerned with most of the parish. Observe a secretary's day. She begins with a chaos of papers, memos, orders, reports, files to assemble, prepare and arrange. Letters, bulletins, booklets to be prepared. Programs to be coordinated. And while she is doing these, the phone rings, the clientele's bell clangs, the interruptions can be many and maddening. In the middle of all the above, the secretary is expected to welcome, reassure, inform and

empathize with persons of all varieties. She is expected to do all this cheerfully and patiently, as well as efficiently.

Q: Don't you exaggerate?

A: No. Not in the parishes with which I am familiar. And while the parish secretary has much in common with both male and female legal, medical or general office secretaries and receptionists, she plays an essential role in the ministry of the Catholic Church. She represents not only her priest-employer, but to many people she represents the Church as a whole. Frequently the parish secretary is the first person whom timid enquirers encounter when they first approach the rectory in search of information or counsel. She must communicate the spirit of welcome, support and understanding that will encourage the callers to seek help from a priest. Consider the harm that would be done by an abrupt, tactless, unfeeling secretary. I have often admired the patience and a kind of motherliness of so many secretaries toward people who come to the office, or who phone. Many are worried and need a genuinely sympathetic understanding.

Q: What are special problems of secretaries?

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



A: Terry Bulat, a secretary at Blessed Sacrament, San Diego, in an article on church secretaries, wrote: "The hardest problem in our job is a frequent lack of communication: with priests, with the school, with committees. Almost all decisions and changes in the parish should be communicated to the secretary. Why? Because her job involves her to some extent in nearly every activity. You can't give an answer if you don't have the information." She also adds:

1) When the secretary promises, "Father will return your call," she earnestly hopes that the promise will be honored. Since several secretaries made this plea, it must be a problem in many parishes.

2) Sometimes the priest "pops out for a minute," without indicating when he plans to "pop back again." The secretary does not need to know where he is going, but she

does need to know when he will return, so that she can serve the people properly.

Q: Considering the responsibilities and some frustrations secretaries have, why do they stay?

A: Most secretaries like their jobs. They resist the temptation to work elsewhere for higher benefits and better ones. Why? They welcome the opportunity to serve others and thus fulfill Christ's command to serve the people with love. To paraphrase Ecclesiasticus: A faithful secretary is a strong defense, and the parish who has one has found a treasure.

The next time you phone the rectory or ring the rectory office doorbell, why not a cordial thanks to the woman who responds? Quite often it is she who keeps the wheels of the parish nicely oiled so that it works smoothly. Let us prize her.

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 18:1-8; (R1) Exodus 17:8-13; (R2) 2 Timothy 3:14-42.

All three of Sunday's readings point to one thing: the need for persistence or perseverance. The persistent prayer of Moses secured Israel's victory over the Amalekites. The persistent pleading of the widow won for her a favorable judgment. Paul tells Timothy to teach constantly and never lose patience.

The difference between a saint and others is persistence, the ingredient of all success.

Noah Webster worked 36 years on his dictionary.

William Cullen Bryant wrote *Thanatopsis* 100 times before he was satisfied.

Perhaps one of the costliest battles in the

Pacific in World War II was the invasion of Tawara in 1943. But it paved the way for future victories.

The Japanese commander on that tiny atoll boasted that Tawara couldn't be taken — it was defended by over 4,000 seasoned Japanese troops with 200 machine-gun emplacements. More than 1,000 Americans died during the four days it took to capture the 300-acre atoll.

The Japanese prisoners told Marine General Holland Smith that what broke their morale was not the bombing, nor the naval gunfire, but the sight of marines who kept coming ashore in the face of withering machine-gun fire. Tawara was taken because the marines just kept coming.

One of the worst blights ever on the

escutcheon of the United States is abortion. To remove this national shame, we need one virtue: that of persistence.

In Coupland's life of William Wilberforce, there are some very suggestive chapter headings: "The Call," "Novitiate," "Crusade," "Interruption," "Persistence," "Victory." Like all great reforms, the abolition of the slave trade took longer than the reformers had originally thought.

Wilberforce himself admitted that they met more difficulties along the way than they ever dreamed possible. Year after year, he brought in his resolutions, and they were defeated. Yet something was happening in a roundabout way. In public opinion, slavery itself began to appear only less abominable than the slave trade. So the roundabout road prepared the way for a greater moral triumph than the shortcut. Wilberforce fought for the abolition of the slave trade; he achieved instead the abolition of slavery.

Maybe God has other plans behind the insane opposition to the repeal of abortion.

What must be done is that anti-abortionists must persist in their seeking to correct this dastardly evil. Their constant persistence is all-important. As someone said, "Man makes the straight canal; but God makes the winding rivers." He writes straight in crooked lines. We must learn the patience of God — especially with regard to the abortion issue.

But this is true of every issue in life. It was James J. Corbett, former heavyweight champion of the world — an athlete with limited physical attributes but with great competitive spirit — who said "Fight one more round."

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest! if you must — but never quit.

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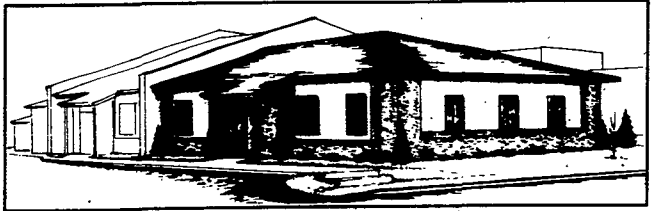
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