

Guest Editorial

Advent: A journey of love

By Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley
Superior General
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester

Recently our local church community has witnessed:

- The publication of letters of judgment and discord in regard to Father Charles Curran and Bishop Matthew Clark.
- A feeling of dismay at the way in which these events get carried away in the public media, which presents such a truncated and sometimes distorted version of the entire reality.
- The experience of confusion stemming from our lack of access to facts and our inability to form opinions from a complete context.

We have just entered the season of Advent. What might be some of the gifts of the Spirit waiting to be born for us this season — even in the midst of our confusion, dismay and pain?

Perhaps it is the acknowledgement that we walk this journey in brokenness and powerlessness, and that it is as a divided community that we walk into the truth.

Maybe the gift will be understanding of the essential unity that lies beneath our apparent differences.

Or it could be the gift of humble self-examination, penitence and petition.

Advent is not the season of arrival and answers, but the season that celebrates journey and waiting. It is a time for self-emptying and expectancy of a God who comes to fill hearts with life and love.

In this spirit and in hope that God will touch our local Church with whatever grace we need at this time, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have planned an hour of prayer at the Motherhouse on December 21 from 2 to 3 p.m.

We invite all who share our feelings of concern for our Church to join us at that time — as we bring before God the facts of our communal experience and ask that they be touched and transformed by our Creator's love.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Of nature and of joy

Nature is the greatest duplicator, repeating itself often in different organisms. Take death, for example; watch how nature repeats the process in animals, plant life and humans.

In fall, the demise of a leaf's life is perhaps the most popular symbol of death for human beings. As they die, leaves — like human beings — change color or grow old, symbolizing that the end is near. Notice, too, how leaves on some trees fall off in a day or two, while others — like aging people — hang on, sometimes well into the winter.

I remember from my college days sitting by a favorite window in the library studying four young trees. Of those four trees, one in particular caught my fancy because, though it was midwinter, its brown leaves remained fully attached.

What did that tree represent to me? Was it an aging person refusing to let go of life? Was it an intransigent old person stuck in his ways, or, was it perhaps a young person who refused to let life's initial disappointment keep her from her dreams?

A few weeks ago in the park I looked up and saw groups of birds flying south in fixed "V" formations. I heard a squirrel rustling nearby making hurried preparations for winter. In this movement of nature, I wondered why we human beings, like those animals, couldn't be more single-minded about the purpose of our existence. Why do we find life and its trappings so confusing when nature itself, through example, seems to be preaching to us so loudly of life's purpose and what our work ought to be?

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to observe my daughter at school through a one-way mirror and, frankly, I found her innocent and beautiful face overwhelming. Watching her in a way similar to God's loving gaze, which is unseen yet so near to us, I stood but a few feet from her, though she was completely unaware of my presence. Was this my little creation? In prayer to my deceased wife, I asked for assent and confirmation of my own observations about our daughter: "Maxie, isn't she beautiful?"

In all this, it struck me that the most beautiful part of nature — that is, the most beautiful part of all of what God has created — is a human being. Certainly, physical beauty is worth noting; but, most of all, the inner beauty that comes from the Most Beautiful One of all, Our Lord, is perhaps the shimmering jewel.

Speak to us, Jesus, about all of your creation. Teach us, God, about how we are to listen to you in the work of your nature. Call to us, Lord, with a message for all your children of beauty and of love, of nature and of joy!

Letters

School crisis requires openness

To the Editor:

After attending one of the hearings sponsored by the implementation committee of the Urban School Plan, I have a few reflections that I would like to share with your readers.

Our Catholic schools are in trouble. While this may seem obvious to many, it should be a fact as we consider the present state of our schools. I do not say the schools are in trouble as far as the dedication of our administrators of the local schools or the faculty or the quality of the education are concerned. As a co-pastor of a parish with a city school, I feel we provide a fine Catholic Christian atmosphere and a fine education for the children in our school. I believe this is generally true for all the city schools.

However, I feel that our difficulties revolve around three areas: first, the planning of the diocesan education office; second, the parochial nature of our parishes; and third, the economic crunch that the future holds.

A word about each of these. While it is true that we now have an Urban School Plan that is supposed to set a direction for the future, I do not believe that this plan has been accepted by the diocesan officials. Nor are they implementing it as quickly as it needs to be

implemented. At a recent hearing at St. Philip Neri parish, members of the implementation committee were talking of a plan for 1987. We have a plan that sets a direction now. We do not need another plan. Further, the present plan — which cost upwards of \$25,000 — has called for a number of committees. As a member of the Blessed Sacrament-St. John's school board, I know that we spent practically a whole evening lining up members of the school board to serve on these committees. That was last March, and as of this date, only three of the 15 volunteers have been contacted by the education office. Thus, I am concerned that the diocesan education office has dropped the ball in carrying us into the future.

My second concern has to do with the parochial nature of the Catholic parish structure and of the school system. We are very slow to consider other options for the continuation of the school system. We have difficulty in dealing with future planning if it means that the structure that we are a part of will have to change at all. We will accept consolidation of a school only if we are forced into it and, then, hopefully with the other group coming to our facility. This is a larger problem, as recent attempts at consolidation of parishes point out. We must face

the fact that structures we knew may have to be different in the future, or there will be no future.

Finally, let me comment on the economic crunch that we will face soon. It is not news to anyone that Catholic school teachers are paid considerably less than public school teachers. A new teacher out of college in our Catholic system starts at \$10,300 — considerably less than the wage paid to a comparable teacher in the public sector. With the anticipated shortage of teachers over the next several years, the public schools will certainly be more attractive to new teachers and to many of our experienced veterans. Thus, we will have to increase our teachers' salaries significantly over the next several years. With Catholic education presently taking 50 to 75 percent of a parish's budget, we will not be able to keep up with these new demands.

Is all doomed? I do not think so. However, it will call for strong, creative leadership, a willingness to accept non-parochial schools and a sacrificial financial commitment from parents with children in the schools.

It will not happen, I believe, unless we face these issues squarely.

Father Kevin P. Murphy
St. John the Evangelist Church
Humboldt Street
Rochester

Don't offer blanket excuses for homosexuals

To the Editor:

Another authority has arisen to champion the cause of homosexuality. Again, a member of our religious has taken up his cause against the pope and the Vatican. Catholics who expect their leaders and ministers of faith to transcend individual opinions and stand with their religion when the pope confirms doctrine, are again put in a turmoil.

Sister Cheryl Lee (see C-J Nov. 6: "Vatican letter seen as another rejection of gay Catholics") claims that the real truth lies in the hearts of homosexuals and the Catholic Church is ignorant of the truth. One must have a pretty high opinion of himself and his information to make such a statement. Trying to cite the Gospel as being neglected to steer

lay people away from the Catholic Church's very clear approach to homosexuality is setting oneself up as the ultimate authority and would seem to be incongruous for a Catholic teacher. One only has to talk to people to "put a face on homosexuality," as Sister Cheryl puts it. The face has always been there, and everyone recognized it. While complete acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle is being sought and promoted by homosexuals, it is not, nor has it ever been, a teaching of the Catholic Church.

Being Catholic isn't always the easiest path to follow. There are many moral issues that are hard to conform to. I think that Catholics in the past have always realized this and have made the conscious choice

to live the Church's teachings with the expectation of the final reward: eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Sister Cheryl Lee never mentioned the terrifying fear that is gripping the nation concerning the spread of AIDS. This horrible plague is being spread by prostitutes, drug addicts and the homosexual community. Why would anyone be expected to excuse a segment of the society that has been so instrumental in bringing this affliction upon themselves and their fellow man?

I believe that Sister Cheryl Lee and her associates should take a hard look at what they are promoting and weigh the teachings of the Church with its wisdom before making statements to their congregations and showing the poor example to the rest of the community.

We all have sins that torture us and make our lives difficult. To make a blanket excuse for one segment of the Church will destroy the Catholic Church, which seems to be the aim of so many people.

James J. Nothnagle
King Road
Churchville

Writer thanks columnist for stressing that 'Christ's love pulls no punches'

To the Editor:

Every now and then, we might read a text that unalterably changes our life. Victor Bartolotta's column "Pro-love, pro-life" (C-J Nov. 13) changed mine. To make a point, he quoted Christ: "If you love those

who love you, what is that? Even sinners do that."

There is nothing confusing here. Christ puts forth the attitude that it is not necessary to receive love after you give it. In countless Gospel readings, I've heard this line before, but in Bartolotta's column, it hits home with poignancy.

Perhaps others have experienced the existential notion of giving up on our fellow man and woman because each has his own life to live and, besides, no one has time for me. We pray for blessings, but an emptiness permeated the soul, till one day we perceive the astounding reality that Christ's love pulls no punches.

Thank you, Victor, for perpetuating this love.

Michael Otto
Pinnacle Road
Rochester

Reader collects prayers

To the Editor:

God the Father is our best friend. And God, just like our earthly friends, wants to hear more interesting conversation than complaints and requests for favors, at least once in a while. Some prayers should be solely for the purpose of expressing love.

Since September 1, I have been collecting prayers as a Christmas present for God. So far, I have collected 25,000 prayers.

Would any of your readers like to participate in this gift for God? All I ask is two "Our Fathers" a day, from now until Christmas, just for the purpose of expressing love for God the Father.

Please send your name and the date you begin to: Christmas Present for God, Lucille A. Zimnotch, 60 Lancaster Road, Apt. 32, Wethersfield, Connecticut 06209.

Lucille Zimnotch
Wethersfield, Conn.



HELEN TELLS ME YOU'RE NOT ALL THAT CRAZY ABOUT BEING RETIRED AND LIVING IN FLORIDA.

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They should be sent to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 1 1/2 pages. We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made, and the letters will reflect the writers' own styles. Because submitted opinions exceed the space reserved for letters, we publish only original letters addressed to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent to other publications or persons. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.