

Priest seeks to heal America from a sickness of suspicion

By Jeanne Gehret

A polluted wind blows toward us, creating a culture in which a debilitating illness is a prerequisite of citizenship, according to Father Daniel Berrigan, SJ.

"Our sickness encourages everyone to settle into one pattern and protect themselves against the outsiders — the unborn, women, the elderly, convicts on death row and those who suffer with the new leprosy, AIDS," said the famed antiwar activist, in Rochester last week to speak at a peace-making retreat he conducted for the Episcopal Diocese.

In the opinion of the controversial Jesuit priest, the American phobia over outsiders amounts to what he termed a national "dis-ease" whose worst symptom is the buildup of nuclear arms.

In May, 1968, Father Berrigan was arrested for destroying draft files in Catonsville, Md., to protest the Vietnam War. In the ensuing years, he and his brother, former Josephite priest Philip Berrigan, have been arrested and imprisoned many times for antiwar activities. The Berrigans have since become synonymous with what William Van Etten Casey, SJ, writing in the January, 1971, issue of Holy Cross Quarterly, called "the collision of conscience with the state."

Speaking at Grace Episcopal Church in Scottsville, Father Berrigan called the Pentagon and the Kremlin shrines to enmity that are administered by what he considers a demonic priesthood. "Because our countries are not officially at war, we can still go to visit the stores, the homes and the children of Russia," he said. "But we cannot go to the places where enmity is enshrined and say we will not be enemies."

"We cannot go to these places and say our prayers of forgiveness, because America is supposed to have enemies. We must accept the enmities imposed upon us at birth," he said.

In a meditation on Jesus' cure and forgiveness of a paralytic in the first chapter of Mark, Father Berrigan noted that Jesus confronted similar "dis-eases" by taking on the "uncleaness of outsiders to make them clean. Jesus' bold actions caused Him great trouble. Early in that Gospel. He was forced to stay on the fringes of society because of the attention He attracted.

Father Berrigan dedicates himself to Jesus' mission of forgiveness and healing by helping Americans recognize how suspicion of outsiders makes us sick. He lives in New York City and divides his time between peace-making activities and his chaplaincy to patients with AIDS and cancer at St. Vincent's Hospital.

"I submit that forgiveness is trouble today and peacemaking is an act of great forgiveness ... We get arrested frequently at a

nuclear think-tank in New York City called Riverside Research. Every week we demonstrate and leaflet several times a week," he explained.

Father Berrigan described how his group goes as far as possible into the research center and posts a printed indictment of its crimes "according to the Nuremberg principles, international law, and domestic law. We commonly pour our blood over the indictment and over the doors and sit there until we're arrested.

"Getting arrested is inevitable in times like these when laws protect weaponry, not people," he said in an interview earlier that week. His most recent arrest occurred in November at Riverside, where he said much research on the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) is conducted.

"We've asked our lawyers to push the case to a trial to draw public attention to the crimes in progress," he said, but the charges were dismissed because "the research center doesn't want to discuss what they're doing."

Berrigan said judges have meted out long sentences for anti-nuclear protesters. He mentioned Helen Woodson, who is serving 18 years and is the mother of seven children. The Cabot brothers, whom Father Berrigan called "admirable priests," are currently serving 14 and eight years. "A sense of them is so important to the seriousness of what we're doing," he said.

Progress in peace-making is slow but discernible, said the Jesuit priest. He spoke of people close to the making of weapons who had "come to a realization, healing, and an understanding of what was so well-hidden from them."

Berrigan cited a highly-trained engineer who was confronted by his children during their opposition to the Vietnam war. "How can you approve of what we're doing and having your work?" he quoted the children as having asked.

That man was healed by his children. They agreed to live more simply so he could get his job and begin to talk about the arms race," Father Berrigan observed.

Before the retreat, he also praised the efforts of the Catholic bishops and local groups that protest the presence of weapons at the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus, N.Y. "The only people I know of who provide a loving but consistent critique of the state are the religious groups," he said.

Berrigan was the natural choice to lead the retreat because of his "total commitment to peace-making," said the Reverend Gail Keeney-Mulligan, chairwoman of the Episcopal diocesan commission on peace and justice and organizer of the retreat.

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Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

Sunday evening: I sat here tonight feeling very much a blessed man because of the experiences I have had this week with people like you. Some of those experiences have been through correspondence; some have come through personal contact. A huge measure of them has helped me to better understand my own humanity and to locate my own sense of it in the beautiful themes of the Advent season.

Let me illustrate what I mean by naming three themes that have engaged my spirit these days and by offering with each an example of how some of you have helped me to appreciate that theme more deeply.

1) We are unfinished. God's gracious mercy has begun something beautiful in us, and that same mercy will one day bring it to completion. I thank a correspondent, now in her 82nd year, who wrote this week with uncommon wisdom and delightfully disarming humor about her faith and the times in which we live. Her letter convinces me that the Lord loves us into new life through all of our years, even to the time we are called to its fullness. More importantly, she reminds me by the spirit and tone of what she writes that the Lord takes enormous delight in every one of us all the days of our lives. Now I feel less intimidated by the realization that I will not be free to retire until the year 2012!

2) All that is past is a part of us and, in God's providence, is for our instruction.

To the parent who wrote with such simplicity of the death of her beautiful daughter at a tender age, I can offer only my prayer in return. She wrote of how the memory of her daughter teaches "the true meaning of love, of accepting people as they really are, of how to

reach out to others, of how to lean on the Lord during periods of struggle and trial, of how to let Him control all that I am and all that I hope to be in His name and how, above all else, to trust His way always."

Such courage helps me to look at hard, unabsorbed memories and to read them in light of Christ's tender mercy. I hope it might do the same for you.

3) God's gracious mercy does not bear fruit in us apart from our freedom for the works of justice and peace.

For new openings to this, I am indebted tonight not to a particular individual but to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, with whom we celebrated this afternoon the 150th anniversary of their order's arrival in the United States.

When I think of the sisters this evening, I remember their constant care for the uneducated, the weak, the hungry, the ailing, the oppressed and the lonely.

And not only do I think of their direct care for such people, but I remember and give thanks for the courage and vision they show in striving to change structures in society and in our Church that hinder their sisters and brothers from realizing their God-given potential.

I thank them tonight for the many ways they have called me to search out new truth and for their willingness to engage with me in that life-giving endeavor.

There are many other ways in which you have strengthened my faith this week. I cannot mention them all here. Let it be enough for me to say that I remember you all in prayer at moments like this and thank God for your wonderful goodness. Peace to all.

Diocesan Appointments



Rochester, effective November 17, 1986 to May 31, 1987.

Father Paul J. Tomasso to temporary pastoral moderator of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Rochester, effective November 17, 1986 to May 31, 1987.

Father Mieczyslaw Zygallo to parochial vicar of St. Stanislaus Church and St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Church, Rochester, effective December 1, 1986.

Father James E. Hewes to sabbatical at Weston School of Theology, effective November 17, 1986 to May 31, 1987.

Sister Julia Norton, RSM to temporary parochial administrator of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church,

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