

Father Richard P. McBrien

## Essays in Theology



### The product of idle hands

Years ago the sisters used to warn us, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." A similar admonition is contained in a composition by 18th-century English hymn writer Isaac Watts: "For Satan finds some mischief still/For idle hands to do."

I thought of the sisters' warning after reading a news report of Archbishop Patrick Flores' homily at the annual convention of the Catholic Press Association in San Antonio.

"What makes the Catholic Church 'catholic' is the fact that it is supposed to be open to all," the archbishop said. Therefore, when we exclude people from the Church, we don't allow it to be catholic.

On the other hand, Archbishop Flores continued, "One cannot be Catholic and refuse to serve." Indeed, serving others keeps Catholics happy.

When parishioners complain "How come our pastor has an Irish accent or a Mexican accent; how come our pastor is bald-headed; how come he's fat;" or make disparaging remarks about the quality of the choir's singing, the archbishop said he asks them what they are involved in at the parish.

"Nada. Nothing," they respond. "No wonder. You're unhappy because you're doing nothing. Get busy. Then you won't notice accents or the choir," the archbishop said he tells them.

That same advice could be applied to other unhappy Catholics. I have in mind those who complain not about the pastor's accent, but about his theology and his liturgical style. He isn't orthodox enough or he doesn't treat the Mass like the obscure, inaccessible, and boring "mystery" it's supposed to be.

They complain not about the choir but about the catechists and religious educators. They're not teaching our children the basics of the faith — the Ten Commandments, the precepts of the Church, and all the other "rules of the road" to heaven. Nor are they warning the children of the punishments God has devised for those who break the rules.

They complain not about the pastor's baldness but about his kindness and compassion toward those the complainers believe are heading for hell. Sinners shouldn't be allowed to feel that they're worthy of love, respect and dignity. They've done wrong, and they should suffer for it — like AIDS victims.

They complain not about episcopal obesity but about episcopal radicalism and permissiveness. The bishops are spending enormous pastoral energy promoting socialism and have nothing left to deal with heretical theologians, disobedient priests, irresponsible nuns and wayward lay people.

And so what do the complainers do? They write letters. They clip and paste. They publish ads. They draft petitions. They organize boycotts. They button-hole bishops and cardinals. And they frown a lot.

Archbishop Flores' advice is as pertinent to them as it is to the parishioners who have complained to him about their pastor's brogue or their off-key choir: "You're unhappy because you're doing nothing. Get busy."

But the archbishop did not mean getting busy doing just anything at all. He meant getting busy in the work of the parish, in the mission of the Church.

The work of a parish and the mission of the Church are the same today, in 1987, as they were in 1957, five years before the Second Vatican Council opened. The Church is still called upon to worship God in the Eucharist and the other sacraments. There are many ministries required for this work — ministers of hospitality (ushers), lectors, music ministers, ministers to the sick, marriage counselors, catechists and the like.

The Church is still called upon to practice the corporal works of mercy, to work for justice, to reach out to the broken-hearted. The Church needs youth ministers, ministers to the elderly, ministers to the handicapped, social action ministers and the like.

Whatever internal controversy might happen to be in the headlines at a given moment, the Church must still carry on with the work the Lord gave it — preaching the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, serving the needs of the poor, witnessing to the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

But to do this work, the Church needs people. Indeed, the Church itself is people, the People of God. Without people, there is no Church. Unless those who belong to the Church do the work of the Church, the work of the Church simply doesn't get done.

On occasion, writing letters, organizing boycotts, circulating petitions, pressuring bishops and curial officials might legitimately be a part of the work of the Church. But only on occasion. Not all the time. Not as a steady diet. Not as an obsession.

People who only have time and energy for those kinds of activities — and they do take a lot of time and energy (especially psychic energy) — obviously don't have enough constructive work to do. They're underemployed. They have "idle hands." And we know what "idle hands" are.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

## On the Right Side



### Sunday's rumination

Father William Cosgrove is the pastor of St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville-Manchester, 5 miles north of Canandaigua. The parishioners adulate their pastor to the point that I suspect they have begun canonization proceedings — a beautiful condition for any priest and for his parishioners.

For several years Father Cosgrove has engaged me to fill in for him during his vacation period. He goes to a mobile trailer — located in the middle of nowhere, near Hammondsport — which he owns with his brother, Father James Cosgrove of Waterloo. He brings scholarly books, spiritual things for his soul, odds and ends of food for his body, and his beloved companion, Chico, a 13-year-old poodle. There he putters around with a paint brush, a hammer and a trowl. It doesn't seem exciting, but it fits his tranquil temperament and intellectual bent.

On Sunday, July 26, the heat in Shortsville-Manchester was debilitating, and the Sunday schedule mercifully light. Just two Masses, at 8 and 10 a.m. No baptisms; no meetings. A few extra worshippers came from St. Mary's, Canandaigua, because the reconstruction program at their church forced Masses to be relocated to the school hall and the local theater, neither of which is conducive to normal devotion.

After the last Mass I checked the church, put away what needed to be put away, took down my religious articles store (beads, medals, prayer books, children's booklets) which I set up for the convenience of townspeople who have no nearby religious goods store. Canandaigua, however, has a quite good one, The Christian Shop run by Don Ferentino on Niagara Street. Don stopped in the previous Monday after our novena service in honor of Our Lady, wondering why he was not getting his *Courier-Journal*. I often meet people who suddenly are not getting their *Courier* and don't know why. I always tell them to call their rectory first if they are supposed to be on their parish's list. If there's no problem at the parish, then subscribers should call the *Courier's* circulation department. "The C-J staff doesn't want you to be without, nor does Bishop Clark," I say.

Finally I checked to make sure the collection was in the safe. One Sunday a few years ago, a thief lifted the collection at St.

Joseph's, Penfield, and went off with over \$5,000. I often wonder what happened to that thief.

The morning was done. The heat would melt a sunflower. I was bushed, so I took a shower and plopped into bed for an hour.

Like so many country rectories, St. Dominic's has no cook. So about 1 p.m., I fried some bacon and eggs, made a whole-wheat jelly sandwich, instant coffee, and sliced half an apple. Then I leisurely chomped away, reading *The Church and I* by Frank Sheed (1974), which I had read twice before. The Church should be mightily grateful to Frank Sheed and his wife, Masie Ward, for giving us authors the like of which seem not to exist today. For 40 years the Sheed-Ward publishing company gave us such writers as Monsignor Ronald Knox; Christopher Dawson; Alfred Noyes; Jesuit Father Martindale; Dominican Father McNabb; the convert psychiatrist Karl Stern, author of *Pillar of Fire*; Father Leonard Feeney; Leon Bloy; Paul Claudel; Francois Mauriac; and Father Leo Trese, of whom Sheed wrote: "No one has taken me deeper inside a priest in sheer dailiness than Father Trese's 'Vessel of Clay' took me." With the exception of Morris West, Flannery O'Connor, Mortimer Adler — and, in a way, Greene and Waugh — can you think of others not on the Sheed-Ward list?

After doing the dishes I thought: "It's like a tomb here. I'd better get my breviary prayers done." Halfway through, Ed Smith — a recent convert who is now as gung-ho about Catholicism as Mormons are about their faith — dropped in. He left in half an hour. I finished the office prayers, and thought: "I feel like a lump, and it's too hot to go outside. Anyway, I don't have the energy."

So I picked up Sheed's *The Church and I* and chuckled at some funny stories narrated by the late Father Feeney. One was this: "On a train, a man came and sat next to me and said, 'I'm sure you'll be pleased to know, Father, that I have a sister who is a nun.' 'Of what Order?' 'The Faithful Companions of Jesus, if you'll pardon the profanity, Father.'"

It's a funny thing how a bit of humor does away with the lumpiness, cheers the soul, restores energy, and even makes the heat seem less hot.

It was a good Sunday.

### Red Cross offers stress relief

The Red Cross is offering a two-part stress-management course for those who want to lessen the negative effects of stress. Classes will

### Nutritionist to speak at meeting

Beth Walsh, a local nutritionist, will speak at the Regional Council on Aging's next caregiver support meeting, which is scheduled for August 14. Walsh will discuss "Nutritional Needs of the Older Person and Caregiver."

The caregiver support group meets on the second and fourth Fridays of each month from 10 a.m. until noon at 34 Meigs St., (next to the Third Presbyterian Church on East Avenue). Time for discussion will follow.

The lecture is free. For information or assistance in getting to the meeting, call Sandra Pecora at (716)454-3224, ext. 112.

take place on Tuesday and Thursday, August 18 and 20, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Red Cross, 50 Prince St., Rochester. The fee is \$16.

The first class will address the nature of stress, including its sources, signs and symptoms as well as the relationship between stress and health. In the second session, participants will learn to develop their own personal stress management plans.

Both sessions must be taken together. Call (716)461-9800, ext. 222 or 326, to register.

### Breakfast slated for widowed people

An informal breakfast for all widowed people is scheduled for 9 a.m. Saturday, August 15, at the Ye Old Feed Bag Restaurant, 1310 Waterloo-Geneva Road (Routes 5 and 20), west of Waterloo.

For information or reservations, call Margaret, (315)789-9837; Carl, (315)539-2284; Doris, (716)526-5062 or (315)789-2686.

### Tompkins County task force seeks safe homes for families

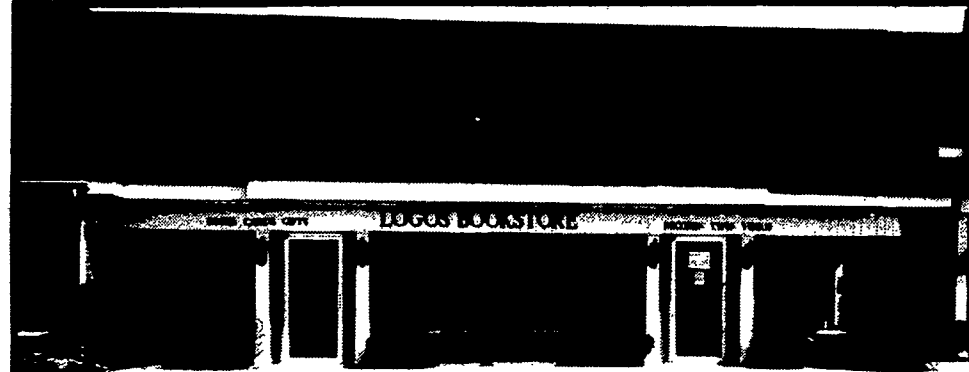
The Tompkins County Task Force for Battered Women is seeking volunteers to offer safe and secure sleeping spaces to women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

Safe homes are used for up to three days in cases when the shelter is full, its location is inappropriate, or when a few days' refuge is all that's needed. Hosts are asked to provide food and sleeping space. All other necessities are provided by the task force.

For more information, call Lori Wyman at (607)277-3203 Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

### Clown theater to offer show

Tim Anderson's Clown Theatre will offer a free performance of mime, clowning and music for children on Thursday, August 6, at 7 p.m. in Highland Park's Lilac Glass Pavilion. The event is sponsored by Young Audiences of Rochester and Citibank New York State.



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