



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

An era of challenges

Next Monday, I shall have the privilege of addressing the clergy of the Diocese of Albany, who will gather at Saratoga Springs for a day of prayer, fraternity and recreation. It will be a gathering in faith and friendship at which the priests will celebrate and be strengthened in the ministry to which they are called.

I am delighted, for several reasons, with the invitation to be with them that day. One reason is that it will be an opportunity to renew friendships with those who were my first brothers in the ordained, priestly ministry. Although I was a priest of the Diocese of Albany until my ordination as a bishop in 1979, I have not served within that diocese since July of 1972, when I began a seven-year term of service at the North American College in Rome. Through all of those years and even until this day, the priests of Albany have been good friends to me. It will be a special joy to offer some small sign of my gratitude to them on Monday.

A second reason why the invitation to Saratoga has been such a gift is the opportunity it has afforded me to reflect on nearly 25 years of priestly ministry. It has been a joy to do that, because such an enterprise inevitably brings me back to a realization that God is always gracious and utterly faithful to us — even when we are mean-spirited, selfish, confused, sinful and forgetful.

The years to which I refer have been filled with challenges for all of us old enough to remember them. Who among us who were coming to adulthood in the late '50s could possibly have imagined the ecclesial, civil, cultural and technological revolutions we were to experience in the next quarter of a century? I know that I could not. And as I look back on all of it, I am convinced that we have survived it all — and even made some progress! — simply and solely because God never gives up on us.

It has dawned on me during these days of preparation for Saratoga that I have experienced one-third of these 25 years in each of three distinct local churches — Albany, Rome and Rochester. That is a blessing for which I shall always be grateful. It has taught me that, while all of the local churches are called to ongoing renewal in this post-conciliar age, each local church must respond to that call out of its own history and with its own resources.

That's what it means to be enfolded, to be local, to be particular. We, who make up the local church, have available to us all that we need to celebrate and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. But we are not self-sufficient. We will perish if we do not keep among our deepest values and commitments that communion of life with the other local churches — and, in particular, with the Church at Rome — that form the church universal.

It is within this communion that we live out the bond of faith and affection through which we most effectively witness to the merciful love of God.

Such are the thoughts that come to me when I think about old friends in Albany. God has shown me rich and merciful love in and through them for many years, and now extends that same grace to me through you. I am deeply grateful for every bit of it.

Peace to all.

The Editor's Desk

A costly comedy

Admitting to naivete is not something that comes easily to a journalist. After all, much of our training is designed to aid us in rooting out fallacies, and the popular stereotype tells us that every good journalist is endowed with more than a healthy dose of skepticism.

Yet, when a journalist goes to work for a Church publication, it seems reasonable occasionally to put skepticism aside and accept even somewhat implausible information in good faith, especially when the information is provided by official ministers of the Church who have no apparent motive for duplicity.

That is why, inasmuch as I am embarrassed by having fallen for a hoax, my overriding emotion is a sense of disillusionment. Let me explain.

Before we went to press last week, I looked long at the photo depicting several diocesan deacons, their wives and "Pope John Paul II." It was a poor photograph, blurred and ill-composed. Had a photograph of similar quality been submitted for an article of lesser import, I certainly would have rejected it out of hand. The pope, moreover, looked peculiar. I joked that it was a papal impersonator, while others on the staff quipped that he looked like a cardboard dummy. Yet none of us seriously believed it was a fraud.

I looked again at the information the deacons' "public relations chairman" — a deacon himself, by the way — had provided. "Shown in the picture are those who were fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time ..." he wrote. "For more details of the trip, including some really interesting stories of how the spirit of God truly blessed those in the group during the visit and the various meetings attended, please call ..." At the bottom of the release, he wrote: "Karen— Hope you can use this."

"Well," I thought, "the poor quality of the photograph probably accounts for the pope's peculiar image; some of the deacons look pretty odd, too. And what possible reason could they have for attempting to trick us?"

To make a long story short, the photo was a fraud. The "pope" was nothing more than a cardboard cutout, the kind you can find at any carnival. I was naive in trusting the source, and the Courier-Journal has been embarrassed.

Of course, we're still idealistic enough to hope that the deacon who submitted the photo never really intended to trick us. Maybe he planned for us to question it, expecting to laugh with us rather than at us. If that's the case, the caption information should have hinted at a joke. But it didn't, and I'm left feeling that we've been deliberately ridiculed.

And if so, I hope the laugh will hold the joker for a long time, because we won't be so gullible again. As someone asked when the hoax was discovered, "If you can't trust the deacons, who can you trust?"

PEACE



C-J Letters

Protestors disregarded God's truth

To the editor:

That members of women's rights groups and gay organizations would protest the Church's stance on abortion and homosexuality during the pope's visit to the United States makes about as much sense as if an individual were to boycott the postal service for the delivery of a past-due bill or Western Union for an unwelcome message.

Judging by their attitude and contemptuous accusations of "injustice," it appears these dissidents are under the impression that Christianity presents its leaders with multiple-choice options in matters of doctrine and morality. Their disagreements, however, are not with the teachings of any man, but with the Word of God, whose laws they interpret. Truth

is not variable. Abortion and homosexuality are not wrong simply because the pope — or any man — says they are, but because God says so. If what he speaks are "the oracles of God," can he be condemned personally for the message he bears?

I am a secretary. If my employer dictates a letter for me to type, am I responsible for the reaction it arouses in the recipient? Of course not. On the other hand, knowing the response my employer's words might provoke, would I be right to alter what he has said? Absolutely not. By the same token, gay activists and women's rights groups, rather than rebuke the delivery boy, ought to recognize that their disagreement is not with the carrier, but with the One whose message he bears.

There will always be those who angrily fault the messenger with the unpalatability of the message. (Amos 2:11-12) The prophet Zechariah was stoned; Jeremiah was thrown in a pit; John the Baptist was beheaded. All, as spokesmen for God, suffered for the truth that they bore. But, as God instructed the prophet, any vessel fit to carry His message must bear it without compromise — neither polluting nor diluting it to please the people. "Diminish not a word!" (Jeremiah 15:19; 23:28; 26:9). To do so would incur the destruction of many souls. (Ezekiel 33:1-9) "If they persecuted me," Jesus said, "they will persecute you also." (John 15:20)

Diane Dew
West Allis, Wisc.

Soviet aid sows Central American discord

To the editor:

The Courier-Journal's August 27 article "Campeños" cries calls sister to second Salvadoran voyage" related Sister Kathleen Weider's experiences in El Salvador. One of her experiences

that I find difficult to believe is a statement allegedly made by Salvadoran campesinos that, "If the United States would only stop sending aid, the war in El Salvador would end tomorrow."

What makes that statement ques-

tionable is the fact that the Soviet-backed Sandinistas of Nicaragua are aiding the rebels in El Salvador. It is far more likely that without Soviet aid to Nicaragua, peace would not only come to El Salvador, but to Nicaragua and the rest of Central America as well.

We should remember that despite harassment from the rebels, 80 percent of the people in El Salvador risked their lives to elect the current government in El Salvador and the contras in Nicaragua would allow communist forces to consolidate their power and further oppress the people of Central America.

Robert Bart
Ithaca

Respect life; back handgun controls

To the editor:

I urge everyone interested in handgun control to write to your senators and congressmen about sponsoring the Bandy Bill, H.R. 975 in the House and S466 in the Senate. This bill requires a seven-day waiting period before purchase of a handgun to enable local police to do a background check. Also in the House a bill is being discussed which will ban the importation and manufacture of plastic handguns, which can evade detection by X-ray and metal-detection devices.

At a time when our nation is committing vast resources and energies to stopping terrorism and protecting our citizens abroad, we should not make it easier for the terrorists to operate in our country.

Write to Senators Alphonse D'Amato and Daniel Patrick Moynihan at the United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510. For residents of the Bath area, write

also to Representative Amory Houghton, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515.

With Christ's love, let us respect life.

Elsie C. Stabel
East William Street
Bath

C-J Letters Policy

The Courier-Journal wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting Church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the Church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader

interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: Letters to the Editor, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.