

Editorial & Opinion

Giving thanks for God's transforming love in our lives

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I hope that your Thanksgiving holiday was a pleasant one for you and your loved ones, and that the Advent Season we have just begun will be a time of special grace for all.

As in past years, I began Thanksgiving Day by presiding at the eucharistic liturgy at Sacred Heart Cathedral. That liturgy is always a warm and joyful event. Families are reunited, people are in good spirit, and the liturgy is prepared with loving care. This year, there was a special joy to the celebration because Father Bob Miller, the rector of the cathedral parish, rejoined us after a two-week stay in the hospital. His presence — an immediate, visible and common cause for thanksgiving among all of us — gave a special significance to the event. It was another indication of the deepening power of his priestly ministry in the midst of the suffering caused by his illness.

It's very hard to be in the presence of someone like Bob and not be aware of the graced things that are taking place in him and in others because of the faithful and courageous way he has responded to the reality of his illness. His response cannot help but draw those who know him to prayers of thanksgiving to God for such blessings as life, good health and friends, and to prayerful recognition of our dependence on God for these blessings.

Along the Way



When Mass was over on Thursday, my mother and I drove to Waterford to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner with my sister and brother-in-law, their five girls and my dear friend Father Tom Powers. Dry roads and light traffic made the drive an easy one, and conversation with my mother made it fast and pleasant.

Being with Bob in the morning was one way to experience the living presence of God with His people; being with my five nieces in the afternoon was another! My mind reels trying to find words that even begin to capture the excitement they create in the life of their uncle! Beauty? Mystery? Intrigue? None of these words quite do it. Perhaps the best I can say is that it is great fun to be with them and a total delight to note the changes that occur in them in the intervals between our visits.

Grace, the oldest, will be 20 in May and is now a

student at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy. She also works in a local hospital to help finance her education. Jane, 17; Mary Ellen, 16; and Margaret, 14; are all students at Waterford-Halfmoon High School. They are members of the senior, junior and freshman classes, respectively.

Kathleen, 11, is the youngest of the five. Like her sisters, she is fun to be with, and also like her sisters, she likes to keep her uncle off balance! For instance, when I invited her to participate in my jubilee celebration, she responded, "Why don't you have your people call my people, and we'll see what we can work out?"

I could write a lot about each of them — maybe one day I shall! But I mention them all here because so many of you ask about them. They are all growing up in beautiful ways, and I am never with them for very long without being aware in some way of how people change.

At the end of this Thanksgiving weekend, Bob, Grace, Jane, Mary Ellen, Margaret and Kathleen are all on my mind because each in his or her own way speaks to me of God's love transforming each moment of life. They help me to search for that presence and process in my own life. Perhaps they can help you to do the same.

Peace to all

Letters

Reader sought parish faithful to canon law

To the editor:

I have been following with interest your various articles concerning the Bishops' Synod, especially that "the synod's final recommendations to the Pope did not include a proposal that all non-ordained ministries be equally open to men and women." Neither the last, or this synod, have come to a vote to approve "girl-altar boys" — female acolytes — and thus recommend it to the Pope for approval, thus leaving the canon law still in existence which does not permit it — except under one circumstance as I was informed.

After 27 years in my parish, I "walked" because of this very reason — girl-altar boys. I would sit at Mass and quietly fume that I was a captive audience for what I knew to be a knowing and blatant violation of canon law.

Finally, I took my own advice — except I had been saying it to Catholics who didn't like the rules concerning abortion, etc. As a convert of over 40 years, I know there's a Church out there for everyone — I have studied and attended many.

I found myself in the reverse position of sitting in my own church of over 27 years and by my continuing physical presence supporting the breaking of Church canon law — promoted by people who should know better. Finally, I realized I was a captive audience only as long as I permitted it. I vocalized my objections to various proper authorities, then found a Catholic Church that does not willingly and knowingly break Church law and drag other people into physical support of their theories — willingly or unwillingly.

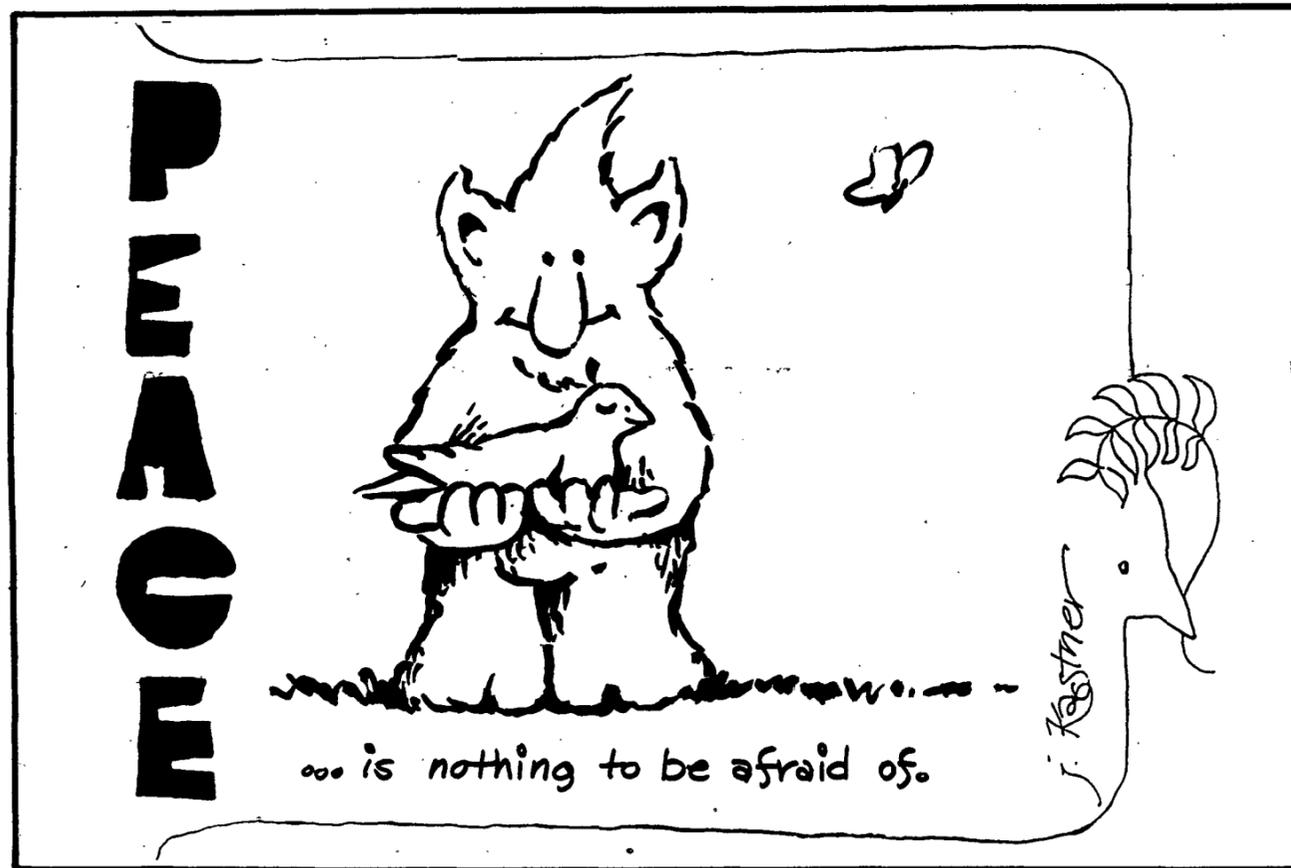
Too many people want to change the Church to what they want it to be, rather than change themselves — or try anyhow — to what God said we could become through the teaching of the Holy Spirit in His Church as instituted by Jesus Christ — not man!

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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



Archivist recalls life of diocese's first black religious

To the editor:

I grieved to read the notice of the death of my good friend Brother Ralph Carpenter, MCS (Courier-Journal, November 11). What the obituary did not mention of this strapping, but gentle and devout man is that he was the first black Rochester Catholic to enter the religious life.

Ralph was born on May 2, 1915. Orphaned at nine, he was entrusted to the care of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the New York Protectory in the Bronx. In 1925 he was received into the Catholic Church. Subsequently, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Brocco, Rochesterians

who then lived at 14 Mitchel St., adopted him and brought him to Rochester to live. Ralph thus became a parishioner of St. Andrew's Church and a good friend of its longtime pastor, Monsignor George W. Eckl.

When he was in his mid-20s, Carpenter felt a call to serve the Church. In 1942, he entered the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart as a lay brother — the first American black vocation to their community. Brother Ralph spent the next 13 years at the congregation's motherhouse in Geneva, Illinois. When he professed his perpetual vows on March 8, 1951, he was happy to have on hand Monsignor Eckl and Brothers Jerome and Alban, who had raised him in his New York Protectorate days.

During his 45 years as a religious, Brother Ralph established for his community *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Press* and its associated book bindery. As the C-J obituary noted, he was also a strong promoter of the lay retreat movement.

The only other Rochester black man who has been called to the religious life was Father Charles Hall (1931-1967). A graduate of Immaculate Conception School and Aquinas Institute, Charles entered the Society of St. Joseph in 1950 and was ordained a decade

later. He had scarcely begun a very promising career as a teacher in the renowned Josephite school of St. Augustine's, New Orleans, when he contracted cancer and died on March 25, 1967.

There are today no black members in either the Rochester Sisters of Mercy or the Sisters of St. Joseph, much to the disappointment of both communities. Nor have I heard of any local black women who have joined other congregations of sisters.

However, the Diocese of Rochester is blessed in having a black permanent deacon, Mr. Anthony J. Mercandel, ordained in 1982 in the first class of Rochester deacons. And another black candidate, Mr. John Holmes of St. Bridget's Parish, is scheduled to be ordained with the deacon class of 1988. This is a heartening development.

But who now will come forward to become the first black to be ordained a priest of the Diocese of Rochester? I pray that he will soon appear. I believe also that his appearance will stimulate other local blacks, both men and women, to offer themselves and their gifts to the service of the Church of Rochester.

Father Robert F. McNamara
Diocesan Historian