

Columnists

Bashing bingo is 'small potatoes'

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

The charismatic Father James Callan, rector of Corpus Christi, Rochester, wrote an "anguished" article in his November 29 Sunday bulletin. His bulletin is always interesting: homey, personal and encouraging, it helps to bond his parishioners together.

With the zeal of a Savonarola, he thoroughly bashed the administration of Corpus Christi Parish of 20 years ago with this salvo: "I remember taking lots of pictures of Corpus Christi Church because I was particularly appalled at what I saw. There was a big bingo sign in front of the church, and a big bingo sign in front of the school. At each entrance to the parking lot, there was a sign that said: 'Corpus Christi: PRIVATE DRIVE.' My comment 20 years ago was that Corpus Christi looked like a private club, consumed with internal affairs, rather than the welcoming, missionary face of Christ. The signs, I stated, did not manifest the true spirit of Christ. Most of those signs have been replaced — except one. I pass that sign many times a day. I never pass that bingo sign without becoming incredibly sad at the compromises we are continually willing to make. I cringe for the scandal we continue to cause in the Rochester community. Believe me, I am not overstating my feelings."

Now, lest the hundreds of good people in the diocese who work on bingo with a generous giving of time and discomfort begin to be disturbed in conscience that they are bad Catholics, it might be good to consider another aspect of bingo.

Some years ago I was taking care of Rochester General Hospital for Father James Schwartz, the chaplain. He resided at St. Andrew's, near the hospital. While caring for the hospital, I lived in his quarters in the rectory. One Saturday afternoon, about 2:30, I was leaving the rectory. The Saturday bingo game was full swing in the church hall. A young matron of about 30 came steaming up the steps, late but earnest. Cheerfully I said to her: "Well, young lady, do you expect to win?" I shall never forget the sincerity in her response: "Well, sir, I'd like to. But I don't care whether I do or not. If I didn't come to this every week, and get out of the house and away from the kids for a while, I'd explode." Many people pay large sums to counselors, psychiatrists and the like to unravel their frustrations. To this woman and to thousands of others, this was not a gambling binge. It was an innocent recreation, valuable therapy for a good, house-bound mother.

On the Right Side

I am fascinated by the people in bingo halls. They are earnest. They form a communion of people not terribly concerned about great theoretic or political problems. To criticize these people for enjoying what is a simple pleasure for them, and to criticize those generous men and women who take their turns every week or month as helpers in an activity that brings "anguish" to a fine priest is small potatoes.

These people who are so hep about justice and rights might better turn their guns on legislators about defrauding Catholics and others who run Christian and Jewish private schools for love of religion. Let me tell you of an instructive incident.

In 1944, I was in England with our 409th Bm. Group, waiting to be sent to France. We were stationed at Saffron Waldon, near Cambridge. Our trucks were going to the city, so I got a pass to that historic place. And I went to see the one parish school. It was my first experience of a school without sisters. The headmaster showed me through. I asked him: "How do you finance the school?" He explained: "The institution has to provide the building and facilities. Then the government pays for the teachers' salaries, maintenance and the like." I recall with shame my bumptious response: "Oh, in the States we don't bother about that. Our people pay all the expenses." The headmaster glared at me, and with a bit of contempt replied: "In the first place, we couldn't afford it. And in the second place, don't you believe in fighting for your rights?"

Father Callan could well be an effective advocate of justice for our doubly taxed parents and schools. And lest our bingo workers and patrons be troubled by a guilty conscience, go ahead and enjoy the game, which helps the works of religion even more than bake sales, benefit dances and banquets, and which helps thousands of people to keep balance with stimulating recreation.

It might be to the point that the apostle Mathias was chosen by lot (Acts 1:26), which is a cousin of sister bingo.

Birthplace of a new kingdom

By Cindy Bassett

My journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem had taken only a day, but the small town I saw before me seemed worlds apart from the city I had left behind. Unlike Jerusalem, this village had no grand buildings to cast a lasting impression on the minds of visitors.

Bethlehem was, after all, merely a stopover for caravans of merchants making their way south to Egypt. The ordinary citizens of the village were mainly shepherds, and the hills outside town were dotted with their herds.

Yet, what had the prophet Micah said of this seemingly insignificant place? "Bethlehem is a small Judean village, but it will be the birthplace of a king." With this thought in mind, I entered the village.

The streets were crowded with people who had come to register in compliance with the census law. It was almost as if Bethlehem had suddenly become a small city overnight. Most of the people in the crowd looked like simple folk. Would the king come from one of these families?

As I walked the street, I noticed the place of business of the tax collector. Most tax collectors in Judea were Hebrews, but they were bitterly despised by their own people. They made their livings from the profits left over after the mandatory taxes were paid to the Roman government. Even so, the Romans neither trusted nor respected them. Would this new king come for the tax collectors, too?

The Hebrews believed that the Messiah's coming would change everything. As the new king of the land, he would overthrow the Roman oppressors, and his kingdom would be one of justice for all.

Nearly 1,000 years ago, the prophet Nathan told King David that one of his descendants would become the ruler of this everlasting kingdom. King David was born here in Bethlehem. He began first as a shepherd, but after he had slain the giant, Goliath, David became known as one of the mightiest warriors in all of Israel.

It seemed fitting that the Messiah would be

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one of his descendants. Perhaps this king would form an army and march against the city of Rome itself, leaving the emperor powerless to stop him. King David's son, Solomon, was the wisest king who ever reigned in Israel. He built the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, and the rulers of foreign nations sought his counsel.

The Messiah might be born in Bethlehem, I imagined, but certainly He would rule from Rome or Jerusalem. Like the great patriarch, Abraham, he would leave His homeland, traveling forth to conquer all the nations of the world. As I envisioned Him, the Messiah would possess all the qualities of the greatest leaders who had ever lived. And once He had come, the world would never be the same.

Because my master, King Herod, was ruler of all Judea, the census officials gave me immediate access to the records. I did not tell them the reason for my search. In the records, I found the name of Joseph, a carpenter, listed under the house of David. I was reminded again of David as a youth tending his father's sheep. Soemhow, I was certain that the Messiah would come from the family of this Joseph.

I left the very next day for Jerusalem. Already I had decided not to tell King Herod of my findings. My loyalties were now to the new kingdom that would come to pass.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, King Herod had called a meeting of all the Jewish leaders. But no matter how ruthlessly he would treat them, I knew he could not hold back the coming of the new kingdom.

To be continued ... Scripture reference: Micah 5:2.

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