

Columnists

Words of wisdom to a young priest

By Father Paul J. Cuddy
 Nearly 20 years ago, I wrote this letter to a newly ordained priest, and wish to share it.
 Dear Father,

The *Courier-Journal* carried word of your assignment, and next Thursday you will present yourself to the pastor to assist him in the care of all the souls within your parish.

Welcome to the fraternity of the priesthood! Your youth reminds me that I am old enough to be your grandfather. Your health, your zeal, your knowledge, your piety, your good humor, your resiliency give me the greatest joy. We who are trudging toward the shadows love you young priests greatly, both for yourselves as God loves you, and for the Church, which has such great hopes in you.

I am smiling as I imagine your thoughts about your pastor and your people. If coming assistants have some wonderment what the pastor is like, receiving pastors are frequently wondering about the assistant — before, during and afterward.

If you wonder what the people will be like, imagine their curiosity about you! All priests differ in gifts and talents. There is the CYO type, the organizer type, the inner-city type, the turtle-neck sweater type. But these are all incidental.

First of all, your people need and want a priest who honors his own priesthood. They need and want a man who has reverence for the Mass, who is a man of prayer, who listens more than he talks, and who is manfully kind.

There is a fad — at least I hope it is — of discounting the Breviary. May I tell you a story? One Saturday about 10 a.m., almost 15 years ago, the phone rang in my quarters at Lackland Air Force Base. An urgent voice said: "This is Captain X. I just arrived at the base as a directly commissioned officer. Can I see you at once?"

"Of course. Come to my quarters," I responded.

He came promptly. He said: "Father, I am a priest from X diocese. I got tired of my priesthood, and since I have a good educational background and several degrees, I got a direct commission in the Air Force in education.

On the Right Side

Now that I'm here, I'm not sure what I want. If I should want to, would it be possible to be transferred to the chaplaincy?"

I wondered how a priest could possibly get tired of the Mass, of serving God's people, of the holiness and mystery of the priesthood. He had none of the usual reasons for running away — namely wine, women or song.

But every man is free, so I said: "I'm glad you came over. Of course, only you can decide what you will do. I surely hope you will return to your priesthood. In the meantime, I suppose it might cause wonderment if you say your Breviary prayers, but I hope you will say your rosary every day."

He replied with a trace of challenge: "I haven't said the Breviary in years. I'm not likely to begin now!"

I have often speculated on the connection between the omission of the Breviary prayers, pledged for the Church and the people, and his defection. Only God knows, but as a result of his default, I have considered it a grace to want to be faithful to these prayers rather than using even reasonable excuses from reciting them. May you have the same grace.

Whatever gifts you have in serving God's people, I give thanks to God that you have the goodness to use them. However, above all things, be reverent toward the Mass, faithful to your Breviary, regular with your rosary, and take a little time each day for some meditation.

My time is running out, but I am happy to leave this world knowing there are men like you: zealous, devout, cheerful, faithful, bursting with a love of God and Our Lady and the Church which is Christ's Body. God continue to give you His grace and happiness.

More daring New Year's predictions

By Father Richard P. McBrien
 Last year at this time I made 25 predictions for 1987. I just checked them over and found that I earned a perfect score. Look it up, if you don't believe me. My very first prediction, in fact, was that Pope John Paul II would not appoint Detroit's Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton to be the new archbishop of Philadelphia.

But what does one do for an encore? Conventional wisdom would dictate that you should quit while you're ahead. No one can improve on a perfect record. On the other hand, two perfect years in a row would be a record in itself.

So in the spirit of the holiday season I've decided to go for double-or-nothing. So here goes. In 1988 the following events will not happen:

The national average of baptized Catholics attending weekly Mass will not exceed 50 percent. (I could have made it easy for myself and said 75 percent, but this is a high-class, high-wire act.)

The national average of church-going Catholics who actually join in the singing at Mass will not exceed 50 percent either. (That's a safe one.)

The national average of church-going Catholics who leave Mass excited about the homily will not exceed 50 percent. (This is getting too easy.)

The number of Catholics who leave Mass early will not decline. (Child's play.)

The number of church-going Catholics who drop \$2 in the collection basket and think it generous will not decline either. (Am I getting too serious?)

The number of Catholics attending Mass on the feast of the Assumption will not increase, and those who do attend will sing even less, on a percentage basis, than those who attend on Sunday. (Two predictions for the price of one.)

No diocesan association of religious education directors will complain to the bishop that their salaries and fringe benefits are too high.

Fewer than 100 parents nationwide will urge their parish DREs to increase the number of sessions they would have to attend in connection with their children's sacramental preparation. (Let's go for broke: I'll reduce that number to 25.)

Essays in Theology

Not more than 100 people will decline — despite the fact that it's the dinner hour — to call the rectory to inquire about the Christmas Mass schedule.

No active pastor widely respected both in his parish and among his fellow priests throughout the diocese will be named an archbishop. (These predictions aren't all supposed to be funny, you know.)

In no parish where the median family income is over \$100,000 will a majority of parishioners request a parish lecture series on the contents and implications of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on the economy. And if one is presented anyway, a majority will not attend.

The number of Catholics who fail to attend announced meetings but regularly complain nonetheless about the performance of parish staff members will not decline in 1988.

Neither will there be a decline in the number of Opus Dei members who will try to insert themselves in the religious-education programs of U.S. Catholic parishes with the primary purpose of "restoring orthodoxy" to such programs.

Not more than 37 middle-aged Catholics who now look upon their parish almost exclusively as a social club — sports' nights, dances, bazaars, recreational activities for youth, etc. — will come to see it as a community of faith with a serious religious mission — and be willing to pay for it as well!

Thousands of dedicated, self-sacrificing women — lay and religious alike — who do most of the serious pastoral things a parish needs to do if it's really going to be a Christian faith-community will not receive the recognition, appreciation, or compensation they deserve. And the overwhelming majority of them won't quite in spite of that.

On that reassuring but sobering note, have a happy new year!



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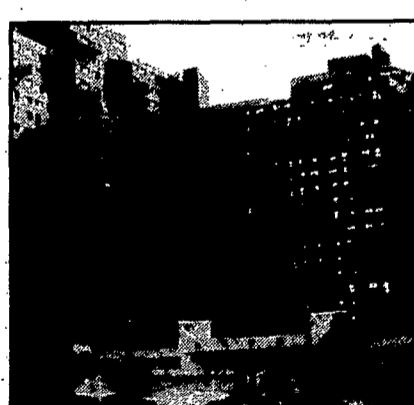
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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



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How do I help the elderly at the time of a funeral?

Death of a loved one is painful. There is a tendency to believe that the elderly adjust more easily because they "should" anticipate the loss. Having more time to prepare does not guarantee that grieving will be easier. The elderly may have fewer resources such as long time friends, money or good health. Losing a partner or long time friend may mean living life alone at a time when a person may be least able to be independent. Support from family and friends at this time is most important. Being over protective or taking away a person's independence by making decisions for them is not desirable and may be harmful. Help the elderly begin their adjustment by attending the funeral and offering specific help.

We purchase all forms of insurance to protect our family & assets, not because we expect the worst to happen, but to be prepared. Doesn't it make sense then to prepare for what will happen. Let our trained counselors assist you with the many options available in planning for a worry-free future.

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