

## Editorial & Opinion

# Lenten reflections on the continuing need for conversion

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In these days just before the Lenten season, I have been trying to think and pray about the significance of these special weeks, so that I might be able to enter them in a proper spirit. I have thought about our wonderful God who loves us as children, about God's fidelity and mercy, about God's compassion and care for those of us who can so often forget about others in the pursuit of our own designs. I have thought about the need for ongoing conversion in my own life, about the ways in which I know that need and about the ways of which I remain ignorant.

Grave illnesses in people who are very dear to me have made me more aware than I have ever been that life is a gift given to us moment by moment. Such friends have also made me conscious at a new level that God accomplishes wonderful things through those who are weak, when these people offer their weaknesses as a dwelling place for the power of God.

A woman who wrote to me recently to share her struggles with the question of birth control has set me to reflecting a lot on the manner in which we in the Church search for truth in matters close to the heart and how we communicate that truth when we have something to say. It seems to me that we have long miles to go in learning from the experience of people who deal day by day with such issues. And I believe that we need to teach the truth we hold in a more pastoral and persuasive manner.

Through these and other current, personal experi-

## Along the Way



ences, I am led again and again to the realization that we in the Church need to keep struggling with the tough questions of who we are as a people of faith and what it means to be participants in the mystery of Christ dying and rising. I am afraid that we act sometimes as if we understood everything quite well, and we send the message that all we need to do for everything to be perfect is to behave according to that understanding. I suppose that is true in some ways, but I wonder if we yet fully understand the mind and heart of Christ with respect to servant-leadership, the equality of human persons, the sanctity of life, or with respect to violence. The religious persons whom Jesus scolded because they were sinning were not the last ones subject to that ire. We all are.

These are some of the areas in which I experience the need for ongoing conversion, and during the Lenten season I shall be praying in a special manner for

growth in these areas. I don't have any magic formula for doing so, except to renew my commitment to be faithful to prayer during this privileged time. Normally that means taking time at the beginning and end of each day to remember that all good things begin and end in God. It means keeping an awareness through the day that the deepest life is below the surface of things, and that we must reflect on our experience if we hope to be in touch with that life.

As a reminder to do such things, I'll tap into the Church's ancient wisdom about fasting. For me, that means refraining from alcohol and eating three times a day in an amount sufficient to keep me healthy and able to work. It will allow me to remember each time I want to eat more — and that will be quite often — that there are others whose needs are much greater than mine and whose resources are much lesser. When that happens, the likelihood grows that I'll do something to close the gap.

There are some other ways I find helpful — vigorous physical exercise, some good reading, and efforts to center on the needs of others rather than on my own needs.

Whatever I finally do or do not do, I know that it will be a blessed season for me if I remember two things: 1) that it's what's in the heart that really matters, and 2) that everything is God's work and somehow caught up in that is good use of my own freedom.

Peace to all.

## The Editor's Desk

### Different views of Immaculate Mary

On Sunday night, I accompanied photographer Bonnie Trafelet to two events — a Marian devotional service at St. Thomas the Apostle Church and the performance of the heavy-metal band Immaculate Mary — in hopes of gaining some perspective on the situation.

After all that had been reported in the media, I wanted to know if the band would exceed the vulgarity of using Our Lady's name and of distributing condoms at concerts, and proceed to malign the Blessed Virgin or the Church. I wanted to know what attitude the prayer-protestors would take in their effort to make "reparation" for whatever injury the band had done and whether their message would have any relevance for today's teenagers. I also wanted to see what effect the media hype would have on the turnout at the Penny Arcade — whether all the publicity regarding the band's name would succeed only in inflating Immaculate Mary's fame beyond the rightful sphere of its members' musical abilities.

Beyond the ringing in my ears, however, I brought back with me little more than a few scattered impressions. The first was of the contrast between the raucous scream-singing at the Penny Arcade and the beautiful *Ave Maria* solo sung with such talent and reverence at the prayer service. Whereas the prayer service was solemn, the scene at the Lake Avenue bar was frenetic. Fans yelled and shook their fists, and one young man bounced around acrobatically above the heads of the crowd. It was so loud near the stage that Bonnie wore race-track ear-plugs while she took pictures.

My second impression was that neither group was disrespectful of the other. The leaders of the prayer service avoided condemning the crowd at the Penny Arcade, speaking instead of the danger of secularism undermining Christian values. Likewise, during the half hour we were there, the band did nothing lewd, nor did they make any slurs against the Blessed Virgin or the Roman Catholic Church — none at least insofar as I could ascertain. At my age it's hard to admit, but I couldn't understand a single word of Immaculate Mary's lyrics.

Musically speaking, I'd guess that Immaculate Mary is probably no worse than any of the heavy-metal bands that play on MTV. Yet as far as I can tell, the concept of musical quality is meaningless at the decibel levels such bands reach.

And considering all the publicity they've



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal  
Father Anthony Mugavero distributes literature on apparitions at Medjugorje in front of the Penny Arcade.

received of late (Father Callan at St. Thomas remarked that he'd been interviewed by reporters from all over the country), I wouldn't be surprised to learn that Immaculate Mary will soon join the ranks of MTV's Saturday-night scream fests. They're already working on their first album, and by now every record executive in the country probably knows who they are.

The funny thing is that Immaculate Mary's fans — ranging in age from about 15 to 20 — actually seem to believe that the band's name refers only to some muddy horseback rider. "They didn't mean anything by it," one young woman at the Penny Arcade told me. Claiming to know the band members personally, she testified that they were "all really good people." Moreover, she pooh-poohed the notion that anyone had come to the concert because of the publicity. She said that everyone was there just to hear the music — everyone but reporters and "religious people outside," that is. Fans probably said the same things about a similar band named The Dead Kennedys.

Another impression was that the St. Thomas prayer service had drawn people from all over the county and beyond, yet I noticed only

two teenagers amid a crowd of nearly 800 people — averaging perhaps 55 in age — intoning litanies most Catholics under 30 have never even heard. I wondered if the older people at St. Thomas and the teenagers at the Penny Arcade had anything in common upon which they might base a discussion of their differing values.

Father Anthony Mugavero and a friend attempted to bridge the chasm between the two groups by amiably standing in the cold outside the Lake Avenue tavern, handing out newsletters that chronicle the reported apparitions at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia. He chatted with the bar manager and joked with patrons, who brushed past him as if he were selling incense at the airport. "Here," he said, offering a newsletter to two girls walking by, "you can read it later, when you get home."

When the band's first set ended, Bonnie and I hurriedly made our exit. But I looked over my shoulder as I left the bar, recording my final impression of the evening. The floor was strewn with wads of paper — the mud-sodden remnants of Father Mugavero's newsletters. Maybe above all that noise, the kids couldn't hear his message.

— Karen M. Franz

## Letters

### What would Dr. King think of rights today?

To the editor:

Thank you for the feature article in the January 21, 1988, *Courier-Journal*, "King's dream lives on through celebrations in Rochester." I remember the Rev. Martin Luther King, admired what he was doing back in the '60s, and mourned the death of so great an American Christian man. After 20 years have passed, I can still hear his voice saying, "I have a dream," but wonder if he looks upon the turn the civil-rights movement has taken.

In his dream, I do not think he ever imagined that in the name of civil rights "dial-a-porn" would be rampant across his great nation. I do not believe he would have dreamed that literally millions of American babies would be killed in their mothers' wombs in the name of "civil rights." That man no doubt would see this as a nightmare, not a dream.

Many wonderful things have happened in the name of "civil rights," but I believe he as a main leader in the civil rights movement would want many things cleaned up under the name of "civil rights," things that are definitely *uncivil*.

Jean Vetter  
Salter Road  
North Rose

### When was the last time you thanked your priest?

To the editor:

The parish priest is on the firing line daily. He is in combat in the trenches, not for a couple of months, but all year, year after year, for 10, 20, sometimes 40 or 50 years. What is the appreciation he receives for serving, for trying to do his best, for helping, for staying at his post in these troubled times?

You would hope Catholics would be grateful beyond words. Instead the priest receives constant criticism from many. Does this make sense?

Father gets up morning after morning to another day of trouble, many complaints, hearing about the suffering and sorrow of the people. Because he loves them, he takes their problems to heart. He worries about them. He is often at the hospital with the sick and dying. He is at funerals. All the tension and pressure exhaust him.

Do Catholics care? Can you even remember the last time you said, "Thank you, Father," to your parish priest?

Patrick O. Sullivan  
Elmwood Avenue  
Brighton

## 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: Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY, 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.