

Editorial & Opinion

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

This week I want to tell you of my decision to take a five-month period for sabbatical enrichment, beginning in mid-October of this year.

My hope is to model the experience along the lines of the sabbatical program we have for our priests. That means that it will have a study component, a spiritual component and a recreational component.

I have not worked out any of the details yet, but my intention is to use the study component to try to develop a modest conversational and preaching ability in the Spanish language. I have wanted to do that for a long time, and have come to realize that the only way I'll have a chance to succeed is to devote myself totally to study of the language for a significant period of time.

Although I have not made the arrangements yet, I hope to study in Cuernavaca, Mexico, at the school where the members of our mission team in Tabasco have studied the language. They give it very high marks because of the excellence of the classes, and because of the opportunity it affords participants to live with Mexican people and to converse only in their language.

The spiritual component would certainly include my annual retreat. What else, if anything, I might include in that component I am not certain. My inclination just now is to devote some time to reading and writing.

I don't even have a rough shape to the recreation portion yet. My first thought is to be near the ocean in some

Along the Way



quiet place. But I must also confess to an attraction to driving across our country on the way to Mexico — just to experience the variety and vastness of our land. If I decided to do that, it would afford a wonderful opportunity to visit many old friends I came to know during my years in Rome.

There is much to be worked out yet, and it will be a joy to do that. I wanted to share my plans with you this week for two reasons. One is that I need to make scheduling adjustments in order to do this — and so do others who will be stepping in to take on some of my work! Secondly, I want to ask early for your prayers and support of this venture.

I have mentioned that I want to learn the Spanish language, at least enough to establish a foundation for ministry with and among our Hispanic brothers and sisters. They are now a rich reality among us in our local

church and in the whole church in the United States. In future years, Hispanic people will be the majority of Catholics in our country. I also want to do this in recognition of and in commitment to our relationship with our sister diocese of Tabasco.

If a desire to learn the Spanish language is a strong motive for wanting to take a sabbatical leave, so is the growing awareness that I need to step aside for awhile from the day-to-day demands of my ministry. I love what I do and I love being among you, but I have noticed that my reserves are dwindling and that I need to do something to replenish them. I confess that I have experienced some inner reluctance about going, but when I really get at that reluctance, I have to admit that it is just a temptation to deny my legitimate human needs and my real human limitations.

The demands of these nine years have been heavy enough to make me realize that I am going to need to step away from them from time to time if I am to be able to offer you the kind of ministry you deserve. I expect to be at this for 25 more years and I know I can not do it well — or lovingly — if I ignore my need for ongoing renewal and new challenges to my mind and spirit.

I will appreciate your prayers and support as I work out the details of the sabbatical, and I will keep you informed about it as time goes by. My thanks to you.

Peace to all.

Surprised by effort to view Mary differently

To the editor:

I was surprised by the comment by Father Thomas Mull, the director of the Office of Liturgy, regarding the diocesan focus for the international Marian Year (C-J Feb. 4: "Woman rabbi offers context for understanding of Mary").

"One of the goals for this year is to see Mary in a different type of experience than the one traditionally portrayed in images of her," Father Mull explained. "(We are focusing) not so much on Mary as mother, as on Mary as a woman of faith." The diocesan focus, if in fact Father Mull speaks on behalf of the diocese, would seem to limit the intent and spirit of the Marian Year as well as the role that Mary plays in the mystery of salvation.

There were several women of great faith in the Bible, but only one is privileged, and blessed, to be the Mother of God. The Second Vatican Council explains her role. "The maternal role of Mary towards people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (Lumen Gentium, 60). That is, Mary's maternal medi-

ation serves to do one thing: direct her children to her Son. Her role has been determined from all time, as the documents attest. "The predestination of the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God was associated with the incarnation of the divine Word: in the designs of divine Providence she was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord" (Lumen Gentium, 62).

There is no question that the submissive assent of Mary stands as one of the greatest statements of faith in the history of the world. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) But to focus on her as a "woman of faith" only and attempt to downplay — ignore? — her role of mother does a great disservice. In fact, the council document emphasizes her maternal role. "By reason of the gift and role of her divine motherhood, by which she is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with her unique graces and functions, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united to

the Church" (Lumen Gentium, 63). So it is primarily through Mary's motherhood that she continues to act on behalf of all of us, her children.

In his encyclical "Mother of the Redeemer," Pope John Paul II clearly states the intent and spirit of the Marian Year. "It is precisely the special bond between humanity and this Mother which has led me to proclaim a Marian Year in the Church ... I wish to emphasize the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church" (48).

So as we seek to celebrate the Marian Year, let's do so in a spirit of unity with the universal Church, embracing the true role of Mary in the mystery of salvation, and giving our humble, submissive assent to the spirit and intent of the celebration our Holy Father has proclaimed.

Listen to the voice of Lourdes, at Fatima, at Medjugorje; it's the voice of our Mother calling her children back to the Church.

Edward R. Gaffney
Main Street
Gorham

Letters

'Litmus test' system is no way to run Church

To the editor:

What would we think if the United States senators and congressmen were appointed for life by the president, and they elected his successor upon his death? What would the conservatives think if a Franklin Roosevelt could make all the appointments, including packing the Supreme Court?

What would liberals think if a Ronald Reagan could make all the appointments, including packing the courts and regulating bodies with anti-labor and anti-liberal conservatives, as he has been doing?

The American people would object because it would lock them and their government into one ideology, under which change and improvement would be next to impossible. They would rightly feel that they were under a dictatorship. They would feel helpless.

Yet, that is the way the Catholic Church operates.

Down through the centuries, conservative popes would appoint as bishops priests whom they considered to be conservative. They would appoint as cardinals bishops whom they considered to be conservative. And these cardinals, as could be expected, elected as popes persons whom they considered to be conservative.

The cardinals were surprised when Pope John XXIII turned out to be a liberal, but they won't let that happen again. Pope John Paul II has ordered a strict litmus test of conservatism to be applied to all candidates before he appoints them as bishops or cardinals.

Is this any way to conduct the Catholic Church? The negative answer is given by the many priest dropouts and the small number of seminary applicants since the death of Pope John XXIII dashed all hope of a change for the better.

Walter O'Hagan
Sherman
Auburn

Seek priests where they exist

To the editor:

I wish to publicly thank Charles Kohlmeier for his recent Courier-Journal letter (Feb. 25: "God provides to those whose eyes are open") urging us to recognize vocations to the priesthood where they exist, in single and married men and women, as well as in celibate males.

The religious establishment of Jesus' day found it hard to accept Him because He didn't conform to their preconceived notions of what a Messiah should be. Are we doing the same today with our Church's priesthood? The Spirit blows where He will; do we try to erect walls around His domain?

Often the answer to an "unanswered" prayer is right before our eyes. Thanks to persons like our almost-deacon Kohlmeier who have insight enough to say, "Maybe ..."

Joanne T. Facci
Copper Kettle Road
Webster

Writer calls attention to Father Jenco's experiences

To the editor:

Much has been written about the American hostages in Lebanon, but I'd like to quote from a column that I believe relates to Catholics in a very poignant way. It appeared in the *National Catholic Register* of January 3 as an interview of Father Lawrence Jenco by writer Alice Kalso.

Father Jenco said he was sustained while a captive for 18 months by Scripture, the Eucharist and the power of prayer. He relates that during that time he and four other hostages — Terry Anderson, David Jacobsen, Ben Weir and Tom Sutherland — received permission to celebrate Mass, with blindfolds on, in the company of their captors.

Before Mass, Anderson, who had returned to the Catholic faith just prior to coming to Beirut, had a special request for the guard. He wanted Father Jenco to hear his confession. The guard complied, brought the two men together and closed the door.

"Terry and I lifted our blindfolds for the first time in six months. That was an emotional scene," says Jenco. "I had seen the man in the hall, chained and blindfolded. Yet the first time I saw Terry eyeball to eyeball was in the sacrament of reconciliation."

From then on, Mass was a daily ritual for the five hostages. In the mornings, Jenco would break dried pita bread and celebrate the liturgy. Weir, a Presbyterian minister, would

lead Protestant services. When Weir was released, the other hostages took turns, leading worship in what they called "The Church of the Locked Door."

They prayed for many things — the health of other hostages, their families, peace in the world.

Anderson made each hostage a rosary, crocheted from fibers taken from his sleeping mat.

Father Jenco continues to pray. "I'm sure the same sustenance I received is going on for them," he said.

Jeanne D. Sweeney
Nob Hill
Rochester

Even if church is razed, Holy Redeemer's domes should be preserved

To the editor:

The twin onion-shaped domes of Holy Redeemer Church are the most noteworthy architectural features of that grand edifice. They are also a Rochester landmark. Crafted over a century ago, the beautiful copper domes are worthy of preservation, even if the rest of the building below them must be wrecked.

We — all of us — are responsible for preserving the best of the past and present for the future. We are the custodians of our heritage, now facing a decision that requires a sensible

blend of pragmatism and idealism. If demolition becomes the final solution to the physical and financial problems facing Holy Redeemer, then the copper domes and wooded belfry sections on which they are seated should be removed from the towers and stored. They can be rescued. They can be worked into the design of a future structure — next year or decades hence — and rise again into the heavens, provided we act upon our custodial responsibilities. The statue of Mercury was preserved and returned to the Rochester skyline by a

similar act of responsible foresight.

Selective preservation of the best of Holy Redeemer Church is possible, desirable, and perhaps necessary. For to wholly and needlessly destroy such a work of art is to defile the inspired expression of human creativity, and rob our descendant of that which would enrich them.

Justin A. Tubiolo
Metropolitan Drive
Rochester

Father McBrien's unencumbered column needs more appropriate title

To the editor:

I have been reading Father McBrien's column in the Courier-Journal with excitement and anticipation. I look forward each week to the new edition and quickly turn to his column.

But there is a problem. How can one be comfortable with the name of his column? How can we change and improve that, thus following the example Father sets for things that

cause discomfort?

What would be a good title? Perhaps "Essays from a Theosophist;" for one certainly might suspect at times that Father McBrien is in direct contact with God! Or "Essays from a Theocrat;" for Father McBrien often gives us powerful directions on a new order in which he might someday humbly agree to rule.

As an interim solution, I would like to see

his column discontinued until a proper name is found to match his witty, buoyant and unencumbered offerings.

During this time you might fill in with a column on theology.

Leo J. Vetter Jr.
Salter Road
North Rose