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I give you the gift of peace

By Cindy Bassett

Just after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary took him to the Temple of Jerusalem to present the baby to God. On that day, Simeon, a devout Hebrew, was also at the Temple. When the old man saw Jesus, he was filled with the spirit and proclaimed: "Now I can die in peace, for I have seen the Messiah!" Then he took the baby from Mary and said to her: "A sword shall pierce your soul, for this child shall be rejected by many in Israel, and this to their undoing. But he will be the greatest joy of many others." (Luke 2:22-35)

John hesitated at the doorway, uncertain whether he should intrude on the gentlewoman and her quiet thoughts. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sat gazing out of the window. But suddenly, as if aware of his feelings, she turned to John and smiled. "All has been fulfilled by Jesus," Mary said, her expression tinged with sorrow.

"Is everything all right, Mary?" John asked as he sat down beside her.

"Yes," she nodded, "it's just difficult sometimes to separate a mother's concerns for her son from the knowledge that Jesus was the Messiah."

"And by consenting to be Jesus' mother, you helped change the world," John said.

"Jesus loved you so much, John," Mary reflected. "You were one of his favorite apostles. And now, you've been so kind to me."

"It's what Jesus wanted," John replied. "I can do nothing less than what he asked of me as he hung there dying on the cross."

They both were silent for a few minutes, each recalling their own memories of Jesus.

"Did I ever tell you about the time that Joseph and I lost Jesus?" Mary asked. "We had all gone to the temple in Jerusalem for the annual Passover celebration. When we started home, we thought Jesus was traveling with

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some of our relatives. We were halfway home before we realized that he was not with us. In great haste, Joseph and I returned to the temple, where we found Jesus surrounded by the teachers of the law. Jesus was debating the Scriptures with them!

When I told Jesus how worried we had been, he replied: "Did you realize that I must be about my Father's business?"

Mary paused, smiling at the memory. "Do you remember the first miracle Jesus performed?"

"At the wedding feast at your friend's house in Cana," John offered. "I'll never forget the expression on the wine steward's face when he chided the groom: 'Sir, you are certainly different from most hosts. It is customary to serve the best wine to one's guests first. Why have you saved yours until now?'"

"John, there is still much work to be done," Mary said, coming back to the present.

"Yes, we shall bring Jesus' message of peace to all nations," John agreed. "It is what he commanded us to do until he comes back again!"

Scripture Reference: John 19:26-27; Luke 1:41-50; John 2:1-11.

Meditation: "I am leaving you with a gift — peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So do not be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27)

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The misinformed pope

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Every five years a diocesan bishop is required to visit Rome to report to the pope on the state of his diocese and to venerate the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul. This is the so-called *ad limina* visit, which means "to the threshold" of the tombs of Peter and Paul.

In recent years these visits have been the occasion of papal talks on the state of the Church in the visiting bishops' country or region, and they have not always been free of controversy.

In early September 1983, for example, Pope John Paul II addressed 25 U.S. bishops at his summer residence at Castelgandolfo. The meeting attracted some attention because there was a negative, even scolding, tone to the pope's remarks. He was deeply concerned about the changing role and expectations of women in the U.S. Church, and about dissent against some of the Church's teachings on sexuality.

Several of the American bishops felt that the pope had been unduly influenced by hostile reports from ultra-conservative sources, both in the Vatican and the United States. Over the next few years a rift seemed to develop between the Vatican and the Church in America — a rift exacerbated by the disciplining of Archbishop Hunthausen, the censure of Father Curran, the launching of an investigation of U.S. religious communities, the appointment of very conservative bishops to major archdioceses, and similar initiatives.

So serious did the situation become that several leading U.S. bishops met with the pope last spring to urge him to adopt a more positive attitude toward American Catholicism as he prepared for his second pastoral visit to this country.

We have recently learned that the pope was pleasantly surprised by that visit to the United States. He discovered that the Catholic Church in America is in far better spiritual and institutional shape than he had been led to believe by those whom Pope John XXIII had once called "prophets of doom."

In an address to 25 Midwestern U.S. bishops making their *ad limina* visit early last month, Pope John Paul II expressed his "admiration for everything that the grace of Christ has accomplished in the lives of God's people in your land."

"The ecclesial reality in the United States," he continued, "is an expression of the power of Christ's paschal mystery at work in the lives of countless individuals and numerous communities. I know the commitment of all the people of God in America to carry out their vocation of Christian service."

In private conversation with the bishops, the

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pope complained that he had been misinformed about the state of U.S. Catholicism. Misinformed by whom? Evidently by Vatican officials, including some high-ranking American curialists, and by ultra-conservative groups in the United States.

The pope also assured the bishops that his proposed meeting with representatives of the entire U.S. hierarchy would take place, as planned, early next year. It will probably be similar in format to his highly successful meeting with the Brazilian bishops in 1986.

The Midwestern bishops left Rome last month in a very hopeful mood. Archbishop John May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, was remarkably outspoken in his assessment of the *ad limina* visit.

"I got the impression," Archbishop May told the press, that the pope was "a little irked by people who had filled him with all kinds of warnings and apprehensions about going to the United States."

He and the curia had received "a lot of false indications" from media reports and "from others, too," the Archbishop noted. "Despite the fact we had come over here (last March) to try to disabuse him, apparently we didn't succeed. But the people did. Apparently he saw a different Church in the United States from what he had been led to believe."

On the whole, therefore, this recent *ad limina* visit "couldn't have been more positive, more complimentary to the Church in the U.S., and I was amazed, frankly," Archbishop May concluded.

Meanwhile the March 10 issue of the conservative Catholic newspaper *The Wanderer* urged its readers to flood the Vatican with more horror stories detailing the pastoral decadence of the Church in America. With an exquisite sense of timing, the paper probably went to press as the pope was complaining to the bishops about the misinformation campaign to which he had been subjected.

The editors must feel like the pundits who were still predicting the demise of Vice President Bush's candidacy as the polls closed in New Hampshire.

JUNE 21

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