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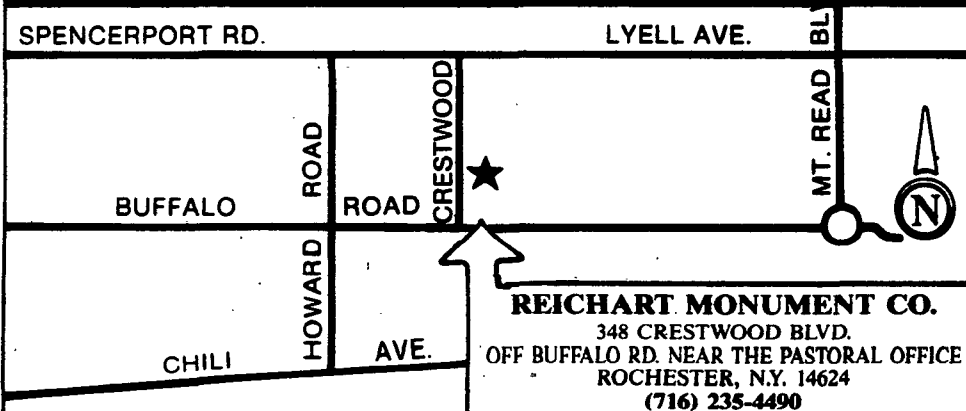
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Columnists

Hints on how not to say Mass

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Father Al Hauser, secretary to Bishop Stanislaus J. Brzana of Ogdensburg, sent me a new monthly magazine, *The Catholic Answer*, edited by young Father Peter Stravinskias and published by Our Sunday Visitor press. In the May issue of *The Priest*, Father Stravinskias wrote a review of a book by Jesuit Father Dennis Smolarski, which is entitled "How Not to Say Mass" (Paulist Press). Father Smolarski writes that the book is aimed at celebrants who would claim "to do it by the book." He warns against:

1) A cluttered altar, which means no cruets, missalettes, announcement books, etc.

Comment: When Father John O'Connor, pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, was an associate at our Webster parish, we rarely had altar boys to serve on weekdays. So he would place a small stand at the right end of the altar, and place the cruets, basin and towel there. I doubt that two cruets and a dish form a "clutter," but the stand at the end does seem proper.

2) Improvisation, not only because it is not permitted, but also few priests can do it effectively.

Comment: Most priests consider themselves quite good preachers. Some also consider themselves adept at interpolating extemporaneous comments into the liturgical texts. A devout lady once remarked with irritation: "Father X is a good priest. But I do wish he'd give us the Mass without his constant comments on his doings, the weather, what he read in the morning paper, and what have you. If he'd just celebrate Mass according to the Church's directions, he'd be fine. And we'd be happier."

3) Secular greetings, like "Good morning," which detract from the sacredness of the moment.

Comment: Redemptorist Father Andrew Costello, in his instruction on preaching, suggests that the priest should start off Mass with a familiar greeting. Whether that adds or subtracts is a matter of debate. Some enjoy the informality. Pope John Paul II seems to prepare his congregations adequately with the customary sign of the cross.

4) Changing the blessing at the end of Mass

On the Right Side

to "May Almighty God bless US . . ." instead of the directed "bless YOU?" This is phony chumminess and reflective of a misunderstanding of the priest's role in the liturgical assembly.

Comment: I wonder if priests who change the blessing as above have lost sight of the liturgical and theological import of the celebrant as a priest.

5) Turning a funeral homily into a eulogy, contrary to the clear direction which forbid this.

Comment: That's why I have engaged Corning's Father Thomas Brennan to give the homily at my funeral Mass. He will praise God working through the Church, the priesthood, and Our Lady, and end up with a request for prayers for my soul. I have heard enough eulogies at priests' funerals to wonder "Am I at the right funeral?" Going overboard with a canonization at the funeral is contrary to both the directions of the Church and reality.

One thing which Father Smolarski does not mention is the weird habit some priests have of eye-balling the congregation during prayers directed to God. At the Eucharistic Prayer, it makes no sense to send the eyes rolling over the congregation as if they were being addressed instead of the Lord God.

I knew a priest in a western diocese who was pious, personable, and had a good memory, so he did not rely on the missal. When he came, for example, to the Preface, which he knew by heart, and which begins by directly addressing God: "Father, all powerful and everlasting God, we do well . . ." his eyes roamed the congregation, addressing them. The words were addressed to God. But the address was to the people.

Not good liturgy. Not good theology. Not good rhetoric. Not good sense.

The very strange story of Paul

By Cindy Bassett

"Caiaphas," the servant called timidly, "the two guards have just now returned from Damascus."

"Send them in at once," Caiaphas said, frowning.

The two men were visibly uncomfortable as they stood before the high priest's silent grimace. They had not as yet sorted out the strange events for themselves. These events would most certainly be the subject of the high priest's interrogation. Nearly two weeks had passed since they had left Jerusalem with Paul in pursuit of those under arrest for their belief in Jesus.

"How is it that you were sent to protect Paul in his mission in Damascus and I see only you?" Caiaphas asked pointedly.

"Sir, we fully intended to carry out our duty," one of the men stammered. "We had almost arrived in the city — it was in our view — when suddenly, a light so bright that we covered our eyes flashed from the sky . . ."

"Too much desert sun, no doubt," Caiaphas interrupted sarcastically.

"We heard a voice, but due to the intense light, we could not see," the man continued.

"There were strange words addressed to Paul?"

"What words?" Caiaphas snapped with impatience.

"A voice clearly said, 'Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me?' And when Paul asked who was speaking, this same voice replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Go into the city and I will tell you what to do,' the man responded.

"But you are supposed to be the captain of the temple! Why did you not continue with your orders?" Caiaphas shouted, his eyes flashing angrily.

"Sir, we just couldn't leave Paul there," he replied. "It took both of us to lead him into Damascus."

"Lead him?" Caiaphas asked, puzzled.

"Paul was completely blinded by the light. We took him to a friend's house in the city," the other guard explained. "Paul spoke not a word, nor did he take any food or water. Af-

The Bible Corner

ter nearly three days, we thought it best to return here and report everything. I suppose that the poor man is dead by this time."

"Dead! A dead man does not go out preaching in the streets of Damascus!" Caiaphas said, his voice rising as he thrust a piece of parchment in front of them. "This news arrived by messenger a couple of days ago."

"What is it?" the guard asked the captain as he read it.

"It's a letter from the leaders of the synagogue in Damascus," he said dryly. "It reads: 'Paul, the one whom you sent with authorization to arrest the followers of Jesus, has now joined forces with them. He has been heard proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God!'"

"What would you like us to do now?" the captain asked Caiaphas.

"If you want to keep your jobs, you are to return here to me with Paul in the same chains he intended for the other criminals. He must be stopped! Paul is even more dangerous than those he sought to imprison. Now get out of here!" Caiaphas shouted.

Meanwhile, back in Damascus, the Jewish leaders had already posted guards at the city gates. As soon as Paul was caught, he was to be executed.

When the followers of Jesus learned of their plan, they lowered Paul in a basket through an opening in the wall, and he escaped back to Jerusalem.

Scripture Reference: Book of Acts, Chapter 9:1-25.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, help us to keep going in our own lives when we are not sure where you are taking us.