

Columnists

A jaunt with Kenyan company

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Brother Martin Okongo and Father Steve Mbugua are two native Kenyans. They came to Rochester last January under the aegis of the Basilian Fathers to study at St. John Fisher College.

Father Steve has been an administrative assistant to Bishop Raphael Ndingi in Nakuru, Kenya. Brother Martin has been bursar of St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary near Nairobi, the capital.

Over Memorial Day weekend, St. John Fisher was on academic break, so I phoned my "African nephews," inviting them to join me on a "jaunt." The high point was to be a family-and-friends celebration of the silver anniversary of the ordination of my nephew, Father Bill Cuddy of Syracuse.

Like a local train, I tended to hit local spots which might interest my Kenyan friends en route to the final destination.

First we stopped in Auburn to pay my respects to a fine sister-in-law, Florence, who is in frail health. She lives with her son, City Court Judge James G. Cuddy, and family, James' wife, Laila Curtin, whose brother is a holy Jesuit, is a CCD director at Sacred Heart, Auburn. Five of James and Laila's six children live in scattered cities; but all were home for the holiday. They assembled in their grandmother's spacious room, with my great-great-niece, Katie VanCleef, the special center of attraction. It was her first birthday. What struck me is that this is a large family, all graduated from college, all on their own, all faithful to their Catholic faith.

We proceeded to Syracuse and the 600-bed Van Duyn nursing home to visit my only sister, Florence, who is completely incapacitated from Alzheimer's disease. My African nephews had never seen a nursing home, an institution foreign to Africa.

From Van Duyn, my nephew, Neil McLane, who teaches CCD classes, led us to St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Liverpool, where the celebration was being held. The pastor, Father Charles Major, is a first cousin of Father Bill. His mother was one of the seven "Meagher girls" from Auburn, all accomplished harpists

On the Right Side

in their day. Father Bill's mother is Kathryn Meagher, widow of my brother Joe, and aunt to Father Major.

It was heartening to meet, even so briefly, so many returns, my friends; so many residents of Auburn, my home town; so many friends of my nephew. He is in the Syracuse jail ministry, and is somewhat of the spirit of Rochester's young Father James Callan.

In circulating among many people, I was struck by the vibrant Catholicity of the youth. Their firm and intelligent faith was a joy. The reception included a great smorgasbord, contributed by the parishioners. This accords with the Gospels, which indicate Jesus was a great party-goer.

About 7 p.m., we left and stopped at Sam and Eileen (O'Toole) Cichello's in Weedsport. There we met their four sons: virile, bright, good, and strong in the faith. At times I envy such parents. One son, just graduated from Purdue University in Indiana, had just returned from a week working with the Glenmary missionaries and 50 other collegians in Appalachian Kentucky. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm from working a farm, visiting the sick and simple, sharing a bouncy Pentecostal service loaded with "Amens." He was so moved he is giving his next year as a volunteer with the Glenmary missionaries.

Who could say that men and women with ideals have ceased to be? Or that the drive of grace and devotion has deserted our youth? With some, yes. But with many others, a resounding NO!

On the return to Rochester we three, dedicated to God in religion, said the rosary, and listened to an hour-long Archbishop Sheen tape from the car cassette deck, a fitting conclusion to a happy day.

Looking beneath the surface of life

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 4:26-34; (R1) Ezekiel 17:22-24; (R2) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.

In Sunday's readings, the image of a tree predominates. Ezekiel talks of a noble cedar. The psalmist speaks of a palm tree. Our Lord preaches about a mustard tree.

The readings teach two lessons.

First, God's ways are not our ways. He lifts up what is lowly and makes it the instrument of His saving power.

You ought to read the entire 17th chapter of Ezekiel, which includes the eagle-vine allegory. The eagle — Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon — tears away the top of a cedar — Jehoiakim, king of Judah. The Babylonian leader then plants a vine-seed — Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's successor after the deportation in 597 B.C.

Zedekiah, at the urging of Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt, revolts against Nebuchadnezzar, who captures and destroys Jerusalem and blinds Zedekiah.

Then the prophet soars into the future (R1). He sees God taking a tender shoot, the Messiah, from the top of a cedar, the royal house of David, and planting it on a high and lofty mountain, which is Sion. He foresees God causing this shoot to grow into a majestic cedar, exalted from ignominy to universal greatness, so that "birds of every kind (all nations) shall dwell beneath it." Thus God brings low the high tree — the kings of Israel — and lifts high the lowly tree — the stump: the Son of David.

Secondly, life is full of surprises. God does so much with so little. The tiniest of seeds bursts into the largest of all bushes without our knowing how it happens.

So often, we hear people say: "Why should I go to Mass? Why should I pray? What can Jesus or religion do for me? Can He control the stock market? Can He do anything about my cancer or heart trouble or cataracts? Look at the violence and lack of peace in the world today. Things seem to be going from bad to worse. Be honest! Christianity has been around for 2000 years, and what has it done?"

The Gospel parables give us the answer.

A Word for Sunday

They tell us to look beneath the surface of life. The farmer in the Gospel reading had relatively little to do with the growth of his crop. He tilled the soil and planted the seed, but the sun, soil and rain did the rest. The crop sprouts and grows. The ground yields increase — first the blade, then the ear, then the perfect grain in the ear.

The Kingdom of God is like that. It is fundamentally God's work. We do our little bit — planting and watering — but it is God who gives the growth.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is like the mustard seed. How frail and tiny she is. How late in life — at 49 — she sowed the seed, yet how great the harvest of her good in the world!

At baptism the seed of divine life is planted in each of us. It grows in ways we do not even suspect. For instance, have you ever stopped to realize how much support your presence at a Sunday Mass gives to others? The author of Hebrews wrote: "We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but encourage one another" (10:25). Our presence at Mass encourages others.

To believe that God exalts the humble and puts down the proud, that He is always working, drawing all things together unto good, takes a lot of faith.

Paul confidit confidence (R2). We continue to be confident, he told the Corinthians, even when the chips are down. The two moods that plague us today are discouragement and impatience. It is enough only to read the papers or listen to the news.

No matter. With Paul, be full of confidence, for God is always at work, exalting the lowly and making little things big. Look to the end!



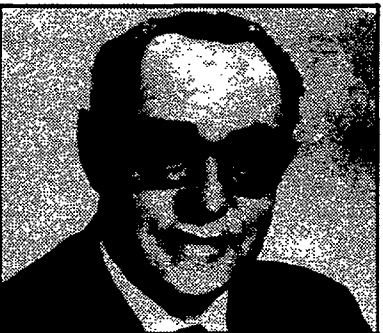
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CORRECTION

In last week's graduation issue, we had listed Christopher Adin of Rochester as ranked first academically and Thomas Patamia of Rochester as second for McQuaid Jesuit High School. The class of 1988, which numbers 202 placed Thomas Patamia of Rochester first in the class academically and Christopher Adin second. We apologize for the error. Both graduates plan on attending Duke University in the fall of '88.

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