

Columnists

Pertinent observations from the past

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

A few years after Vatican II ended in 1965 — when the Church was in a turmoil from change and experimentation, and the takers-over kept repeating: "Before Vatican II Catholics knew nothing of their religion," and the liturgists were having a field day with ritual — this column presented some pertinent observations which are relevant today, especially a disdain for those who held traditionalists in bumptious contempt. I am satisfied with the vernacular, but I think that the abrupt dropping of the Tridentine Mass was a great mistake. Bishop Kearney was so pleased with the column that he sent me a note of commendation in his own beautiful handwriting. I wish I had kept it. So here is the column.

Dispelling Myths

Myth: Before the council people didn't know anything about the Mass. Now we have the Mass in the vernacular, and the people understand it.

Reply: How naive can you be? I ask you a question: Now that the Mass is in the vernacular, do people generally know more about the essentials of the Mass? I doubt it. Why? Because the Ritualist Club took over the communications at first. They suppressed the sacrificial aspect of the Mass, overemphasized the meal concept and introduced, in some places, a vaudeville show of relevancy. The result: the people became saddened and uneasy and puzzled. It is true that the community aspect of the Mass needed to be developed. But wasn't that the purpose of the council? Namely to develop, update and better understand the traditions handed down from the Apostles?

Myth: But the Mass was in Latin, which people didn't understand.

Reply: Evidently you are not familiar with the Mass books in English. Have you never seen Father Steadman's 'My Sunday Missal'? It is a masterpiece of order, art and scriptural instruction. We have nothing comparable to it today. Because a man doesn't know Greek or German or French or Italian does not mean that the Gospels or Goethe or Daniel-Rops or L'Osservatore Romano are buried in good translations. This repetitive yapping: "Before the council people didn't understand anything about the Mass" is a canard. As Hitler said, "Repeat a lie often enough, and people will believe it."

On the Right Side

Myth: But the people didn't participate in the Mass.

Reply: Do you really think so? Today we have more motion and commotion, more volcanoes in song and word, and more share in the readings and response to the prayers. The people carry gifts and give the Sign of Peace. But tell me, do you think because people are sounding words and in motion that this is participation? It is action surely, but authentic participation means *heart to heart* — not just ear to ear, or motion.

Myth: But the people share in the readings.

Reply: It is true that most congregations dutifully read the responsorial prayers as priest and people trudge through the psalm after the first reading. I think there is often quite a dubious comprehension of the beautiful psalms. And frequently lectors cannot be understood.

Myth: The Sign of Peace encourages unity and love.

Reply: The Sign of Peace frequently gives me the willies. One effervescent priest in Brooklyn was instructing his flock on the ceremony. He proclaimed: "Do what is natural to you. Shake hands. Smile. Nod. Do what comes naturally to you." A big yahoo stood between his wife on the left and a pretty blonde on the right. He shook hands with his wife and gave the blonde bomber a big hug. I suppose that came naturally. Were I married it would seem pretty sterile to shake hands with my wife or my children. Furthermore, it seems fraudulent to be shaking hands with a deadbeat who won't pay me money he owes me, with a cordial "The peace of the Lord be with you." It would be more honest to gaze into his eyes and say sincerely: "When the Son of Man will come, He will render to each man according to his deeds. When are you going to pay up?" Our liturgists who have bungled the Sign of Peace could learn from the Eastern Rite Byzantine Liturgy which effects it well and devoutly.

A 'prophet's' disasterous homecoming

By Cindy Bassett

Ephraim glanced around the crowded synagogue, looking for somewhere to sit. Hardly an empty spot remained on this Sabbath. His friend Samuel motioned for him, and Ephraim took his place in the assembly.

"Why so crowded today?" Ephraim asked as he sat down.

"Do you remember the carpenter, Joseph, who used to have a shop here in Nazareth? Some say his son, Jesus, has become a teacher of the law. The ruler of the synagogue has invited him to read from the Scriptures today," Samuel replied.

"A teacher? Not very likely. He spent his youth working in his father's business. I don't suppose Jesus received any special training in the law there," Ephraim said.

"Well, all the same, Jesus' present occupation seems to be going around the countryside preaching about a new kingdom," Samuel continued. "People are even claiming to be healed by him."

"Impossible! Jesus is nothing more than a simple carpenter. But we'll soon see for ourselves," Ephraim said as the leader of the synagogue came forward to say the opening prayer.

Everyone in the assembly watched as Jesus approached the lectern. He took the sacred scroll and carefully unrolled it until he found a particular passage from Isaiah. Then Jesus read: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has sent me to preach good news to the poor. I am here to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and the oppressed, and healing for the sick."

Those who heard Jesus were impressed with the manner in which he had read the Scriptures. Then, as was customary, Jesus sat down to interpret the reading.

Jesus said simply: "Today these words are being fulfilled in your hearing."

"Whatever can Jesus mean?" Ephraim asked his companion. "Certainly he does not think himself capable of changing the world?"

Jesus waited for silence. He knew well what

The Bible Corner

was on their minds. Finally, he stood again, saying, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown. Although there were many widows in Israel during a severe famine, Elijah was not sent to any of them. Instead, God sent Elijah to a foreign land to the widow in Sidon. And so it will be for you because of your unbelief?"

"This is blasphemy!" Ephraim cried to Samuel.

The entire assembly was furious and forced Jesus from the synagogue. They were so angry that they tried to drive him over a cliff near the edge of Nazareth. But Jesus eluded them, going instead to a synagogue in Capernaum to preach.

This time, as Jesus was reading to the people, a man possessed by an evil spirit suddenly rushed forward.

"Why have you come here, Jesus of Nazareth?" the man shouted. "Do you want to destroy us? I know who you are!" And the man fell to the floor.

"Be quiet!" Jesus commanded. "Come out of him!" With that, the demon left and the man stood up.

After this incident, news about Jesus started spreading all over Judea. People brought their sick for him to heal wherever he went.

Many of the people in these towns begged Jesus to stay with them. But Jesus refused, saying, "These miracles are but a sign for something much greater here. I must preach the good news of God's kingdom to people everywhere. That is why I was sent."

Scripture reference: Luke 4:14-44.

Meditation: Your words, O Lord, are the way to eternal life.

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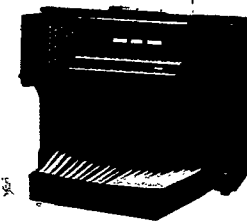
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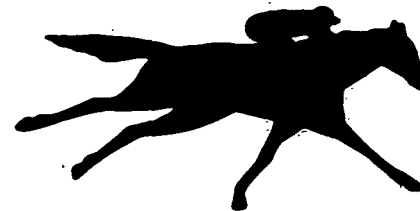
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