

Columnists

Glimpses of a letter apostolate

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Letter writing has long been an important part of my apostolate. Here are some such.

To a 23-year-old nephew:

"You folks tell me you have moved from Philadelphia to Connecticut, and that you have rented an apartment and are settling in. For heaven's sake, do go to the parish office and register as a parishioner.

"People should be registered for voting in politics and share a responsibility in citizenship. With Catholics, it is not right just to live in a parish, then to plop into a pew for Sunday Mass, drift out, and like a nonmember, have no responsible ties with their spiritual harbor.

"While I am pleased you were graduated from St. Joseph's in Philadelphia, I doubt that the good Jesuits included a mature sense of belonging to a parish. What St. Joseph's probably did not supply, your uncle wishes to.

"I will be interested in how you are received by the priests when you register. Some make you feel welcome and that you have a spiritual home and a religious community. Others will ignore you utterly — or worse. One woman once wrote me: 'I met the pastor in front of the church after Mass and asked about registering. He said: "Go to the secretary and take out envelopes." Then he turned away.' No matter how lacking we priests may be, love the Church. It is Christ working in the world, and it has many handicaps."

To the Village Council, Killarney, Ireland:

"Some dozen years ago I was appalled at the dirty, wet floor and the obscene drawings and scribbling in the men's convenience opposite the Franciscan Friary. It bothered me so much that I wrote your council, expressing my dismay and requesting a remedy of the situation. Your secretary at the time wrote a good letter, acknowledging my request and assuring me that the council had voted for a special care of that important facility. For a dozen years less one, I have visited Killarney and each year have inspected the place, and I have found it in quite good condition. But this last August I was there and was thrilled to find walls and floors spotless, with a gray gloss on walls and stalls and floors sparkling clean.

On the Right Side

"Let me commend you and thank you. And enclosed is a check for a bit of a treat for whoever maintains the place of my long concern."

To Mr. William Polito, barrister and pro-lifer:

"At the Knights of Columbus meeting September 8, I inquired of the 80 members present at the meeting if any were familiar with a new magazine entitled 30 Days. No one had ever heard of it. That isn't surprising since the American edition is only six months old, though the editions in Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese have been published for some time.

"It is a cerebral magazine akin to the universal Church as William Buckley's National Review is to American politics. It is intellectual and comprehensive. Father Baker, editor of Homiletic and Pastoral Review, wrote of it: 'On my last visit to Rome, I was told that the cardinals and important Church officials are, for the most part, avid readers of 30 Days. One insider told me that many officials in the Curia read the magazine to find out what is going on in the Curia. The articles are so loaded with names and facts that it is difficult to ignore them. I am not familiar with any other magazine that does what 30 Days does. It is aggressively Catholic in a very intelligent way.'

"Since you have both an intellectual and devotional love of the Church, I am sending you a subscription and am confident you will find it stimulating.

"It pleases me greatly, too, that the Knights of Columbus' Columbia reaches some 1,400,000 members, reaching out to bring the Church, the Holy Father and the world into the embrace of our membership. I only hope that our members and their wives and families read it faithfully."

The greatest faith in all of Israel

By Cindy Bassett

When I first became one of Jesus' apostles, I had my own ideas of who he was and why he had come. Jesus spoke often of a new kingdom. I felt certain that his coming meant that the Roman government that had enslaved the people of Israel for many years would finally be destroyed.

Because of Roman law, the Hebrews paid heavy taxes to support the rulers they hated. Before I met Jesus, I had joined an underground group that sought to overthrow this government. I became known to all as Simon the Zealot.

Now that I was a follower of Jesus, I believed that soon the people of Israel would have a new king. But something happened to change my view of things forever ...

One day, in Capernaum, I noticed a group of elders from the synagogue waiting to see Jesus. As usual, Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd of people. Some had come to seek healing for their sick. Others came to hear Jesus preach.

These elders waited patiently for nearly an hour. Finally, Jesus sensed their need and made his way through the crowd to speak to them. I stood by and listened.

"Jesus, there is a certain man here in Capernaum who needs your help," one of the elders began. "He sent us here to find you."

"He has not seen fit to come himself?" Jesus asked.

"No, his servant is quite ill," the man continued. "This servant is like a son to him. He loves the boy so much that he planned to give him his freedom one day. But now, he is near death."

"But why did this man not come here himself?" Jesus asked again.

"Because he is a Gentile," the elder replied. "He has heard of your miracles, and he thought if you could just come and see the boy ..." he continued, his voice trailing off.

"Although he is not of our faith, this man is indeed worthy of your help," his companion interjected. "Not only does he treat the Hebrew people well, he has contributed from his own resources to build our synagogue here."

The Bible Corner

"What does this man do?" Jesus asked pointedly.

"He is a Roman centurion stationed in Capernaum," the elder replied.

Surely, I thought, Jesus would not go and offer his assistance. This man was a part of the force that oppressed the Hebrews. My face betrayed these thoughts, and one of the elders repeated: "This man may be a Roman, but he is worthy of your help."

I wanted to tell Jesus that this man could never be worthy of him. But I said nothing as Jesus followed the elders to the centurion's home.

Before we even arrived, a group of this centurion's friends came to meet us with a message from him. I'll never forget his words: "Lord, please don't come to my house. For I am not worthy to receive you. That is why I have not come myself. However, I am certain that with just a word from you, my servant will be healed. For I am, like you, a man of authority. If I tell my soldiers to do something, then they will do it."

Jesus stopped abruptly, then turned to the crowd that had followed us. "I have not found such great faith in all of Israel," he said.

Later on, I learned that when these messengers returned to the centurion's house, the servant was well.

Jesus was much more than I had ever supposed him to be. He would have done just as I knew it, but not my way. The kingdom of God was at hand for anyone who allowed Jesus' message to take root in his heart.

Scripture reference: Luke, Chapter 7:1-10. Meditation: Do I limit Jesus to whom I think he should be? Jesus is for everyone who calls on him with faith to be saved.

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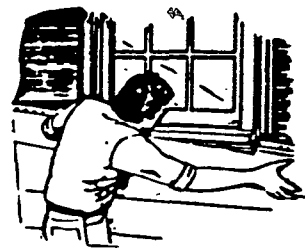
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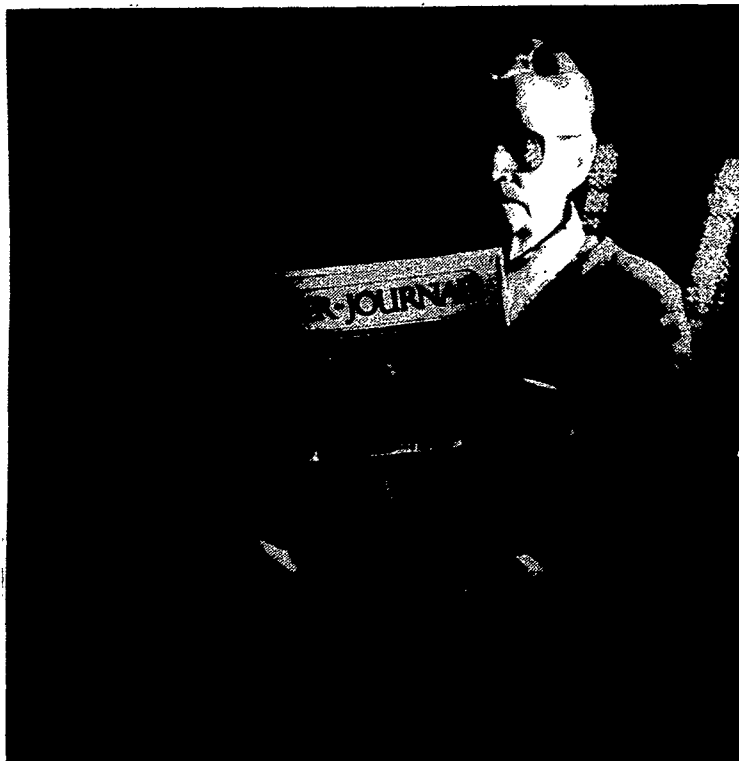
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