

Columnists

Reverence for the Blessed Sacrament

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Father Pat Seelman, TOR, is the pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Auburn. TOR stands for Third Order Regular, a branch of the Franciscans. He is a great "devotions priest." Recently, he had Forty Hours devotion for his people in cooperation with Father Richard Nangle, his associate. An added plus to the church is a small religious goods stand, with rosaries, medals and sundry religious articles, and a selection of devotional books. Striking the eye especially is a pile of "The Imitation of Christ," by Thomas a Kempis. This small book has for centuries been the most read Christian book after the Bible. It is returning to favor after being booted out for a generation by the iconoclasts.

The Forty Hours was conducted by Father Bart O'Brien, who has been retired from the "active priesthood" by reason of having reached the magic age of 70. His inactivity includes giving retreats, conducting sundry religious exercises, assisting as a supply at needing parishes. He is "a priest for all occasions."

The Sunday night instruction was on reverence toward the Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. He noted that in recent years, the awful reverence we have had toward the sacrament has gradually been eroding into a casualness which takes away the sensible and spiritual consciousness of the Sacramental Lord, with a weakening and even loss of faith.

In his instruction, Father O'Brien pointed out many things to be concerned about. Among them are: making the Sign of the Cross with care, thought, and reverence; approaching to receive the Sacred Host with hands folded in an attitude of devotion, different from a secular stance; a devout attention at the Consecration. Then, regarding genuflections, he instructed that we should genuflect with right knee to the floor, looking at the tabernacle where the Lord is reserved.

Since the tabernacle at St. Francis is still on the altar of the Blessed Sacrament in the center, as was traditional until recent guides directed that the Eucharistic Lord should be parked out of the way so as not to be a distraction to the gathered community, his direction to genuflect to the floor is relevant. But I don't know

On the Right Side

what is supposed to be done when the Eucharistic Lord is isolated to some roomette or to the backs of the gathered people. Perhaps he will add an explanation in his next discourse.

Quite puzzling is his direction: "Now, if you weigh over 175 pounds, do not try to genuflect. Simply make a reverent bow." A man, tall and spare, could well weigh over 200 pounds and have no trouble genuflecting. Most of them do quite successfully.

One thing I wish Father O'Brien would add to his list of directions is about Communion with non-Catholics present, which is usual at weddings and funerals. Most non-Catholics are not champing at the bit for Communion at a Catholic Mass. They just want to know what they should do. One priest expressed it quite well at a large funeral where there was a great mixture of Catholics, Protestants of many denominations, a few Jews, and non-religious people. Just before the homily, he said: "On the occasion when there is a mixture of Catholics and non-Catholics at Mass, people want to know what is expected at Communion time. Holy Communion is reserved only for practicing Catholics. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has directed: 'Because the Eucharist signifies a oneness of faith, life and worship as a community, reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not exist, and for which we must pray.' I have found that most people just want to know what they should do, and are more at ease to have the record clear."

Perhaps Father O'Brien, who with Father Albert Shamon is one of the best instructors in the diocese, will develop that theme at some future date.

If abortion is murder, who pays?

By Father Richard P. McBrien

In a recent letter to *The New York Times* (October 23), Dr. J.C. Willke, president of the National Right to Life Committee, took exception to an editorial that had criticized then-Vice President George Bush's stand on abortion.

In his first debate with Governor Michael Dukakis, the vice president was asked whether he favored criminal punishment of a woman who has an abortion. It was one question for which he was obviously unprepared.

The vice president conceded that "of course there's got to be some penalties to enforce the law," but he admitted that he hadn't "sorted out" what they should be or on whom they should be imposed. Governor Dukakis charged that Bush was "prepared to brand a woman a criminal for making this decision."

The damage-control squad, under the direction of the vice president's campaign manager, James Baker, went to work immediately. The next morning, Baker told a press conference that Bush "would not wish to see a woman labeled as a criminal, notwithstanding his view in favor of right to life."

"Frankly," the campaign manager continued, "he thinks that a woman in a situation like that would be more properly considered an additional victim, perhaps the second victim. That she would need help and love and not punishment."

Baker reported that the vice president would favor some punishment of the person performing the abortion, but he did not indicate what penalty Bush had in mind.

The Times editorial of September 29 suggested that Bush's position would not "satisfy pro-lifers who want sinners behind bars."

Dr. Willke challenged that interpretation. The Times, he charged, hadn't done its "homework." He noted that during the first 200 years of this nation's history, when abortion was illegal, not a single woman who had an abortion was put in jail or even indicted.

"But the 'hit man' was," he declared. "Abortionists were charged, convicted and sent to prison."

"I have no doubt," Dr. Willke continued, "that's the way it will be again. I don't know of a single pro-life leader who would punish the mother."

I find that position astonishing. On what moral or ethical grounds does Dr. Willke exempt a woman who procures an abortion from personal responsibility for her action?

Essays in Theology

The Catholic Church certainly does not. Its newly revised Code of Canon Law is clear and straightforward on the point: "A person who procures a completed abortion incurs an automatic excommunication" (canon 1398).

Bush regards the woman as an innocent "second-victim" and apparently Dr. Willke buys that line. Is she somehow forced to hand over her unborn child to the abortionist's deadly instruments? Is she dragged kicking and screaming into the clinic?

On the contrary, she sometimes has to fight her way through noisy lines of anti-abortion demonstrators. Will our "bleeding heart" right-to-lifers also regard as innocent "second victims" those 10,000 women in China and France who have already procured abortions via the new RU 486 abortion pill?

Who is the morally culpable party in a pill-induced abortion? Do we send only the druggist to the slammer?

The fact of the matter is that those in the pro-life movement have always characterized abortion as murder, plain and simple.

They want that street killer to go to jail, and to even be executed. But the woman who has an abortion? She gets off scot-free.

What about the physician? How many years in prison would be appropriate for such a murderer? They don't want to say. They haven't "sorted it out" yet.

What about the nurses? Or the taxi-driver who provides transportation to the clinic? They're all accomplices to murder, aren't they? What criminal penalty do they deserve? The pro-lifers don't even talk about them.

It's time to go back to square one. What is abortion? Is it murder or is it something other than murder? If it's murder, then let's treat it like murder — all along the moral and legal line.

If we're not prepared to do that — and the evidence is that not even the pro-lifers are — then let's start cleaning up our language — and our political posters.

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