

Columnists

Seeking the key to more vocations

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Young Rob Cullivan is a features writer for the *Courier-Journal*. He came to Auburn to interview me as a feature in the December 22 edition. Here is my reaction, with a pursuit at the end.

Dear Rob:

That interview in the *Courier-Journal* was a dandy. The large picture of my immense self in the large stuffed chair in the St. Alphonsus Common Room brought many comments. One person observed: "You looked so relaxed." Another said: "You looked so contented." One lady who has always regarded me with a pejorative eye shot: "You looked so smug!"

I liked the way you culled observations from such diverse men you interviewed. John Dash, whose *Democrat and Chronicle* columns on religion are always balanced, has — despite his personal liberal tilt — always been fair even about the institutional Church. Did you know that the Baltimore Catechism definition: "The Church is the congregation of all those who profess the faith of Christ, partake of the same sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head" was composed by St. Robert Belarmine? It stressed the institutional Church without regarding the concept of the Mystical Body, that concept so clear in the Gospels and in St. Paul, which has been part of Catholic doctrine from the beginning. It came into modern times largely through the encyclical entitled "The Mystical Body," promulgated by Pius XI.

Deacon Leo Kester is always generous in his observations. I was glad he gave a special plug for the *Catholic Digest*, recording that I send 40 subscriptions to great nieces and nephews at Christmastime ... This is positive advertising.

Jack Burke, my barber for 15 years in Webster, is a traditional loquacious barber whom I greatly enjoyed. He clued me in on local events, and entertains his clientele with corny jokes like those of my friend, the late Father Robert Kress.

Milford Voorhees from the Travel Bureau became a good friend when the *Courier-Journal* contracted a travel program with him in 1972. Although I was titled "Tour Conductor," which was a kind of baggage master, it took me

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some time to realize how well planned his tours were. He struck the correct button when he said: "Most who traveled with him were beyond middle age. They figured if they went with Father, they couldn't get hurt." Our accident incidence thankfully was low. And the friendships, both with the members of the tour and with me, were a great bonus.

Now to an important point. You are 23, cheerful, outgoing, with an outlandish hairstyle that seems to match those stone-washed jeans the youth today are affecting. You are bright, and I presume virtuous, and at least average in Catholic practice. Didn't you go to St. John Fisher College? In the middle of our interview, I asked abruptly: "Why is it that no young men of your age are drawn to the priesthood? After all, priests like me will die off soon. Who will take our places to serve the people?"

You gave three reasons for the disinclination: 1. celibacy; 2. the disinclination of the young to make a permanent commitment, as required by the priesthood; and 3. the great variety of options. When I objected to number two, saying: "Marriage equally requires permanent commitment," you replied somberly: "Yes, and see how it's observed." Touche. That is worth a separate article some time.

What I ask of you is this. Write an article on the pros and cons regarding the priesthood from the viewpoint of men in their 20s, your peers. If celibacy and permanent commitment seem stumbling blocks, how do these relate to the demands of the Gospel and of St. Paul? As for options, I suppose that's one reason why seminaries flourish in the Third World, viz. relatively few options. But for me, there is no option so great as the priesthood, to praise God and serve others in the ultimate of vocations, the priesthood.

Anyway, do the article please. You may give the answer we are all looking for.

The story of Gideon, Part one

By Cindy Bassett

One late night, a young man named Gideon set himself a strange task. It was a cloudless evening and the nearly full moon provided only a sparse bit of light. Even so, Gideon was so determined that perhaps he would have been able to accomplish his task with no light at all.

Gideon's actions would have been a peculiar sight by day. First he moved a huge rock, which nearly took all of his strength, and then he proceeded to dig a deep hole. When he was finished, he carefully placed several sheaves of wheat in the hole.

If Gideon had looked up for even a brief moment from his work, he would have seen the stranger who sat quietly beneath the oak tree just a few yards away. As this stranger waited patiently for Gideon to notice him, the scene before him seemed to amuse the stranger enormously.

As might be expected, when Gideon finally did see this man, he was so startled that he cried out and dropped the stick with which he had been digging.

"Forgive me, I am not here to harm you," the stranger said matter-of-factly. "You were so busy, I thought it better to wait until you had finished."

Gideon hesitated a few minutes before saying anything. He studied the man intently, and then he said, "Well, I don't suppose you are one of the Midianites. I would have been killed for hiding even this little bit of grain."

"No, certainly not, for I have come to tell you that the Lord is with you!" the stranger announced.

"With me?" Gideon questioned, his face perplexed. "There are not many Hebrews living here who would agree with you. For the past seven years, we feel as though the Lord has abandoned us to our enemies, the Midianites. Every year, at harvest time, they come and steal our crops and livestock and we are helpless against them. How can you say that God is with me?"

"You are mistaken, Gideon," the man replied, calling him by name. "It is the Hebrews who have left God by worshiping the false god of Baal. Even so, God has heard the cries of his people. Go now and rescue Israel from these Midianites."

"Me rescue a whole nation of people? That's impossible," Gideon told him.

The Bible Corner

"It will not be you who will defeat your enemies, but the Lord," the man continued. "You will be able to triumph over the Midianites as if they were just one man."

Gideon was still not convinced. "Please wait for me here until I return," he said.

A short time later, Gideon came back with some meat and bread as well as bread that had been made without yeast. He placed everything before the stranger, saying, "If what you have said is indeed a message from the Lord, please give me some sort of sign."

"Place the meat and bread here on this rock," the man instructed. "Now pour broth over everything."

After Gideon had done so, the man touched the food with a stick and a fire started and consumed everything. Before Gideon could say anything, the stranger was gone. Realizing that his visitor had been an angel, Gideon built an altar to God on the spot.

That same night, Gideon went and destroyed the altar which the people of the town had built to honor Baal. When they discovered the next day that he had built a new altar to God in its place, they went to Gideon's father. "Your son, Gideon, must die for his offense against Baal!" they cried.

"If Baal is truly a god, then he should be able to defend himself," his father said to the angry mob. "Besides, even now the Midianites are preparing to attack us. We should be making plans to defend ourselves."

When Gideon heard that the Midianites were camped across the valley, he sent messengers to all parts of the country. "It is time to defeat our enemies," the messengers proclaimed. "Come and join the army of Gideon!"

To be continued ...

Scripture reference: Book of Judges, Chapter 6:1-35.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, help us to rely on you and not on ourselves to accomplish the things that you call us to do.

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