

Rumblings among laity warn of stormy days ahead

ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

There have been several highly publicized instances recently where laity have challenged bishops over the appointment or transfer of their parish priests.

Significantly, a few of these challenges have even been mounted within so-called national parishes, which some people have mistakenly regarded as the most subservient to the hierarchy's will.

Many observers aren't sure what to make of the phenomenon. Some have speculated that it reflects a struggle for power in the post-Vatican II church; an increasingly democratic-minded laity against a traditionally authoritarian hierarchy.

While a desire for power may be at issue in one or two exceptional cases, the entire phenomenon cannot be explained on that basis alone. There is something much more profound at work in these recent developments.

Vatican II does have a lot to do with it, of course. It was the council that described the church as the People of God, every member of which shares in Jesus' threefold mission as prophet, priest, and king.

Lay persons are not mere instruments of the hierarchy; their Christian responsibilities are rooted in their baptism and confirmation (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 33).

But the council asserted something more than that: "The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their sacred pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the Word of God and the sacraments" (No. 37).

The council encouraged lay persons to "openly reveal their needs and their desires to their pastors with that freedom and confidence which befits a son or daughter of God and a brother or sister in Christ."

Pastors, in their turn, were urged to "recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the lay person in the Church." They are to "make use of the laity's prudent advice," and also to encourage them to "undertake tasks on their own initiative."

In light of such conciliar teachings, let me offer a tentative explanation of these recent little explosions at the parish level. What is happening cannot be reduced to a power struggle between a restive laity and a possessive clergy. Very few lay persons are naive enough to believe that they have either the time or the skills to assume pastoral control of a parish. Sensible, healthy lay persons are content to leave that task to their priests, religious, and lay ministers.

What these lay persons do want, however, is caring and competent pastoral service. They want — and have grown to expect — good liturgy, good preaching, good religious education for their children, good pastoral care for their sick and aged, organized service to the needy and handicapped, and a sincere concern for their own spiritual welfare.

We are often sourly reminded by Catholics who have never been happy about the

council that a smaller percentage of Catholics goes to church now than was the case before 1962.

That may be true, but those Catholics who do "go to church" go because they want to, not because they are afraid of committing a mortal sin and risking their immortal souls. Catholics who once attended Mass primarily out of a sense of obligation weren't noticeably concerned about the quality of eucharistic celebration or preaching, for example.

As far as the Mass was concerned, the faster, the better. And if the priest decided to cancel the sermon, all the better still.

Those who come to church today come because they want to come. If they didn't want to come, they wouldn't. And many don't.

Those who do come are attracted by the presence of God that they find in the liturgy, in the community itself, and in the ministers who serve them.

Indeed, effective pastoral service, especially, but not exclusively from their priests, usually defines the difference between a good parish and a not-so-good or

bad parish. When parishioners become accustomed to effective pastoral service, they notice the change at once if suddenly deprived of it.

In the past, they might have simply accepted the change as the will of God. Today they don't. They want and expect quality pastoral service, and when they don't receive it, they want to know why.

The Second Vatican Council said they have a right to such service, and a right as well to express their needs and desires for it.

Unfortunately, bishops and diocesan personnel boards aren't always in a position to accommodate the laity's legitimate needs and desires. The sad truth of the matter is that there just aren't enough good priests to go around, and the situation is getting worse.

These latest rumblings over clergy appointments and replacements are only the first stages of a more violent storm to come.

Sensible people don't prepare for storms by filling their picnic baskets. They take the weather reports seriously and act accordingly.

Searching for charges to accuse Jesus

By Cindy Bassett
Catholic Courier columnist

A few days before Passover, Caiaphas, the high priest, hastily convened members of the Jewish Council. The meeting was prompted by the urging of the chief priests and the others who served in positions of authority at the temple in Jerusalem.

After they had been assembled, Caiaphas, as was the custom, stood before them and posed a single question for purposes of debate. His question led to a heated discussion that went on well into the night. The question was this: "What has Jesus of Nazareth done that we can charge him with?"

"Jesus is a charlatan who used trickery to get the masses to follow him," said Joseph. "Someone saw him change pots of water into fine wine at a wedding."

"He fed 5,000 people with little more than a few loaves and fishes," someone else added.

"There is no crime in any of that," Caiaphas said and waited for further charges.

"Jesus cares nothing for God's laws," Eli offered. "He healed a blind man on the Sabbath."

"If Jesus were some sort of prophet, then he would condemn these people he associates with," Joseph said. "He has been seen eating dinner with all of the outcasts of society."

"Condemn sinners?! I've heard Jesus offer them forgiveness for their sins. That's blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins," Eli said.

"Did you hear what Jesus did at the marketplace in front of our temple?" asked Jacob. "He was like a madman, overturning tables and driving out all of the merchants and moneychangers."

"So I asked Jesus," Jacob continued, "What gives you the right to do such a thing?" And he said, "These people have turned my Father's house into a den of thieves."

"He called our Temple, 'his Father's house'?" Samuel asked. "Jesus suffers from delusions of grandeur."

"So far I've heard nothing more than the pretentious actions of another false prophet," Caiaphas said impatiently. "There have been many like him before and they all came to nothing."

"Well there are many of our own people who would not agree with you, Caiaphas," Zerah said. "They claim that Jesus is the Messiah and would make him a king after the incident at Bethany last week."

"What incident?" Caiaphas asked. "Jesus brought a dead man back to life," Zerah stated.

THE BIBLE CORNER

"Impossible, just another trick!" Samuel cried.

"All I know is I saw Lazarus dead and placed in the tomb," said Zerah. "Four days later, I watched Jesus call him forth from the realm of the dead."

"Jesus offers his followers a great promise," Zerah continued. "He said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will have eternal life.' Seeing is believing and thousands have flocked after Jesus now."

"Caiaphas, Jesus must be stopped! If we let him go on like this, the Romans will think we are trying to overthrow them," Joseph cried.

"We must go about this in a most prudent fashion," Caiaphas said. "When the Passover is finished, we shall have Jesus arrested by the Roman authorities. Pilate will be pleased to see that we have already dealt with the problem of Jesus."

"How shall we ever find Jesus?" Samuel asked. "His followers will find out and hide him."

"We shall appeal to their hearts just as Jesus has done," Caiaphas said, smiling. "Let us offer a reward of 30 pieces of silver to the person who brings Jesus to us."

Scripture reference: John 11:45-57.
Meditation: "Believe in the light, then, while you have it, so that you will be the people of the light." (John 12:36).

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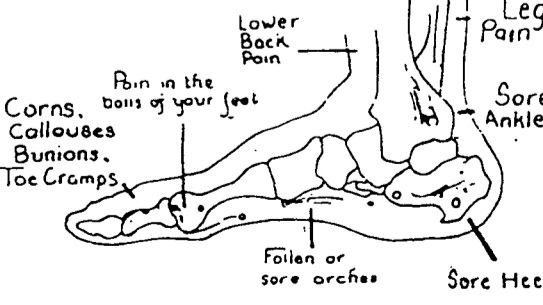
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Q. Is it true that people wear orthotics for knee pain?

A. Yes. Any pain in the skeleton, not necessarily the foot, which can be related to foot imbalance might be helped with orthotics.

Q. Do I have to wear orthotics all the time?

A. The eye glass analogy works well here. When do you need your glasses? For reading, for driving, all the time? When it comes to orthotics, it depends on two things—the demands on your foot and the degree to which the foot has faulty structure.



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