

Sacrifices of priesthood balanced by spiritual rewards

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The weirdest pitch for vocations to the priesthood I ever saw was in 1942. I was a new chaplain at Napier Air Field in Dothan, Alabama, and ran across a folder from some religious congregation which read: "Join our congregation and within a year of ordination you will be a pastor and have a car of your own."

What a motive for a vocation that demands sacrifice! For example, celibacy is a tall demand. But it is a sublimated gift to God to serve his people best. Priesthood is a vocation that is supernatural, with God's special graces infiltrating the priest's soul. Priesthood is a vocation that is happy, despite crosses — and every vocation has crosses. That's life. The service given for people is always great and good.

I have read that a priest's life is a lonely life, and wonder at the self-pity of some priests. Loneliness is a part of every person's life. It is present in successful marriages. It is present even in happy families.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Loneliness is not a constant thing. And for priests, the lack of wife and children is compensated by the companionship with other priests, with spiritually healthy lay people, and with the best of companions — Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

The "Imitation of Christ" directs celibate religious to: "Be familiar with no woman, but commend all good women to God." While written in the 15th century, it comes to grips with a fact — women are attractive, and celibate religious had better be prudent in dealing with them.

Bishop Clark is instituting a campaign to recruit young men for the priesthood. Older men could be even more valuable. The

church needs priests, but not just anyone. She needs men who are concerned about God's glory, about His church, His Gospel, His people. She needs men who are not centered in self. To these the words of Samuel are appropriate: "Speak, Lord, for your servant heareth."

Our diocese needs priests. But for more than 60 years I have been zealous also for the progress of the church in the Third World. Our Catholic faith can never be parochial.

On May 18 this column published a letter from Webster's Father Gerry Aman, SJ, now in Benin, Nigeria, thanking an Elmira benefactor for a \$1,000 gift for the training of seminarians. He wrote:

"The expenses for keeping a young man in a seminary are very low, compared to the U.S. Even so, money is scarce here, so the boys don't get the food to eat they really should have. Your generous gift will make a huge difference in the lives of our future priests."

A Rochester man wrote: "As per your

column in the *Courier* I am requesting information regarding the training of priests in Nigeria, and how I can help." To which I replied:

"Thank you for your interest in the training of priests. In 1981 I visited the seminary for all Kenya when Father Walter Gleason of Phelps, a Maryknoll priest was teaching there. He has since died, a great loss to the Church.

"While the courses are similar to our own in the States academically, the living conditions and food are far from what our seminarians have. However most African seminarians come from quite austere backgrounds.

"Father Aman, the Jesuit priest in Benin, Nigeria, is coming to Rochester soon. His mother, a saintly woman from Webster, is a patient at St. Ann's Home, Rochester. When he does come I will let you know. You can meet and have a first-hand picture of the Church in Nigeria, and of the seminarians whom you would like to assist."

Visits of love, compassion change widows' lives

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 7:1-7; (R1) 1 Kings 17:17-24; (R2) Galatians 1:11-19.

Each of Sunday's readings emphasizes in different ways how God brings new life into human crises through His faithful servants. In Elijah we see God's power; in Paul, God's grace; in Jesus, God's compassion.

There are three resurrections: two from physical death (readings 1 and 3), and one from spiritual death (R2).

Two themes stand out: widowhood and compassion.

The sons raised from the dead are the only sons of widowed mothers. The tragedy is inconceivable for us to realize: widows deprived of their only means of support would be doomed to dire poverty.

But the joy — God cares! The man of God, Elijah, restores life; so does the Son of God. Compassion moved them both. Compassion means "to suffer with." But real compassion leads to action. Both Elijah and the One greater than Elijah restored the dead sons to life. But more, each restores the son to his widowed mother.

Consider the widow of Naim. Naim is the Arabic word for "sleep." For God and for us death is only a sleep. Perhaps Naim was a sleepy town, a "sleepy hollow." The widow had an only son. Like every mother she had great dreams for him. Life is sometimes cruel, though. Her son died. A large crowd of friends escorted the funeral procession out of the city. Their

presence meant more than they could know. But still the pain was great. First she had lost her husband, then her son. "Does anyone know the emptiness I am feeling," she asked herself. "Does anyone care?"

A man named Jesus, with his disciples and a large crowd, passed by the funeral procession. He saw the widow weeping. Moved with pity upon seeing her, He said to her gently, "Do not cry." Then He touched the litter and said, "Young man, I bid you get up." The dead man sat up and began to speak. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.

The widow had been heartbroken. But Jesus saw and Jesus cared, and her sorrow was turned into joy. The point is that Jesus always sees us in our distress. He always cares, and He is always able to turn our sorrow into joy. Sometimes, people think in their doldrums, "No one knows what I am going through right now." But Someone does know.

We read newspaper articles about tragedies that leave people lying on a walk after an accident or a mugging and no one does anything. We think to ourselves, "If I had been there I would have done something."

But sometimes people in our own family or our neighbors' families are in terrible distress, and we never pick up on it. It is as if we are blind. Jesus is never blind. He sees us in our distress. He hears us when we call upon Him.

And He understands our loneliness and despair. Because He has been there too. He carried a cross.

Because He sees and understands, he can give us the strength to carry on. Even if Jesus had not raised the widow's son from the dead, meeting Him would have brought her much comfort. It has for many others, for there is something about the Master's love and compassion that has helped countless millions of persons endure in the midst of great suffering and sorrow.

Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz, speaking at the annual sales meeting of the Western Insurance Companies, said, "I've been on the top and I've been on the bottom. At Arkansas my first year, we won the Orange Bowl. Then everybody loved me. They put me in the Arkansas Hall of Fame and issued a commemorative stamp in my honor. I was on top.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

"The next year we lost to Texas, and I was on bottom. "One year I tried to sell cemetery plots for a living. My wife told me I couldn't sell anything. She was wrong. That summer, I sold our car, our television, our stereo ..."

Like Holtz, sometimes we are on the top. Sometimes we are on the bottom, on rock bottom. But Jesus sees, understands and is able to help.

Suppose Elijah or Jesus had not come by. Death would have triumphed. But they did come by, and the lives of people were changed, and God was praised.

Do we ever stop to think-how significant our stopping by or dropping in or sending a card or making a phone call can be for one who is all alone, on rock bottom — separated, perhaps widowed? Such a meeting will also evoke the Psalmist's cry: "I will praise the Lord ... you changed my mourning into dancing. O Lord, my God, for ever will I give you thanks" (Response).

Six-day guided retreat set for Cenacle Center in June

The Cenacle Center in Rochester is offering a six-day guided retreat June 23-30.

The retreat will be offered by Sister Hilda Blade, r.c., and Diana Phillips, a registered nurse and massage therapist. Each session of the retreat — which will consist of morning and evening prayer, conferences and celebration of the Eucharist — is optional.

The offering for the entire six days is \$180. Those who would like to attend two or more days should contact the Cenacle Ministry Office, 693 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y., 14607, or call 716/271-8755.



Cliff Hollenbaugh

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