

Webster native enjoys rich spiritual life as missionary

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

In August, this column recorded: "If the church in the United States and Europe are staggering, the Church in Africa is thriving."

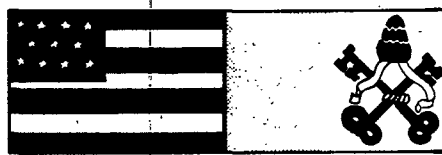
Jesuit Father Jerry Aman, a native of Holy Trinity, Webster, and an alumnus of McQuaid Jesuit High, Rochester, is stationed in the Jesuit parish in Benin, Nigeria.

In July, Father Aman recorded the progress of the Church in Nigeria, under the caption, "Seminary Training a Bargain in Africa."

"Training men to be priests here in Africa is a bargain," he wrote. "But even bargain rates given, the cash is often short. I know that seminarians are on the lean and hungry side because food is not overly plentiful."

As a result of this note, several generous people sent me more than \$15,000 for the education of seminarians in Africa and for the training of African young women in the

sisterhoods. They are wonderfully flourishing. It's a tidy sum, but as I observe how many Catholics spend a lot of money in transient things, I long for hearts open to spread the Faith, helping with cash. In a "thank you" note, Father Aman wrote: "The Gospel story has Jesus saying: 'The harvest is rich, but the laborers are few.' In Nigeria the harvest is rich. Last year in our Jesuit parish alone, we baptized 1,004 people; we performed 102 marriages; and confessions would require an electric computer to keep track." He continued, "The Church is vibrant and alive and continually growing. God is blessing us with vocations both to the priesthood and to the sisterhoods. The two major seminaries are among the largest in the world. But the new priests are needed even more quickly than they can be ordained. The Church spreads as quickly as we can send priests and build churches. Our parish is presently trying to build two new parish churches and a chapel. Our people are exceedingly generous at giving



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

their widow's mite, but they are poor, and struggling to feed their families. So we are indeed grateful for the generosity of your people in supporting seminarians, and helping the Church to grow." He concluded, "Our ministry at St. Joseph's in Benin city is very varied. Our parish has 11,000 parishioners and three out-stations. We also take care of the leper colony and the local prison. The leper colony has the poorest of the poor. Once someone is discovered to have leprosy, even though with modern medicine the disease is no longer contagious, and its spread can be stopped, they tend to be abandoned. The pain of iso-

lation is often a greater burden for the people than the loss of hands, feet or eyesight which many of them endure. Just saying Mass for them is one of the greatest privileges. I am reminded of St. Peter, "Silver and gold I have not, but that which I do have I give to you ..." I can bring Christ to these people and continue to heal their brokenness, their isolation and their spiritual wounds. The singing at these Masses is indeed inspiring, and I learn anew each time what it means to *celebrate Mass!*"

We Americans can become so limited in our vision of the Church Universal that the squeals of dissidents seem to be the voice of the people. Not so! The best monthly I know to give a broad view of the Universal Church is a new magazine, *30 Days*, published in Italian, Spanish, German, French, Portuguese — and as of two years ago — in English. This monthly gives an overview of the universal Church, recording both the progress and the problems. Africa gets good billing.

One must express thanks openly and accept others unreservedly

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 17:11-19; (R1) 2 Kings 5:14-17; (R2) 2 Timothy 2:8-13.

A girl named Debbie was asked in her general science class, "What is salt?"

Debbie answered, "Salt is what spoils the potatoes when you leave it out."

We might ask, "What is gratitude?" To paraphrase Debbie's answer, we can say, "Gratitude is what spoils life when you leave it out."

The bulletin board on the lawn of a church reads: "We reserve the right to accept everybody."

There is a double theme in Sunday's readings: gratitude and acceptance. Lepers were wholly unacceptable people. But when the lepers, Naaman and the Samaritan, were cured, they were most grateful people.

The Naaman story is ripped out of its context. All the first reading tells us about the leper Naaman is his cure and his subsequent gratitude. The people who played the greatest roles in the story, servants, are passed over.

It was a servant girl from Israel who told Naaman's wife about Elisha the prophet. It was Elisha, the servant of God, who told Naaman what he must do to be cured. It was the servants of Naaman who persuaded him to do as the prophet had commanded. And when cured, Naaman also became a servant of the true God. All of us are called to be servants, both servants of



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

God and servants to one another.

The gospel speaks of 10 lepers, as if to underscore the fact that Jesus is a prophet 10 times greater than Elisha. Like Elisha, Jesus gives a command. When obeyed, the lepers are cured. One of the 10 was a Samaritan.

Jews and Samaritans were enemies, but a common ill had made them one. Two men were fighting a duel in a woods when a bear attacked them both. They stopped fighting each other to fight off the bear. So, often a common danger or affliction will bring enemies together. It is significant that once the lepers were cured, Jews and the Samaritan parted.

The Jews probably went on to the temple in Jerusalem; the Samaritan returned to Jesus. He wanted more than physical healing, and he got it: "Go your way, your faith has been your salvation."

Then Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine? Were not all 10 made whole? Was there no one to return to give thanks to God except this foreigner?"

Judging by this incident, we might think that nine people out of ten are not grateful. Perhaps the ratio is even greater.

Ed Spencer was a hero of one of the worst shipwrecks on Lake Michigan. On

the night of September 8, 1860, an excursion ship with 400 people aboard collided with a lumber freighter and was sinking.

Spencer jumped out of bed and raced the three miles to the scene of the wreck. It was a stormy night; the lake was acting up. A strong undertow discouraged would-be rescuers. Spencer was a strong swimmer; he had learned to swim in the Mississippi River at his home in Rock Island. For six hours he swam back and forth and personally saved 17 people.

During the wreck, 287 drowned and 98 were saved — 17 of those by Spencer.

Years later, newsmen interviewed Spencer to get his recollections of the disaster. Spencer said, "Not one of the 17 people I saved ever thanked me."

Startling? Yet the Son of God has saved us from a fate far worse than drowning. Sunday Mass is a way to say thanks, yet few understand this.

The Preface of the Mass says, "It is right to give God thanks and praise." In other words, gratitude is an act of justice. We ought to praise God, for He is so very good; and we ought to thank Him, for He is so very good to us!

The other lesson the leper stories tell us is: Do we have lepers? Do we divide people into the acceptable and the unacceptable; the worthy and the unworthy; them and us?

Our Lord accepted even lepers. The leprosy of sin must never separate us from the sinner. For each of us is tainted and

each of us has been blessed so that we might reach out to others and share our blessings with them.

"May our love for you, dear Lord, express itself in our eagerness to do good for others" (Prayer of Sunday's Mass).

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