

Reunion experiences illustrate ever changing 'flow of life'

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Last Thursday at Sacred Heart, we had a wonderful reunion experience. We invited alumni of the North American College in Rome to gather at noon for an Italian meal and reminiscing which occurs on such occasions. Friends from the dioceses of Syracuse and Buffalo came to join us.

The North American College is a seminary owned by the bishops of the United States. Its student body reflects that ownership and generally represents a great number of the dioceses of our country at any given time.

I have fond memories of my years there, first as a student, and later as a member of the staff. The presence of so many brother alumni at Thursday's party was a gift because it was another occasion to reflect on the flow of life and how we — as well as our good friends — change and grow through the years.

I suppose that came to me most strongly in the presence of two classmates who were able to join us on Thursday. Jack Wagner came from Syracuse and Bill Tuyn drove from Jamestown to be with us. I see both of them only occasionally, but some 27 years after we finished our seminary days, we still come together as friends, peaceful in

one another's company.

The varied experiences we've had over the years have not separated us. They have fueled the conversation fires. For my part, I hope that the three of us can have mini-reunions more frequently in the future. One thing we readily agreed on is how young the three of us have remained while our brother alumni have aged much more rapidly.

We had a wonderful turnout from our own diocese that day: Bishops Joseph Hogan and Dennis Hickey; Monsignors John Maney and Emmett Murphy; and Fathers Elmer McNamara, Robert MacNamara, Jim Moynihan, Dave Mura, Bill Cosgrove, Ed Dillon, Kevin McKenna, Alexander Bradshaw, Stan Kacprzak, Joe Hart, John Reddington, Joe Jankowiak, Joe Brennan, and Bill Laird, who kindly and ably organized the event in which all came to lunch that day.

It was so good to see those men all together and especially pleasant to be in the midst of so many who were renewing precious friendships.

The week continued with a reunion of a different sort. My mother came to stay a few days at Sacred Heart and my niece, Jane Early, came over from Canisius College to spend part of her Columbus Day

weekend with her aging uncle. It has been a pleasure to have them. The only complaint I have is that I am mildly exhausted this morning after following them around one of our shopping malls yesterday.

In a few hours I am going to Holy Rosary Parish to celebrate their 100th anniversary with them. It will be a delight to join Father Bob Meng and all of our Lexington Avenue neighbors to celebrate 100 years of God's blessings to that beautiful community of faith.

This afternoon, I'll be leaving for Colorado Springs for a meeting of our Conference Committee on the Life and Ministry of Bishops. This is an ad hoc committee charged by the conference with the task of studying this theme and making recommendations designed to help the bishops of our conference in their personal and ministerial growth.

I have found it thus far to be a most stimulating and rewarding project. It is my opinion that the work of this committee will have a significant long-range impact on the life of the church.

I'll be back home on Thursday afternoon. I'll be in touch with you soon after that.

Peace to all.



Along the Way

Daily Masses afford opportunities to receive Christ

To the editor:

I would like to ask my fellow Catholics a question. I'm sure the answer will be "yes," but is it just memorized Dogma, and in our minds, like information in a computer, or is it something deeper? Is it something that influences our words and actions as well?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is really present in the Eucharist?

In the Holy Scriptures and in the words of the Celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist is always referred to as the Body and Blood of Christ. If God is Spirit, then why this emphasis on His Body and Blood? Shouldn't it be specifically mentioned in the Mass that it is the Body and Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ as well?

In the Holy Scriptures, certain aspects of a reality are mentioned and others are not to bring a point across. The reason the Church emphasizes Body and Blood is that when the Son of God became Man, He became physically present to us as well. This is infallible. Jesus is just as much present physically in that Host at Mass as He was 2,000 years ago. He only appears to be bread and wine like a child would pretend to be something at a masquerade party.

When we receive Him, we partake of His Divine Being, and the old saying, "you are what you eat" comes true. We become more and more Divine as we receive Him.

Since we believe Jesus is really present just as much at Mass as 2,000 years ago, then why don't more people go to Mass during the week? In Jesus' time people came to Him in droves. Do we really believe He is present there? Not going to

daily Mass when we can would be the same as someone 2,000 years ago preferring not to go to see Jesus in person because "I have God in my heart already, so I won't bother?"

The fact is, Jesus wants to be that close to us, He wants to touch us in the flesh, too.

Didn't God say in the Old Testament "I Am Who I Am?" Refusing to touch Jesus in the flesh when we can, would be like saying to your spouse "I love you," but hardly ever really touching them affectionately in body as well.

It is true that we can't say we are superior to our Protestant brethren, but we are more privileged. Many of us, because of our love and responsibility to our family, cannot go to Mass during the week, Monday to Friday, but what about Saturday?

We also must recognize what is better

for others — priorities — in a particular case. Am I doing frivolous things for our family when Mass is going on? Would it be better for them if I spent the time asking God's blessings on them one extra day a week?

The Word of God tells us how to love and frequent Confession, and Spiritual Direction helps us to "know" our Divine Spouse. How can we say we love God and even touch Him physically if we are not more and more conscious of what we are doing in the flesh?

The Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary and the Saints are waiting to touch you. Don't stay away and disappoint them.

Matthew G. Pompeli
Rochester, NY



Letters requested to help death-row convict

To the editor:

I correspond with Vernon Cooper, 52, who has been on Death Row at Florida State Prison since 1974, when he was sentenced to die for the murder of an Escambia County Sheriff's deputy named Charles Wilkerson. Many people who arrived on Death Row years after Cooper have already been executed.

During his confinement on Death Row, Cooper has created no disturbances. He has become severely disabled from emphysema and suffers constantly from this disease. Dying in the electric chair would be more merciful than dying of emphysema in a lonely prison cell, yet Cooper still wants his sentence changed to life imprisonment.

The evidence that Cooper was the actual killer is weak. Furthermore, in 1977, Warren Holmes of Miami, a nationally respected polygraph expert, tested Cooper. Holmes concluded that Cooper is truthful in his claim that it was Steve Ellis, Cooper's crime partner, who shot the deputy while the pair were fleeing from the robbery they committed and that Cooper had no advanced knowledge of Ellis' murder intent.

Ellis was killed in a shoot-out with another deputy. I suspect that because Ellis was dead, there was a rush to judgment to label Cooper the trigger man in order to assure that someone would go to the electric chair for Wilkerson's murder.

Florida governors have apparently considered all these mitigating factors and have never signed a death warrant against Cooper, yet they have also not been inclined to commute Cooper's punishment to

life imprisonment, leaving Cooper in limbo longer than any other person on America's Death Rows.

The Florida Supreme Court twice upheld Cooper's sentence, but in May, 1988, granted him a new sentencing hearing, which was held in Pensacola in March, 1989. The judge heard Holmes' testimony outside the presence of the jury. Even without knowing about the polygraph findings, the jury recommended a sentence of life imprisonment.

On July 29, Judge Nick Geeker sentenced Cooper to the electric chair. Usually the Florida Supreme Court reverses trial judges who override jury recommendation in capital cases. Cooper's lawyers are optimistic, but the appeals process is lengthy and filled with uncertainty.

About his return to Death Row, Cooper writes: "I guess I'd partially forgotten just how hot it really is here, about the discomfort of having my hands cuffed behind my back everywhere I go ... the mattress on my bed is so thin it's like lying on the floor on a blanket." Death Row inmates are confined to their cells 23 hours a day.

I'm hopeful that readers will write to the Honorable Bob Martinez, Governor of Florida, The Capitol, Tallahassee, Fla., 32301, to urge that he commute Cooper's sentence to life imprisonment and that he facilitate Cooper's transfer to a prison infirmary where Cooper's health needs can be more adequately addressed.

Joel Freedman
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...is cold crisp air, great fleecy clouds and the smell of autumn leaves on the wind. Kestner

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