

Parishes need fewer meetings and more evangelists

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier Columnist

Father Robert Downs is a big fan of baseball and Civil War history. He usually takes three weeks to sate his soul during the baseball season, and to absorb Civil War history at Gettysburg and such sites.

Last August, he asked me to fill in for three weekends in October at his parishes in Moravia — located about 18 miles south of an Auburn — and Scipio Center, which is an easy nine miles from Moravia.

Moravia has about 1,500 souls, excluding the 900 prisoners at the nearby state prison — which is overcrowded by 200 prisoners. Scipio is much smaller.

Q: What did you do there?



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

A: Confessions in Moravia are between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m., with Mass at 5 p.m. So I arrived early from St. Alphonsus, Auburn, to test locks and switches and made an orientation of the rectory which had no housekeeper. Then to the church to find the sacred vessels and set up for Mass.

This was simple enough since Father Downs had written clear directions, and there were several good helpers — lectors, Eucharistic ministers and CCD teachers — after the Sunday 8:30 a.m. Mass. The congregation sang surprisingly well a capella when the priest led the hymn-singing.

If anything, Scipio is even more organized. Although the congregation is small, it is also very active. It even has an organist and has a nice coffee hour — which is chummy — after each Mass.

Q: Are there many who don't go to Mass?

A: Yes. And this is true everywhere, especially in the big city parishes. In the big parishes, the stray sheep are mostly unknown.

In the villages, the strays are known, though usually not sought after. The question is: What to do about the problem?

Two reasons for so many strays are 1) a lack of understanding of the Catholic Faith, and 2) as people drift from the church, so little is done about it. I envy the energy of the Mormons and witnesses and Baptists. They constantly knock on doors, seeking converts. I am constantly in distress that we Catholics not only do not knock on doors for converts, but we do not knock on doors even to seek out our own drifting Catholics.

In suburbia, great tracts of new homes are built and new families move in to the area. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists diligently seek them out. With superb inertness we do not seek them out. We seem just to expect newcomers to come to the parish office, register and take out envelopes with hardly a welcome.

One large parish in Rochester divides the parish into some 25 sections, and places responsible persons in charge of each area. These allow the parish the following: to welcome newcomers; keep in contact with drifters; show concern about the sick, the newborn, and religious education; be attentive at the time of sickness or death or mourning or some particular need. Most dioceses have a multiplicity of meetings in order to discuss what to do.

I think if we cancelled three quarters of these meetings, but had the participants at the meetings do like the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Baptists do and knock on doors, our leakage from the church would change into a vital participation on the part of many wandering lambs.

Q: Anything unusual about Moravia and Scipio parishes.

A: They are typical of most small parishes with which I am acquainted. There is a core of faithful parishioners who help the pastor. There is a section of parishioners who are faithful to Mass, but are involved little with the parish outside of Sunday Mass. There is a section of wandering lambs, who have the faith, but it is so tepid it seems half dead.

Oh for less meetings, less discussions, and more knuckles at the doors to announce Our Lord and His Church.

Jesus refutes group's disbelief in the resurrection of the dead

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier Columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 20:27-38; (R1) 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; (R2) 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5.

As the church year winds down, the readings point to the climax of history: the resurrection of the dead.

In the days of Our Lord, the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels and spirits. The Sadducees were the liberals of their day; they were wealthy, influential, collaborators with Rome. The only books of the Bible they accepted were the first five books; the books of Moses; or the Pentateuch.

With the cocksureness of religious cynics, they came to Jesus with a ridiculous case. It was based on the Levirate Law (*levir* in Latin means "a husband's brother"). That law decreed that if a man died without children, his brother must marry the widow and beget children to carry on the deceased's name (Gn. 38:8; Dt. 25:5).

There were seven brothers. The first one married, but died childless. According to the law, the second brother married the widow, then the third and so on. All seven died without leaving her any children. Finally, the widow herself died. For the Sadducees, the situation showed the absurdity of the very notion of the resurrection. To make their point, they asked Jesus the apparently unanswerable question, "At the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? Remember, seven married her."

Tricky cases — like this one of the Sadducees — is typical of the argumentation of most religious debunkers. Joseph Fletcher

(author of *Situation Ethics*) and his colleague Bishop John A. T. Robinson (author of *Honest to God*) concocted "sticky situations" to deride traditional morality and launch their new "morality" of living as you please provided you do all in love.

The poor Scribes could never refute the case of the seven brothers. They were elated at Jesus's answer and even complimented Him, saying, "Teacher, you have answered well."

Jesus' answer has two parts. First, He rejected the naive understanding of the resurrection held by the Sadducees. A little girl asked her father what heaven was like. The father said it was a land flowing with milk and honey.

"What! No Cokes or Pepsi in heaven?" the little girl blurted out. "Our Lord made it clear that the life to come will differ from life here and now. Here people marry; there they do not."

Our Lord further pointed out that the life to come will be one of reward and punishment.

In the first reading, the fourth brother says to King Antiochus, "... but for you there will be no resurrection to life. Those who have done good deeds (will rise) to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn. 5:29).

In solving this case, Our Lord restricted His remarks only to the good — "those judged worthy in the age to come."

Jesus said that "those judged worthy" in the resurrection would be like the angels — deathless. Hence there would be no need for marriage to procreate life. Implicitly,

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A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Jesus was saying the purpose of marriage is to replenish the race, which is being constantly diminished by death. And, since that is the purpose of marriage, the use of artificial contraception in marriage has to be wrong.

In the second part of His answer, Jesus argued for the resurrection of the dead from the books of the Bible accepted by the Sadducees. He could have quoted from the book of Maccabees (R1), but he chose to meet the Sadducees on their own grounds.

He cited the words of Moses himself calling the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Ex. 6). Since Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been long dead at the time of Moses, they must have risen to life, else how could Moses have called God their father if they no longer existed?

Jesus closed with the words: "All are alive for him;" that is, in relation to God all live. For God is life, and just as any cord plugged into an outlet becomes energized with electricity, so all who walk in the footsteps of Moses and the patriarchs are alive and shall live forever with God.

There is no need, then, for the good Christian to be overanxious about the coming of the Lord.

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