

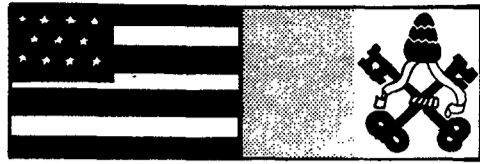
Marginal Catholics must be treated with great caution

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier Columnist

Father Joseph Champlin is the trim pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Camillus, N.Y. During his 33 years in the priesthood, he probably has had a greater impact on the church than a dozen bishops.

Why? He has authored some 25 books, published thousands of syndicated columns and lectured widely on liturgy, ministry and doctrine. But greatest in impact is the book he published, *Together for Life*, a kind of wedding bible for those to be married.

The last printing was astonishingly over



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

3 million! Although Father Greeley might be an exception, few priests or bishops can top that.

Father Champlin's latest book is *The Marginal Catholic*. The marginal Catholic

is always a puzzle and a worry and a challenge to those in pastoral ministry, priests and deacons.

What to do about a couple who want to be married by the Church, but who rarely go to Sunday Mass? Or with a religiously careless couple who ask for baptism for their child to assuage anxious grandparents? Or those married outside the church, but who are faithful about Sunday Mass and even active in parish projects? What about a presumed mafioso or an abortion advocate who dies suddenly, and the family passionately want a Catholic funeral? "Prior to Vatican II," Father Champlin

writes, "there were several commonly accepted norms used to distinguish good from bad or practicing from non-practicing Catholics: Sunday Mass, Easter duty, Friday abstinence, marriage in the church, registration in the parish.

"Since Vatican II these external criteria for mainstream as opposed to marginal Catholics are less defined, reduced to Mass attendance, frequent Communion, and registration in the parish. Even these lack the precision of yesteryear."

Who are the "marginal Catholics?" Father Champlin defines them as "those who have a tenuous link with the parish."

"When pastoral leaders challenge these so-called inactive, non-practicing, fallen-away Catholics," he writes, "they must do it with great caution. They do not want to crush those who have displayed some sign of good will and faith by their very request for baptism, matrimony or another of the Sacraments."

An old Italian patriarch once said to me, "There's nothing wrong with the Catholic Church. The church is from God. The trouble is with the priests!"

As we read history and have our own experiences, we all know the frail, fallen nature in priests shared with all mankind can bring great hurt: arbitrariness; indifference to the mind and emotions of others; selfishness; and worldliness.

But accepting this, we must be firm in the Faith. "The Church is from God." Our experience with most priests is that they are men who try to do their work honestly and with forbearance and generosity. But priests must work within a framework such as the Gospels and the teachings of Christ carried on through the Institutional Church guided by the Holy Spirit. To preserve integrity of doctrine and spirit there has to be laws and regulations and discipline.

The book is published by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind., and sells for \$6.95. A good present for your priests and deacons and pastoral assistants.

And for those having troubles with the local parish.

We must be patient, joyful in waiting for the Lord

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier Columnist

Sundays readings: (R3) Matthew 11:2-11; (R1) Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; (R2) James 5:7-10.

In the first reading, Isaiah speaks six times about rejoicing, joy and joyful song. Traditionally, this mid-Advent Sunday was called *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* is the Latin word for "rejoicing." But why rejoice?

"Because," Isaiah said, "the Lord, He who is the glory of Lebanon and the splendor of Carmel and Sharon, is coming — coming to save us. He comes to save us! Do you want proof? The blind will see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak, and sinners will return to the Church — enter Zion singing."

What are we to do? We are to exercise joyful patience, like that of the groom waiting for his bride. Four times in the second reading, St. Paul speaks of patience.

Tolstoi in *War and Peace* wrote, "The strongest warriors are these two: time and patience."

Patience means to wait, as the farmer does until the winter snows and the spring rains fertilize the fields making them productive.

The gospel begins with John in prison. Prisoners can do little more than wait and hope for a better day. Waiting is hard. Yet it consumes a great part of our lives.

We can't wait until we grow up. We can't wait to graduate. We can't wait to get married. We can't wait to go on vacation. Children can't wait until Christmas comes. And adults can't wait until it is over.

Advent is a time to play the waiting game: joyfully waiting for the Lord. Waiting, St. Paul tells us, can be joyful, joyful if creative.

"Steady your hearts" — be strong and fear not as you face day-to-day chores.

Then, "Do not grumble against one another" — accentuate the positive, affirm, lift people up: a pat on the back is far better than a kick in the pants. The one you kick may propel him even farther ahead.

Finally, "take the prophets" as your models. Take any one of them, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Daniel or any of the 12 minor prophets. Read about them in your Bible.

You will discover what spiritual giants they were, what great men of faith and patience! They had thankless jobs and were often rejected, persecuted and martyred by their own.

Yet, they held firm to their vocation. They did what they were supposed to do no matter the cost. They were patient and joyful in the thought that God was with them and that in the end good would triumph over evil.

Jesus, in answer to John's question, claimed to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. For He made the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk.

However, to the taste of John, there was



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

too much patience and tolerance in this Jesus and not enough judgment. Freely, He forgave sinners; why, He even ate with them! John was puzzled, impatient. So he sent his disciples to Jesus and asked, "Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for another?"

Let us interpret John's questioning as weakness, Jesus heaps highest praise on him: He is no need, he is no sycophant currying the favor of kings. He is even more than a prophet — the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, for he is the precursor of the King.

Then the surprise, O. Henry ending: "Yet the least born into the kingdom of God is greater than he." To be a member of Christ's body is far greater than being a member of the church of Israel.

Therefore great should be our Advent joy and fruitful our patience! For He who is the glory of Lebanon comes to save us.



Cliff Hollenbaugh

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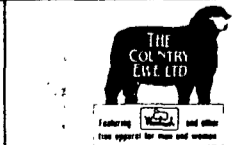
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