

Perceptions are valuable part of truth

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In a large number of rectories, schools, hospitals and other institutions in our diocese, you'll find a picture of me hanging in some public area.

In the photo — more properly called a portrait, I suppose, because of its formality — I am wearing what are called choir robes. The outfit consists of a red cassock and sash; a full white surplice; a short, red cape-type garment buttoned at the neck and covering the shoulders; a red zucchetto, or skull cap; and a pectoral cross.

That rig is standard fare for bishops and is usually worn at liturgical functions at which the bishop is not presiding or concelebrating. For other formal functions of a non-liturgical nature, the customary dress has been a black cassock with red buttons, red sash, zucchetto, cross and, sometimes, floor-length red cape.

On the advice of friends, I bought two of each of those outfits when I was ordained a bishop and, at the very beginning, had the above-mentioned photo taken in the choir robes.

In the 11 years since those days, I believe I have worn the choir robes no more than 12 times, and in the last five years, not once that I can recall. The figures are very much the same for the other outfits. I wore the black cassock for graduations and commencements. And five years ago, I wore it through six of 10 receptions designed to pro-

mote the Thanks Giving Appeal.

At the sixth reception, I ran into Father Kevin Murphy from St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street. Kevin told me in kind but not uncertain terms that in his opinion the clothes I was wearing were not advancing the end I was trying to achieve. Rather, he said, they were distracting people from our common objective. I remember being angry with Kevin that evening. I was angry because he was right and I knew it. I went through the remaining four gatherings in a black suit.

I think of this matter of dress again because, as you know, we have been studying and working hard at the diocesan Pastoral Center to respond to our community's needs and desires as faithfully and flexibly as we possibly can. We want to meet our common, centralized responsibility and foster the ministries carried out in our parishes and other communities.

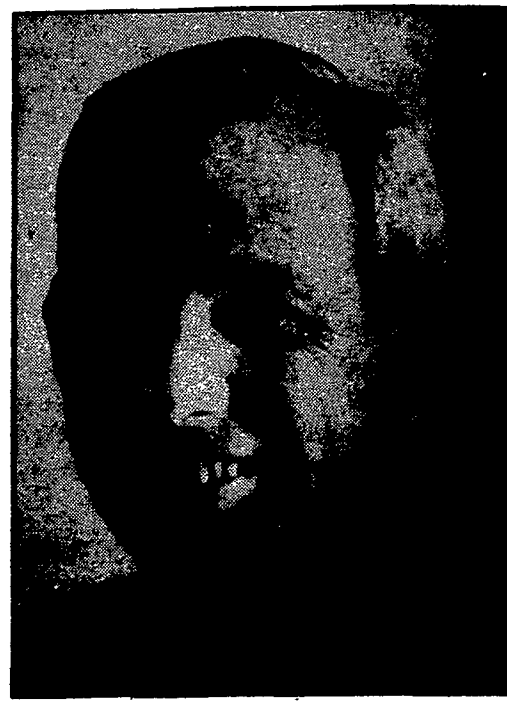
In order to do this, we need to learn how others perceive us, how they feel about and evaluate the services we render. We are in the process of doing that now, and I believe that when the process is completed we will have learned a good deal about how to be more effective servants in the community. I think that this study and other work we are doing will lead to some changes in the way we organize ourselves and how we do things.

Knowledge of the perceptions others have of us is a valuable piece of infor-

mation. It is not always easy to receive those perceptions, especially if they are negative, but at the very best they challenge us to be clearer and more sensitive to others as we speak our words and conduct our work.

I do not believe that perceptions are necessarily the truth, but when kindly and appropriately shared, our perceptions of one another can help us to understand the truth of one another. There is a freedom in that kind of understanding because it offers living ways mutually to respect and call forth what is best in our neighbor.

We will soon enter Lent and will hear often that God does not judge external appearances; rather God knows the heart. We cannot know the heart of one another as God does, but we have the capacity to look past mere appearances in an effort to understand other people. Doing so takes patience



and work, plus large measures of trust and mutual understanding. But trying to understand our neighbors is well worth the effort because of the new life it brings.

Peace to all.

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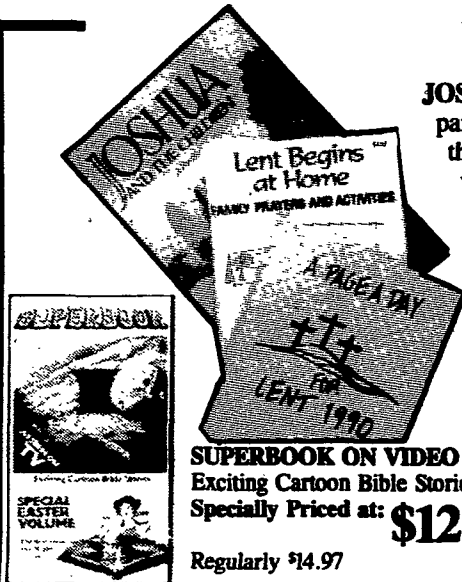
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