

Catholics need to go after those who slip from faith

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

On the Sunday afternoon after Easter, I picked up a hitchhiker en route to Auburn from Port Byron. There seem to be more hitchhikers between Auburn and Port Byron than in most places.

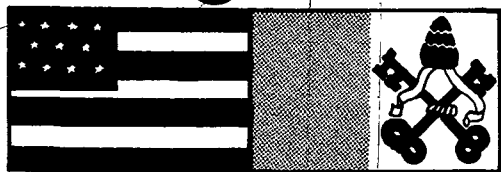
After we introduced ourselves, I said: "I was at Holy Family grade school with a boy of your name." Laconically he said, "Maybe a relative."

Then I asked, "Are you Catholic?" Hesitantly he said, "Yes."

"But you don't go to church much?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "The last time was when I went with my grandmother on Easter Sunday."

That sounded promising since Easter was only the previous Sunday. As the conversation continued, however, he mentioned that his grandmother had died three years ago.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

As he was getting out of the car on State Street, I remembered I had a basket of "Treasury of Prayers" and Father Collin's "Acceptance" in the car, so I got out and gave him one each, took his name and address, and promised to keep in touch with him.

But the question remains: What is the religious future of this youth, a baptized member of the church? What parish is equipped, or even willing to send an evangelist out to contact him and guide him to instructions and fellowship with other Catholics?

He is one of hundreds of thousands who are drifting away from us. Yet, we seem to have no system of pursuit, or even an inclination to pursue. I believe in Auburn, where I reside, there is a stronger Catholic community than most places in the diocese. The city has an estimated 22,000 souls, plus thousands of others living on the outskirts.

The city has seven Catholic churches. It is estimated that 70 percent of the population professes to be Catholic. Yet, Sunday Mass in the seven churches draws only about 8,000 souls. And this is better than in most places.

At the recent Priests Convocation in Rochester, Father Dennis Shaw, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church — which is predominantly Hispanic — said to the nearly 200 priests and seminarians assembled: "Thousands of our Catholic Hispanics are leaving the church and joining the fundamentalist churches because we are not

caring for them with their own language and culture."

He asked the Priests' Personnel Board — when making assignments to parishes with a large Hispanic population — to insist that the priest learn the language and the culture. He also spoke of other minorities such as blacks and now importantly the Vietnamese, who should be cared for with fervor to keep them secure in the bosom of the church.

For years I have decried the neglect of evangelization of our black brothers and sisters, and the indifference toward integrating them into our parishes. Three parishes in Rochester — St. Monica's, Immaculate Conception, and St. Bridget's — have succeeded in the apostolate to the blacks.

The same need applies to the Vietnamese who have a strong Catholic group in Rochester. They meet on Christmas and Easter at Corpus Christi Church for Mass and confessions, which are conducted by a Vietnamese priest. But the Vietnamese group is not connected to the bishop's office. Given a generation, where will these Vietnamese be within the church in the United States?

I do not know the answers to these problems, but I wonder why the "makers and shakers" of our diocese don't get on the stick toward finding a resolution.

What will happen to the hitchhiker I picked up? Ideally, he might marry a strong Catholic girl and become confirmed in the practice of the faith. More likely, he will not. He and his children will be completely lost to the church.

We waste time in great discussions about evangelization. We need knuckles knocking on the doors of stray sheep to get them to come home.

Faith calls us to count on God day in and day out

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) John 14:1-12; (R1) Acts 6:1-7; (R2) 1 Peter 2:4-9.

Except for Shakespearean lovers, parting is not sweet sorrow. For the disciples of Jesus, His parting was a frightening, heartwrenching experience. So on the eve of His death, Jesus comforted them by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

As a remedy for their "heart trouble," He said, "Have faith in God and faith in me. Trust me! I'm going to prepare a place for you and you know the way."

Thomas, like an innocent child, blurted out, "Know the way? Why, Lord, we don't even know where you are going."

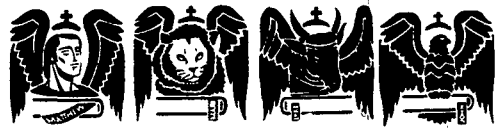
"I am the way," Jesus said, "the way to the Father who is life — for I am the truth!"

Then Philip, revealing how little he understood Jesus, cried out, "Show us the Father." A bit disappointed but ever patient and kind, Jesus — like a teacher reviewing a lesson for the fifth time — explained, "Whoever sees me, Philip, sees the Father ... believe me!"

The first reading, like the Gospel, is riddled with questions. The simple life of the early church is over. With growth comes the inevitable problems. The word "complained" grabs our attention.

There is discrimination in doling out charities. The Twelve, like good leaders, act immediately. They ask for "deeply spiritual and prudent men" who are both idealistic and practical. After seven are picked, they are prayed over and hands are imposed on them. Peace is restored and the faith spreads, even among many of the Levitical priests.

Peter tells us that faith is, and must be, in



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Jesus. "Come to the Lord" because the Lord is "a living stone," and we are called to be living stones. He is also the cornerstone; and so, unless we build our lives on Him, He will become, not a cornerstone, but a stumbling stone.

How happy we should be, Peter reflects, because God has chosen us to be His people. He has made us a royal priesthood because that is what baptism does. He has consecrated us by the christening with oil at baptism, commissioning us to be lights in a darkened world. All this to those who have faith in God and faith in Him.

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