

Short sermons keep people from becoming indifferent

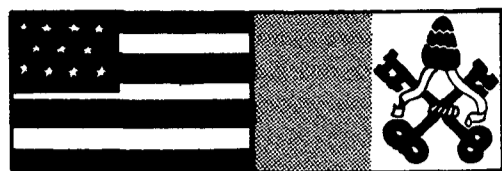
By Father Paul J. Cuddy
Courier columnist

Older people remember the 1920s as a time of active anti-Catholicism, with groups such as the Ku Klux Klan holding rousing meetings against those of our faith. There were also stories of phony religious who "escaped from the convent and would reveal all."

Cayuga County had its share of anti-Catholic sentiment. That is why a sermon given by the Rev. Ralph Walker to non-Catholics at Auburn's Central Church of Christ was a surprise. The sermon, which was published in the *Auburn Citizen* in 1926, was entitled, "The Meaning of the Roman Catholic Mass."

Last week this column provided excerpts of the sermon. Here are more clips from the column. After describing the reverence of the Catholic congregation before and during Mass, he continued: "I have seldom heard so short a sermon! It was simple and direct and dealt entirely with spiritual matters."

Comment: Since preaching is the center



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

of worship in non-liturgical churches, a short sermon would be rare. In the Liturgy of the Mass — which is essentially the commemoration of the Passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus — the homily is secondary. I have great sympathy for our people who are a captive audience with no opportunity to respond, and who often listen to clerics expound on subjects of their own fancy. Some listeners must react: "Well, that may be his idea but it is not Catholic teaching. He protrudes his ego instead of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Many times I have asked individuals, "If you had the pulpit, what would you preach about?" It surprises me that very few peo-

ple have any idea. This puzzles me because I am sure that as they listen to the words from the pulpit, they must react: "That's not what the church teaches," or "I wouldn't say it quite like that."

The first person who responded to my question was a firm feminist who promptly replied: "I would talk about why women should be ordained to the priesthood." I admired her because — while she is in contradiction to the Holy Father and the Catholic Church — at least she had some idea sizzling in her soul.

Recently I led a day of recollection for a group of Legionnaires of Mary in Rochester. After posing the same question, I received a unanimous reply: "I'd talk about the love of God." In addition, a devout woman from Canandaigua responded promptly, "I'd talk about prayer."

I'd like to ask those of you who read this, what would you preach about?

In 1938, Father Kress and I were assigned to Father William Byrne in Ithaca. He preached exactly seven minutes. His ser-

mons were well prepared and outlined so clearly that the listeners could give the substance of the sermon after Mass. Father Kress and I were told to never run over seven minutes. That was wise advice, which regretfully I have not always followed.

While the congregation rarely complains about sermons, they are often quite indifferent to them. They also frequently complain about the length. A typical complaint is: "Our priest is a good man, but he talks on and on. Why doesn't he give the message and stop? But no! He has a good landing place, but carries on and on!" I have often said: "Why don't you tell him so?" The response is: "Oh, I wouldn't want to hurt his feelings." If you wish, you could mark this paragraph and send it to the culprit.

The rest of the Rev. Walker's column reads: "Comes the communion. During all the solemn preparations for it at the altar, there are the bowed heads, the hush over everything, the atmosphere of devotion. It is an impressive scene, with its sincere spirit of worship."

"In the mystery of the Mass, the whole process of the redemption work of Christ is portrayed. The altar is at once the manger of Bethlehem, the scene of our Lord's ministry, Calvary's Mount, and the Mount of the Ascension. And the Catholic believer feels that by the miracle of transubstantiation, the wine and wafer of the communion become in very truth the blood and body of Christ. Christ is there, upon the altar, in the same room with you! No wonder the faithful bow and pray, and their hearts swell with devotion when they feel Him so near."

Comment: Have you ever heard a better presentation from a Catholic pulpit? I read the sermon aloud and it took just seven minutes to deliver. Anyone wishing a copy of the complete text, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to me at St. Alphonsus Church, 10 Lewis St., Auburn, N.Y., 13021.

Woman's persistence, faith touched Jesus' heart

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier Columnist

(R3) Matthew 15:21-27; (R1) Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; (R2) Romans 11:13-15, 29-32.

Sunday's gospel might be a puzzle to many. Aloofness, apparent unconcern for the needs of another and name-calling seem so out of character for the gentle and compassionate Jesus.

A woman came to Jesus. She was a Canaanite, the race most hated by the Jews of all the Gentiles. St. Mark called her a Syro-Phoenician — a lowlander from the fertile valleys and level coastal plains between Lebanon and the Mediterranean — in contrast to the Afro-Phoenician. He also called her a Greek. Greek referred not to her language, but to her religion. Paul divided the world into Jews and Greeks; God-fearing people and pagans. The woman was a pagan, who worshipped Baal and Astarte.

This despised Canaanite cried out to Jesus, but "He gave no word of response." A rare thing for Jesus. Why? In addition to wanting to teach His disciples a lesson, He sought to prepare them for their upcoming missionary work. At this time, His disciples were still imbued with all the prejudices of their race toward the Gentiles. Thus, they entreated Him, "get rid of her." There was no pity and no concern for her problem. They were men of their race and times.

They wrongly believed that Jesus' mission was only to their people. Jesus simply echoed their thoughts: "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." After the woman surmised what Jesus was doing, she insisted, "Help me, Lord." Once again, Jesus expressed their minds when He said, "It is not right to take the food of sons and daughters and throw it to the dogs."

The mother understood, but she pleaded,



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

"Even the dogs eat the leavings that fall from the masters' tables." Her persistence paid off and she won. The heart of Jesus was touched. "Great is your faith, woman," He exclaimed.

In this dramatic scene, Jesus was saying to His disciples, "God has come to save all peoples, not just the house of Israel, but even the Gentiles, whom you call 'dogs.'" Isaiah had foretold the same thing when he said, "The foreigners who love the name of the Lord ... I will bring to my holy mountain" (R1). But none of Jesus' contemporaries, not even His disciples, had grasped the meaning of the prophet. Very likely, Jesus had made this 50-mile tour out of the Holy Land precisely to teach this lesson which turned out to be most important for His disciples' evangelization of the world.

Two things stand out about this Canaanite woman:

First, she knew how to pray. Her prayer was an expression of great faith in Jesus. She believed Him to be "Lord, Son of David." She believed His power was so great that to drive out a demon would be for Him, but a crumb on His table.

Her prayer was persevering. She persisted in her petition. Few things are reached by a single effort. Many strokes of

the brush are needed to produce the painting. Many blows of the hammer and chisel are needed to sculpt the statue. Therefore, consistently praying strengthens faith. Delays are not denials. They are only occasions to exercise the soul and make it fit for God's answer.

Secondly, she was the most humble person. When she was called a "dog," she did not argue and say, "I'm a human being, no dog, even a lap dog." At night glowworms shine like sparks of fire and rotten touchwood glistens like molten gold. Yet, in the daylight, the glowworm is a miserable insect and the touchwood nothing but decayed wood.

This woman sensed she was in the presence of the Light of the Word before whom we are all nothing. She knew her nothingness. It is hard to give alms to a rich person. "The rich he sends away empty." But Jesus loves the humility that knows its own poverty, that is why He sent her away rich.

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