

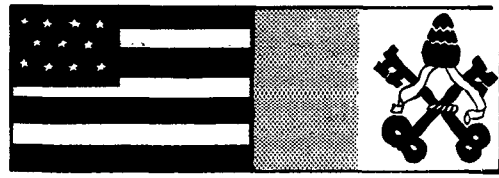
# Writing military personnel is a corporal work of mercy

By Father Paul Cuddy  
Courier columnist

As Christmas approached in 1944, the 409th Bombardment Group — the unit of which I was the Catholic chaplain — was in a panic. We were stationed near Paris. Dressed in U.S. military uniforms, German spies were infiltrating our vicinity.

In addition to speaking impeccable English, they were very knowledgeable about the United States, including baseball teams. The war was going badly.

Consequently, all mail was held up at landing docks for nearly a month. No mail meant low morale. In addition to increasing the loneliness of our men, no mail from home increased the longing for spiritual contact with loved ones.



## ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Toward the end of the month, the mail clerk at headquarters came into my office smiling. He said, "Chaplain, you are the only one in the whole squadron who got any mail." He handed me a printed card which read: "It is four years since your last eye examination. We suggest that you come in and have a new examination." The card was signed: "Waldert's Optical

Company, Rochester, N.Y."

I was delighted by the invitation's humor to pop into Waldert's at my earliest convenience. Nonetheless, I was pleased to have the card from home.

This funny recollection came to mind recently when I read the Sunday bulletin at St. John the Evangelist Church in Clyde. The bulletin stated: "One of our St. John's parishioners is serving in Saudi Arabia and would welcome letters from home." His name is John Spino, whose parents and grandparents I knew as strong Catholics in Clyde.

Letters to those in the military service really come under the corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, visit the sick, shelter the homeless.

Our men and women away from home are always hungry for news, and the love and concern contained in a letter or package. While our men and women have shelter in tents and such, it is hard for us to appreciate the appalling heat in the Middle East.

Probably worst of all is the certain ennui which pervades the spirits of these men and women in a land so different from theirs: no alcoholic beverages, no churches, limited recreation, dreadful heat, and no casual calls to friends and relatives among other things.

The November edition of *30 Days* contains an informative article about Saudi Arabia and the other Muslim countries. I have friends in the civilian sector of Saudi Arabia who told me of the problems they had practicing the Christian religion amid a suppressive Saudi government. I wondered if this applied to our 220,000 U.S. military men and women.

So I phoned the Military Ordinariate at Silver Springs, Md., and spoke with a Father McCormack. I asked him: "Are our military people able to practice the faith in Saudi Arabia?"

He said, "Whatever the practices among the Muslim-Saudi population, our armed forces have religious services and can receive religious articles and books and magazines. 100,000 Bibles have been sent. And mail to servicemen goes to the postal offices of the military units."

So I have written a letter to John Spino, and included a few of the "Treasury of Prayers" booklets. One of the booklets is for him and the others he can give away.

He will be pleased that he is still thought of over here. He will also have a prayer book for his own spiritual life. In addition, he will be an evangelist as he gives the other booklets to other soldiers in his unit.

This is a reminder for those who read this column to send a letter or package to our men and women in the military. It is a great charity.

# Wisdom means preparing for the end of one's life

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Matthew 25:1-13; (R1) Wisdom 6:12-16; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

Wisdom is the theme of the Sunday readings. "Be wise," it says in the first reading. The Gospel tells what happened to five people who were not wise — the five foolish virgins.

In the Gospel parable, Our Lord used the image of a wedding feast. He is the bridegroom, who comes at the end of the world. Heaven is the wedding feast; and we are the wise or foolish virgins.

A foolish person is one who puts off being ready to the last moment. He is foolish because there are certain things that cannot be put off. That was the moral of Aesop's fable with the ant and the grasshopper. The grasshopper hopped the summer away while the ant worked. When winter came the grasshopper paid the price of his folly. Everyone knows what will happen to a student who puts off studying till the night of his exams. It is too late to wait till death to change one's life. St. Bernard said there was a good thief to teach us never to



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

despair, but only one such conversion to teach us never to presume on a like grace.

I like to watch the pro football game on Monday night. When a player gets hurt, a reserve is sent in to replace him immediately. I have often thought about those substitute players. They do not wait till they are called into the game to get ready for playing a position. Reserves train long before the game so that they can take the place of an injured player at a moment's notice. Even though many games may come and go before a substitute gets a chance to play, he is always ready to play.

Years ago, I remember listening to "Rigoletto" on the radio one Sunday afternoon. The leading baritone was stricken during the opera. Lawrence Tibbett was also listening. When he heard what had happened, he hailed a taxi, sped to the Metropolitan Opera House, and within 15 minutes he was filling in for the stricken actor.

If athletes or actors have understudies — people so prepared that they are able at a moment's notice to come in as a substitute — how much more should we be ready for the greatest moment of life: when the bridegroom comes!

The following point in the parable used to bother me: the wise virgins didn't seem so Christian, for why didn't they share

their oil? Well, in the parable, the wise virgins did not say, "We will not share our oil;" rather they said, "We cannot!"

There are certain things in life one cannot give to others, that is certain things one cannot borrow. For instance, we cannot borrow someone else's mind or someone else's faith. When we were young, we had parents to fall back on. Often they were our safeguard and our strength. But there comes a time in everyone's life, when one has to stand on his own two feet. When one has to face life alone. When one has to face God — alone! The good works of others will not avail us then.

What kind of a spiritual life are we building up now? Will we be able to stand up to trial, temptation, to the final judgment?

Are we letting golden opportunities slip by us now? Are we being fools? Or are we being wise: preparing ourselves for the final judgment?

Dear Lord, "Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps. 90).

## Diocese receives thanks

In a letter to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Father William J. Byron, SJ, president of The Catholic University of America, thanked the people of the Diocese of Rochester for their contribution of \$22,952.67 to the university's recent collection. The collection is taken up annually in the parishes of all U.S. dioceses.

"Your people have many claims on their generosity," Father Byron wrote in his letter to the bishop. "I am deeply grateful not only for their donations but also for the encouragement their support brings to all of us here at CUA."

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**My friend's baby died.  
How can I help?**

Infants are very important to their parents. The hopes that are built during pregnancy, the excitement at birth and the thrill of getting to know the infant are dashed when the baby's life ends. Parents ought to be allowed to grieve and express their feelings. If possible, an opportunity to talk with other parents who have also lost young children can be most helpful. It is usually not helpful to suggest that there is another angel in heaven or that the parents' grief will be eased by simply having another child. Visit the family often and allow them to tell you of their loss and what the infant meant to them. Please call us for referrals to local support groups.

We purchase all forms of insurance to protect our family & assets not because we expect the worst to happen, but to be prepared. Doesn't it make sense then to prepare for what will happen. Let our trained counselors assist you with the many options available in planning for a worry-free future.

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