

Priesthood is sacred, but priests must act 'human'

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The Edward Boyle Center is a high-rise residence for senior citizens in Auburn. Wonderfully managed, the facility provides constant care for the elderly — including weekly blood-pressure checks.

Dr. Maher, my medical doctor who often prescribes a rosary along with pills, recently changed my blood pressure medication and told me to have a weekly blood test.

Since the center provides free blood tests each week, I recently decided to get the test there and stay for dinner because many of my peers live at the facility. Now, you cannot just walk into the dining room and say, "Here I am." One must phone to make a reservation — like I did — before 10 a.m.

Although I got the day wrong — Tuesday instead of Wednesday — I stayed for my reserved dinner. The meal that night happened to be the Thanksgiving special. I was assigned to sit at a table with three interesting ladies. I had a hilarious time.

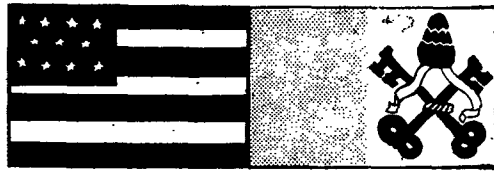
Since the center is located near St. Mary's Church and yours truly is a cleric, we began talking about the personalities of certain priests. One of the women said: "We love Father Pat Sullivan, St. Mary's assistant. He's so human."

Referring to him as "human" petrified me because the term is often used to excuse one's faults. It is often said, "To err is human."

All of a sudden I thought to myself, "Good heavens! What has ever happened to Father Pat. Is he ogling the girls? Has he taken to drink? Is he twisting the Liturgy of the Mass to satisfy his ego? Is he not paying his bills? Has he become a problem to Father Zimmer, his pastor? What?"

With these many possibilities I asked: "What do you mean, 'human'?" She replied: "Oh, he's so friendly and cheerful. You feel at ease with him." I said, "Why, don't you find that true of most priests?" She replied, "No, I don't. Some think they are God."

This remark got me thinking. Years ago pastors were considered very special people, but some did rule their parishes with



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

iron authority. Their word was law and few had the skill or the power to circumvent it. But these men were few. Most served their people conscientiously as good shepherds should.

But times have changed. Priests today are no longer regarded as very special. I once asked an African priest: "Do your people back in Kenya regard the priest as

someone special?" He replied: "No, each priest has to prove himself on his own merits."

This now applies here. And priesthood does not change human nature, which, thanks to Adam, suffers from the seven capital sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony and sloth.

I was a seminarian of theology about 60 years ago. At that time I read the biography of some English minor poet whose name I have forgotten. He was a convinced convert to the church, strong in the faith. He lived on an island where there was only one priest and one parish.

One day, he had a huge disagreement with the priest, and from that time on — al-

though he attended Mass faithfully — he held a strong dislike for all priests. Nonetheless, he held the priesthood in great reverence.

I have often marveled at the number of people who have suffered hurt or injustice from various "leather-headed" priests — who may have not thought they were God but did think they were the "last word" like our English poet — but nevertheless remained faithful to the church and held the priesthood in high honor.

These people made the same distinction that our poet made between the human weaknesses of priests and the sacredness of the priesthood and of the church. We should be grateful for the fine priests we do have.

Greatest road of all is one that leads to the heart

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Mark 1:1-8; (R1) Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; (R2) 2 Peter 3:8-14.

What was the greatest road-building project of all time? Was it the Appian Way? The Romans built sturdy roads that crisscrossed their vast empire and they said, "All roads lead to Rome."

Maybe it was the Cumberland Road which brought early 19th-century pioneers to the West (which at that time was Ohio). Or was it the Oregon Trail that opened up the far West from the north? Then again, maybe it was the Santa Fe Trail that opened it up from the south?

Or maybe it was the Burma Road that wound through steamy jungles to bring military supplies to our allies in China?

The answer is none of these. The greatest road-building project of all time was the one John the Baptist was building: a road for the long-awaited Messiah into the hearts of all people. John, who was God's wild-eyed and plain-talking taskmaster for this project, tried to recruit everybody: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

John borrowed his message from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah (540 B.C.) comforted God's people who were languishing in the Babylonian captivity by describing their imminent return from exile. He com-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

pared their flight from Babylon to the exodus of their fathers from Egypt, when God led his people through the sea and across desert wastes.

Now, as the end of the exile from Babylon neared, Isaiah showed that God was inaugurating a new and a greater exodus. No blood would be shed and God would again march out at the head of his ransomed people and lead them home to their own land.

Even the harsh desert of Arabia would not stand in God's way. In fact, nothing would except the people's hardness of heart. Human beings, then as now, liked to place in God's way such obstacles as infidelity, disbelief and apathy.

Six hundred years after Isaiah, John the Baptist preached a similar message of coming salvation, a new exodus, whereby the Messiah would lead, not just the Hebrews, but all mankind from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God, from death to life, from error to truth.

But again the hearts of the people have to be renewed by repentance — a change of lifestyle. Just as the people of the ancient

world leveled and smoothed the roads for a visiting king or queen, so the Lord's people needed to make straight in the desert of their hardened hearts a highway for their God.

We don't need shovels or bulldozers or graders for this road-building. We need Christ's love to fill the valleys of our shallowness. We need his humility to level the mountains of our pride and smugness. We need God's grace of repentance and renewal if we are to put our entire selves into the greatest road-building project of all time.

The work won't be completed overnight, but there's no better time to start than now. John the Baptist still calls us to remove the obstacles that our sinfulness places in the way of God's entry into our hearts.

We do not need to go off to the desert to do this. Our own families, offices and factories are good places for making ready the way of the Lord. There's no better place than those places, and there is no better time to start than now.

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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



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Can drugs be used to manage grief?

Grief is best managed by talking about it and expressing our feelings to those we trust. Drugs, including alcohol, limit our ability to face grief openly and serve only the non-productive goal of hiding or masking our feelings. There is no question that feelings of grief are painful and will often be difficult to face. Instead of drugs find good friends who will listen and support you as you express your feelings of grief. If you have been taking drugs and you feel you cannot go on without them, see your physician, or a mental health worker who knows about grief. If you find yourself drinking more than usual or suffering severe stress seek help from professionals.

We purchase all forms of insurance for your 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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