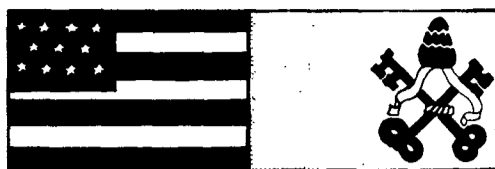


World is full of positive signs waiting for all to see

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

Someone from the *Catholic Courier* phoned, saying: "The theme of our holiday edition is hope. Would you incorporate that into your column?"

Webster defines hope as "a desire accompanied by the expectation of fulfillment." At my evening prayers, I like to say the Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity. The Act of Hope is: "Oh, my God, relying on your infinite goodness and promises I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of your grace, and life everlasting through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

and my Redeemer."

This expresses utter trust in redemption through Christ, not through my own deeds. My sins are confessed. The need of God's grace is professed. The hope of heaven is expressed with a confidence derived from

our faith.

But this is a theological concept, whereas I think the *Courier* staff intends rather to boost up our spirits. We become dejected by much of what we read, see and hear.

First of all, an objective view both of church and state requires an honest assessment of facts not just desires. Secondly, there needs to be the acknowledgement of the tendency towards evil, which is in every person thanks to original sin. It requires an equal recognition of our free will, and our ability for great goodness within our hearts, and the hearts and lives of others.

The newspapers, TV and radio tell us about dreadful sins committed by people around the world.

While many bad things are happening, many good things are visible around us such as: good families; faithful spouses; generous single people; exuberant youngsters; coping bishops, apostolic priests, brothers and sisters; volunteers; and civic workers who keep the wheels of service moving despite our complaints.

We also see groups that strengthen and expand the church: religious schools; Cur-sillo; charismatic groups; the Legion of Mary; Marriage Encounter; Legionnaires of Christ; prayer groups; and an increasing return to popular devotion as well as an active participation in the liturgy.

We also have *Ignatius Press*, which has been giving us the Catholic classics in print for years. The scholarly Father Thomas Erdle introduced me to "The Rock" and "Catholic Answers" after his recent trip to China with 140 other American priests.

"The Catholic Answer" is an organization of lay groups, which explains and defends the faith through print, seminars, public debates, apologetics and evangelization. The organization has brought many strayed Catholics back to the church. Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) reaches some 15,000,000 each day. We could multiply the number of things that are positive and bode well for the future.

"Two men gazed out from behind prison bars. One saw mud; the other saw the stars." Life is never all star dust nor all mud, but a combination of both. We may not be able to change the whole world, but we are able — by God's grace — to bring hope and courage within our own little sphere by our personal response to Our Lord's invitation: "Come, follow Me."

God's love provides hope even amid suffering

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 2:22-40; (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

A misprint in a church bulletin read, "I Hear the Bells on Christmas Day." Yes, there are bells on Christmas Day, but for some of us the bells will be turning to Christmas bills soon after the holidays.

Mary and Joseph got back to the real world soon after Christmas. They could not linger forever with the shepherds and the angels in Bethlehem.

Unfortunately, it was a stark and cruel world to which they had to return. It was a world in which a cruel tyrant could put to death all the babies in a region on the word of some astrologers.

A man named Simeon prophesied what lay ahead after Christmas for the Child born on Christmas. Just and pious, Simeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, came to the temple in time to meet Joseph and Mary.

Simeon took the Child, blessed God, then blessed Joseph and Mary. He finally said to Mary, "This child is destined for the downfall and rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed and you yourself shall be pierced with a sword."

Holman Hunt had a picture in the Guggenheim Museum in New York City called "The Shadow of Death." It is the only known picture of Jesus laboring as an adult in the carpenter's shop.

The picture shows Jesus at the end of a



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

day's work. He rises from his bench, stretches in relaxation and the shadow of his body and upraised arms falls on the wall and we see prefigured the form of one to die on the cross.

In the background of the picture, Mary was kneeling besides a chest, containing the gifts of the Magi. She sees the shadow of the cross on the back of the wall. Her heart is pierced, but from that day forth, the shadow is ever before her. Simeon knew what lay ahead and so did Mary.

As wonderful as Christmas is, it is only a small part of a much bigger drama: the drama of redemption. Simeon saw this and said: "My eyes have witnessed your saving deed..." Anna, the prophetess, also saw it: "She gave thanks to God and talked about the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem."

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