

Convocation provides opportunity for visit to Geneva

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

Catholics are divided over the wisdom of gathering diocesan priests for a convocation, such as the one held recently in Corning. Some consider the convocation a valuable way to update ecclesiology and also a precious opportunity for priests who rarely meet during the year.

Others view the convocation as a diminution of the Mass and the priesthood, noting that it leaves many parishes without priests for Masses, visits to the sick, emergencies and funerals.

The highly organized Monsignor Gerard C. Krieg, pastor of St. Stephen's Church in Geneva, knew his parish would be without a priest during the convocation held April 8-10, so he asked me to stand in for him. Responsibilities included morning and



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

noon Masses, the funeral of a most faithful parishioner, a novena service and any emergency calls that came up.

St. Stephen's Church was a haven for me during my Sampson College chaplaincy from 1946-1949. I served under Monsignor William McPadden and Father Ray Nolan in my early days, before serving under Father James Lane, a beloved classmate. Upon my arrival at noon on April 8, Bella Hastings, the housekeeper,

welcomed me with the enthusiasm worthy of the bishop's coming.

As she settled me in the guest room, she expressed many fine observations. The best she told me was this: "I have liked every priest I have ever known, but I've liked some better than others." Isn't that worthy to be engraved in granite?

When Monsignor Krieg came in from confessions, I once again received a fine welcome and he introduced me to staff members, beginning with Judith Kiehl, pastoral assistant. She is a former Latin teacher at St. Agnes High School in Rochester, and a graduate of St. Bernard's Institute.

With each of Monsignor Krieg's introductions came the declaration "the finest pastoral assistant in the diocese" or "the finest assistant priest in the diocese." Ev-

eryone I met was several notches above the ordinary mortal.

Amused by the superlatives, I asked, "And does that include the pastor?" He smiled modestly and said, "Well, no. I would not go that far." Many of his parishioners would, however.

Noting the devotion of the people at the daily Masses, I thought, "If it would seem a diminution to deprive 200 people of daily Mass in Geneva, what of the whole diocese?"

Across the street from the Catholic school is the "Ave Maria Shop," which has a good selection of religious goods. Sis Morgan of Waterloo runs the shop. I arranged with her to set up a table in the vestibule, offering a selection of 21 Sheen cassettes.

One of the tapes was about the devil, a popular topic since the recent "20/20" program showing an alleged exorcism in Florida. The cassette entitled "Youth and Sex" is also in demand. Making available tapes such as these is part of evangelization.

For many years I have heard good reports about DeSales High School and its principal, Edward Tracey, so I phoned to meet him. The DeSales principal has an enthusiastic personality and a strong devotion to Catholic education and his students. A number of DeSales students come from neighboring towns and villages.

My meeting with Tracey ended around noon. So I shuffled off to the lunch room and talked with many students. I came away impressed by the students' vigor, camaraderie and goodness.

My two days in Geneva were both enjoyable. I have much praise for the Catholicity of Geneva as well as for Monsignor Krieg and his staff.

Oh, and by the way, reports of the priest convocation have all been favorable.

Salvation can be found through union with God

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) John 15:1-8; (R1) Acts 9:26-31; (R2) 1 John 3:18-24.

Life is made up of relationships. To express the deep intimate relationships of love, the language of prose does not suffice. We need the imaginative, romantic language of poetry.

We need figurative language, such as the picturesque metaphor or simile. For instance, the similes "some homes are as lonely as a merry-go-round without children" or "he was as nervous as a mailman at a dog show" convey strong images.

Our Lord often used figurative language. He often used familiar images because his listeners were shepherds or farmers. Last Sunday, for example, he referred to himself as "the good shepherd. This Sunday, he calls himself "the true vine."

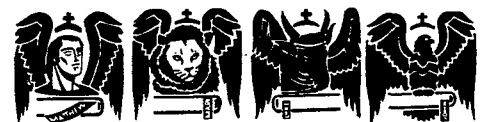
Adjectives are the key words in Our Lord's expressions. When he proclaims, "I am the good shepherd" — the key word is "good." Likewise, when he says, "I am the true vine" — the key word is "true."

Israel was the vine of God. In fact a golden vine with grapes was embossed on the temple door, symbolizing Israel's clinging to her God. The prophets referred to Israel as the Lord's vineyard. When they berated her, it was because she was producing no fruit.

In proclaiming that he was the true vine, Jesus was implying that Israel had not been a true vine. Therefore, clinging to Israel was not enough. Judaism would no longer save people: salvation will be found only in union with himself.

So Jesus said, "You cannot bear fruit apart from me." He didn't say "not without me," but "apart from me." For God is always with us, but we can cut ourselves off from him. To do so would render our lives as sterile as a branch separated from the vine.

Jesus added, "Apart from me you can do nothing." It is not a question of wanting, but of capability. We can't do anything apart from him. "You can do nothing," he said, not "you will do little."



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Hence seven times Jesus advises us to live on in him, live in him, stay part of him. And how does one do this?

Grapevines need trellises or supports. We need orderly habits — such as discipline in our spiritual life — if we want to grow. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once noted that discipline doesn't exist anywhere in the United States — except in football. We need a daily regimen that should include morning and night prayers, the daily rosary, Bible reading and reflection, and the fruit of the vine such as frequent Mass, Holy Communion and confession.

Grapevines also need pruning. Dead branches, shoots and suckers have to be cut away and burned because wood from the vine isn't good for anything but firewood. Live branches, on the contrary, are trimmed to make them more fruitful. The pruning knife is in God's hand: the pruning is affliction.

During pleasure, God whispers to us, but in affliction, he uses a megaphone. Sweet are the uses of adversity. Or to change the metaphor a little bit: affliction is the plowing of the soul needed to ready it for the seed of God's word and inspirations.

Still, we must not forget that afflictions are only a small part of life. The grapevine gets more sunshine than showers.

Finally, the grapevine is a perfect plant. The vine has no thorns, harms nothing to which it clings, offers shade and edible leaves, and produces the wine that delights the heart of man.

Similarly, like the vine, we should never harm people, especially through our words. Nor should we ever be a thorn in the side of others, but rather a refuge to the lonely and needy.

Then, like the grape, we should radiate joy because the grape gives wine and the wine gives joy, especially when it is changed into the body and blood of Christ.

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