

Refugees ardently follow the Catholic faith

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The June 15 Syracuse *Post-Standard* ran an article about how Vietnamese refugees are adapting to religion in that city. Reporting how the Catholic refugees ardently continue to practice the faith, the article stated that Syracuse's St. John the Evangelist Church serves as the center for Catholic refugees.

Bishop Joseph T. O'Keefe has appointed Father Thomas Fitzpatrick as director of the Asian apostolate for the Syracuse diocese. The priest celebrates a Vietnamese Mass each Sunday. Father Fitzpatrick and Sister Judy Howland see to the needs of the approximately 400 Vietnamese refugees who attend Sunday Mass. A Vietnamese priest is expected to arrive in July.

My own interest and concern for Vietnamese Catholics began at Holy Trinity Church in Webster about 12 years ago. An interfaith group in Webster sponsored a Vietnamese family. The United Methodist Church furnished a large house for them, located next to the church.

On the first Sunday after the refugees' arrival in Webster, I beheld a vision. I saw

a tiny Vietnamese father — he was only about five feet tall — and an even tinier mother with their nine children sitting in the third pew in the west wing of our church.

Although they knew just a little English, they sat in the third pew Sunday after Sunday, sharing in the Mass with fellow Catholics. They didn't have the privilege to attend Mass under the communist regime.

Father John L. O'Connor, Holy Trinity's assistant pastor at the time, kept in contact with the family. When he left for Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Rochester, I continued keeping the bond of faith and friendship vibrant. The cold north was hard on them so they moved to Anaheim, Calif., a few years later.

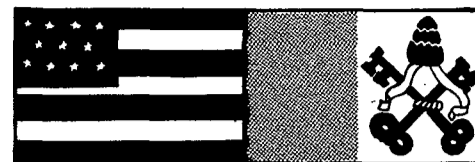
I heard how they were doing from a letter the daughter wrote me about four years ago. She wrote that Anaheim has a Vietnamese population of more than 70,000 people, with churches, schools, cinemas, stores and such to serve these important people. Several family members were working, according to the letter. Some were in school, and she herself was a sophomore in college.

About six years ago, six Vietnamese youths — ranging from 16 to 23 in age — came to Webster under the auspices of the Rochester Catholic Charities. Two were brothers, while the other four unrelated refugees had also escaped from Vietnam. One of the boys lost his whole family as they tried to escape by boat.

I learned of the boys when they came to Sunday Mass their first week in Webster. They continued to attend Mass faithfully. I remember when I went to visit them that I was impressed as the eldest brother told me: "We do not want charity. We intend to support ourselves." And they did.

Rochester boasts a Vietnamese Catholic Community of about 400 to 500 souls. Their elected chairman, Thant Nguyen, and four other officers try to keep the refugees together.

They gather at Corpus Christi Church each Christmas and Easter for Vietnamese Masses celebrated by a New York priest. Due to my interest in the refugees, I have been invited to the Masses. During these celebrations, the priest hears many confessions; worshippers recite the rosary and Stations of the Cross; the fine choir and the



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

congregation sing Vietnamese hymns; and members of the community elect new officers.

After the Vietnamese Mass, worshippers gather for a social hour in the church hall. How concerned is the diocese about these important people? Last year the diocese hired Ha Nguyen — whose father in East Rochester once served as chairman for the community — as coordinator for ministry among Vietnamese.

I'd also like to mention that the priest — above all priests — who has long helped the Asians, Catholics and Buddhists is Father Frances H. Vogt, pastor emeritus of St. Anne's Church in Palmyra.

Sacramentals raise faithful's hearts and minds to God

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 5:21-43; (R1) Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; (R2) 2 Corinthians 8:7,9,13-15.

Have you ever heard the joke about the baby Jesus? One day he was crying as he wandered around in heaven. When St. Joseph asked him why he was so sad, the baby Jesus replied, "Mommie's never home anymore."

During the 19th and 20th centuries, apparitions of Our Lady have been reported in many places. The Blessed Mother has reportedly been seen in such places as Paris, La Salette, Lourdes, Portmain, Fatima, and Medjugorje.

Apparitions are homilies from heaven. They recall forgotten truths. One such forgotten truth is the use of sacramentals. Thus, in every apparition Mary has been urging their use: the miraculous medal, the rosary, the scapular, her pilgrim stature.

Here is what she has reportedly said at Medjugorje:

"Dear children, today I invite you to put more blessed objects in your home, and may every person carry blessed objects on himself. Let everything be blessed. Then, because you are armored against Satan, he will tempt you less" (7/18/85).

The following is a short quiz:

1. What other word is the word "sacramental" like?
2. Name another word for sacrament and sacramental.
3. Who gave us the sacraments?
4. Who gave us the sacramentals?
5. What do both sacraments and sacramentals give?
6. How do both sacraments and sacramentals produce their effects?

Answers: 1. Sacrament. 2. Sign. 3.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Jesus. 4. The Catholic Church. 5. Grace. 6. Sunday's Gospel.

Sunday's Gospel describes two miracles: one tells of a woman with a hemorrhage for 12 years; the other deals with a dead girl of 12. How were each cured?

The woman with the hemorrhage was cured by her faith. "If I touch his clothing, I'll get well," she said. The dead girl was cured by the action of Jesus when he took her hand and said, "Talitha, koum" ("Little girl, get up!").

The woman's cure symbolizes the sacramentals, signs instituted by the church. The sacramentals produce grace because of the prayers of the church and the faith of the recipients (Canon 1166). The woman's faith in Jesus — her action of touching him — obtained what she wanted.

The raising of Jairus' dead daughter

symbolizes the sacraments. In this instance, Jesus did these things because of the father's faith. In the sacraments, Jesus acts directly; in the sacramentals, he acts indirectly.

Why does God want us to use sacramentals? The following is an example of some reasons why:

- To crush the pride of Satan. It is beneath the dignity of God to take Satan on directly. He chooses weak things to confound the proud. Imagine mighty Lucifer being curbed by such small and paltry things as water; a cloth scapular; not chains but a string of beads. Even these things show clearly that their power derives from God.
- To afford us the opportunity to make an act of faith in God — the belief that God can do a lot with a little. We might call this the "Naaman syndrome."
- To communicate with us in the human

way. We communicate by signs and symbols. We need rites and rituals because we are not angels or pure spirits.

• Lastly, to bring our everyday life into contact with the invisible world. Statues, images, and pictures have suggestive power. The symbol leads to the symbolized. That is why those who attack religion, such as the French revolutionaries, smashed statues. They wanted to get rid of all reminders of God.

Our Lady has reportedly said to Father Gobbi: "Each of my statues ... reminds you of your heavenly Mother ... How deeply saddened I am to be ousted from the churches; ... placed outside, in a corridor, like some trinket; or put in the back of the church, so that none of my children can venerate me" (1/24/84).

Sacramentals, such as prayer, raise our hearts and minds to God. They are never adored; they teach us whom to adore.

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