

Army friend offers a few thoughts on priests

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

Henry X was a G.I. friend at Biggs Air Force Base in El Paso, Texas, during my last year in the service (1955-56). I have not seen him since 1958, when he stopped to visit me while he was en route to his home in California.

I had hoped he would become a priest, but he married and fathered five children. We have carried on an occasional correspondence for more than 30 years. His letters are like a dialogue, and he frequently expands philosophically.

Recently I wrote to him: "I am curious about your thinking about priests, their friendliness or lack of it."

In July he replied, and I confess he leaves me puzzled.

Henry X: "You asked about my perception of priests' interest in people or their friendliness. I believe many priests are naturally inclined to personal isolation."

Comment: Priests are a cross section of many personalities. My own observation is that they measure about the same as most professional men. Some priests are gregarious and outgoing. Some, especially the studious, tend to be disinclined to mix greatly with others — priests or laity. But most enjoy the company of others, with no

sense of personal isolation. I have known a few who have isolated themselves, but most have the very human need of association with people and need a few special friends.

Henry X: "I think they have real reason to avoid 'intimacy' with others, especially lay-folk, or even other 'religious.' This can be perceived as a lack of authentic friendliness, and may well be!"

Comment: This puzzles me. Probably from the word "intimacy," which means "a close association, or marked by a warm friendship." Ecclesiastes records: "A faithful friend is a strong defense and he who has found one has found a treasure."

Few people have many intimate friends with whom they are willing to share their thoughts and hopes, their fears, and ambitions and weaknesses with real candor. Most people, including priests, have many with whom they are on cordial terms: people at their work places, recreations, societies and such, and they share with them common interests and concerns and enthusiasms. But inmost thoughts are rarely revealed in the market place.

Henry X: "People, when they seek closeness, want priests to be something that is incompatible with their traditional station."

Comment: What does that mean? Does



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this have a Freudian overtone? Perhaps. But priests by virtue of their vow of celibacy must be sensitive to any intimacy, which can lead to troubled waters.

However, this is equally true of married people who are vowed to fidelity until death. Married men and women associate with many people, some of whom may be dangerously attractive and even seductive. Neither the celibate nor the married may jeopardize the jewel of fidelity, which is a special gift to the Lord God.

What is a priest's "traditional station?" By ordination his station should be one of complete dedication to God and the church, ordained to lead the liturgy, to teach and to give the sacraments, to care for the flock entrusted to him. It is a sublime vocation of service to God and to His people. If by "closeness" Henry means an

untoward "palsy-walsy-ness," incompatible with the priesthood, then we are in agreement. But I think the usual friendships that exist between priest and people is simply the charity of Christ of which St. Paul writes so clearly in 1 Corinthians XIII.

Henry X: "Younger priests, who are invested into 'the Priesthood of Believers School' risk confusing their priestly identification."

Comment: I suppose that's a reference to St. Peter's declaration that all the baptized formed "a priestly people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart" (1 Peter 2:9). I have never heard any priest, young or old, who would equate the Petrine concept of the priesthood of the baptized with the priesthood from the Sacrament of Holy Orders, though I have heard progressive lay people expound of this falsity. It certainly is at odds with the 1964 Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, from Vatican II.

Henry X: "As long as celibacy is a prerequisite, people who are inclined to solitude will be drawn to the priesthood. Estimate your current peers if they were all required to be married."

Comment: As my friend Father Robert Kress used to say when some prodigious concept was proposed: *Wow!*

Abraham answers God's call to journey to a new land

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"I've heard talk in the village this morning," Sara said to her husband as she entered the room.

"Talk?" Abraham asked blankly. He'd been distant ever since his father, Terah, had died.

"I'm sorry about your father," Sara began. "But it's time to think about the living. Now that Terah is gone, a new chieftain will be needed for our tribe. You are Terah's eldest. There was talk about you being asked to be his successor!"

The news brought little reaction from Abraham. But this didn't subdue Sara's enthusiasm. "Do you know what this could mean for us?" she asked eagerly. Not bothering to wait for Abraham to answer,

Mercy Prayer Center set to celebrate fifth birthday

ROCHESTER — The Mercy Prayer Center, 65 Highland Ave., will celebrate its fifth anniversary by sponsoring a Cabaret Night at the Plantation Party House with Phyllis Contestable and Alan Jones on Friday, Sept. 27.

Contestable originated the role of Mother Superior in the Downstairs Cabaret production of *Nunsense*, which had a two-year run in Rochester. Jones is a high school music coordinator specializing in choral music.

The cost is \$25 per person for the 7 p.m. buffet supper and show.



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she continued, "A bigger house, more livestock, more servants — isn't that exciting?"

"Sara, I've been listening to talk, too," Abraham finally said.

"I've seen no one come to the house," Sara remarked with a puzzled look.

"You know, Sara, Haran is not really a very good place to live," he continued.

"Not a good place to live? We've had a wonderful life here. I've never wanted for anything." Her face suddenly became very downcast. "Is this about my not being able to give you a child?"

"No, not at all, Sara," Abraham said. "The people in Haran have no regard for God at all. They prefer to worship their moon gods."

"So what are we to do?" she asked. Abraham smiled. It was the first time Sara had seen her husband look happy for

weeks. "God has made a wonderful offer to me. He has promised to give us a whole new land. And Sara, the best part is that I am going to have many descendants."

"You mean?"

"Yes."

"It's almost too good to be true," Sara replied, "especially now that we are so old."

"We are both going to have to trust God every step of the way with something called faith," Abraham reassured her. "It's not going to be easy."

"How shall we live while we travel? How will we know when we get there? And how can you be so sure of this?" Sara asked.

"So many questions!" Abraham chuckled. "There's really only one thing needed here, Sara. Just have enough faith to take one step at a time. The whole journey won't seem so frightening if we take it day by day."

All of their neighbors and relatives thought them crazy when they left the next day. They were going to cross the desert and travel each day until they reached a water source. They would also have to camp out in a tent. This would be a difficult thing for a young man. And Abraham was 75 years old. In the end, Lot, his

nephew came with them.

It was a difficult journey. And some days, even Abraham wondered if he could muster up enough faith to keep going. When he was really worried, he never let on to Sara. He just kept talking to God.

And one day, they came at last to Shechem, land of the Canaanites. Abraham had an odd feeling about this place. That night, they camped by a great tree and God spoke to Abraham in a dream and repeated the promise he had made to him before they had left Haran:

"To your offspring I will give this land. For I am going to make you into a great nation."

First thing the next morning, as a sign of his faith, Abraham built an altar on that spot to the Lord. And before they went into the land God was giving to them, Abraham, Sara and Lot worshipped in thanksgiving.

Scripture Reference: Genesis, Chapter 12:1-9.

Meditation: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." (Hebrews 11:1 and 8)

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