

Speak freely during discussions

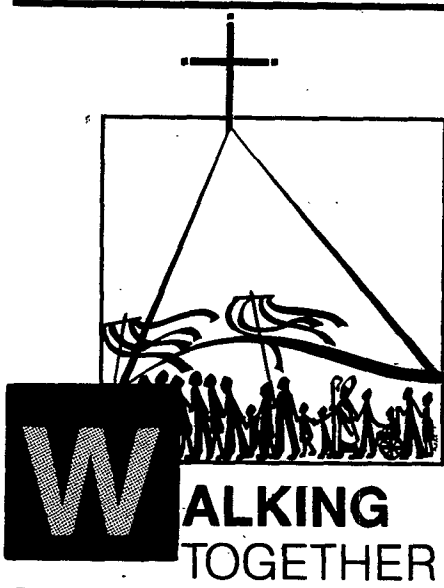
By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid had been bishop of the fledgling Rochester diocese less than two years when he was called to Rome to participate in the First Vatican Council.

He was not at all pleased with the council's slow pace at the beginning because it gave him too much time to think about all the work waiting for him at home. He was even less pleased later when a large number of bishops petitioned Pope Pius IX to permit a discussion regarding the question of the Roman pontiff's infallibility.

Bishop McQuaid was firmly opposed to defining the bishop of Rome's primacy or infallibility. Like many other bishops, he felt that these "abstract questions," though they "may be true enough in themselves ... will be highly injurious to us in America from the handle they will give our enemies" (Zwierlein, *McQuaid*, p.48). In addition, he believed that the proposed definition of infallibility was too broadly presented, since it did not require that a pope consult the bishops prior to a definition.

Since the time of the church's first ecumenical councils, it has always been held that for a general council to be accepted as truly ecumenical, there needs to be freedom of discussion. This freedom is required so that those gathered in council truly listen to the Holy Spirit's prompting as it speaks



through the lively debate on the council floor.

In 1870 this was a difficult concept to grasp for some bishops — including Archbishop Manning of England, who felt that such opposition bishops as Bishop McQuaid should not be allowed to speak. "Heretics are called to Council to be condemned not to be heard," he remarked. He considered any bishop opposed to the definition of infallibility to be a heretic and liable to the judgment of God "inasmuch as his error would be culpable, and his ignorance vincible" (Manning, *Centenary*, p.65).

But Rochester's Bishop McQuaid prized the freedom of discussion. During the council itself, in fact, he signed two petitions asking Pope Pius IX to alter the council's rules to extend

and safeguard the council's freedom. Bishop McQuaid is also a model in the proper use of that freedom. While the discussion was still in process, he held tenaciously to his good-faith position, even though he understood that it was not the opinion in favor in the highest circles.

However, once the council adjourned, he was quick to assent to its decrees. On Aug. 8, 1870, from the pulpit of Rochester's St. Patrick Cathedral, he preached: "I have now no difficulty in accepting the dogma, although to the last I opposed it; because somehow or other it was in my head that the bishops ought to be consulted ..." (Zwierlein, p.63).

Given this background, it is not surprising that when Bishop McQuaid called diocesan synods in 1875 and 1887 he asked the priests beforehand for their suggestions on the matters to be treated and provided ample time during the formal synod sessions themselves for open discussion on the legislation proposed.

He was the last bishop of Rochester to do so, despite the fact that canon 361 of the church's law required it. Instead, the synods of 1914, 1924, 1934 and 1954 were *pro forma* affairs in which diocesan legislation was read out to the assembled priests, who — in turn and on cue — gave their formal assent.

Since the Second Vatican Council, freedom of discussion is once again a cornerstone of a diocesan synod. The council encouraged the notion of freedom in the church by instructing the

laity, for example, that "by reason of their knowledge, competence or pre-eminence, (they) are empowered — indeed sometimes obliged — to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church. If the occasion should arise, this should be done through the institutions established by the Church for that purpose and always with truth, courage and prudence ..." (LG 37).

The diocesan synod is one of those institutions established by the church through which the laity, religious and clergy are invited to freely express their opinions about how best to carry on the church's mission. Some Catholics are uncomfortable with such freedom because people might say things we do not want to hear. This past year more than one pastor in our own diocese instructed his people prior to the synod sessions about what they could and could not say.

How foolish for us to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance on the one hand and stifle the Spirit's voice on the other. Pope John Paul II has more faith in the Holy Spirit. The revision of canon law he promulgated in 1983 requires that: "All the proposed questions are to be subject to the free discussion of the members during the sessions of the synod" (465).

I pray that we, like Bishop McQuaid, will use this freedom well, speaking freely and courageously while the questions are open and then in unity and fidelity supporting the decisions of the General Synod — whatever they may be.

People must be warned in the right way

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 18:15-20; (R1) Ezekiel 33:7-9; (R2) Romans 13:8-10.

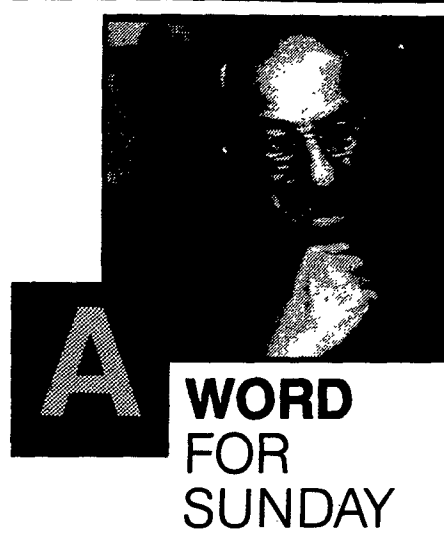
Will Rogers once said that itching is a premonitory warning that you are about to get something. An itching palm indicates you are about to receive something. An itching head shows that you already have something.

Sunday's first reading and the Gospel both speak about giving warnings.

Ezekiel talks about the responsibility of warning society. Today, we have fire alarm systems and burglar alarms. In Ezekiel's day, they had watchmen to alert a city to the danger of invasion or attack. Woe to the watchman found asleep on duty.

In the Gospel our Lord talks about the responsibility of warning individuals. Our Lord said that if one warning is not enough, take somebody else with you to repeat the warning — leave no stone unturned.

Paul speaks of loving our neighbor.



Both Ezekiel and Jesus explain that real love of neighbor cares — gives warnings. Love is a relationship with someone else. Real love is a mystery of life, because for a moment we put someone else's interest before our own: we go out of ourselves, we fall in love.

Ezekiel and our Lord both said

that we love our neighbor when we warn and correct him or her. To allow evil to go unchecked in a friend is to be unloving. Real love cares.

But correction has to be given correctly.

Once there was a little boy who got into mischief. Upon discovering this, his mother gave him a resounding slap and said, "I'm warning you. Don't ever let me catch you doing that again." Because the boy was eager to obey his mother — and more eager to avoid the resounding slap — he was ever so careful when engaging in mischief. And his mother never caught him again.

Then, one day when he was 12, the boy stole something from the local grocery store. The storekeeper caught him, but didn't press charges. Yet he angrily warned the boy, "If I ever catch you again, I'll call the cops." So the boy, who was quite clever, became very skillful at shoplifting. And the storekeeper never caught him again.

When he was 16, he "borrowed" a car from a parking lot. The police caught him and in juvenile court the judge said, "I'm warning you. Don't

ever let me see you here again, or I'll send you away!" The boy heeded the warning and became very adept at stealing cars and never again appeared in juvenile court.

But one day when he was a young man of 20, he was caught breaking into a house and was sentenced to jail. It was the first of several prison terms over the next few decades of his life and he is in prison again now. The pattern of his life is set.

When this young man was a little boy, there lived another little boy who also got into mischief. But his mother, upon discovering this, took the boy aside and gave him a different kind of warning: "Son, I want you never to do this thing again. I'll tell you why. If you don't understand, please ask questions. I love you still, but I'm disappointed in you for doing this, and I hope you will never disappoint me like this again. I'm warning you because I love you and I want you to grow into the type of person both your Dad and I will be proud of."

And that little boy, eager to obey his mother, and eager not to disappoint her, never did it again.

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