

'No room in the inn' for justice?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

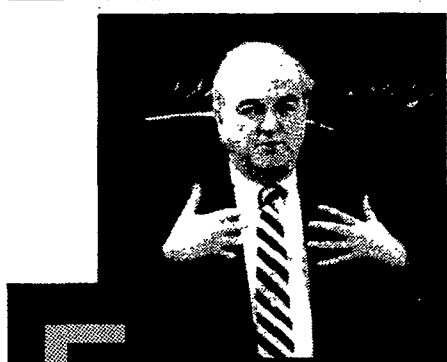
Every Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, and every year we sadly note the discrepancy between his message of peace and the state of human relationships all over the globe.

There is no peace today in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nor is there peace in Northern Ireland. Nor between Hindus and Muslims in India. Nor among warring ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union. Neither is there peace in the inner cities of America, nor in homes where women and children are abused, nor for those dying of AIDS, nor for those in the grip of drug and alcohol dependency, nor for victims of injustice, discrimination, and oppression of every kind.

The message of peace inside a Christmas card doesn't translate readily into practice. And it doesn't come cheaply.

Popes Pius XII and Paul VI often reminded us that peace is the work of justice. But justice seems to be one of the least popular of virtues today, even within the church.

You will hear homilies that make frequent reference to love, faith, forgiveness, patience, fidelity, self-sacrifice, generosity, respect for life, obedience to God's will, or loyalty to the church and the Holy Father, but rarely to justice.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

This is not to lay all the blame on preachers. Many in the pews become uncomfortable when the subject turns to justice, and preachers sense that.

Politically conservative churchgoers bristle at the mention of justice because for them that usually means having to acknowledge the rights of people they dislike or having to pay higher taxes to support them.

They're not at all happy when their priest or a lay minister tries to tell them that they don't have an absolute right to what they possess, and that perhaps some of what they possess was obtained at the expense of others.

For such people, the U.S. Catholic

bishops' 1986 pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All," was an act of supreme impertinence.

What right do bishops have to instruct us on matters they know so little about from their own direct experience? (Probably about as much right as they have to instruct us on matters of human sexuality and marriage, others would point out.)

Theologically conservative churchgoers also balk at the mention of justice because that can mean having to acknowledge the rights of church employees (more than 80 percent of whom are women) or having to drop more money in the collection basket to provide them with a fair wage and benefits.

Justice is an especially touchy subject in a parish, school, or diocesan agency where an employee has been unfairly treated or fired. Most know it was wrong, but few, if any, dare to become involved lest their own jobs be placed in jeopardy.

Intermittent reminders of the plight of the former employee — adrift without income, without health benefits, without prospects of another job, even without unemployment compensation — are about as welcome as rain on Christmas morning. They don't want to hear about it anymore.

But an injustice never goes away — not until it is addressed and rectified.

There is an old Latin maxim, "res clamat domino," which literally means, "a

thing clamors for its owner."

The maxim was a familiar part of the moral theology taught in Catholic seminaries before Vatican II. It meant that a stolen object never becomes the thief's property, even if the thief holds onto it for a very long period of time.

There is a kind of internal moral alarm system in the stolen object which relentlessly signals to its rightful owner. And that mechanism never shuts off until the object has been returned.

Injustices are like that. A hit-and-run driver isn't morally exonerated if he's not caught within a year. A brutal concentration camp guard isn't morally absolved if he manages to escape to another country.

Neither do victims of sexual abuse forfeit their right to justice simply because many years have passed since the abuse occurred. Nor does an unjustly fired church employee lose her claim on her former parish, or school, or diocese simply because many months have elapsed and another person has been hired to take her place.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. But peace, Popes Pius XII and Paul VI declared, is the work of justice.

Unfortunately, when justice knocks at our parish, or school, or diocesan door, it too often receives about as warm a welcome as Mary and Joseph did in Bethlehem at the inn.

Discover the true spirit of Christmas

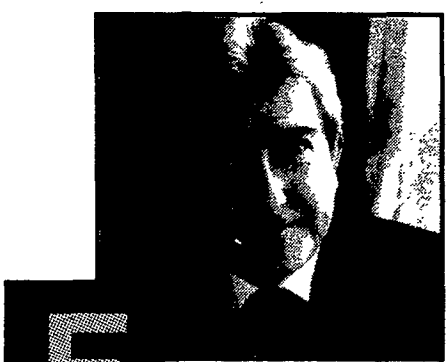
By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

The "Holiday Tea" at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago has become the traditional kickoff to the Christmas season for my family. We all get dressed up in what used to be called our "Sunday best" and head downtown.

The museum is transformed into a wonderland of decorations, music, performers, goodies to eat, and — of course — a visit from Santa (the "real one," we assure the kids).

Our children, Abby, Nate and Zack, ages 6, 6, and 4, respectively, love everything about Christmas. They helped me put up the Christmas lights on the front of the house this year for the first time. It only took me twice as long as usual. They lobbied to decorate the Christmas tree as early as possible, and they couldn't wait for the snow to fly so they can go sledding and make a snowman.

The three of them poured over the



FAITH AND WORK

catalogs from Toys R Us and other stores, circling all the things they wanted for Christmas. While watching the Saturday morning cartoons on television, Zachary could be overheard re-

sponding to each commercial by whispering under his breath, "I want that Santa Claus."

What makes me proud of my kids is that they also struggle to capture the true religious spirit of Christmas. They know that it is Jesus' birthday. "How many years ago was Jesus born?" Nathaniel asked me one day. "One thousand, nine hundred, and ninety three," I replied. "That's a lot," he observed, and walked away with an impressed look on his face.

We have an Advent wreath around which we gather to sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and say a prayer, although the big attraction for the kids appears to be the chance to blow out the candles.

The best family tradition we have, however, is our annual Christmas trip to the toy store to buy presents for "the poor kids." Each year, one shopping trip is exclusively dedicated to buying things for children who otherwise

might not get anything.

My wife Kathy and I give each of our children a modest budget to purchase toys that they think other kids would like. This year, for the first time, we encouraged them to also use some of their own allowance and birthday money.

Abby, Nate and Zack look forward to this annual shopping spree for others, and we think that it does more than anything to teach them the true meaning of Christmas. It seems to be working.

A couple of months ago, Abby and Nate came home from kindergarten with the news that they were to purchase — with their own money — some canned goods to give to a food drive that the school was holding for an inner-city parish. Both of them bought something, but Abigail also insisted on putting some of her money in an envelope and handing it in with the food "in case the poor people want to buy something we didn't think of."

God bless them, every one.



CREATE A NEW RITUAL

This Holiday Season light four candles in Honor and Celebration of your loved one.

The four candles represent your Grief, your Courage, your Memories and your Love.


During this Season of New Hope, may you find Peace and Joy in Remembering.






Crawford
FUNERAL HOME INC.

495 North Winton Road
Rochester, NY 14610
(716) 482-0400



ST. JOHN FISHER COLLEGE
BUDDY BASKETBALL CLINIC
For Boys & Girls: Grades 1st thru 6th

THE CLINIC: The St. John Fisher college Buddy Basketball Clinic is an introduction to basketball for both girls and boys, grades 1st thru 6th. It will be held three consecutive Saturday mornings (January 15, 22, 29). Youngsters will be instructed by both the St. John Fisher coaching staff and its players.

LOCATION: The Buddy Basketball Clinic will be located at the Student Life Center on the campus of St. John Fisher College.

SCHEDULE: Saturday, January 15th, 22nd, and 29th; 10-11:30am.

COST: \$30.00 per child. Make checks payable to The Buddy Basketball Clinic.

WHAT YOU GET:

- Free T- Shirt
- Free St. John Fisher Media Guide
- Free Basketball
- Many Extras

To register, or for more information:
please call: (716) 272-9853 or (716) 385-8391