

Stories hidden in every heart

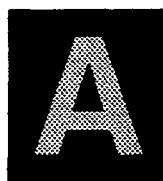
By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

A recurring thought of mine as I go about my daily business, is the mystery of what is happening in the hearts of people whom I meet. That's true when I associate with friends. It's true in another way when I meet with co-workers and I suppose that thought is never stronger than when I am with a group of people.

For example, I think of the individuals at a confirmation liturgy or a funeral or a meeting of the Priests' Council, or at any number of events that fill a month's calendar.

At such events people generally gather for some common purpose. Folks at a confirmation come — among other reasons — to show love and respect for candidates. People who come to a funeral are there to mourn the passing of a loved one or a friend. Or they come to support a friend who has lost someone near and dear. Priests' Council members attend to work for the good of the church and in support of their brothers in the presbyterate.

But what fascinates me is the internal work those present for such events need to do, so that they can be as fully present as they want to be, to the liturgical celebration or business event or whatever else it is drawing them. You'll know what I mean if you have ever gone dog-tired to a meeting and had to call on all of your



LONG THE WAY

reserves in order to do your fair share. Or if you have gone to a wedding carrying a deep sadness within you. Or if your little one, as only little ones can, absolutely insisted that you give up the one quiet moment of your day to rejoice in her or his latest achievement. Or if you've ever had to go fresh from a tough moment with your spouse to a party at the boss's home. Or if you're trying to be patient with someone who has badly disappointed you after you have tried mightily to help.

The examples I just cited have all been part of the experience of people I have met in recent days. I met all of them just before or just after celebrations or meetings at which they and I had been present. In all cases, the men and women

to whom I refer were very much a part of the events and quite clearly, contributed much to them.

Their contribution was apparent. The depth of their investment and the cost of that investment to them in most cases were not. They made no big deal about that at all. But they did me a great favor when they shared with me some piece of their inner reality. It helped me to appreciate even more their generous commitment to the people and activities that gathered them.

I remember such stories whenever I preside over liturgies in our communities. Although I don't know the stories of all of the people who gather for them, friends like the ones I mentioned above help me to remember that every person has a precious story to God. These stories make sense in God's love and find their salvation there.

I'm not suggesting that we should all go poking into the interiority and private affairs of our friends and neighbors. Not at all. The disclosure of such things, when made, should be offered freely as a gift. What I am suggesting is that we presume the good about people and that we be willing, whenever possible, to give them the benefit of the doubt.

It's probably true to say that all of us would welcome such dispositions offered in our behalf.

Peace to all.

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