

January a time to learn, reflect

As I write this evening, I do so with a sense of joy about two commitments that, taken together, will occupy my time for most of January.

1) The first event is a retreat in which I'll be participating this week at the Notre Dame Retreat Center, Canandaigua. The theme of the gathering will be "Preaching the Just Word."

I am happy to be going to this retreat for a number of reasons. One is that I welcome the opportunity these days will provide to think and pray about the ministry of preaching, which is so important in the life of the church and, certainly, in the life of a bishop. I want to reflect on how I do or do not give preaching the pride or place it deserves in my ministry among you.

A second reason I look forward to the experience is the emphasis it will place on justice as a constitutive element of the Gospel. I am concerned that those who are called to preach the Gospel, myself included, be as familiar as we can be with the Gospels' justice dimensions. Beyond that, I hope we can become more peaceful about addressing justice issues as an integral part of our preaching min-

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

istry.

Thirdly, I am delighted that the retreat will be led by Father Walter Burkhardt, SJ, a theologian and preacher whose work I have admired for many years. It will be a great pleasure to hear his experience and enjoy his guidance during those privileged days. It will be no less a pleasure to be with the other retreatants, as we reflect together on and practice the preaching ministry so dear to all of our hearts.

2) We'll be finishing the retreat on Friday, Jan. 12. Less than 24 hours later I'll be leaving for South America to visit our Sisters of Mercy who serve in Chile and our Sisters of St. Joseph who serve in Brazil.

I can't tell you how rewarding or how challenging past visits to these two places have been for me. I go to express your affection and support for

our sisters and the people among whom they serve, and I do so to the best of my ability. I come away from the experience with a renewed sense of the church, of the wonderful variety of its people and of the many ways in which God continually speaks to all of us.

The insights such visits afford are especially helpful in light of the many pastoral adjustments circumstances require of us in this era of the church's life. I don't mean that what works for our friends in Chile or Brazil will necessarily work for us. What I refer to are the ways in which the people of these countries understand and express their Catholicism in circumstances that are so often radically different from our own.

It is life-giving to hear them speak of the values that spark and sustain their lives of faith. It is most encouraging to realize that they have long since developed creative and realistic responses to pastoral problems we are just beginning to address.

Thanks for your kind attention to these words. In future columns I hope to tell you a little about the retreat and the trip to Latin America.

Peace to all.

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