

COLUMNISTS

Small diocese enjoys great bishop

Raymond Lucker, bishop of New Ulm, Minn., was considered one of the "old men" when we were graduate students together at the North American College in Rome in the early 1960s, during the Second Vatican Council. He had already been a priest for more than 10 years and was in his mid-30s. Most of us were recently ordained and still in our 20s.

Ray Lucker impressed me (and many others) then as a quiet, self-effacing, spiritually rooted priest. As a New Englander who had attended one of the country's most provincial seminaries in Boston, I had had little previous contact with Midwesterners at the time. (I have made up for it since, having lived in the Midwest now for more than 18 years.)

We did have a few seminarians from the Diocese of La Crosse, Wis., in the late 1950s, but they were regarded by many of the locals as oddities because of their informality and accents (and this from Bostonians who didn't pronounce the letter "r"). I recall them as being among the psychologically healthiest men in the seminary, and I especially treasure the memory of my own classmate from La Crosse, Vaughn Brockman, who died at an all-too-early age just three years ago, a dedicated and much beloved pastor.

Bishop Lucker is cut from that same



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

mold. Born in 1927, he was ordained for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 1952, and served as its superintendent of schools and then in a leadership role in the department of education in the U.S. Catholic Conference before being appointed auxiliary bishop in 1971. He was installed as bishop of New Ulm in early 1976. New Ulm was, and still is, farm country, with a Catholic population of 72,000 out of a total of 285,000.

According to a recent profile in the Minneapolis/St. Paul *Star Tribune*, Bishop Lucker had expected that, after more than 10 years in New Ulm, the Vatican would want to see the diocese energized by new blood. He, in turn, would be given an opportunity to do the same for another, larger diocese like St. Cloud, which came open with the resignation of its bishop in 1987.

But such was not to be. St. Cloud went to someone else and Ray Lucker was left in New Ulm, where he remains to this day. (He comes of retirement age in 2002.)

There had been other openings after St. Cloud, but the word was around that Ray Lucker had been blackballed because of his outspoken support of women in the church. According to the *Star Tribune*, the bishop himself shares that suspicion.

To be sure, Bishop Lucker has made his views known on other issues as well, including the need for a married clergy, a greater role for the laity in the church, and a more collegial exercise of papal authority. He is also one of the few bishops who belong to Call to Action, an organization committed to the ongoing renewal of the church.

But St. Cloud's, Dubuque's, and whatever other diocese's loss has been New Ulm's gain. That relatively tiny diocese in the heart of Minnesota has been blessed with one of the nation's finest bishops for these past 23 years. At a time when the words "spiritual" and "prayerful" are too often used as a cover for safe, don't-rock-the-boat, submissive personalities, Ray Lucker embodies a spirituality and a prayerfulness that are at once theologically substantive and psychologically balanced. For him, a bishop is not

primarily an administrator or a "churchman" (whatever that means nowadays), but a pastor. And it is that role that he has always enjoyed most and done best — throughout his nearly 47 years as a priest.

He should be as comforted as his diocese is by the fact he was never transferred to a larger see. Otherwise well-informed Catholics do not realize how incongruous it is for bishops to be "promoted" routinely from smaller dioceses to larger ones. For most of the First Christian Millennium the church regarded such transfers as unthinkable as a husband's leaving his wife to marry a wealthier woman.

Indeed, the First Council of Nicaea in 325 explicitly forbade such transfers, and it was not until 882 that someone was elected as Bishop of Rome who was already the bishop of another diocese. Nicaea's prohibition has never been formally rescinded.

Raymond Lucker has been a faithful "spouse" to the People of God in New Ulm. His ecclesiastical resume doesn't need Dubuque nor even Chicago, Boston, or New York to secure his place as one of the finest bishops this nation has ever produced.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Beatitudes require the right attitude

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12. (R1) Zephaniah 2:3-3:12-13. (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

This year we are in Cycle A, which means that the Sunday Gospels will be taken chiefly from St. Matthew. In the Sundays before Lent the Gospels will be from Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5, 6, 7, of Matthew's Gospel.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes. The word "beatitude" means "happy." When we start a journey, we always begin with the end — "where are we going." Though our destination is the last thing arrived at, it is the first thing we think of, for our destination will determine what we take with us on our trip. If I'm going to Alaska, I won't take my swimsuit. If I'm going to Hawaii, I won't take my snow skis.

So Jesus began his public ministry with the Beatitudes, for happiness is the goal of his religion.

The Beatitudes tell us how we can become happy. Jesus said that things and possessions are not vital. Nor are one's feelings. Activities do have a place, but the key is one's attitudes — one's inner life.

The Beatitudes are the attitudes that



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

should characterize our inner life.

We should be poor in spirit; that is, trust and hope in God, and not in self.

We should be so full of love that we mourn over the injustices in the world and man's inhumanity to man.

We should be meek; that is, we should return good for evil, accepting injuries and wrongs for the redemption of sinners.

We should hunger for holiness, for we get only what we go after and we go after only what we want.

We should be merciful; we should have a heart for the miseries of others and try to do something about them for God's sake.

We should be clean of heart, non-judgmental, giving everybody the benefit of

the doubt. To see the good in all and not to focus on evil like vultures who miss the landscape looking for carrion.

We should be peacemakers by giving to everyone what is his due: to God, worship and obedience; to our neighbor, love and service.

Finally, we should be willing to pay the price of trying to do God's will, namely, to bear the cross. The servant is not above the Master. They gave him a cross, they will give the cross to his followers. The mark of the Christian is suffering; but the goal of the Christian life is happiness, beatitude. *Per crucem ad lucem; per aspera ad astra* — Through the cross to the light; through bitter paths to the stars.

Beatitudes are attitudes. Attitudes are more important than facts, than education, than money, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. Attitudes are more important than appearances, giftedness or skill. They will make or break you.

The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past; we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The

only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. Life is not so much what people do to us as how do we react to what people do to us. What is my attitude toward people, toward life itself? I'm in charge of that.

Jesus asked us to learn of him, for his attitude, his inner life, was simply the living out of the Beatitudes.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, February 1

Hebrews 11:32-40; Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday, February 2

Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18;

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

Wednesday, February 3

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15; Mark 6:1-6

Thursday, February 4

Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24; Mark 6:7-13

Friday, February 5

Hebrews 13:1-8; Mark 6:14-29

Saturday, February 6

Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21;

Mark 6:30-34



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