

Advent is invitation to self-assessment

I celebrated the beginning of the Advent season in unusual circumstances — in beautiful St. Mary's chapel on the campus of Boston College. I was there for a conference on the Teaching Activity of Bishops sponsored by the Jesuit Institute of Boston College.

The Advent season is a great favorite of mine. I have always found its themes and mood to be an invitation to a contemplation of the life to which we are introduced in baptism and which will be brought to completion when Christ comes again in glory.

When we come to a prayerful consideration of that great vision, we experience an invitation to locate within it the values and choices that change our daily lives.

One of the reasons why I enjoy the Advent season so much is that it provides a privileged time to re-locate my own values and choices against the great sweep of God's gracious plan for us in Christ. I can bring to this holy time the experience of the year past and my hopes for the year to come. On one level the gift of the season helps me in a self-critique of what I do and why I do it. At a deep-

along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



er level it reminds me of the fidelity, compassion and life God continually offers to all of us.

The experience at the conference of the Jesuit Institute nourished that kind of Advent spirit in two ways. First, our theme, discussed by so many distinguished scholars, put me in touch in wonderful ways with my own experience of the episcopal ministry. The discussions evoked memories of the ups and downs, joys and sorrows, successes and failures of the years. Advent's invitation impelled me — and helped me — to look at them all from a new perspective. I always find it helpful in my continuing education.

The conference was also a gift in the opportunity to renew friendships with people who were once a part of my life but whom I do not see very

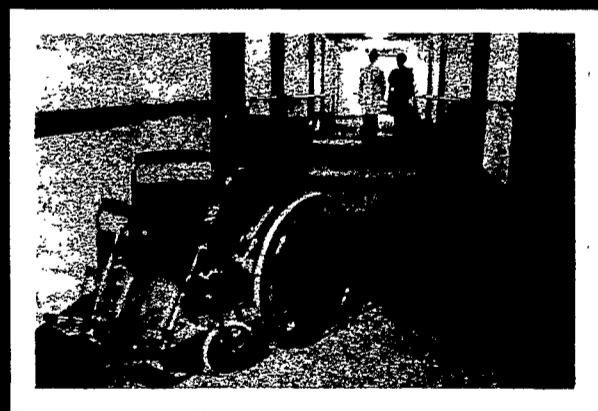
often. I think of Pheme Perkins, a biblical scholar at Boston College, with whom I worked on a pastoral letter on women several years ago. Pheme contributed much to that effort, not just through her scholarship but through her strong witness to the faith. Father Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, comes to mind. Frank was my ecclesiology professor in Rome in 1959. Nearly 80 years old now, he continues to write books and articles of great significance. Archbishop John Quinn's presence at Boston College was also important to me. In his writing, John has been able to merge beautifully his rich pastoral experience and careful research to suggest more fruitful ways to consider church governance and episcopal authority.

It was a pleasure to be with all of the 32 participants at the conference. Not only are they excellent scholars but they are people of faith, lovers of the church and pilgrims who, in humble ways, share the life they have received so that we might all come to the fullness that is God's promise to us. They were Advent gifts to me and I am grateful to them.

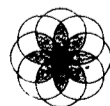
Peace to all.

OUR PATIENTS ARE A LOT LIKE
HOTEL GUESTS.

They have a tendency to leave things behind.



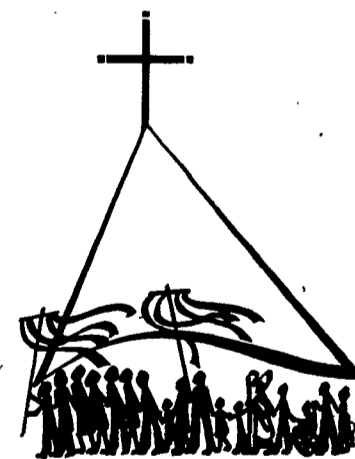
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(John 15:12)



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