

OPINIONS

Jesus did not fear to touch outcasts

Catholic Courier

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Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: *Catholic Courier*, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

To the editor:

Sometime ago a letter writer expressed concern about spreading germs at the kiss of peace. Several subsequent writers concurred. It reminded me of the clean, unclean controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. Suppose the priest did not stop to aid his wounded countryman because he was on his way to the temple. Contact with blood would have made him unclean and kept him outside the temple. Would that justify him in Jesus' eyes? No way! The disciple of Jesus must go beyond the self. Jesus chose to be unclean himself when he stretched outside the law to touch and heal a leper. Jesus knew that only what is in the heart can render one unclean. Francis of Assisi made a choice to touch a leper, was transformed by this act and became a great saint. Had he chosen not to, no one would remember Francis of Assisi.

My mother taught me it is very important to both go to Communion and live in communion. Doing the first properly helps us accomplish the second. Touching is important for those living in communion. Touching helps us answer the questions "who are we" and "whose are we." Touching helps us experience that we are "the Body of Christ," "The People of God," recognizing that we belong to Christ, we belong to God. If this is true we must extend ourselves touching the marginalized in society, the poor, homeless, unemployed, those fighting addictions or dying with AIDS.

At Mass in some communities the people hold hands for the "Our Father." A lonely man told one of our priests the kiss of peace and the "Our Father" were special for him because it was the only time all week someone touched him.

Paul Claudel understood clearly who we are and whose we are and that communion with God necessitates communion with each other. He wrote, "There is no one of my brothers that I can do without. In the heart of the meanest miser, the most squalored prostitute, the most miserable drunkard there is an immortal soul with holy aspirations which deprived of daylight worships in the night. I hear them speaking when I speak. I hear them weeping when I go down on my knees. There is not one of them I can do without. Just as there are many stars in the heavens and the power of calculation is beyond my reckoning so also there are many living souls and they scarcely give forth their light, but I need them all in my praise of God. There are many living beings but there is not one of them in whom I am not in communion in that sacred apex when we utter together the 'Our Father.'"

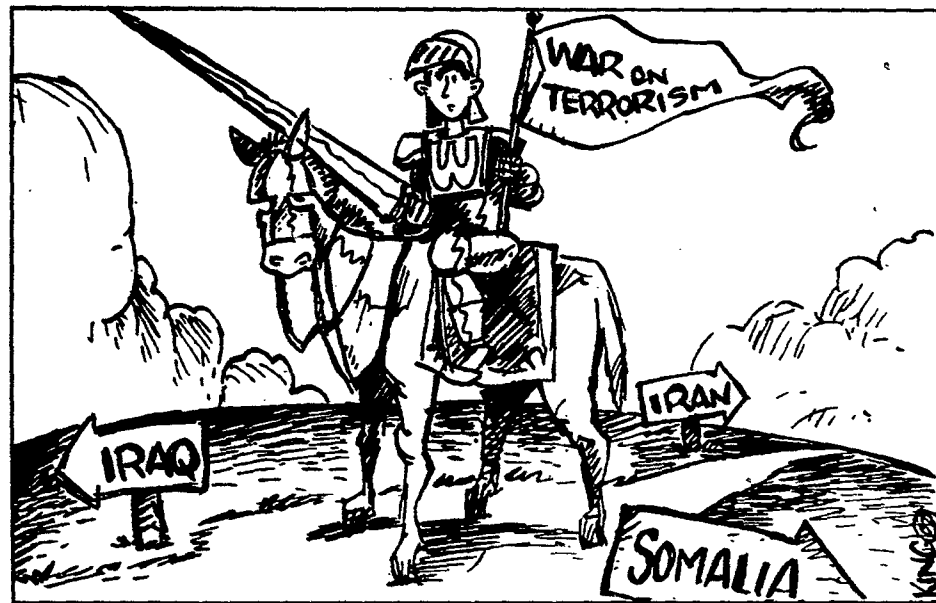
Next time at Mass at the kiss of peace and the "Our Father" reach out and touch someone. Allow the Communion you are about to receive to create communion with one another.

Emmett Neary
 Bakerdale Road
 Rochester

Wash your hands to eliminate contagion

To the editor:

As a medical laboratory technician with over 20 years of hospital experience, I feel compelled to respond to the recent letters published in the *Courier* about abolishing the practice of shaking hands. Almost any health care worker can tell you, the best way to avoid an illness is good hand washing. Germs do not enter the body through one's hand, but rather when a hand that is carrying germs touches the eye or nose. Handshaking is not the only way to pick up germs — you can get them by touching the back of a pew, a door, the money you put in the collection basket. If you then rub your eye, you have provided a pathway for



U.S. Catholics are 'impotent'

To the editor:

It was not surprising but with great sadness that I heard about the New York Legislature passing legislation that would force Catholic hospitals to provide contraception coverage, some of which will be abortifacient. This demonstrates two important concerns. First, it shows that those who advocate abortion really don't see abortion as a private decision of a woman. They ultimately want to force everyone to provide abortions, whether it is Catholic institutions, all taxpayers — who now pay for abortions through Medicaid — or by requiring all medical students to learn the abortion procedure. This shows that pro-abortion advocates are really not about choice or freedom, but a very rigid ideology.

Second, it shows the impotence of the American Catholic Community. The Jewish population in America is only 6 percent of our population and yet they exert a strong influence over our public policy towards Israel. Catholics are over 22 percent of the American population and yet as a body have little impact, whether it is the issue of abortion, the embargo on Iraq, the rising defense budget, or school vouchers. In New York state, Catholics make up almost 40 percent of the population and yet we still have the death penalty, Medicaid funding of abortions, partial birth abortions, and now forcing Catholic institu-

tions to provide abortifacient coverage. We as Catholics should be outraged at this latest attempt to keep the anti-Catholic bigotry alive in our country. I doubt there will be such an outcry because we have sold our soul to blend into our American culture of death and we are not united as an American Catholic Community. The alternative is not to give up but rather to redirect the time and energy that we have used to become American Catholics into becoming Catholic Americans. The U.S. Bishops document reminds not only Catholic legislators but all who consider themselves Catholic what our stance should be: "We urge those Catholic officials who choose to depart from Church teaching on the inviolability of human life in their public life to consider the consequences for their own spiritual well being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin. We call on them to reflect on the grave contradiction of assuming public roles and presenting themselves as credible Catholics when their actions on fundamental issues of human life are not in agreement with church teaching. No public official, especially one claiming to be a faithful and serious Catholic, can responsibly advocate for or actively support direct attacks on innocent human life."

Father Jim Hewes
 St. John/St. Patrick Church, Clyde

Late priest inspired with humor

To the editor:

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Word of God "does not return void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it."

Over 45 years ago, while an altar server at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, N.Y., a kind and playful young priest, Father James T. Wolfe, spoke God's Word to me. He did so — not with showy acts of piety or deep theology — but with a delightful sense of humor that expressed itself through a weekly series of small gag toys hidden under the servers' Latin "cheat

sheets" near my kneeling place.

Years later on my wedding day, July 4, 1967, after imparting the Church's blessing on our marriage, this same droll priest grinned broadly as the cherry bomb he had deftly hidden in my missal rolled to the Cathedral floor. "Thought you might want a little fireworks on your wedding day," he chuckled slyly.

Father Jim Wolfe died this week (Feb. 16.) His obituary pointed out that he had a "quick mind" and was a "good thinker" who had a "special interest in mushrooms." But I'll remember Father Wolfe as the priest who taught me that God liked a good laugh as well. I'll remember the priest first mentioned to me and others that the Mass might some day be in English. To his dismay, no one at the time seemed all that interested in the possibility.

I'll also remember Father Wolfe as the priest who, through kindness and humor, watered the seeds of faith that many years later led me to the ministry of deacon. Although I have not seen him in over 10 years, memories of Father Jim combined with the words of Isaiah to inspire my homily on the life changing power of simple people, acting with gentleness, kindness, humility, and a smile. Thank you Father Wolfe. May you rest in peace.

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