

Make time for quiet Advent prayer

My friend, Mercy Sister Ann Miller, recently returned from a 40-day retreat at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. I have not had a chance to speak to her at any length about her experience, but I do know that she enjoyed it. That did not surprise me. I was quite certain that she would.

I know that she left for Guelph wondering what it would be like to spend 40 days in almost total silence. Ann has been a person of prayer all her life. She is also quite gregarious and action-oriented. I can well understand her curiosity about how she would deal with such sustained silence.

At a recent confirmation with the Good Shepherd and Guardian Angels parishes in Henrietta, I spent a little time just prior to the rite inviting the congregation to maintain a prayerful silence until I had confirmed all of the candidates. I explained that at some recent confirmations, long before we were finished, the volume of conversation in the church was so high that it seriously distracted those yet to be confirmed.

So, I encouraged the congregation to enjoy the music to be played during the ceremony and to sing along as they wished. I asked them to pray



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

for the candidates as they came forward to receive the sacrament and as they returned to their places. And, I reminded them that their prayer was a vital part of the reality that we were celebrating.

I am happy to report, although I am not surprised that I can, that the people at the confirmation were most cooperative in response to my request. Their quiet at the time was more than refraining from speech. Rather, it was a prayerful quiet that was an important gift to the rest of us. We enjoyed the strength of their prayer. They were involved in and cared deeply about what we were celebrating that evening. They were not spectators at an event that had little to do with them; they were participants in an act of faith.

There was not time at the conclu-

sion of the evening to ask reactions from the congregation about that experience of silence. I wanted to ask them: What are your reactions to the time of prayerful quiet we shared this evening? Was it peaceful and easy for you? Did you find it to be hard work or on the tedious side? How did what you heard, saw, sang or thought about help you to pray, or make prayer difficult? Did you talk to the Lord, or listen, or do some of each?

Sister Ann and the people who gathered for the confirmation are people of faith who love the Lord, who are salt and light for others. All recently had an experience of prayerful quiet and attentiveness that may have been new to them. All entered into the experience with willing spirit and, I am willing to bet, found it to be a graced time.

As we live these early days of Advent, I hope that we will all respond in generous fashion to the season's invitation to be attentive to the Lord's presence and gifts in our lives. Such a response may require a decision on our parts to give ourselves time to be quiet, to listen, to pray. That's not always easy, given the demands on our time. But, I do believe that such a prayerful disposition eases our bur-

dens. It does not increase them.

Our nuns at the Carmelite Monastery in Pittsford will be attentive to this Advent call in accordance with their vocation. So will our Dominican nuns in Elmira, the Trappist community at Piffard and the Benedictine monks at Mount Saviour. So will Sister Ann Miller and the people of Good Shepherd and Guardian Angels.

With all of them I'll make a special effort to give good time to quiet prayer during Advent. I hope that you will too. And, I hope that when we pray, we will remember to relax, be confident and remember that, even when we cannot find the words, the Spirit of the Lord raises our prayer to the God who gives us life.

Peace to all.

CORRECTION

A photo caption on page 8 of the Nov. 28 *Catholic Courier* incorrectly identified Dimitri House, a homeless shelter and emergency food cupboard, as being sponsored by Corpus Christi Church. It was at one time, but is now separately incorporated.



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