

Gatherings boost a heavy spirit

Last night at the 9 p.m. Eucharistic Liturgy at St. John Fisher College, I told the students and their friends that I was particularly happy to be with them. That was because I felt a heaviness of spirit because of the war in Iraq, and longed for the hope and encouragement I always find when I encounter the faith of the young.

In the event, my hopes were realized — and more. By their presence, song and quiet prayer they helped me put my concerns in perspective and reminded me that, notwithstanding the horrors of this or any war, there is much that is hopeful about life; much to be celebrated.

It was as though they were an immediate answer to a phrase in the opening prayer, "... when I grow discouraged because of my failures help me to remember your love."

That brief moment of clearer perspective came at the end of a long week in which the attention of our nation has been riveted on Iraq, and the prayers of the nation have been raised for as speedy a resolution of this conflict as is possible.

I was in Washington for a meeting of the Administrative Committee of



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops when battle was joined. All of our prayer through those days expressed our thirst for peace and for the safety of all.

On Wednesday evening, we all joined in a Eucharistic Liturgy at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The presider and preacher on that occasion was Bishop Wilton Gregory, Bishop of Belleville, Ill., and president of the USCCB.

Our war-related activity included more than prayer. The Administrative Committee approved a framework response to concerns generat-

ed by the conflict for the use of anyone who might find it helpful. We also expressed our encouragement and support of Bishop Gregory, who issued a presidential statement about the conflict.

If the young people at St. John Fisher were a boost to the spirit in these early days of armed conflict, they were certainly not the only ones.

Saturday evening, Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation celebrated its 35th anniversary with a gala dinner at the Monroe Country Club. The proceeds from the evening will be applied to Sheen's Emergency Home Repair Program. For 35 years this wonderful foundation has provided safe, decent housing for low-income families and services in an effort to promote their sense of self-worth and dignity.

The Friends of Sheen who gathered are a committed and generous group whose quiet service over the years has changed the lives of many families in this part of New York state. It was good to be in their company for a night of celebration and thanksgiving.

All of that would have been enough. But, I must confess that, be-

ing a longtime Buffalo Bills fan, the presence and thoughtful speech of former Bills coach and Football Hall of Fame member Marv Levy brought an even greater measure of delight to an already pleasurable gathering.

Lastly, I mention a continued awareness of those preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil as tremendous signs of hope and encouragement in our midst. It is a great consolation to know that they want to share the life of our community, and a great encouragement that they will strengthen us with their faith and their desire to serve others in the name of Christ. I often think of the invitation to us in the community in the Rite of Election to hold the elect "in our prayer and affection as we prepare for the Easter feast."

As we move more deeply into the season of Lent I hope that, while we continue to pray for our catechumens and candidates, we will also pray for one another that we will be open to the continuing conversion and renewal of heart which is God's constant call to all of us.

Peace to all.

Bishop releases statement on war

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bishop Matthew H. Clark released the following statement March 20 concerning the war with Iraq.

What many have said was inevitable is now upon us. The United States, with what President Bush has characterized as "a coalition of the willing," has launched a military campaign to disarm and overthrow the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. I am struck by the great irony that presents itself in the timing of this action, which takes place as we prepare for Easter, a season of life and new beginnings.

While a decisive victory by our military forces seems certain, I am convinced of the truth of Pope John Paul II's recent reminder that "war is always a defeat for humanity."

Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator who has inflicted horrible atrocities on his enemies, and on his own people. But I am concerned about the path we are following to deal with the threat he poses. With the Holy See, I question whether the alternatives to war were exhausted and I am mindful that our nation has acted without the strong

consensus of the international community and the diplomatic bodies formed to resolve such issues. I also fear that the good that may come from this war will be outweighed by the unintended and unexpected evil that it could bring. Most importantly, I have grave concerns that this military action has moral implications that will haunt our nation for years.

I am mindful of the innocent and vulnerable people in Iraq — the civilian men, women and children who have suffered for so long and will no doubt endure even greater pain and sorrow. It is my expectation that our nation will continue to respect and uphold long-held tenets of human rights and the laws governing war. In all our actions in war, we must value the lives and livelihood of Iraqi civilians as we would the lives and livelihood of our own families and citizens.

Always, my thoughts and prayers and affection are with the faithful young women and men of our armed forces answering the call of our president. They and their families will inevitably endure great sorrow. Reservations or

concerns about this war should not be transferred to military personnel and their families. They need and are entitled to our steadfast prayer and support. We need also to understand that those whose conscience calls them to refuse to participate in this war find support in the moral tradition of the church.

We continue to hope and pray for peace. Our Lenten prayer and fasting can lead us more deeply into the peace of Christ. As a people of faith, we are called to follow our consciences as we continue to raise our voice in support of peace. Civil discourse, public communal prayer, financial support for relief organizations, as well as expressions of concern to elected officials, can all be acts of prayerful hope.

I encourage our pastoral leaders to keep the doors of our churches open as an invitation for all to gather to pray for peace. I pray that we can all be signs of hope, confident that God, who values all people, is present in all the circumstances of our lives.

Peace to all.

Catholic Courier
to honor

'Milestone' Anniversaries

The *Catholic Courier* again plans to honor couples who are celebrating "Milestone" anniversaries this year. Couples who marked or will mark 25, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 or more years of marriage this year may be listed in the special Milestones/Vocations issue, which will be published May 15.

We will accept anniversaries occurring between Jan. 1, 2003 and Dec. 31, 2003. Please send the following information: Full names of husband and wife; date of wedding; church and city where married. Also include a telephone number should questions arise.

Deadline for submission is Thursday, May 1.

Send the information to:
Catholic Courier, PO Box 24379,
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or e-mail it to
agall@catholiccourier.com.

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