



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Iraq, the politics, all the pros and cons from every possible source, with demonstrations highlighted, with opinions galore.

Is it possible that Dr. D'Amico is questioning the necessity of war and politics coming at us, also, from the pulpit? Maybe he was trying to say that we go to church to be spiritually nourished and nurtured and revitalized, but aren't.

This is a legitimate complaint, that the concentration on social activism is so emphasized in the churches and *Courier* of this Diocese that the spiritual aspect is sadly neglected.

Church is supposed to be about growing and developing a vital faith and prayer life. We expect our Church to lead us into a deepening knowledge and love of God. Spiritual vitality does not just happen. Prayer does not just happen. At all ages and stages there is a longing to learn and discover new depths of prayer. Most of us attend Mass and other services for that purpose, to receive that sustaining power that fosters a deep and abiding prayer fervor.

When a person or a congregation is not being spiritually fed, all the social activism homilies fall on deaf ears.

Jesus said, "My house is a house of prayer..." Today he might criticize, "but you

have made it a social meeting hall."

Joanne Lepkowski
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Says group has agenda

To the editor:

In recent media articles, the new protest group "Voice of the Faithful" portray themselves as well-meaning and pro-church. The truth is they have an agenda to change the structure of the church. Their leaders are aligned with the dissident groups Call to Action, New Ways Ministry, Coalition of Catholics and Survivors, We are Church, Dignity/Boston, Siecus and others. Among their desires are: ordination of women, an end to priestly celibacy, same-sex marriages, the acceptance of homosexuality and democratization of the church structures. Concerned Catholics can learn more about their real agendas in the publication "I Have Weathered Other Storms" by the Traditional Family and Property Committee on American Issues and available through American TFP, PO Box 341, Hanover, PA 17331.

Leo R. Kamalsky
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Repentance is about change, not failings

During Lent, the word "repentance" creeps in quite a bit. James Gustafson, an American theologian who taught for many years at Yale, the University of Chicago and Emory University, has several wonderful passages dealing with this important Christian concept. He writes: "Repentance is not self-recrimination; it is not wallowing in masochistic guilt feelings, enjoying the humiliation of our failures. It is more than the acknowledgment of guilt; it is a turning."

As he goes on to describe this turning, Gustafson tells us that in biblical language, repentance is a call "to return unto the Lord." The turning he intends is toward the purposes of personal and common life that align with God's purposes and deeds. It is, in Gustafson's terms, "to engage in those actions that sustain, enhance and fulfill the well-being of creation and particularly the human community."

For Gustafson, repentance should not lead to a crippling fear to act because of mistakes we've made in the past. Instead, it points to a willingness to acknowledge our mistakes, but more importantly to revise our purposes, to redress the harmful consequences of our actions in the past. Repentance requires a willingness to question our own judgments, to listen to oth-



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

ers whose wisdom and insight might help us, and to move forward in hope.

Sometimes I think that Lent can leave us hopelessly mired in looking backwards and focusing so much on remorse that we forget its actual focus, which is on the "good news of Christ," which is what the word "Gospel" refers to in the first place.

Martin Luther was also a great theologian. He reminded us over and over that a true sense of human freedom is grounded in repentance. For Luther, the freedom of the inner person flows from repentance because of the assurance of God's mercy and love. God's mercy and love is so real that it is not overcome even by our turning away from God. The core message of the Gospel, the good news of the life of Jesus and the story of Israel, is not that we so often turn our backs on God. Rather, the message of the Gospel is that God remains with us regardless.

A true sense of repentance

does not focus on our failings. A true sense of repentance invites us to turn, in freedom, to the God who offers us "good news." And the good news is that God is with us even when we turn away.

Lent is ultimately not about earning brownie points with God, or focusing on externals regarding our ability to do without something we really like for six weeks or so. Lent isn't even about ourselves at all. Sometimes I think we enter into Lent with some cockeyed notion that God is happiest when we are miserable. That would be so anti-Gospel!

Lent invites us to focus on God. It invites us to remember that the news from God is good news: God is merciful to us and loves us in spite of our turning away. The invitation during this season is not to prove how abstemious we are, how much self-discipline we have, how many noble external acts we can perform in order to prove our "worthiness." The invitation of Lent is to "turn" — to turn ourselves entirely inside out so that we are able to align ourselves with the God of love and mercy. The invitation is to enter into a complete change at the core of ourselves so that we are open to take on the ways of God and to align ourselves with what God is doing.

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Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers 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 to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 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.

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