

# Give thought to real meaning of 'holiday'

Have you figured out yet what Christmas gifts you are going to give to your husband, wife, children, parents and friends? Have you made any travel arrangements to see relatives or friends during the holidays? What about your menu? Have you thought about who likes what and what you are going to serve?

Yes, it's that time of year again. The rush is on. People are making plans, hoping to make the holiday season as festive as possible.

Interestingly, the word "holiday" comes from two English words, "holy day," and the word "holy" means "sacred" or "consecrated to."

As we rush off to buy gifts and make the holidays something special in our lives, it might help to view all this activity in the context of consecrating ourselves to another. But what would this entail?

Gifts have two values. They may be considered valuable because they are expensive, unique and difficult to obtain. And they may be considered valuable because they are chosen with care to express the heartfelt desire of giving oneself to another.

Before going out to shop, take a few moments to reflect on your love for the person for whom you are buying a gift. Get personal. Look into the person's soul and ask yourself: "What is it that I so cherish in this person? What does he or she



Father Eugene Hemrick

## The Human Side

mean to my life? What would it be without this person?"

Don't take your love for another for granted, but use the holidays to renew it at a deeper level.

If you practice this little meditation, you won't have to worry about finding the right gift. It will find you.

Before preparing menus and going through the hassle of cooking huge dinners, repeat this meditation and ask yourself some fundamental questions, such as: "How can I create an atmosphere that takes the rush out of eating and allows more time for people to enjoy each other? Will music softly playing in the background enhance the spirit of the moment? How do I make this a peaceful, relaxed event? What topics should be avoided? Should

the television be left on or put away in order to promote conversation?"

No matter how tasty the food may be, what matters most is the camaraderie served with it. If people are enjoying each other, the food will taste that much better.

If you travel, rather than getting all caught up in the packing and the arrangements, try to get caught up in the person or people you are going to see. Take a moment to reflect on who they are, what they have been through and what their feelings and emotions might be during the holidays. Enter into their world, and don't get stuck in yours. This will make the packing and the arrangements much more rewarding and much less stressful.

Finally, remember that what you are getting ready for is a holiday, a holy day, a day consecrated to someone. Take a moment before it all begins to thank God for this time in your life and to ask him to grace you with a better understanding of what he wants for you right now.

Father Hemrick is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

As part of the format changes scheduled for the *Catholic Courier* in April 2004, we plan to expand our Commentary and Faith & Family offerings. This week and over the next few months, we will publish samples of various columns we are thinking about adding, in addition to Father Richard McBrien's "Essays on Theology." We invite reader feedback on the columns, which may be sent to PO Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624 or e-mailed to [newsroom@catholiccourier.com](mailto:newsroom@catholiccourier.com).

## She will talk to late priest in her prayer

To the editor:

Father Bartholomew J. O'Brien gave me religious instruction in 1956 at St. Peter and Paul's Church in Elmira, baptized me in 1957 and officiated at our marriage in 1959. A few years earlier, I had made a pledge toward the repair of the church building. After the birth of our first child, whom he baptized in 1961, we started attending a nearer church, but I was still honoring my pledge. Imagine my surprise when Father O'Brien sent me a refund. By then we were living on one income, and the money was such a help. That was the way with Father O'Brien. He cared for the people who came to him, and he helped in whatever way he could.

Singing overflowed the sanctuary at his memorial service and funeral, and the homilies by Fathers Rick Farrell and John Firpo were healing remembrances for those in attendance. For all the children who attended St. Mary Our Mother School — including my four — Father O'Brien made an indelible impression. Other than my parents and my husband, no one had more of an effect

on who I am than Father O'Brien.

After Vatican II, Father O'Brien introduced liturgical changes in a gradual way, explaining their background. He introduced lay leaders at Mass, then lectors and extraordinary ministers. He also led the parish through the process of building the beautiful and functional church we have today.

His illness emptied Father O'Brien of his capabilities, but he was filled with God's love. Even when he was unable to converse, if you asked for his blessing, you would get it. He was a priest to his very core. Since he has used his "Ticket to Heaven," I will talk to him in my prayers. I believe he is a saint because he always tried to cooperate with the Lord in his daily life, becoming as much like Jesus as he could.

Betty Lou Crowley  
Ridge Road  
Horseheads

## Calls story 'illiterate'

To the editor:

Soldiers and abortionists kill on state authority. Indeed, since many unborn are killed in war, soldiers are abortionists.

Jesus' Gospel records his command "Agape your enemies" thrice. Jesus is killed by enemy soldiers and offers no violent resistance. Our killing of Iraqis is no less political than the execution of Jesus. Then as now, the wealthy and powerful justify violence/untruth to maintain their position.

That's why the article "Veterans institute prayers for peace" (*Catholic Courier*, Nov. 13) can be described as Gospel illiterate. "The prayer service was not meant to be for or against war or political..." said an organizer. "Let us pray for our (soldiers) as they serve with courage ..." said a priest who also urged the imitation of St. Francis. The only Francis there is, received Jesus' call, rejected military ways, met the "enemy" unarmed in Jesus' name and wrote a rule for laymen, "They are not to

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