



Front the Heart

A Newsletter ♦ Published by Sacred Heart Parish ♦ Main Street South, P.O. Box 686 ♦ Southbury, CT 06488

"Be of Good Heart," Our Blessed Lord Why the "Heart?"

Isn't it very significant that in the four Gospels, the word "heart" is used only of two individual persons: Jesus (Matthew 11:29) and Mary (Luke 2:19 and 2:51). Surely this is not without import.

The Heart of Christ represents a great and unceasing call from God addressed to the human family and to each individual human heart. Not surprisingly, therefore, the first human heart to respond to this divine call was Mary's. Her fiat at Nazareth made possible the formation of His human heart, beating beneath her own. Her Immaculate Heart is the first to enter into that union of hearts to which we are all called.

So to the question, "why the heart," let it be said that in virtually every culture, "heart" means much more than the physical organ, the preeminent vital organ which pumps blood through the body. "Heart" implies so much more: love, affection, attitudes, feelings, emotions, courage and even fear. The heart speaks of one's innermost being, one's deepest interior, one's spiritual core.

Think of this: in our everyday language, we give "heartly thanks," "heartfelt greetings," "heartly welcomes." I speak from "the bottom of my heart." We speak of "brave," "good," and "true" hearts. I may do something "with all my heart." I have something "on my heart." We "pour out our hearts." We "take something to heart." We "set our hearts" on something. We

know "heartbreak." We "take heart." We "lose heart." Something "goes straight to our heart." We are "heartily sorry." We can have a "heavy heart" or a "light heart."

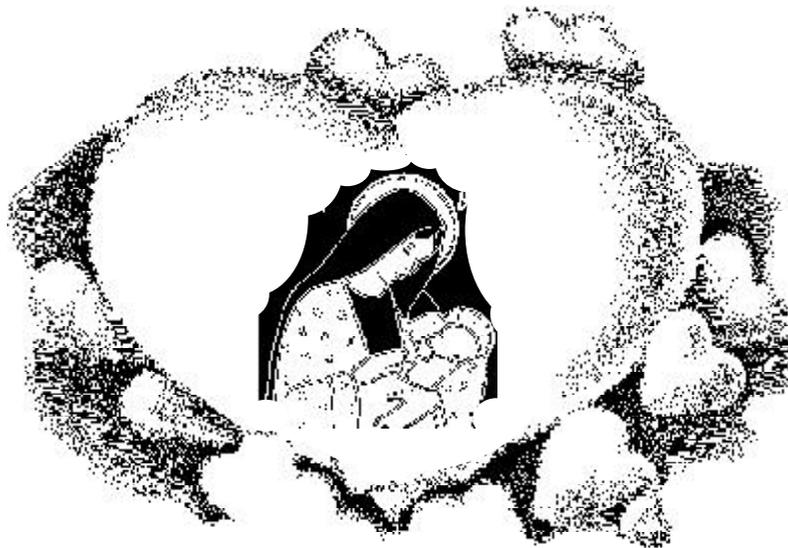
Surely this by no means exhaustive catalogue shows that our language is certainly not so heartless after all. Nor has the symbol of the heart lost any of its expressive power. Many public signs on our highways can be ambiguous, but even a child knows what a heart carved on a tree means.

Surely all of this popular usage testifies to the rich

spiritual resonance that the word "heart" awakens within us. The word evokes not only sentiments of emotion and affection, but also those memories, thoughts and plans that make up one's innermost world.

Only of man can it properly be said that "he has a heart." Obviously, it cannot be said of a pure spirit, an Angel, nor even of an animal. It is a possibility reserved uniquely to humanity alone.

So from our usage of the language of the word "heart," we may well begin to perceive the wondrous significance of the fact that the word of God became Man in the womb of the Virgin Mary and from that moment God began to love us with a human heart. How can we fail to respond?



C r o s s w i n d s

A Hero of the Unsung Variety

We live in an age of many "isms." It has been said that we are the generation of "criticism and judgementalism." Others point to our "pessimism." Still others characterize our present age as one that has annihilated "idealism." I suppose there's a large mixture of all three "isms" in our society's composition. I often think that one of the problems facing us today is that we have so few heroes to give us the example and inspiration we need. I would like to share with you the story of someone who is a true hero in a time when we have lost all idea of what courage, love, dedication and commitment mean. I wish to relate this story so that it will not be lost and can instead be celebrated.

I first met him on the steps of another church about 18 years ago. He always had a wide smile on his face and a warm, genuine greeting for me. Usually he came alone to church but on very rare occasions, he would be pushing his wife in her wheelchair.

Even now, it's hard for me to believe that for five years this was our weekly contact. Sometimes through his smile he'd wince from the pain of a bad back. I never heard him complain, though. All I really knew of him was that he was a good, decent, gentle man.

His wife died recently. Her multiple sclerosis had flared up

and she needed to be hospitalized. Complications set in: first pneumonia, then the need for a feeding tube. His wish that God would spare her further pain and suffering almost came true, but things turned around and to everyone's surprise, she was recovering enough so that she was about to be discharged. The afternoon before she was to go home, while watching television in her hospital bed, she gently looked away and breathed a last breath as her heart stopped beating.

As I sat with him at the funeral home and listened to him talk about the wonderful life he and his wife shared, I realized I was in the presence of someone truly special. At one point in a story, he referred to someone calling him "Teach." I would never have guessed that he had been a high school and college math teacher as well as a football and basketball coach. He traveled some 50 miles a day to his school until his wife became ill. Finally, eleven years ago, he freely gave up the profession he loved so much to

care full-time for the woman he loved even more.

He told me how he struggled to receive his degrees after the war on the G.I. Bill, and how he juggled his time to help out in our parish grammar school. He consoled himself with the knowledge that his wife died in the hospital, because if she had died

at home, he would have blamed himself for doing something wrong.

I don't know why he asked me to celebrate his wife's funeral after many years of not seeing each other, but I do know I felt honored to be

a part of the love and faith that this family shared. How truly he embodied the spirit of those words he had uttered so many years before: "in sickness and in health, until death do us part." His commitment—evidenced by a bad back from lifting her body and pushing her wheelchair without complaint, regret or a



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Crosswinds

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second thought-spoke volumes to me and many others about what real love is.

"Teach" may not have realized it, but long after giving up the teaching and coaching that he loved so much, he continued to be a teacher. His commitment to his wife and his decision to live life fully and without regret challenges me—and hopefully, you—to look at our own lives with greater honesty. We need to ask ourselves if we are really fulfilling our commitments without excuses or complaints.

Anyone privileged to have known "Teach" could not help but learn from him. The way he lived out the Gospel is neither too esoteric nor beyond our capabilities. His very ordinary yet genuine manner is what ultimately makes him so very special.

There are tens of thousands of just such heroes all around us. They are good and simple people who, without fanfare or headlines, quietly take what life has given them and live honest, compassionate, courageous, and most of all loving lives, regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves. And they do it not because they have to, but because they choose to do so. They are the heroes we should look for. We need to acknowledge them and we need to honor them. Most of all, we need to emulate them.

Father Mark Flynn

Gifts of Hospitality

At Sacred Heart, our parish family has been blessed with a number of committees and ministries that carry out important functions. One of these groups is the Hospitality Committee, headed by Jane Santopietro.

Those who attended the reception for the RCIA candidates at the Easter Vigil or the reception for Father Phil Sharkey following his first Mass in May well know the dedicated work of this committee. In addition to these and other occasional receptions, the Hospitality Committee works closely with the Social Activities Committee (chaired by Mary Korsu) in planning the annual parish picnic, makes arrangements for the Newcomers Dinner each fall, and handles occasional events such as the Thanksgiving Social.

Jane and her husband Ed are the parents of two children, Jessica and Alex. Jane's busy schedule includes her career as Vice President of Sales for a cosmetic company.

Hospitality Committee Chairperson Jane Santopietro (on right) is shown with one of her dedicated workers, Lina Savard.

Jane asked that all of the members of her committee be spotlighted here. "They are the ones who are truly dedicated and make it all work," she noted. Committee members are: Ester Rada, Chris Doran, Geraldine Wilson, MaryEllen McQuail, Roseanne Franco, Alice Fahringer, Jean Brickey, Lina Savard, Marabeth Finnerty, Kathy McCann, Irene Wilkins, Ann Virga and Loretta Stocking.

Jean Brickey



A Parish Ministry: Social Concerns

When asked to write about the Social Concerns Committee, I remembered from serving on the committee that it seemed the group's purpose was not completely understood by the parish. I suppose it's the word "social" that does it. In this case, "social" doesn't denote parties or entertainment, but rather the fabric of our lives that pertains to the good of our fellow human beings.

The Social Concerns Committee is made up of extremely dedicated people. For as long as I can remember, they have proposed and brought to fruition a variety of programs that have added many positive Christian works to the Sacred Heart Community. After looking at the programs currently sponsored by the committee, one might wonder how so few can do so much. In truth, they can't, and this ministry is in need of people who have a bent toward social action or social justice and are interested in getting involved. Here's a sample of what the group does:

A group of dedicated women, guided by Rose Shutte (264-3326), meets on Wednesdays to make sandwiches for a shelter in Waterbury. Not only do the sandwiches have to be made, but the materials procured and the product delivered. Many hands make light work, and more than 1,000 sandwiches are delivered each month.

All the Pro-Life activities, from post cards to our legislators to vigils and prayers for abortion concerns,

are steered by Bernie McGarry (264-9028).

Some time ago, Covenant to Care, a cooperative pairing of the needs of a Connecticut social worker with the ability of Sacred Heart to provide, was set up by Jeanne Kaufman (266-4717). She has passed on the day-to-day administration to others, but still tries to maintain the program's continuity. The back-to-school packs were one of the group's projects.

Our interfaith activities are guided by Barbara Lowe (264-1687). The Bike-a-thon was one of this group's efforts, and raised money for the fuel bank to help Southbury stay warm this winter.

Southbury's elderly community is served directly by Bob McGarry (264-9028), who has followed through each year with the much appreciated Healing Mass. Soon to come: a Senior Companion Program.

The Social Concerns Committee felt that those who spent Thanksgiving alone could benefit from a Community Thanksgiving Dinner. The idea has been successful in many places and has worked well here. Linda Fanelli (264-9157) spearheaded the dinner at Sacred Heart and now backs the effort continued by our Baptist brethren this Thanksgiving.

New members are continually needed for this vibrant ministry. The monthly meeting, held the second Monday of each month at 7:30 in Room B, would be a good time to drop in. Or, call one of the committee members. The committee's work can provide the outlet for whatever your interest may be in the social outreach concerns of our parish.



Ernest Swanberg

Spiritual Update

Advent Day of Reflection and Prayer

December 2, 1998

Fr. David Cinnquegrani, C.P. facilitator

Advent Evening of Reflection and Prayer

December 8, 1998

Sr. Eileen Fucito, C.P. facilitator

Advent Weekend Retreat for Men and Women

December 4-6, 1998

Retreat Staff

If you are interested in attending any of these retreats call Bob McGarry at 264-9028, Ernie Swanberg at 264-0408 or the Retreat Director at Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center at 860-521-0440.

The Little Things in Life

And so it came about in our house in Bronxville one December night, the following conversation:

"I'm destitute," said Tommy, my oldest son, then a junior at Fordham Prep.

"Destitute?" asked Sean, the youngest of my children. He had reached the age where every sentence ended with a question mark and was usually ignored by his older siblings.

"He means broke, penniless!" responded their sister Lauren, with a little more enthusiasm than I thought necessary. "John Wanamaker needs a stock boy," Lauren noted gleefully. "Of course, it would mean working." Lauren had landed a coveted spot in Wanamaker's cosmetics department for the Christmas season.

Dad to the rescue. "Have you ever read *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry?" I asked.

"Is he Irish?" asked Sean. Silence from the others.

"It's a wonderful story of self-sacrifice, humility and love, set in the Christmas season," I explained. "The story might be somewhat secular, but the religious reflections could be quite thought-provoking."

"Sounds great," said Tommy, "but I don't think Maureen would be happy receiving religious reflections for Christmas."

"Bob better come through," noted Lauren.

Who is Bob, I wondered, and whatever happened to Al? One of

the great joys of fatherhood is that I'm never part of the informational loop that would probably add at least 10 years to my life.

"That's not the point," I said. During this age of materialism, though, I figured he was probably right.

"Look at it from Jesus' point of view." All six eyes were now on me.

"He loves us so much, but do we dwell on the gifts we give Him—and more importantly, the gifts we get from Him? The Church says that He is demanding of us, but I wonder how that is true. We sin, we ignore him, yet he forgives and forgives and forgives. Isn't that because He loves us? It's perfectly clear to me."

Then, a revelation from my guardian angel. "Why not give Maureen rosary beads? It would mean more to both of you than a bottle of perfume, and it would bring your relationship to a higher level. And, it's a pretty thrifty present," I said.

"Thrifty?" asked Sean. No one replied.

As was the custom in our house on Christmas Eve, after attending Midnight Mass each child was permitted to open one gift. I recall that night as if it were yesterday.



Maureen handed a small package to Tommy. Tearing into the wrapping paper eagerly, he held the gift out for all of us to see: an emerald-colored rosary with the cross emblematic of St. Patrick.

Tommy and I exchanged glances: we knew and understood Maureen's message to him.

Rummaging through my bureau the other night in search of heaven-knows-what, I discovered the very same rosary, which I apparently borrowed from Tommy years ago and forgot to return. Maybe I should give it back, I thought. But maybe I just won't.

Dermis J. McLaughlin



Slow Me Down, Lord

I was studying for my last Catholic Biblical School test of the year when I flipped my desk calendar to the month of December. After just a brief look, my mind began to swirl. November promised to be a hectic month, and December looked no better. I looked at the days ahead of me: two parties, one shower, two birthdays, one installation dinner. Three events on one day, two events on another, all crammed into one month. December should be a time to think of gathering with friends and family for the holidays. Forget it. My wallet has been an open ATM since early fall, and it looks like I'll go into temporary bankruptcy until the new year.

I stepped back a little and asked myself a few questions. Why am I so anxious? Where am I going in such a frenzied state? I realized that I needed to stop focusing on externals only and prioritize the events in my life. The stress was getting the best of me, and I was jumping from one thing to another wondering how to fit everything in. I closed my eyes for a moment to think about the real focus in my life. After a little while, the stress seemed to disappear. I thought about what Jesus did when He needed a break from His public ministry. When things were coming at Him fast and furious, He and his disciples often went to the mountains or for walks by the sea, to get away from it all.

We need that same break from our own fast-paced lives. We walk around with our Daytimers and our appointment books chock full of events and activities. We log endless hours carting kids from one baseball game to another, from a soccer game, to a birthday party. We plan

months in advance to meet friends for dinner or for just a casual get-together.

As I slowly came back to this planet, I thought about a book I just bought. Entitled *Sanctuaries*, it's a guide to lodgings in monasteries, abbeys and retreats throughout the Northeast. I haven't read it yet, but the idea is coming in my mind to do a weekend retreat where I can take a break, focus on God and get a fresh infusion of His spirit—take time to be still and listen to God in the silence of my heart.

I remembered my schoolwork, and I glanced again at the calendar. Hopefully, this will be the season that I have a getaway with God, just the time for us. Regardless of what lies ahead in the coming months, I will take each

challenge in stride with new spirit and delight and, most of all, peace—the peace that only God can give each of us if we take the time to embrace it.

Paula Vaghi



Don't Eat the Fruit

Whenever your kids are out of control, you can take comfort from the thought that even God's omnipotence did not extend to his kids. After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing God said to them was:

"Don't"

"Don't what?" asked Adam.

"Don't eat the forbidden fruit," said God.

"Forbidden fruit? Really? Where is it?" Adam and Eve asked, jumping up and down excitedly.

"It's over there," said God, wondering why he hadn't stopped after making the elephants.

A few minutes later, God saw the kids having an apple break, and he was very angry.

"Didn't I tell you not to eat the fruit?" the First Parent asked.

"Uh huh." Adam replied.

"Then why did you do it?" God asked exasperatedly.

"I dunno," Adam answered.

God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own. Thus the pattern was set, and it has never changed. But there is a reassurance in this story. If you have persistently and lovingly tried to give your children wisdom and they haven't taken it, don't be so hard on yourself. If God had trouble handling his children, what makes you think it should be a piece of cake for you?

The Internet Grapevine.

Ask Father Flynn

Q *Has the Church changed its position on confession? We used to have to go every Saturday if we intended to receive Communion on Sunday.*

A This question raises many issues. Let me begin by saying that the Church has not changed its position about confession (known by the post-Vatican Council name of reconciliation) or the importance of this sacrament in the life of every Catholic. Sin continues to be a part of everyone's life. What has changed is the attitude that individuals have concerning sin and personal behavior. This has most recently come to light in regard to President Clinton's "indiscretion," which for many is a less abrasive word than "sin." Recent polls indicate that most Americans were not concerned with such behavior: what an individual does in private is his own business. Sadly, this indicates just how far we have allowed our sense of moral responsibility to deteriorate. Marital infidelity and sexual promiscuity have seemingly been rationalized into frivolous indiscretions instead of willful, conscious acts detrimental to one's moral character. In the eyes of society, sin is associated only with what is considered abhorrent, such as murder. But that view has also become objectified: society does not consider abortion or euthanasia as murder.

In essence, sin is any thought or action that violates moral law and the Gospel values. Sin is not simply the selfish acts that we perform, but also those things we fail to do out of laziness,

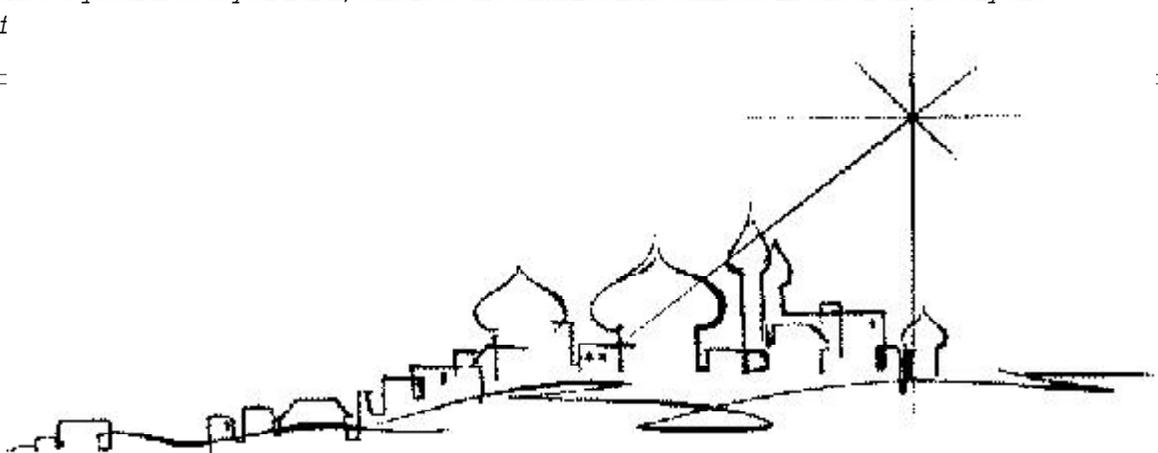
apathy, or willful neglect. People constantly say, "I'm a good person. I try to be kind. I don't have any sins." Those are delusional remarks made by those who have rationalized every action or inaction to coincide with an uninformed conscience.

The Church requires that we confess our sins at least once a year to a priest. In doing so, we are not stating how terrible we are, but rather how human we are and that in our humanity we constantly fail in our call to be holy. We should seek forgiveness for the sole purpose of receiving God's grace and assistance to be better, and to acknowledge that we need to redirect our lives to more fully live as followers of Christ.

There will always be individuals who will say that we don't have to go to confession anymore. Some will even say that a priest told them that. How unfortunate to take that attitude. In addition to being directly opposed to the Church's teachings, such an attitude indicates that we don't need God's mercy in our lives.

If one has committed a serious sin (mortal), he must go to the sacrament of reconciliation prior to receiving communion. I always suggest that every Catholic should present themselves for the sacrament of reconciliation at least twice a year. Likewise, it is always advisable to say a good act of contrition before receiving the Eucharist on any given occasion.

If you have a question about your faith, send it to the Communications Committee in care of the rectory and watch!



“We wish you a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!”



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