



UP FRONT AND PERSONAL
**Nursing Home Ministry
 Has Special Appeal**
 BY FATHER PATRICK J. DIFFLEY

The incentive to write this column came from a phone call from Tablet reporter Marie Elena Giossi. She asked that I tell "up front and personal" why I go to SS. Joachim and Anne Residence in Coney Island to celebrate the Eucharist, which I have been doing four times a week for more than a year, and to explain why I consider it important to do so. By way of encouragement, she added it would have "wide interest" for readers.

Despite the encouragement, my initial response was not very enthusiastic. I have never put in print my personal views based on experiences. In the seminary, we were taught to be wary of personal experiences because truth is objective and personal experiences were considered suspect. However, I recently read that 14 first-rate theologians have contributed to a new book titled "Theology in the Making," and all agree that theology grows out of life experiences that are both personal and universal.

The Tablet, it seems to me, is ahead in providing a column for exploring the spiritual dimension of personal life experiences. So, I am pleased to take the risk of this new adventure.

I consider the Gospel values and liturgy basic to a mature spiritual grounding and something our Church sorely needs. Liturgy is meaningless without sound bedrock Gospel values, which is the reason why the liturgy of the Eucharist is preceded by three readings on Sundays and two on weekdays. There is no shortage of Scripture; if anything, there is a glut. What is needed is a breakdown of what is meaningful and relevant to the community's personal and spiritual lives. Light devotions do not achieve this. I offer this introduction to explain how I apply my trade for and with the faith community at SS. Joachim and Anne Residence. Its appeal is covered in what follows.

The ministry itself is low key and lacks the hype and voltage commonly associated with wide appeal. The chapel room is stark and simple. Yet, it is quite adequate for its purpose. The furnishings consist of a crucifix, altar, Stations of the Cross, wheelchairs for their occupants wheeled in and out and as many portable chairs as necessary. Anything more would be trimmings, although a choir with accompaniment would be a benefit. I have mused and fantasized, if only the vibrant talent of once upon a time that presently sits in the rows could be revived, we would have a very lively celebration. But that hope is now mute, like the harp that once was heard in Tara's Hall.

The liturgy of Jesus with His disciples in the Upper Room must have been quite somber, even stark. The stress, anxiety, and confusion in that setting and through the following days must have seemed like a lifetime. Jesus had prepared His disciples previously by telling them that they would have to drink from the cup that He Himself was about to drink. This would be necessary. He told them, if they hoped to be re-united with Him in the Father's kingdom after His resurrection.

In the life of every Christian, a similar crisis of faith erupts when any one of us becomes the victim of betrayal and gross injustice. We were in awe during Holy Week at Jesus' forbearance and patience during His betrayal, trial, and condemnation. In our profession of faith, we gave our consent and our acceptance of it as necessary for redemption. But the hard test of faith comes when we find ourselves in similar circumstances and must decide how we will react.

A real case in point recently occurred in a liturgy setting. The question that Jesus put to His disciples: "Can you drink from the cup that I will drink?" appeared in a Gospel reading in Lent. Of course, the somber setting is always the same, but the Scripture readings give an opportunity for a change of mood and reflection each time. In this case, the direct question put by Jesus to His disciples offered the opportunity to reflect on the significance of being asked to drink from the cup. With so much suffering present, this part was easy. The cup takes on a special meaning when one's own personal condition and reality can be identified with its symbolism, namely, the redemptive suffering of Christ.

After the liturgy, one member who is always confined to the limits of a chair, said with exuberance, "I am ready to go." When someone replied, "You have great faith," she spontaneously responded, "I was born with it." Faith becomes first nature when it is well-grounded in one's own reality. Such witness is the only good explanation of what faith really is.

"Deep waters run smooth" is a proverb of the ages. That saying comes to mind as a result of this reflection of having observed over the past year a deep peace and quiet in the faith community of SS. Joachim and Anne. And it has the special appeal of being a sign that Jesus is still calming troubled waters in fulfillment of His promise to those who drink from His cup.



Papal Currency

A woman walks past a placard showing a bank note with the picture of the late Pope John Paul II inside a bank in Warsaw, Poland. The commemorative bank note will be issued in October to celebrate the anniversary of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla's election as Pope John Paul.

Bishop Places Priest on Administrative Leave

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has placed a Brooklyn parochial vicar on administrative leave from active priestly ministry after accepting the Diocesan Review Board's finding that an allegation against the priest of inappropriate behavior with a young lady two decades ago was credible.

The bishop announced his decision on the status of Father Paul Vazhapilly in a letter read to parishioners of SS. Simon and Jude Church, where he had served since 1997. Msgr. Kevin B. Noone, the Episcopal Vicar, read the letter at the conclusion of the four weekend Masses April 22-23.

As a priest on administrative leave, Father Vazhapilly may not present himself as a priest, celebrate Mass publicly or administer the sacraments. He is permitted to offer Mass privately.

The diocese will submit documentation on the matter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican "for its review and any direction it may wish to provide to our Diocese," said Bishop DiMarzio.

In his letter, the bishop stated his concern for the well-being of the person who presented the allegation against the priest.

"On behalf of the Church, and in particular the Church in the Diocese of Brooklyn, I apologize publicly and profoundly to the victim for the suffering she has endured," he said.

"Even the passage of time has not dimmed the memory of a painful episode in her life," he added. The improper behavior took place when the priest served at Regina Pacis Church in Brooklyn.

In describing the process that led to the decision to remove the priest on administrative leave, Bishop DiMarzio said he presented the allegation to the eight-member Diocesan Review Board, comprised primarily of lay persons with experience in social services, family life, medicine, the law and law enforcement.

The board engaged a former detective for the New York Police Department to conduct a thorough investigation of the allegation. When the investigator completed a report, it was given to the board for analysis and review.

When the board found the allegation to be credible, the information was presented to the bishop for his own review. The bishop said that while Father Vazhapilly denied the allegation, he determined that the facts contained in the review board's report were sufficient for him to reach the decision he announced in his letter.

The review board has served the diocesan bishop since early 2003. It is a confidential consultative body that functions as directed by the "Essential Norms" that accompanied the U.S. bishops' 2002 "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Bishop DiMarzio's letter repeated a call he has made many times for anyone who may have been a victim of improper behavior by a member of the clergy "to come forward and advise us."

He said he had established a toll-free telephone number "to facilitate the making of such a call" — 1 (888) 634-4499. He said callers would be "treated courteously and with respect."

After the Masses at SS. Simon and Jude, Amityville Dominican Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, and five members of the diocesan Healing Intervention Team were on hand to meet with parishioners who wished to discuss the news contained in the letter.

"This continues to be a challenging time for our Church," Bishop DiMarzio said. He asked the parishioners at SS. Simon and Jude to pray for the victim and for the priest, adding that he offered "my own prayers for you as you receive this distressing information."

**Youth Ministers, Coaches
 Must Attend Workshop**

All youth ministers and athletic coaches in the diocese, whether clergy or laity, paid or volunteer, must take the three-hour Virtus workshop in order to work with young people.

For a full list of upcoming workshops, call 718-965-7300, ext. 1312.

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