

THERE ARE  
SET BEFORE YOU  
FIRE AND WATER;  
TO WHICHEVER  
YOU CHOOSE,  
STRETCH OUT  
YOUR HAND.




SIRACH 15:16 BY JACK KERSHNER

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1987

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RELIGIOUS  BULLETIN

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Volume III Issue 19 February 15, 1987

"...all who grow angry with their brother or sister will be liable to judgment."

Today's scripture reminds us of our need for "a certain wisdom", of the need to choose life, and Jesus' insistence on being honorable and just. Listen to Him, "Lose no time, settle with your opponents..."

As the season of Lent approaches, let us ponder scripture and let God's word sink in. Try three minutes of scripture each day.

**THIS WEEK'S CATHOLIC FAITH PROGRAM** features Catherine LaCugna, Theology Department/UND, speaking on IMAGES OF GOD, 7-8:30 PM Sunday and Tuesday evenings in the Keenan-Stanford Chapel. You are invited.

Sixth Sunday  
of the Year  
February 15, 1987

Lord, for the honor of your name,  
lead me and guide me.



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## Vow of Nonviolence

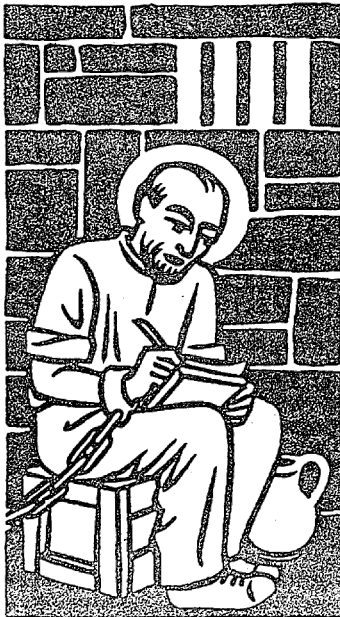
Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow for one year to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God...You have learned how it was said, "You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy"; but I say to you, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven."*

Before God the Creator and the Sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life
- by accepting suffering rather than inflicting it
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence
- by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in Your sustaining love and believe that just as You gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so You will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.



SAINT PAUL

*When the going  
gets tough...  
try this prayer.*

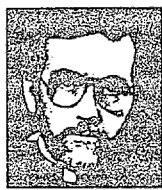
God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another.

I have a mission. I may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next.

Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him. In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me — still He knows what He is about. ■

# A Priest's Painful Choice



In his pajamas, with tubes running into his body, Bobby gradually became a healer for me

BY CHARLES R. BURNS

**H**ow odd," I thought, "that he should come to see me." The young man was obviously distressed and experiencing great difficulty trying to verbalize his pain. He was 25 years old, darkly handsome and dying of AIDS. His parents knew neither that he had AIDS nor that he was an active homosexual. And he had come to me, a Roman Catholic priest, for help.

It was yet another of those times when I knew all the right things to say but knew, too, that the right things were wrong. Bobby resurrected ghosts in my psyche and for a moment I knew the terror of an Orestes pursued by the Furies. In all my religious training I had been given rules that embodied good intentions. But upon application in particular cases, they revealed an inflexibility that could drive you crazy. Bobby had asked me a very simple thing: would I stand with him as he tried to talk to his parents?

Church law forbids homosexual acts, however, and according to the rules, I should have condemned him. But I stood with Bobby and helped his parents accept him as I was also learning to do. He was a man of faith who happened to be a homosexual. And I was struck by his obvious sincerity. We talked many hours after that, and I managed to pry open, with his help, a steamer trunk of past regrets—of relationships I had run away from because my training taught me that any relationship could become sexual. It also taught me to fear homosexual men, and so I dealt with them as nonpersons: I did the same with women.

When I entered the seminary 30 years ago, everything was set and sure. You knew what the rules were. Anything not within their purview belonged to that hazy limbo labeled "a mystery." Seminary living is just slightly less natural than foot-binding. We were 70-odd men gathered together in our late teens and herded into a totally male environment. We slept in the same huge dormitory and studied in the same huge hall. We had individual desks, but nothing about them was allowed any trace of individual expression. The world we lived in was impersonal, a long black line of marching heads bent at the same angle. Is it any wonder some of us became depersonalized?

We were trained and taught to have the right answers. A few years later when each of us had his own room, we were forbidden to visit anyone else's room without the door being ajar. Aside from the sniggering and unspoken fear of homosexuality, such arrangements also precluded intimacy. The preclusion was worse than the fear; how does one grow as a

person without intimacy? We were also warned about the danger of having a "particular friendship." Particular friendships became the altar upon which intimacy was sacrificed.

I always suspected that drawing close to a man or a woman would automatically lead to sexual involvement. One learned to avoid involvement. One learned to follow the directives and to "fit in" with all the others. One learned never to be particularly noteworthy—either by doing something well or by doing it badly. Getting along with others was prized. I learned how to banter and to make clever remarks; this smoothed relationships. It was a life devoted to getting others to accept me rather than of accepting myself.

Bobby once asked me why I always kidded him. He told me that he knew that I loved him and cared deeply about him, but he wondered why I always tried to have something funny to say. I had no answer. Instead we began talking about my past, and his, and how I developed the essentially defensive bantering device. In his pajamas, with tubes running into his body, Bobby became a healer for me. Gradually, I learned how to lean over his bed and kiss him goodbye without any trace of fear or suspicion of lust. Each time I left him I began to realize it might be a final leave-taking, and so I wanted him to know at the last that I loved him very much.

My earlier training had been how to get along in an institution, how to be a person whose intellect always controlled his emotions. Bobby helped me to realize that I was starving even as he lost more weight than he could possibly afford. I began to understand that old verity: if you deal with the dying, they will give you life.

**Acceptance and forgiveness:** Two months after Bobby died, Kevin's family called and I was all set to perform another good deed. Again I would appear at an AIDS victim's side, help him receive the sacraments, and I would be properly recognized. There was even an added thrill because, at the time, visits to AIDS patients were still suspect and filled with the fear of contamination. But Kevin's situation did not work out according to my scenario. He refused my sacramental ministrations.

During the 17 years of my priesthood, I had grown accustomed to people bringing me their love and their hate. But it was surprising to me that I respected Kevin for refusing. It was consistent with the faith with which he had grown comfortable: a faith that says we cannot limit acceptance and forgiveness. That wasted body was not about to give in to superstition, nor was he about to feign being accepted into the arms of a church that had spent the greater part of his life rejecting him. I became awed by the power of the man and almost asked his blessing. Now, I wish I had.

In the 23rd chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus admonished his disciples: "Call no one on earth your father. . . ." It is a favored text among the more vigorous fundamentalists who are angry at my church. Bobby and Kevin taught me that I am not their father; that I had enough trouble just trying to be their friend. I try to be a good person, as did they. I try to help, and so did they. I bumble and strive at love, and so did they.

My seminary training would have led me to be distant from those whom I have learned, I would rather love. There are those in power in my church who would make themselves distant from me in the same way. Yet, I now make the conscious choice to love and to befriend. I do it for Kevin and for Bobby. I do it for all who are like them. And there are moments when I stand before the altar and I hear them calling out to me. "Way to go, Charlie. Don't let anyone call you father. Don't keep anyone away."

*The Reverend Burns, a Jesuit, serves in Ronkonkoma, N. Y.*

FOR YOUR PRAYER AND REFLECTION . . .



# DISMAS NEEDS 10 GOOD PERSONS !!

- A family setting
- A beautiful old home in South Bend
- Life in a community

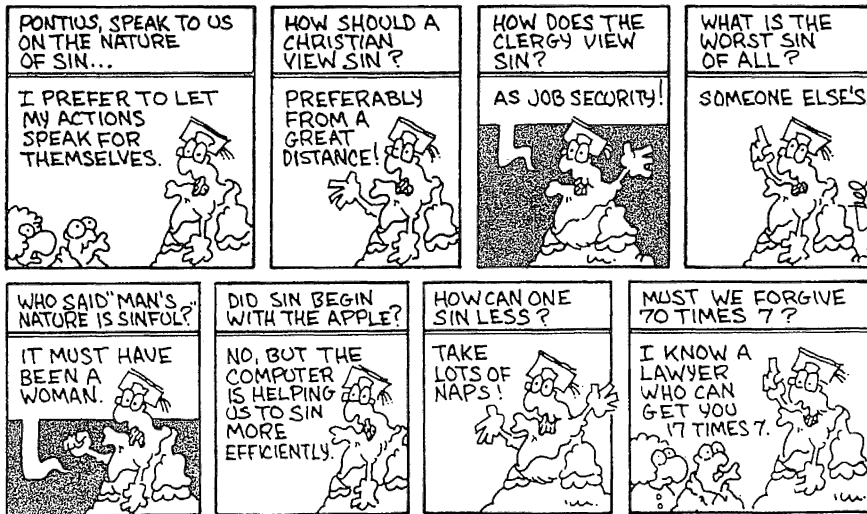
All these things are available at Dismas House, a home for students and ex-prisoners. For \$225 a month a student can live in the house and have good home cooking -- all you can eat. We are looking for 10 students to live in the house next year. Presently there are seven students living there. If you are interested, pick up an application form at the Center for Social Concerns. Application deadline is Feb. 27. Interviews will begin the first week in March. Selection will be made by the first week in April. If you would like to visit Dismas House, please call either Kathy Royer at 239-7862 or Scott Wallace at 233-8522 and make arrangements to eat dinner at the house any evening.

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## Ponius Puddle



Celebration: February 1987