

in a

Word

First Bishop Francis
Scholarship Fund Banquet
huge success page 3

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Photos by Father Pawlicki, SVD

**HUNDREDS TURN OUT TO REMEMBER THE
CHALLENGE OF BISHOP FRANCIS TO COMBAT RACISM**



Reflections on Life! HOLIDAY BLUES CAN BE BEATEN

“Thanksgiving day was terrible! The family met in our parents’ home, but returning to the old household scene was unbearable. I feel awful. I dread the approach of Christmas. I just wish Christmas had already come and gone.”

As you must have guessed, the lady just quoted had lost her mother a couple of weeks before, and this was the first holiday for the family to be together without both their mother and their father who had died 8 years earlier.

That opening salvo against the holiday season was about a month late this year, coming two days after Thanksgiving day. Usually, the firing line is established well before Turkey Day, but this time I heard no earlier laments.

Death, of course, is the dread specter, the feared common denominator which haunts the lives of innumerable people around the world during this season of peace, hope and boundless joy. The loss of loved ones weighs heavy on each of us,

Separation and/or divorce is truly a form of death for a lot of people, who don’t hesitate to tell you exactly that. “In fact, I would prefer being dead,” some will tell you. The aloneness and not belonging are terribly painful.”

What aggravates the trauma of death in many families is the gnawing reality that mama and papa kept the family well in hand, but now the members are being torn ever further apart by petty jealousies and envies.

The closeness, camaraderie and sheer joys of family which once were are now replaced by apathy, suspicion, the grasping pursuit of properties, and the bile of ill will.

Which reduces the holidays to a travesty of joyous praise and celebration, a mockery of all the Christ child was born for and stood for during his incredible sojourn on earth.

So, the holiday syndrome, alias the anniver-

sary reaction, is alive **and** well this year as every year. However, we do not have to be subject to this condition in life, although we cannot deny there will always be a touch of melancholy.

We don’t have to go around moping, paralyzed by sadness, hounded by memories of paradise lost, without appreciation for the gift of today or any hope for a better tomorrow.

Not surprisingly, our rescue comes from the birthday Boy himself, whose awesome teachings simply told and retold the story of Christmas itself. The second person of the Blessed Trinity did the unthinkable by submitting to Incarnation.

Becoming just like us in everything except sin, Jesus showed us how to follow his lead, identifying so completely with each human being that the well-being of each one becomes just as big a priority as our own well-being and happiness.

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” was the precursor of the awesome command of Jesus: “As the Father loves me, so I also love you... Love one another as I love you” (John 15:9).

It is mind—bending that Jesus commanded us to love one another just as he loves us, which is just as the Father loves him. But, if we live this out even partway, wonderful changes will take place immediately in our person and life.

Jealousy, envy and ill will cannot coexist with this kind of love. Wishing each person the very best we want for ourselves, rancor is replaced with peace, melancholy is routed by joy, and despair is smothered by blooming eternal life.

REMEMBERING THE GIFTS AND CHALLENGE

Every one of us can name at least one person who has had a lasting impact on our lives. On November 6, 1999 in a packed auditorium on the campus of Xavier University hundreds paid their respects to the memory of Bishop Joseph Francis, SVD. This man had touched the lives of all those present in some way. They were in attendance to remember this dynamic man's gifts and challenges to us.

On this November evening the Society of the Divine Word Southern Province held its first annual Bishop Joseph Francis, SVD, Scholarship Fund Dinner. It was held to honor Bishop Francis' tireless work on the issues of racism, education and vocations.

The purpose of the event was to raise money to fund lay ministry in parishes. The affair generated more than \$23,000 and will provide scholarship money to lay men and women for lay leadership formation and educational opportunities that will benefit their parishes, communities and families.

Bishop Francis authored Brothers and Sisters to Us, the pastoral letter adopted by the National Conference of

Catholic Bishops which confronted racism in the Catholic Church. He was truly an exemplary human being who fought to bring the value and dignity of human beings into the consciousness of the those who were already empowered and to those who discriminated against the poor, the uneducated and those

who did not know Christ. Though he is not with us in a physical way his spirit lives on.

James Cardinal Hickey of Washington, DC, gave a moving address on the life and work of Bishop Francis. **Cardinal Hickey reminded us that the Bishop Francis legacy was not only a gift to all Catholics but a challenge as well.**

The Cardinal said: "Three gifts, three challenges which Bishop Francis gave us by word and example: (1) The challenge to work for racial justice; (2) the challenge to work for better education for our young people; (3) The challenge to help our young people respond to their God-given vocations."

Cardinal Hickey stated further that "the Bishop constantly invited lay men and women to serve in a wide variety of Church ministries.

He called for the establishment of leadership training programs."

So it was fitting that the scholarship fund be established in the name of this pioneering Bishop. The wonderful gathering of Catholic

priests, religious and lay women and men

and the event was testimony to his legacy and vision. Bishop Francis' insistence on love for all God's children will continue to live on through lay men and women who will in their parishes burn brightly the light and call for equal justice to all.



Dr. Norman Francis, brother of Bishop Francis, Cardinal Hickey and sisters of Bishop Francis

in a word or two

Eat The Scroll Ministry sponsored its first National Bible Study Conference October 29. The conference was a spirit-filled event, centering on The Word of God.

People attended from various parts of the United States and were inspired by presentations from Donna Grimes, John Gaither, Jr., Charlene Howard, Father Patrick Smith and others. Msgr. Raymond East concluded the spirit-filled weekend with a most inspiring liturgical celebration. Michael Howard, founder of Eat The Scroll Ministry was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and response to this inaugural conference.

St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Savannah, Georgia will celebrate its 90th anniversary on December 17-19, 1999. The celebration will include a musical concert, banquet, dance and anniversary Mass. St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church also in Savannah celebrated its 125th anniversary on October 15-17. St. Benedict is the oldest African American Catholic parish in the state of Georgia.

Katherine Drexel moved closer to sainthood on October 7, 1999 when a board of medical experts convened at the Vatican and declared that there is no natural cause for the cure of a 17-month old child's deafness. This moves Katherine Drexel one step closer to canonization by which the Catholic Church recognizes an individual as a saint.

For more information see the web site for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament at www.katherinedrexel.org The web site contains historical information about Katherine Drexel, her family and religious organization.

At the recent US Bishops National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop J. Terry Steib was elected to head the office for African American Catholics.

Documents approved by the Bishops at their November meeting can be found www.nccbuscc.org



Photo by Babatunde Adewunmi

On October 31 St. Mary's parish in Newark, New Jersey celebrated the St. Mary's Harvest festival.

The annual harvest festival is a centuries old tradition in Africa. It is celebrated on weekends throughout the month of October by immigrants yearning to maintain their traditions.

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church is a large diverse parish. Many of its members are from West Africa. The festival was started by Nigerians of the parish in the early 1980's and now draws large numbers of Ghanaians, as well as representatives of Liberia, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and other West African nations.

The yearly event has been a strong fund raiser for the parish. This year over \$24,000 was raised. **"This is a place of hope for African immigrants"**, said Paul Uzosike, one of the first Nigerians in the parish who helped organize the first harvest festival. **"The mission of this church helps them on their feet and gives them a standard for success"**.

Father Philip Waters, OSB is pastor of this parish. We thank him for sending us photos and information on the event.

The entire text of Cardinal Hickey's testimony to Bishop Francis can be found in the archive section on the IN A WORD web site.

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 5,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among blacks in the southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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