

In the Vineyard

Feb. 23, 2006

In Luke 2:21, the aged Simeon was called to the temple by the Spirit. When the baby Jesus was brought in by his parents, Simeon knew he had lived to see “the Anointed of the Lord,” the “consolation of Israel.” Anna, too, was in the Temple that day – another aged person and prophetess. When she came to the scene of the infant’s presentation in the temple, she also knew that the deliverance of Israel was near. How did these old people know so much so profoundly? They knew because they stayed close all their days to their God, listening, believing and watching all things. We must do the same. See **VOTF Lent reflections** in Reflections for Our Time.

The Accountability Now Action Campaigns are ready for a March 2006 launching!
See National Representative Council Update.

Get on board and let us know what is happening in your state’s legislative efforts on reform of statutes of limitations. Send to pthorp.ed@votf.org.

Also note:

VOTF National Representative Council members Frank Douglas (AZ) has set up a new Yahoogroup website/listserv - PCTL—Protect Children through Legislation. The site will act as an information clearinghouse about current and recent initiatives aimed at reforming state laws dealing with sexual crimes against children. Typical reform efforts are mandatory reporting requirements for clergy and changes to statutes of limitations, including the application of “look-back windows” for cases where the statute of limitation has already run. *The site is open to the public so take a look!* Read details in **NRC Update**.

DIOCESE Watch

LATE-BREAKING News in Boston, MA: Archbishop Sean O’Malley has been named a Cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI along with Archbishop William Levada (former Archbishop of San Francisco, CA and Portland, OR). Prior to these appointments, there were 13 American cardinals, 11 of whom are under the age of 80 and thereby eligible to vote for a successor pope. See John Allen’s column at <http://nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/>. Also see the VOTF press release and additional details on this story at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0601063.htm>. For a complete list of the cardinal-delegates, go to <http://www.thebostonchannel.com/news/7323024/detail.html>.

- March 14 is the date set for an exclusive hearing on SOL repeal bills before the State House Judiciary Committee. For details and updates on Boston VOTF, contact Dorothy Kennedy for inclusion on Boston VOTF’s excellent, one-page newsletter distributed twice monthly – kendor713@yahoo.com

What will it take? Chicago’s Cardinal George’s failure to remove a priest against whom credible allegations of sexual abuse had been made documents both the failure of the

USCCB to live up to its own language and the profound, ongoing need for vigilance on the part of the laity. See VOTF president Jim Post's letter to National Review Board chair Dr. Patricia Ewers. Go to www.votf.org.

Denver, CO: As VOTF prepares for what promises to be a long campaign toward accountability in our Church and the protection of children, there is a parallel "campaign" being launched in various US dioceses. The sad state of reality among many US bishops is nowhere more evident than in a recent public relations commentary on SOL reform and windows that appeared in the "Catholic PR Wire," an arm of *Catholic Online*, at <http://www.catholic.org/prwire/headline.php?ID=1841>; "State legislators in Colorado, Ohio, Michigan and New York, Iowa, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Minnesota and Massachusetts have introduced bills that might severely cripple the Catholic Church as an institution, hurting its 67 million members...."

- NRC Region 13 rep Frank Douglas notes: "The message from Denver's Archbishop Chaput, under the logo of his legislative lobbying arm, gives a glimpse into the hardball tactics used by bishops to defeat legislation to protect children." <http://www.cocatholicconference.org/>; the *Denver Post* reports: "The church is arguing that Colorado law makes it tougher to sue public schools under routine governmental immunity laws and therefore it should be just as tough to sue the church for its pedophile priests." See http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_3502536.

Spokane, WA: From the *Seattle Times*: "An organization of 82 Catholic parishes in Eastern Washington is opposing Spokane Bishop William Skylstad's settlement offer of \$45.7 million to victims of sex abuse by priests. The Association of Parishes, which was organized to represent the financial interests of the individual congregations in the diocese, contended the settlement raises the prospect that churches or schools will be sold to raise the money." Bishop Skylstad is president of the USCCB. Follow this story http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2002811879_webspokanesettlement17.html.

Chicago, IL: Gretchen Ruethling reported for *The New York Times* at www.nytimes.com that the "Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago has hired independent consultants to examine how accusations of child sexual abuse are handled. Defenbaugh & Associates Inc., an international security consulting and investigations firm, will review the archdiocese's actions related to accusations of child sexual abuse involving two priests. The cases came under fire after it was disclosed that the priests had been monitored but not immediately removed from the ministry after being accused. The archdiocese also appointed a licensed clinical social worker to review the policies for monitoring accused priests."

Des Moines, IOWA: Bishops hear from victims' advocates: "In an unprecedented session, representatives of victims of priest abuse met with the four Catholic bishops of Iowa in Des Moines Feb. 2 to ask them to take action against one of their own, the retired bishop of Sioux City." See the Feb. 17 posting of *National Catholic Reporter* at www.ncronline.org.

Detroit, MI: SNAP visits the archdiocesan chancery. Go to www.snapnetwork.org

VOTF NATIONAL

Accountability Now Campaigns are under way with instruction materials now in the hands of affiliate leaders. See VOTF Campaign 2006 Update.

- Must reading is Marci Hamilton at <http://writ.findlaw.com/hamilton/20060209.html>; on the same site, see a proposal for federal legislation – the Violence Against Children Act of 2006.
- Educate yourself on questions and issues of financial accountability by visiting the Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA) at <http://www.fadica.org/main.html>.
- Correction: In the January 26 issue of *In the Vineyard*, please note that the “Collaborating on Financial Transparency” was co-authored by George Perkins (not George Bouchey as stated). To see this report again, go to the 1/26 *Vineyard*.
- Get into the conversation! See NRC Update.

AFFILIATE Invitation: RAISE YOUR HISTORICAL IQ!

De-mythologize statements like, “The Church has remained the same since the time of the Apostles.” Sign up for VOTF New Jersey’s online course, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, based on the book by Hans Kung. Registration will open on February 20 and the course will begin its spring semester on Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2006 at www.cathchurchhistory.org. Take advantage of this opportunity for a unique Lenten practice that will enrich your understanding of our church and give you a deeper perspective on our faith as you continue your spiritual growth.

The course is facilitated by NJ VOTF’s Joseph Lynaugh and Maria Cleary, both of whom have advanced degrees in Theology and Religious Education, respectively. There is no fee and the book is a reasonably priced paperback available online at Amazon or Barnes and Noble. Go to <http://www.cathchurchhistory.org> to register. For further information, contact clearymf@optonline.net or m.lynaugh@verizon.net.

COMMUNICATIONS Update: Do you know who your affiliate leader is? your area coordinator? your National Representative? the difference between one and the other? If not, find out here.

SURVIVOR Community Voices: To receive Bishop Gumbleton’s weekly homily published in *National Catholic Reporter* as “The Peace Pulpit” go to <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/peace/signup.php>. *NCR* provides this serve free of charge. Here is an excerpt from a recent homily: “One of the things that I have discovered with the abuse situation in our church, one of the hardest things for the survivors is the way that those who represent the authority within the church, the bishops, have made them enemies. Instead of reaching out pastorally trying to draw them in,

trying to heal, they go to court and going to court in our system is adversarial. So now they're the enemies. We have to fight them off and that's exactly how many of them have felt. And the wound that they received when they were abused just become even more intense. How different our church should be."

- See "Detroit Archdiocese Urged to Support Changing Laws" on the SNAP web site at www.snapnetwork.org.

CALENDAR Watch: The Parish Voice Calendar of meetings and events is posted on the Web at <http://calendar.yahoo.com/parishvoiceexchange>. Use this calendar to find a PV meeting or a VOTF-related presentation near you. Event information should be sent at least two weeks in advance to ParishVoiceExchange@Yahoo.com in order to be on the VOTF calendar. Other events are posted on various affiliate web sites such as the following:

April 22: VOTF in Long Island, NY is hosting a day conference with the title, "Keeping the Faith while Living with Contradictions" on April 22. Go to www.votf-li.org and included in the invitation the following text For more information, go to their web site at www.livotf.org.

See the Feb. 9 issue of In the Vineyard for **Dates to Remember** including the **Feb. 27** (not Feb 26 as mistakenly indicated) panel discussion at Boston College "Catholic Politicians in the US: Their Faith and Public Policy" moderated by Tim Russert from "Meet the Press." Or go to <http://omc.bc.edu/c21faithandpolicy/> or call 617-552-4820; **March 24-26** retreat "The Church Women Want" at the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center in NY – www.graymoorcenter.org; VOTF Bridgeport, CT will sponsor an **April 29th** Fairfield University panel discussion on "Elect Our Bishops? Why Not?" Go to www.votfbpt.org; Fr. Gary Hayes invites clergy of all faiths who are survivors of sexual abuse by clergy to attend a **May 26-28** retreat at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in Bangor, PA. Contact Fr. Hayes at garyhayes@bellsouth.net for details or call 610-588-1793. Register online at www.kirkridge.org.

BOOK REVIEW – *Two Women of Galilee* (MIRA Books, 2006) by Mary Rourke will be available in bookstores on Feb. 28. Rourke covered VOTF in 2002 for the *Los Angeles Times* and is the author of *Amazing Grace in America*. *Two Women of Galilee* is her first novel.

LETTERS to the editor – on keeping our eyes on the prize in VOTF; Aquinas as a model

PUBLICATIONS' Notes: Subscribing to one or more Catholic publications is always worth consideration. We occasionally offer some light/some not-so-light samples of current coverage in these; as always, we welcome your own "finds." See what's happening in *Commonweal*, *America*, *US Catholic* and *National Catholic Reporter* at **In Other Words**.

Commentary and Reflection:

Lent: Reflections for Our Time – Susan Troy
Book Review – *Two Women of Galilee* by Mary Rourke

RASIE your historical IQ! De-mythologize statements like, “The Church has remained the same since the time of the Apostles.” Sign up for our NJ VOTF’s online course, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, based on the book by Hans Kung. Registration will open on February 20 and the course will begin its spring semester on Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2006 at www.cathchurchhistory.org.

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QUOTE for our time: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” *Martin Luther King*

BOOK REVIEW

[*Two Women of Galilee* (MIRA Books, 2006) by Mary Rourke will be available in bookstores on Feb. 28. Rourke covered VOTF in 2002 for the *Los Angeles Times* and is the author of *Amazing Grace in America*. *Two Women of Galilee* is her first novel.]

In the place along the Mediterranean that stretched from Idumea and Judea in the south to Syria in the north and west across the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, the death of Herod the Great around 4 B.C. set off a dispute among his three sons for the kingdom. Augustus Caesar, emperor of the Roman Empire, divided the land among them, giving none a royal title. One son received half the territory comprising Judea, Idumeia and Samaria; Judea included both Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Another son received Galilee and Perea, which included Nazareth, Cana, and Magdala. The third son was given the last patch, just across the Sea of Galilee. Into this mix, comes the light-handed but scholarly fiction of Mary Rourke in her story of *Two Women of Galilee*. It is set mostly in Sepphoris and Tiberias in Galilee while under Herod Antipas; he was the second of the heirs, the “fox” of Luke’s gospel, and husband of Herodias who asked her husband for the head of John the Baptist and, through her daughter Salome, got it.

The two women of the book’s title are Joanna, wife of Chuza, Head Steward for Herod Antipas, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The women were cousins but had been separated

decades earlier by the clash of cultures that divided Roman Jews from religious Jews. The growing public ministry of Jesus and Joanna's weakening consumptive condition brought the two women together in Rourke's story that begins just before Jesus' trip to Jerusalem for Passover and concludes after His death. In the interim, Rourke delivers a clear view of the hazardous life within what might have seemed an impregnable world of power and riches. For all players in the house of Herod Antipas, there was plenty of intrigue, mayhem, and unspeakable cruelty to go around. The story is told in Joanna's voice – young and wise, frightened and courageous – but above all, a convert to the man she called “my healer.” And heal Joanna, Jesus did.

We know little of Joanna, if Scripture is our only guide. We know from Luke and elsewhere in Scripture that Joanna was wealthy enough to be a provider for Jesus and His followers; that she was among the women who accompanied “the Magdalene” Mary, when the women went to the tomb where Jesus was buried and found it empty; and that more than other small “players” around the time of Jesus' ministry and death, Joanna earned very little text. The latter is often recognized as a function of the scandal Joanna was thought to represent – did she leave her husband to follow Jesus and was therefore “disappeared”? Was Chuza already dead when she began to sojourn with Jesus and His disciples? Rourke's story moves in one direction on this question but, in the end, while it makes for fine reading, it is hardly the point. What Rourke gives readers in this book is an informed understanding of that time and its day-to-day realities for one woman believer of considerable means, but there's something else.

Just as the Gospels wrap metaphor and memory around a message, Rourke continues the “good news” in the same tradition. We see again that prophets are not popular. It was no small risk in Herod's world even to ask a question about this one man whose healings seemed to threaten so many in power, whose speeches advanced such notions as one among equals, and whose challenge often included a retreat from hard-earned gains. We get a little closer to the measure of what it took to believe in Jesus and we are driven to ask what our own belief demands two-thousand years later.

As our Church faces up to and fumbles through the current crisis, it is hard for many faithful Catholics to establish passage that feels both safe and right. (Consider the fate of many a contemporary theologian.) Rourke's book might suggest that some things haven't changed much for followers of Jesus – being called today is pretty much the same challenge it was in the time of Herod. Jesus was always difficult; even his family had their ups and downs with him.

Readers may find it impossible to read the story of *Two Women of Galilee* without becoming, for a while, one of them. But if you can't manage quite such a leap of imagination, try choosing any one of the other characters and ask, What would *I* do? Not a bad exercise for Lent and excellent “gos-pel” reading.

COMMUNICATIONS Update

The elected National Representative Council is in place as part of VOTF's policy-making apparatus, which includes officers and trustees depending on the issue. When VOTF's new bylaws are ready, all of VOTF's working parts will be defined clearly. At this time, however, we can offer a thumbnail understanding of who is what and where.

Affiliate and parish voice leaders are the "people in the field" – they are either leaders in a particular parish voice group or leaders of a merged group of smaller groups. These are the first point of contact for members. However, any VOTF member can be in touch with the NRC directly, regardless of parish voice or affiliate membership.

Area coordinators oversee a particular region of affiliates for purposes of communication and for those people around the world who may not be in an affiliate but who are members of VOTF or might be considering membership. Area coordinators know what affiliate is where and can connect a member to the nearest VOTF group.

Those members who are not affiliated with any particular Parish Voice group or affiliate have the same access to leaders in VOTF and might contact the regional coordinator for their region.

Contact information for the **National Representative Council** is on our web site; go to www.votf.org and click on "Who We Are" in the left-hand navigation bar on the home page. The pull-down menu includes a link to the NRC. Your National Representative is identified by region. For **affiliate leaders and area coordinators**, click on "Parish Voice" in the same navigation bar on the home page. In the pull-down menu, click on Directory to find your state and affiliate/area contacts. You will also find under Parish Voice, a page identifying those affiliates with their own web sites. When all else fails, you can call our office at 617-558-5252.

NATIONAL Representative Council Update

CAMPAIGN 2006 Update

The Accountability *NOW* Action Campaigns are all set to kick off in March. The first installment of the Action Handbook has been sent to affiliate leaders introducing the campaigns and providing affiliate leaders with information on how to conduct the first few steps, which include prayerful preparation, research and education. In the research phase affiliates need to find out what the current situation is in their state and diocese and report back to National so that we can establish a national repository of critical data for all to share. Training has been scheduled for the weekend of March 25-26 in Dayton, Ohio for those affiliate members who wish to play an active role in leading the campaigns. To sign up to participate in the training please contact Susanna Gregory at sgregory@votf.org or call 617-558-5252.

We will be supporting our Action Campaigns with ads in the *National Catholic Reporter* beginning March 3rd and running for six weeks. In addition the direct mail appeal being mailed out in March to our full membership list will also emphasize the Campaigns.

There is something for everyone to do. We encourage you to check out the National website in March and click on the www.votf.org/2006 for more information about this effort. We are focused and committed; together we will come closer to realizing our mission statement and our goals through these campaigns.

[Note: Catholic News Service reports a FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities) survey finding: the more generous Catholics are to the Church, the more they expect financial accountability. "The findings from the 2005 survey confirm our conclusions from the 2004 survey: The financial implications of the clergy sexual abuse scandal have continued to linger," Zech said in his analysis. Charles E. Zech is director of the Center for the Study of Church Management at Villanova University's College of Commerce and Finance. Go to <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/briefs/cns/20060209.htm>]

You can help us to help each other

Frank Douglas (AZ) with Judy and Chuck Miller (MD) have set up a new Yahoogroup website/listserv - PCTL—Protect Children Through Legislation. Frank Douglas reports the following:

I thank Chuck and Judy Miller of VOTF's Montgomery County, Maryland affiliate for identifying the need for the website and encouraging its formation.

The site will act as an information clearinghouse about current and recent initiatives aimed at reforming state laws dealing with sexual crimes against children. Typical reform efforts are mandatory reporting requirements for clergy and changes to statutes of limitations, including the application of "look-back windows" for cases where the statute of limitation has already run.

The website/listserv is open to the public. This transparency means anyone can access the e-mail messages, databases, and files posted there. The website/listserv will allow people who are involved in working toward legislative reform in one state to access the experience, expertise, and lessons learned by others in a different state. One way to accomplish this knowledge transfer is to post e-mail messages about what is working and what is not working in a particular state. Another way to do this is to build a database of contacts. A third way is to provide files of actual proposed legislation. A fourth way is to provide links to organizations (e.g., SNAP, VOTF) active in reforming child protection laws. To subscribe to the group, write an e-mail message to PCTL-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

If you feel comfortable in doing so, in your subscription message please provide a brief introductory statement about yourself, your reason for joining, and any experience you

may have in legislative efforts to protect children. Please sign your message with your name, city, state, and organizational affiliation, if any, so that we can begin to build a database of contacts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about the basic goal or approach to the Website, please send them to me at frankdouglas62@yahoo.com or PCTL-owner@yahoogroups.com.

To post a message, write an e-mail message to PCTL@yahoogroups.com.

An excellent definition of terms (SOL, civil and criminal implications, etc.) is available at <http://www.answers.com/topic/statute-of-limitations#top>

Reflections for Our Time

Please send your own reflections on these passages to pthorp.ed@votf.org.

Lenten Reflections: Views from within Voice of the Faithful

Susan Troy, MDiv, VOTF Prayerful Voice

I remember trying to communicate to years of Confirmation students the wonders of reading Scripture, Scripture's "aliveness" and its never-ending ability to be personally engaged by the individual in a particular time and place and happenstance. "This is a living document," I would say. Thinking back on the blank stares, I do hope that at some time in their journey those young people found an opportunity to experience the wonder of discovering how Scripture can be so pertinent, so relevant, so contemporary and so meaningful.

Every time we read a passage of Scripture it becomes new. It offers something very different to us, because, we are different, every time. We bring a different perspective, the nuances of age, and experience, and life lived.

We have heard the Lenten readings for a lifetime. What can be *new*? There is desert and more desert. There is John the Baptist. There is the going up to Jerusalem. What is different is what we bring to the encounter. For many of us these last days, months, years, have been deeply colored by the fact of our Catholic faith lived out in a Church mired in shame, conceit, and delusion. What will we see through our "Voice of the Faithful" lens when we encounter the readings this year? What is our particular Lenten journey as members of a Church in desperate need of reform?

During this Lenten season, *In the Vineyard* will repeat whatever the current passage is from the list below. We invite readers to reflect on the passages selected and share your thoughts in our e-community.

What is your experience? What “revelations” do you experience this Lenten season that relate to our Church, our faith in these difficult days, to the mission and goals of Voice of the Faithful?

First Sunday of Lent, March 5, 2006 – Gospel of Mark 1: 12-15

“The Spirit sent Jesus out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan.”

This going into the desert does not seem to be a totally unencumbered choice by Jesus. It seems the Spirit is a force at work in Jesus’ life and in Jesus’ choice of destination. Another translation says, “The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert.” Implied is that, given the absence of this Spirit, a different choice might have been made.

Voice of the Faithful is said to be a Movement of the Spirit. What does this mean in terms of your understanding of this passage in this season of Lent? What is the “desert” where we might be as an organization? And, what is the value or meaning of desert time in our tradition?

Second Sunday of Lent, March 12, 2006 – Second Reading Romans 8: 31-34

“If God is for us, who can be against us? Is it possible that he who did not spare his own son but handed him over for the sake of us all will not grant us all things besides? Who shall bring a charge against God’s chosen ones?”

What do we within Voice of the Faithful do with all the adversarial feelings that our organization seems to engender within the institutional Church and among our brothers and sisters in the faith in light of this passage? Why is our “faithfulness” questioned? What does this passage say about us? About God?

Third Sunday of Lent, March 19, 2006 - Gospel of John 2:13-25

“As the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple precincts he came upon people engaged in selling oxen, sheep and doves, and others seated changing coins.”

In just this simple first sentence, what can we understand about Jesus, his faith and faithfulness and his expectations? What do we hold today, as Catholic Christians in the beginning of the 21st century, that is familiar with Jesus’ own self as related in this Scripture passage?

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 26, 2006 - Gospel of John 3:14-21

“Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but have eternal life... but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it

for fear his deeds will be exposed. But he who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God.”

Some evil or wickedness is not easy to recognize. Wickedness can be secretive, disguised, alluring, hidden. But some evils are so blatant, that there can be no question.

This is the case with the sexual abuse of children by priests and religious of the Catholic Church. The light, Christ’s action in us, shines on evil and yet we are faced with an institutional Church that blocks the light. What do we do with this knowledge? How might this passage help us prioritize and recognize what is demanded of us as individuals and as the Body of Christ? What is our ultimate authority?

Fifth Sunday of Lent, April 2, 2006 - John 8:1-11

“Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he reappeared in the temple area; and when the people started coming to him, he sat down and began to teach them.”

Sometimes it is instructive to ask the simplest of questions. What do we know of Jesus from this simple, seemingly inconsequential passage? Jesus was accessible and it was the action of the people coming to him that moved him to teach. There was nothing between Jesus and the people except the beginnings of a new faith. How do we experience Christ as accessible to us? How do the structures of our faith, our traditions and institutions, enable or deny that access? In what way are we in Voice of the Faithful sitting at the feet of Jesus and what do we expect?

IN OTHER WORDS

Subscribing to one or more Catholic publications is always worth consideration. We occasionally offer some light/some not-so-light samples of what are to be found. We welcome your own “finds” at pthorp.ed@votf.org.

Commonweal magazine: We repeat this recommended reading in the Jan. 27, 2006 issue, now online “After the Big Chill: Intellectual Freedom and Catholic Theologians” at www.commonwealmagazine.org.

America, Feb. 13, 2006: The National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) has completed a poll asking “which liturgical song most fostered and nourished the respondent’s life.” Winners were “On Eagle’s Wings” topped the list followed by “Here I Am, Lord”; “Be Not Afraid”; and “You Are Mine.” What’s your favorite? (Send to pthorp.ed@votf.org) Visit the NPM site at <http://www.npm.org/index.html>. Upcoming are Stamford, CT (June); Grand Rapids, MI (July); and Sacramento, CA (August) conventions.

US Catholic, March 2006: In this issue, “Women’s words for the 40 days” is another companion during Lent. Some current articles are available by visiting www.uscatholic.org. Here’s a sample: Q: “If Lent is 40 days, why are there 46 days

between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday?” A: “While the season of Lent (Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday) is technically 44 days, the number of days for penance and fasting before Easter is still 40: 44 days minus 6 Sundays equals 38, plus Good Friday and Holy Saturday equals 40.”

- Also in this issue, “Does it pay to work for the church?” is available online. The editors ask, “How fair to its own employees is the church that first calculated the ‘just wage’ in 1891's *Rerum Novarum*?”

National Catholic Reporter reports on the Cardinal Newman Society’s charges against theologian Richard McBrien, calling the Society’s web site fundraising appeal letter “a six-page call to battle the heathens in our Catholic midst, a breathless rambling screed that includes in its attacks a who’s who of notable U.S. Catholic theologians and universities.” Go to http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/022406/022406b.htm.

LETTERS to the editor

Send to pthorp.ed@votf.org

“For years I have considered the revelation of God as self-giving love as the greatest legacy we as church can hand on to our children and their children. Said another way, if we but kept this wonderful truth alive among us by our actions we should not be troubled if all our other treasures were to be lost. Obviously I would be deeply disappointed with our leadership if they did not share such priorities -- if they cared more about material treasure, for example, than the spiritual foundation that makes all our ambitions on earth worthwhile for eternity. Voice of the Faithful as a movement can help them to keep their sights on the things that shall endure.

‘Deus Caritas Est’ is very welcome, a constructive voice for us today, though it is about 25 years overdue.... The letter I would like to have seen would keep the firm grounding in the God of Jewish and Christian revelation that this letter proudly possesses. It would also display the following three qualities.

First, we learn to embrace and hand on the self-giving love of God by our own life of sharing in community and our own self-giving. In other words, love is lived more than it is studied and defined. That is the lesson of chapter 15 of John's Gospel. And that has been the lesson in particular of our modern-day martyrs, many of whom had to suffer at the hands of fellow Catholics in positions of power.

Second, such self-giving has been the object of much serious philosophical study by thinkers in many countries and religious persuasions. We Catholics can quote their work with pride, assuring ourselves at the same time that we have no monopoly on this wonderful revelation.

Thirdly and finally, the self-giving to which we are called is the source of the Church's indestructibility. We often allude to our humblest members as the treasures we possess,

and then press on to the earthen monuments that bear our names and yet will not endure. We do not reach the fullness of life to which God has called us by knowing what God's love is, but by putting it into practice in imitation of God. To quote the prophet, the truth by which we are to live will be found not in our letters and books and basilicas but in our hearts." *Paul Schlachter, VOTF Miami, FL*

"The new president of Notre Dame University, John Jenkins, says that Thomas Aquinas' greatest intellectual influences, aside from Scripture and Church Fathers, were Aristotle, Avicenna, and Maimonides--a pagan, a Muslim, and a Jew. Jenkins says that part of Aquinas' strength was a willingness to learn from any source he could. And us?" *John Chuchman*

"The next St. Francis is VOTF. Our Lord told Francis to 'rebuild my church,' just like the Holy Spirit has inspired many in VOTF to do. And it will! Stay the path, my dear friends, and keep the HOPE. I pray for you (us) daily." *Bill Freeman*