

The lessons taught by Lumen Christi

Word came earlier this month that Mercy Sister RoseMary Boessen had received the Lumen Christi Award from Catholic Extension Society. The honor recognizes the top missionary in the U.S., and it is only the second time in 32 years that an Idahoan has received this honor. Besides the prestige, the recipient also earns a cash prize of \$25,000; the sponsoring diocese receives a matching \$25,000.

That's excellent news for the Diocese of Boise, whose social service arm, Catholic Charities of Idaho, has been forced to undergo severe cutbacks because of the paucity of grants resulting from the tumbling economy. In the end, that good news is a harbinger of hope for the poor at a time when hope is in such short supply.

Beyond that, this as a boon for

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the church.

First, Sister Boessen has labored in this diocese for 39 years, toiling in near anonymity. A cursory look through the archives of the *Idaho Catholic Register* found only two articles with her name, despite having helped thousands of people through no less than three sustained ministries. In fact, when interviewed for the story in this issue, Sister Boessen expressed a degree of surprise that anyone would be interested in what she deemed the "ordinary" events of her life. Mother Teresa is credited with the characterization of saints as ordinary people who lived extraordinary lives. Surely Sister Boessen must qualify on some level.

Second, the story of this nun's mission and its recognition reminds us all that while Boise is a mission diocese, perhaps part of that mission is to spread the Good News to those outside our borders. The lesson is that great things can be accomplished through the determination of a diminutive nun and the indomitable power of God. Imagine what could be accomplished in places with greater resources, more Catholics and fewer natural obstacles. The pursuit of holiness needs no passport.

Finally, a study released this month from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate suggested that active vocations directors and stories of ministry must be reintroduced into religious culture to help overcome the rapidly dwindling numbers of

religious women and men. Stories like Sister Boessen's should be read by every parent to every child in every home in Idaho, because it is in those interior fields where the seeds of vocations are sown. Parents remain the most dominant influence in the lives of their children. Parents must be the foremost stewards in the growth of vocations. When stories like Sister Boessen's are told, those stories should become as much a part of the Catholic culture of our families as Christmas Midnight Masses, Bishop Kelly football games and parish picnics.

To borrow a phrase: The cash prizes will give us fish for a day, but the example and lessons of Sister RoseMary Boessen will, with God's help, make us all better fishers of men and women.

Respect, honor the work done by church ladies

Hierarchy aside, it's the church ladies who really run the church, especially on the local level.

I sing the praises of the church ladies. I learned their importance when I was a very young priest, assigned to a parish that required some decision-making and organizational ability, two characteristics that remain, after all these years, my weakest suit.

So, I stood there after the little ceremony welcoming me to the parish, helpless as a fish flopping on the bank. Then, I saw these two ladies rolling up their sleeves. In no time, things were on track. When time finally came for me to move on to another parish, the congratulations came pouring in: "Good job, Father."

Truth be told, it was the church ladies.

After years of experience, I finally am able to organize crucial parish organizations like the pastoral council and the finance committee. Their members play an important role and I am humbly grateful for their wisdom and energy. However, I also noticed that their ease of function was directly related to the number of faithful church ladies who sat around the table.

Is your parish church a tidy place and is the parish kitchen clean enough to eat off the floor? Somewhere around, there is a church lady. Religious education classes? A whole platoon of church ladies works faith-

In the Midst of God's Abundance

By Father William Taylor



fully, year after year, with not nearly enough thanks from the rest of us. The parish secretary and the parish book-keeper? Paid, perhaps, but what keeps them going are the faithful hearts of church ladies.

A word of advice to all those young priests taking over from tottery old pastors like myself: Tend to your church ladies. Don't cross them. Heap on the praise, and never, ever try to tap their treasury. It's their money. They earned it, and they will spend it well for your sake and for the sake of the parish.

Priests come and priests go, but the church ladies live on.

I think of one in particular, who I will call Elsa (not her real name). Elsa had four words of advice for me when it came to my sermons: "Keep it short, Father." She was the sturdy guardian of the parish hall, and she kept the good silverware and the good table cloths under lock and key. If something needed to be done – a funeral brunch, a parish dinner, or the parish bazaar – Elsa was always there in the thick of it. A whole generation of younger church ladies learned from, and envied, her work ethic.

Lo, in the golden halls of highest heaven, a trumpet sounds. Martyrs were entering the Kingdom, dispatched all too soon by the horrors of persecution. Suddenly, an angel blocks their way and there is a great cry from the Lord of Hosts himself.

"Make room!" the voice thunders. "Make room for one of my choicest children. Elsa has just passed St. Peter's Gate. Oh, look on in wonder: This was a church lady!"

Father Taylor is the author of two books on Mormonism and has penned several award-winning pieces for the ICR over the years.

Have we forgotten our American dream?

Being a Red Sox fan since the moment of conception (that's the usual genetic defect found in New Englanders' DNA), I was glued to the recent ESPN documentary "The Lost Son of Havana" which featured ex-Bosox hurler Luis Tiant returning to Cuba for the first time in 46 years.

For those not familiar with the one called "El Tiante," he was a whirling dervish on the mound, a maestro of mayhem for batters and tamer of the Cincinnati Red's Big Red Machine during the 1975 World Series. I will never forget the scene of him running the bases in Game 1, literally rolling into second base after advancing on a bunt attempt following his most unlikely single. Tiant remains among the most beloved players in Red Sox history.

Just as compelling, however, was the story of his life. He left Cuba shortly before Fidel Castro clamped down on the emigration of talented Cuban ballplayers to the U.S. Despite the communist oppression, Tiant longed to return there. Luis Tiant Sr., himself a barnstormer in the American Negro Leagues and among the most talented lefties of his day, wrote and told

From the Editor's corner

By Michael Brown

his son that he would have no life in Cuba under Castro and he should stay away.

Family, politics and baseball – what a script! In 1975, in events recounted in the ESPN film, Castro personally invited the senior Tiant and his wife to make the trip to the U.S. and to stay as long as they liked. I remember seeing the photos of our Luis, crying like a baby, hugging his dad, for the first time in 14 years at Logan Airport. Then, when the senior Tiant attended the son's next game at Fenway Park, I got goosebumps watching on TV, as the southpaw dad threw out the ceremonial first pitch, a perfect strike to catcher Carlton Fisk, amid the cheering throng.

Flash forward to 2007 and there's the older, stouter El Tiante, along with his ever present Cuban cigar, nervously wiping his brow as his chartered plane touches ground in Cuba. In

a subsequent ESPN blog session, Tiant wasn't sure if he would be allowed to move around, or if he would be taken immediately to jail. "It makes you nervous," he wrote, "but thank God nothing happened."

"Everything that you were doing or thinking, it's a different story when you get there. Then you get depressed and you don't know if you want to cry or be happy. You start talking to yourself, why? Why? That's the question all the time. It really hurts your brains. Thinking too much. I did what I wanted to, in coming back to my country. See the land and where I grew up. That's what I asked God, to let me go back home before I die. I think that's sad that you can't go back to your land before you die. If you find out your mother and father died before you can get that. That's sad," he wrote.

Tiant's parents never went back to Cuba. His father was diagnosed with cancer and died a short time later. His mother died from grief the next day.

What Tiant saw in 2007 in Cuba were the barrios, the slums. The narrator noted that after driving around Havana for two days, the crew had not seen a single market or hardware store or toy store. Cubans received a food allotment that lasts for 15 days and for the rest of the month, they are on their own. Like many savvy travelers to countries like Cuba, Tiant packed extra clothes and suitcases and gave them away to family and friends while he was there.

Tiant is special. Through hard work and luck, he carved out a career that in his senior years should not find him ever wanting. However, in his heart, like every immigrant, there is a longing for the world he left behind, no matter how destitute that world may be.

Some in Cuba thought Tiant was living the life of luxury in America. Some were clearly jealous about the fame and attention he received. His surviving family, however, gave Tiant the same

message that his father had given him 40 years earlier: Don't feel guilty. Don't come back. Just live out your dream.

In Idaho, there aren't many Cubans, but there are other Latin Americans, Africans and Asians. Most of them have a story like Luis Tiant's parents: a life in oppression, a dream for their children to have a better life and a desire to make it to America to make that dream a reality. The journey is perilous and some may die. Many may find some welcome here, but also animosity, back-breaking labor and prejudice. For some, the ties that bind them to their countries of origin are too tight, and they may risk their lives retracing their steps back to the abject poverty or oppression they fled.

Finally, the Tiant family was reunited because of a bold request and political courage. Have we lost that courage as the federal government now separates families, sending away immigrant fathers and mothers from their children because the parents lack proper paperwork? Have we forgotten our American dream?