

New beginnings offer new opportunities

Spring is normally seen as the time for new beginnings, but for many, the end of summer also marks a period of new endeavors.

For students, a new school year is about to begin. Many young athletes have already jumped into preparations for the fall sports season, including football (although at some college programs, this is a year-round affair).

EDITORIAL

For farmers, many of whom enjoy no off-season, harvesting summer crops has commenced and before long, the pumpkins and other seasonal delights will be headed to market. August and September are critical months for their balance sheets, as they reap the rewards sown by the sweat of

their brows.

Parishes enjoy the return of their vacationing members – weary perhaps, but hopefully refreshed – and look for the renewed energy they bring to parish programs.

Most of all, we offer thanks to God for a summer that has been, for the most part, fire-free. We pray for the families that have lost loved ones; for workers who have lost jobs;

and for all who have lost their way. May the cooling air remind them that God offers respite and peace to those who seek him.

Finally, may we all recommit to seizing every coming day for what it is: a gift from our loving Father. May we embrace each day as an opportunity to live out our call to renew the face of the earth. Or, at least, the face of Idaho.

A new look at an old way of receiving sacraments

Sometimes it's good to read an old book all over again. Old ideas, triggered in the first read, spring back to life.

I reopened a book by Father William J. Bausch, who was once considered one of the best pastors in the U.S. Like me, Father Bausch received what passed for a theological education in the days before the Second Vatican Council. We spent many subsequent years trying to catch up on theology, Scripture and church history. Unlike me, Father Bausch wrote some thoughtful and challenging books, like "A New Look at the Sacraments."

One chapter, "Unchristian Baptisms," caused me to write this short article.

Since the time of Constantine, the Catholic Church has contained a very large number of hangers-on who have never experienced a real religious or moral conversion. To put it a little too simply: Many "Catholics" are actually practicing atheists. Some of them go to church.

Many would say the solution is Catholic schools, but most Catholic children do not attend Catholic schools. They make do instead with poorly financed religious education programs. Parents who don't go to church drop off their kids for "CCD." "CCD," in turn, surrenders to the more important demands of sports and other school activities. Young adults struggle without much help from their parishes. Young families often do the same.

As a result, Catholics know less and less about more and more of their faith, and their religious commitment has fallen like a rock. As a result, one third of Catholics are former Catholics. The second largest church in America is made up of baptized Catholics who never bothered to live a Catholic life.

In the Midst of God's Abundance



By Father William Taylor

Writing almost 40 years ago, Father Bausch argued it was past time for us to change our strategy. Now, it is way, way past time. Father Bausch wants us to reinvent the way we do baptism.

Some priests have already come to that conclusion and they baptize only the children of practicing parents who have attended baptism classes. Some argue that doing so simply uses baptism as a weapon and a punishment inflicted on non-practicing parents.

Father Bausch offers a solution that would involve a return to the way it was done in the early church. This radical approach would involve more education and discussion, and it might take time before it could become the normal practice again.

To put it simply, don't baptize infants at all. Shortly after their births, enroll them before the whole congregation in the catechumenate. When they approach maturity, give them the full rite of initiation the way it was done during the days of

the martyrs. The current practice is that while we still call baptism, Eucharist and confirmation "the sacraments of initiation," we break them into separate sacraments administered over a span of 15-18 years.

Restore the unity of the initiation rite. The ancient church flourished well under that system in the face of extreme pressure. It produced some great saints. This return to the sacraments of initiation as they were initially meant to be received might heal the scandal of meaningless baptisms given indiscriminately to babies who will never live their faith as adults.

Father Bausch suggests that we enroll non-practicing Catholics who want to baptize their children into some version of the catechumenate as well, so that they can reclaim their faith and show the example of a lived faith to their children.

The traditional way has created a spiritual monster. As one author put it, we have a case of diminished sacraments. What Father Bausch calls "multi-staged rituals" have distorted the process of conversion and commitment. Growing adolescents abandon their baptism and first Communion as "childish." Efforts are made to stir up renewed conversion and commitment at confirmation during teen-age years, with spotty results.

Well, it's a thought. Take a look at the many baptized who no longer live their faith – some of them your own children, perhaps. The old way doesn't work very well. What about an old, old way?

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

Why do we go? Because it's there and so is God

By Congregation de Notre Dame Sister Patricia McCarthy

"Preach the truth as if we had a million voices, for it is silence that kills the world."
(St. Catherine of Siena)

On July 16, 1999, a small group of people gathered down the road from the Army base in New Mexico where the first atomic bomb was exploded in 1945. They gathered to pray for peace; they asked forgiveness of God for using that bomb and all those which followed, beginning with Hiroshima. They prayed for protection from all the dangers of the nuclear age. They prayed through the intercession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel whose feast is celebrated on that day.

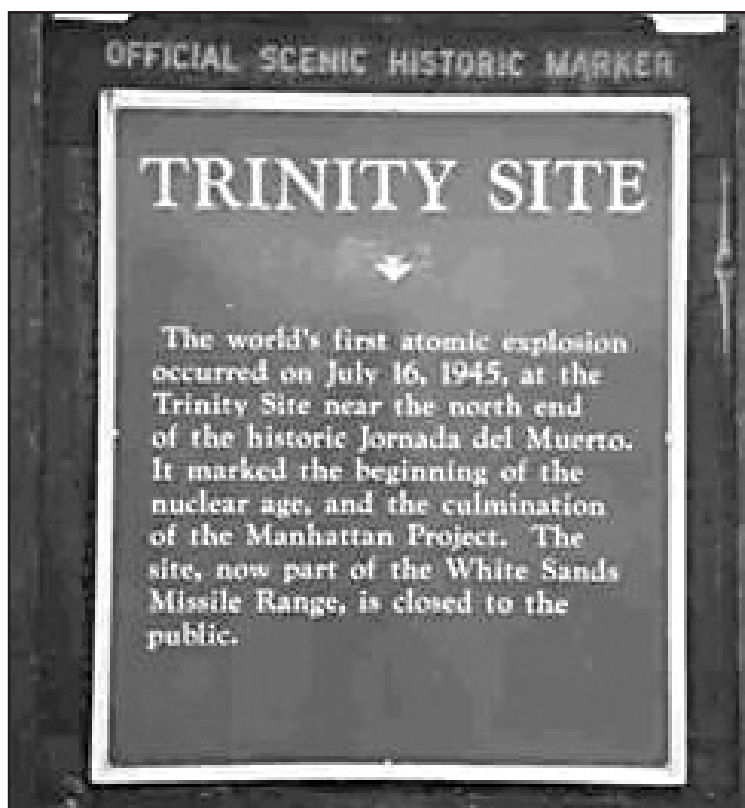
Among those praying was Father George Zabelka, the Catholic chaplain for the bombing crew on Tinian Island, from where the nuclear attacks on Japan were launched.

Since that day, the presence and prayers at Trinity Site have continued every year, with a 24-hour prayer vigil from sunset on July 15 to sunset on July 16. Some

years the number of participants has reached 200. Most years, it is more modest, staying at 60-70. Over the years, we have had two bishops and 10 different priests, a few religious brothers and religious women. However, most of the participants are the laity, some coming from nearby parishes, others traveling from points throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe and Japan. There have been two Hiroshima survivors present at different times.

Trinity Site is desert land owned by the government under the Bureau of Land Management. A lease is negotiated annually for the use of the land for the vigil. Tents are set up to cover the altar and chairs. The hot desert sun and the evening wind and rain are always challenging.

Following the July 15 evening Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and the day-long vigil goes through the long night under the desert sky, usually filled with galaxies of stars. Rosaries slip through fingers; people wrap themselves in shawls and blankets as the cool breeze finds its way into the desert. A flashlight is tied to a pole; the



light is directed to the center of the monstrosity. Heart and eye are drawn to the consecrated host. At first, it seems so insignificant and fragile in the face of the multi-trillion dollar weapon research facility at the Army base behind the altar. It may be the site

of the first atomic explosion, but it is only the first of many. This place which spawned the nuclear age threatens us to this day in North Korea, Russia, India, Pakistan, the U.S., France, Great Britain, China and most likely, Israel.

What good is a handful of

people praying through the night against such high-tech destructive capability? Or, as many have asked me through the years, "What good does it do to keep going there year after year?" In the face of all this potential for death to humanity and earth itself, what can a handful of people praying in the desert do? What can God do?

Questions come easier than answers, but as the night progresses, a flicker of a response sparks in the darkest night. Because we are there at the site of humanity's unleashing of destruction beyond comprehension, Christ is there in us and in the Blessed Sacrament. Against every bomb built, used or tested, we kneel in adoration to our Creator as an act of defiance to destruction. We kneel to the God of love rather than the god of hate. We kneel in the presence of one another as brother and sister instead of enemy. Hour after hour under what the Irish poet William Butler Yeats might describe as "blue and the dim and the dark cloths of night", we gaze on the face of Christ and "all is changed, changed utterly."