

BULLETIN -- SEPTEMBER 20

Father James J. Kavanaugh was born in Kalamazoo on September 16, 1928, and died there on December 29, 2009. But he was no stay-at-home. Of his parents' seven sons, four became doctors, two became priests, and one took over the family insurance business. Both Jim (also known as Jamie) and his brother Robert ("Red") attended our St. Joseph's Seminary on Burton Street, and they were spectacular students. Both went on to be ordained for the Diocese of Lansing, of which Kalamazoo was a part until 1971. Jim wrote a book early in his priesthood, *Everybody Calls Me Father*. For the 1950's, it was a refreshing kind of autobiographical account of his first couple years as a priest, filled with both funny and poignant recollections and stories. When I was ordained about 20 years later, I had a thought after my first couple years to pen a similar "inside story," only I was going to title it "*And You Call Yourself a Priest!*", something I heard occasionally in those days when I had only begun to imagine I knew everything.



Jim wound up leaving the priesthood in the late 1960's after he wrote the book *A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church*. I read it from cover to cover; but even as a college student, I was amazed at the rather lofty expectations Jim had of fallen human nature -- everyone's, apparently, but his own. I found him in that work to be astoundingly arrogant -- like a husband who has married a bride, intent on changing her for the better rather than becoming better himself by serving her. It saddened but didn't surprise me when I heard soon after that he was leaving the priesthood; but in doing so, he said, he would never leave the Church. In due time, he announced he was leaving the Church, but would always be a Christian. Then he had discovered that Christianity itself was severely limited, but he would always believe in God. Eventually, his poetry and other writings, humanly beautiful as they can be, do not express much explicit belief in any kind of divinity. He described himself as a perpetual searcher who could never be tied down or confined. He married and divorced twice. His journey as a spiritual vagabond led him, from my point of view, to wander and wonder around the ball park without ever really settling down to enjoy either watching the game or playing it. He just seemed to thrive on wandering and wondering. Jim lived for many years in California. No surprise there. Ill health finally brought him home to Michigan. He was loved and respected by many. He had a very crowded Irish wake when he died, but no funeral.

I pray that, as St. Augustine wrote, Jim ultimately found the truth that "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Perhaps the God of his Irish-American upbringing was too demanding and too overbearing for a gentle soul like his to truly feel comfortable with that image. Perhaps he didn't actually know Jesus Christ well enough to see him as the true Image of the Eternal Father. Perhaps the great number of people who have acknowledged that he did indeed help them sort things out and give them a more joyful purpose in life will, in company with Christ, be his intercessors before the Father. Perhaps we'll find out in eternity, when, we pray, we shall taste of God's Divine Mercy and come to know all its wonders.

I share this story of a brother priest with you to caution you in your own spiritual journey. We know that we are surrounded in our culture by people who can be described as moral relativists, secularists, or modernists in the classical, philosophical sense. They

have rejected any moral code associated with a God, a religion, or a church, substituting their own arbitrary ethics and then enforcing them ruthlessly. Examples abound:

-- They have no problem with serial adultery or fornication. Second-hand (tobacco) smoke, however, is a major no-no.

-- Climate change should be everyone's preoccupation. Yet the rapid alteration / decline of the *moral* atmosphere is of no concern, and can't even be proven scientifically.

-- Abortion is nearly sacramental in its revered status, brooking neither regulation nor criticism of any kind. Circumcision, on the other hand, is a butchery and mutilation more ghastly than the amputation of arms and legs.

-- Christians are being routinely persecuted and put to horrible deaths by ISIS; but the elites are truly incensed only when ISIS delights in blowing up some inanimate monument of antiquity.

-- Ouija boards, tarot cards, and astrology are innocent pastimes; but an SUV or an oil pipeline desecrates the earth.

-- Refusal by a doctor or a pharmacy to prescribe or sell contraceptives threatens the social order, but any two or more people are free to write their own definition of marriage.

-- The bureaucracy knows best; the father of a family is an idiot.

The moral elites and social engineers can operate on their own terms and with their own set of rules because of an arrogance that recognizes neither original nor actual sin of their own. Sin is either kind of an amorphous attitude of globalized evil that is really nobody's fault, or it's an ethical failure of uneducated masses who still foolishly cling to their guns and religion, and who entertain fantasies about chastity and virginity and an afterlife. This is why public schools must be upheld as the standard, with a common core of ideas, attitudes, and selected facts that will shape the minds of the young according to the spirit of the age and not be restricted by inappropriate (read "Christian") influences. This is why vouchers that allow children to attend schools chosen by their parents and paid for with tax money are strictly prohibited by the elites' new handbooks. Without careful control at every stage of development, children might just grow up with the same old harmful traditional notions that have made their parents impossible to incorporate into the new body politic.

Because they have roots sunk in no tradition or foundation other than those of their own imaginations and passions, the moral elites' rules of order are unwritten. They can shift like the sands on a dune to suit whatever situation they are confronted with, and have the ready cooperation of the media to applaud and reinforce any trampling of established principles and mores. More on this next week.

Anyone remember . . . ? Ten years ago, two sisters made their First Communion with us. Their names were Jacqueline and Josephine Holloway. If you have ANY recollection whatever of these young ladies or their family, please call the parish office at 454-6000. We would like to be in touch with them. Thank you!

Fall Festival next week!! There's still time to step up and volunteer your service for a shift or even part of a shift working at next Sunday's Fall Festival. We're looking forward to seeing you, your family members, former parishioners, friends -- invite 'em all! God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Just as Our Lord didn’t say: ‘I am founding several churches, and any one of them will do,’ so He didn’t say: ‘There are exceptional people who can love Me without keeping My commandments’” (Dunstan Thompson, 1918-75, American Catholic poet).