

MAY 16 1972

Letter #6 with covering letter
and Letter #7, and #8:
MY ROUTE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

I'd leave Warwick House in Roxbury around 6 or 7 PM and drive through the Combat Zone, Scollay Square's successor, watching for new kids who mistakenly thought that was where the action was. It wasn't. The first summer it was Boston Common, then the Public Gardens, thence to Park Square (where an interesting alliance took place between the Gay kids and the hustlers). Then it drifted to Kenmore Square. Where it has gone now, I have no idea having been off the streets of Boston since mid-summer of '70.

I would park and hit all these areas and the popular eating places. A quick walk through Greyhound, Trailways, around the three "meat racks" picking up the younger kids who were only seeking money for food. I tried to keep to a schedule. At each place usually "old" kids who had been a few years in Boston would be waiting with the day's disasters; the latest crop of runaways; who has O.D'd; who was busted; what chick is spreading VD; who is in which hospital; who is flipping out in an apartment alone; who is starving; who is suicidal. If I didn't show, they would know I was lecturing somewhere. After midnite they knew my last and longest stop was Kenmore Square. In my last few weeks on the street, I would get 30 cases in the first 30 minutes. No social worker that I know gets that intake in a week, let alone cases of such urgency. And then they have referral agencies. Imagine yourself, a social worker newly arrived in a town to learn there is - no ADC, no Children's Service, no Mental Health Center, no Legal Aid, no Social Security, no Blue Cross, no Family Counselling, no Guidance people, no Red Cross, no TB wagon - nothing. You are all alone, buddy. And in addition who the hell do you think you are coming to our town? You must be some commie, hippie faggot.

Most of the cases I filed away in memory. Time for only the urgent ones - threatened suicide was always taken seriously. Every suicide left a trail a mile wide for those who cared to read it. Don't believe all you hear about "accidental" overdoses.

How do you spot a runaway on a crowded street? I don't know. I suppose lots of little indications add up: dress, hands, nails, shoes, patterns - if I saw the same kid three or four times in different places in town, I would lay another kid on him. They always got the truth. Then too as the hour gets later and the suburban kids, in town for a movie or sporting event, go home, the runaway begins to stand out.

Usually some adult would ask to walk with me: a minister, teacher, social worker, even some politicians. Usually they began the night tense, apprehensive, expecting and bracing for rejection, being straight and over 30. Some were required to call the wife every hour. Relief was the common reaction. "I had no idea they would be so frank and open, communicative, helpful - - why Jimmy was just like the kid next door, like - - like." "Go ahead and say it like my own son. Now tell me how I get that across to the public which only loves its own sons and to hell with other people's bad kids." One legislator, when he learned I was working with mostly out-of-state kids bugged out of funding. He wasn't going to provide funds except for "our own". If California, Florida or Colorado said the same, then nobody did anything for anyone.

Can the cynicism of James Jones' character in the Merry Month of May (Delacorte) be true: "Do not forget that the audiences of this world don't give a damn about the truth, unless it is presented to them in a way in which they can personally associate".

On a slow night I would drop in at a few apartments. In one I'd hold my nose against the stench until I reached the Florida kids on the fourth floor. Fifty kids paying \$30 a week for a one bed rat trap, one toilet in the whole building and it didn't work. No showers. Blow the whistle on the slumlord? They would be out on the street and worse off.

Remember now, most of these were from middle and upper middle class homes. They had had balanced meals; Sealey posturepedic mattresses and antiseptic bathrooms. Now four on the bed, two under it, one in the broken tub, two on the floor and that was just the nightshift. Cockroaches, rats, stench! Wouldn't you think they would go home? No - rather hamburgers and shakes until death.

"We can do without them" one suburban woman said to me after a talk. That statement stuck in my brain and even now rises to shock me. I'm sure some German Catholic woman once said it of the Jews anent Dachau. Ovens would have been wiser than just "leaving them alone". 80% of crime in the big cities is now drug related.

Covering Letter

In answer to several responses to earlier mailings:

- (1) "What finally became of Jeannie"? Last time I saw her she was a prostitute in the South End.
- (2) "Contrary to authorities you say heroin will increase". "What is this large reservoir of kids whom you think will turn to heroin"? Let me draw his profile. He is in his early twenties, may be doing no drugs at all except pot or hash, has all the virtues of the counter-culture (gentle, sensitive, sensuous, child-like, enduring, simple, nature-loving, instinctive rather than intellectual, ingenuous, seeking only food and love, earthy, imaginative, creative, compassionate, into people rather than things, open, demonstrative, healthy, vibrant - in all a very appealing person.

Right now he is crashing around the counter-culture. What he doesn't know (and no one seems to be talking about it) is that he is incapable of providing for his own food and shelter. If the counter-culture collapses, as it appears to be doing, he will suddenly be left on his own and realize with horror, that he is incapacitated. To continue his profile - he is undependable, unreliable, restless, precipitous, has decidophobia (cf Time Mag.) wandering, undisciplined, constantly seeking to stay high (though not necessarily through drugs), clinically though not obviously depressed - in short, his head is screwed on sideways. He will go into suicidal depression - a common precursor of heroin (the death trip).
- (3) How did this happen? LSD, Acid. Probably the country listened to Art Linkletter, March of Dimes and doctors tell lies about "why not drop acid". "It will make you a Charles Manson; it will deform your children." Discovering these were lies, kids were now defenseless against the temptation - for acid has much to be said in its seductive favor. Kids don't have reasons not to do it as they have for speed or scag or downers.

I can't prove scientifically that acid is the miscreant since I can't find a kid who has only done acid or whose acid I can establish was pure and not a bastard approximation.

Furthermore I am not sure whether acid is the cause or the effect i.e. maybe these kids were already messed up before they went to LSD. By what? Listen to the words of Alvin Toffler in his magnificent book: Future Shock (please read it if you haven't).

"Different people react to future shock in different ways. Its symptoms also vary according to stage and intensity of the disease. These symptoms range all the way from anxiety, hostility to helpful authority, and seemingly senseless violence, to physical illness, depression and apathy. Its victims often manifest erratic swings in interest and life style, followed by an effort to "crawl into their shells" through social, intellectual and emotional withdrawal. They feel continually "bugged" or harassed, and want desperately to reduce the number of decisions they must make".

In any case the frustrating thing is that I am fairly sure how to get his head together now in large numbers, cheaply, before he goes to heroin. I need a farm backed up to mountains, fronting on the sea (Mains, California). And I need the impunity given to Fraternity houses. Everyone knows there are infractions of the judaic-Christian sexual code therein. That there is drinking under 21. But no one harasses them. I need simply that freedom. But judging from the community wrath coming down on Half-Way houses, I can't imagine a place in America where I would be given that freedom. n.b. I still am not into rehabilitation. This is prevention, even though it seems otherwise.

- (4) Some are concerned that my letters indicate that I am down and they are concerned. Cool it. I'm up! The book, remember, was about events of the past. Also many hope-filled things are now transpiring as you will see in later chapters. But- thanks for caring.

Letter #7
Language and Respect

Visitors were always shocked at the language kids used in front of me but amazed at how respectful they were to me. For years as a young priest and before that in social work, I had never allowed a kid to use foul language in talking. I thought: to overlook is to condone. But in recent years I discovered that the words meant nothing, that often a kid is muted, can't communicate if forever on guard. It no longer meant what it had. And it certainly was no sign of disrespect. Better to have foul language and communication than neither. "Do we have to call you Father Shanley?" they asked in the beginning. "Do we have to call you Father?" Obviously they were in reaction to titles. But also the formality cut into the warmth they were seeking. "No, just call me on time for meals" I said. But soon enough it was "Father Paul" and let any cop or adult say "Shanley" and he'd learn about how the kids felt. I feel ridiculous writing all this but it is a question always asked.

Did you teach faith and morals? I never believed it was the task of a missionary to bring Christ to the people or to jam all people into the sacramental system of the Church. Rather to be a leaven. Otherwise, you end up so diluting Christianity that you can be a good Catholic and a racist, a violent person and a Christian. Then too there is something supercilious and condescending about "bringing" Christ. I went out to find Him and discovered Him on the street in ways I never knew Him in suburbia e.g. there is no racism on the street; you seldom see a black boy without a white girl (though for good historical reasons you seldom see the converse). These kids love everyone and share everything. (Even their diseases unfortunately).

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I wondered in the beginning what I would say to their questions on sex. Wasted worry. No one ever asked. They have solved that. And the last one to ask is a celibate Catholic Priest.

Only three times was any kid rude. Now that is something! If 40,000 kids under 17 ran to Boston in 1970 times five (since for every kid under 17, I saw 5 or 6 over but still minors) that's 200,000 (times five years again). One of the three people was a psychotic, nymphomaniac, an escapee from an institution. She was after any man. But when she learned I was an Aquarius she went into orbit. At 11 PM on Boylston Street in the midst of hundreds of passersby while she was wrestling with my buttons, I was desperately defending celibacy; passersby were glaring and the kids were doubled up in hysterical laughter at my plight.

The second time was "Truck Driver", 16 years old, one of three sisters who were together on the street. She started making salacious sallies, as she did with everyone. I said to her "Irene, you are unique. You are the only kid out of hundreds I know who has ever done one particular thing. She lighted. "What?" "I'll tell you later when the crowd drops." Alone in a booth at midnite I said: "You are the only kid who has ever been rude or forgotten that I am a Priest." She flared. She ran. Ten minutes later, she banged a coke in front of me and growled "Thanks". After that, with one exception, she nor anyone ever (except adults) was less than respectful.

The only other time was Astronaut Day on the Common. Kids came from all over the State. Those in charge asked the clergy to wear black so we could be a deterrent to police harassment. The street kids asked me to be their spokesman on the platform. - The suburban kids not knowing my role, seeing just another cleric, began to heckle. Ghost-like and utterly effectively, the street kids moved around them and suddenly the heckling turned to approval.

Letter #8

Atheists and the Liturgy

Are street kids atheists? Yes. So am I. They don't believe in the established God of racism, the God of hatred and violence, of punishment, intolerance, selfishness, exclusion. But they fervently believe in the God of Love, Compassion, Concern and Peace; the God of Tolerance, Understanding and Acceptance.

But do they live up to their beliefs? No. Like adults, like me, they too are sinners. O felix culpa! That is why Jesus. And they do love their Brother Jesus - and know Him - more His manhood than His Divinity but then so many of us erred on the other side, so exalted His Divinity that He was unreachable to ordinary humans. I spent a lot of money supplying the demand for a little book called "Christ in the Gospels". Nor did I ever intend to impose my values, ideals, ethics on these kids. That too is the puritan Jansenistic bag with which we are saddled. We can't or won't accept people who don't subscribe to our sexual morality for example. We pressure, badger and even kill. That thinking led to the Crusades and the Inquisition and excommunication vitanda - you can't even walk together. Have you seen the movie "Joe"? Or "The Devils"?

Because such a significant proportion of street kids is from Catholic backgrounds (often kids would say: "I used to be Catholic" or "my folks are Catholic", or "I went to parochial schools for 8 years", etc.) (cf. "Huckleberries for Runaways" by Rev. Larry Beggs for interesting statistics on the percentage of street kids from Catholic parishes). I wondered about Mass. But lest I antagonize the local pastors or get caught up in the additional war that is liturgical proscriptions, I encouraged them, when they asked me to celebrate Mass, to go to local churches. "You've got to be kidding. We're not welcome there". "Of course you are welcome in any Catholic Church anywhere" said I ingenuously. As always I don't listen soon enough. It wasn't until many said the same thing that I decided to see for myself. With a half dozen freaks one Sunday, I went to a downtown folk Mass in the church hall. I won't go into all the gory details, just generally. The sermon was perfect. "How easy it is to love Biafrans whom you don't see. How difficult to love your neighbor whom you do. How can a man say he loves God whom he does not see if he loves not his neighbor whom he does see". We were a ragged, motley group. At coffestime, I approached the celebrant. Now it is traditional among priests, when you give your name, to elicit a fraternal response and identification. I said "Hi, I'm Father Paul Shanley, a priest of this Archdiocese assigned by the Cardinal to work with these street kids." Response? Niente. I hung on. "The Mass and sermon were great. Perhaps your people would be interested in meeting these kids?" "I'm not in charge, I'll get Father" and he was gone. Father, when he appeared was equally insensitive. A stand off. We had coffee in one corner, they in another. "In case any of you are still concerned about such things, I dispense all of you from any obligation to attend Mass again in a straight church in Boston", I told them.

After the obvious hatred and inhospitality, rudeness and indications of being unwelcome, Canon Law is very specific that the obligation ceases. But now I was obliged to provide a Mass. I hit every church around in vain for quarters. At that time I was Chaplain or Campus Minister to the students at Boston State College, a commuter campus which left my evenings free for street work. There was a drugstore unoccupied in an old empty building across the street from the college, owned by the college, which we fixed up for a center. One Saturday evening about 11 o'clock, I excused myself from a gang of street kids to go to celebrate Mass at the center for the college students. "Why can't we go with you?" So I loaded the car, apprehensive about mingling the two groups and found a marriage meant for each other. Every Saturday midnite thereafter we were jammed with both groups. It was a seedy-looking place, no pews so we sat on the floor, no electricity so we used candles. During the day we would invite every passing cop in for coffee so they would know what we were up to. The Mass sometimes lasted for hours so thirsty were they for liturgy and meaning. This meant walking home at 2 or 3 AM to the most dangerous sections of Boston.

One night I was at the Offertory, when three Irish Catholic cops, presuming the door was locked, put their shoulders to it. It wasn't and their momentum nearly landed them in my lap. "Alright this Mass is over. All of yez get out of here". Frightened, shocked, uncomprehending silence. "Why don't you say it in Latin" I queried. "Ita Missa est". "How do we know you are a priest?" "How do I prove that" I asked. "Want me to give you absolution in Latin?" "Euh, I ain't been to confession in years, and anyway this can't be a Mass - look at all these girls without hats on." "Well you haven't been to Mass in a long time either if you think that is still any criterion."

The shock had turned now to rage and I had all I could do to control the college kids. I went on with the Mass while my Nun co-chaplains dragged the fuzz outside and continued the battle. (Cops still fear Nuns). "It's interesting, I said, that none of you street kids batted an eyelash while the college kids were beside themselves." "It's like we've been telling you people, this happens to us every day. When you got long hair you have no rights." Next morning the college notified me that we would have to vacate. After four years of sitting idle, they were starting renovations on the building. To this day not a brush has touched those walls.

Among the vaunted freedoms of America, perhaps the most sacrosanct is the right to worship. Suppose, dear reader, that at your service next Sunday morning cops burst in and ended it. Imagine the outcry next morning. Consider the thunder emanating from every pulpit and lectern across the land. Headlines would shriek: "Police break up Mass". The apologies, the assurances, the hasty reparations. Well, I told that story every time I spoke on TV, radio or to live audiences. Yet never once was a voice raised in public protest, never once a letter to the editor. More traumatic than the incident was the absolute silence that followed. Was this the public which demanded law and order of my kids? If this most precious of all liberties could be stolen, and with impunity, what liberty could not? I was reminded of Pastor Heinoller's admonition - "first they came for the Jews and I was a Christian so I didn't speak up, etc."

For six months after that I again sought in vain for a place to hold Mass. For six months those kids who loved their Brother Jesus, who attended Mass regularly and received Communion weekly were denied all this by a cop who admittedly attended neither Mass nor the Sacraments, but who knew that God did not wish to be worshipped by long hairs. For six months, I who had been nine years a Seminarian and nine years a Priest with daily Mass went without Mass or Communion. To be sure I could have done my Clark Kent thing, donned clericals and stolen off to suburbia for my own spiritual nourishment. But my kids couldn't. So I wouldn't. After one of my talks a man with a brogue asked "I have only one question. A priest, as we know, is required to say Mass daily by the laws of the church. Do you think it good example to break the law in front of these kids?" "Three hours you have listened to me and this is all you have on your mind? Anyway there is no such Canon Law". "Father, I went to parochial schools and the Sisters clearly told us there is such a law." "My son, they also told you to respect and listen to Father and Father is telling you - the Sisters and you are wrong." The Law! Where is concern for Law? "But" my interrogator persisted, "there is a law of attending Mass on Sundays." "Right on", I said.

So you see, after all, I was a criminal and subsequent "Christian" harassment was thoroughly justified. Deprived of the consolation of the Eucharist, I had to learn to find communion with Christ in the commerce with my young brothers and sisters.

THE MOUNTAIN

When I travel to various cities, I always head downtown, find a freak and inquire "where's the scene?" Usually I'm led to a square, a park, a hamburger joint and I sit. Within a short time, I'm always accosted by a sometimes dimly remembered voice: "Father Paul, what are you doing in town?" It is not that my fame has spread but that they are so mobile. Kids from every city have been to Boston. "Come on meet my friends. Hey guys, this is the dude I told you about on the mountain." And I'm in. Everyone has heard about Easter on the Mountain.

Despairing of finding a place to gather for Easter, we decided, like the Lord, to do it on a mountain. We cleared with authorities, the college kids provided wheels and at 2 AM we gathered on a street corner to set out for Chicatawbut. When we arrived a group of concerned suburban parents and their teenagers had huge bonfires, steaming coffee, eggs, bacon and hospitality waiting at the foot of the mountain. Then we gathered for a meditation, Buzzie, a deserter, grabbed a brand from the fire and led us slowly and silently up the dark trail. Lumen Christae! At the top another bonfire was lighted from his brand against the chill. The Christ Fire. I offered Mass on a flat rock (hoping it had never been eaten off of.) At the Offertory the sun began to rise. By Communion time we could see into the whole metropolitan area. Where there had been stillness and scattered dots of lights, now life began to move, the city awoke, and new birth was in our hearts. Christ had risen. Many were in tears. I was.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jesus cried out, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks and you would not. He loved them. I loved those suburbanites (though it might seem otherwise) yet here were their own children, chilled and isolated on a mountain for the crime of protest against all that was evil and unchristian. Stark, poignant, pregnant silence was all I could muster as I dismissed them. "Go in peace and may the peace of Christ disturb you profoundly."

THE HOLIDAYS

At Thanksgiving we found a beneficent pastor who let us use his hall. But Christmas for us had to be at midnite and no pastor wanted his midnite flock to have to rub elbows with freaks or even see them entering his hall. What to do?

Christmas is a bleak and dangerous moment in these young lives. Some kids would hitch home and peek in the windows at their parents and siblings around the tree, then silently return to Boston. Finally, ironically, the black community in Roxbury, so long the victim of the white establishment, reached out and took in the white "children of the night". Black and white embraced in an unspoken but well understood brotherhood against a common plight - the uncaring, insensitive white man who at that moment was thanking God for His gifts.

Pope John said: "The Church must go where the people are, not where it wishes they were".

The Catholic Church had and missed an opportunity which the fundamental-revivalist group will now pick up. These kids are into Ba Hai, Hari Krishna, Dianetics, transcendental meditation, Yoga, the Jesus Thing. Imagine yourself as an 18 year old spending every Friday evening in meditation!

Father Paul