

# MANNA

*in the wilderness*

Spring 1992

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Vol. 5, No.3

LAS VEGAS RIOTS; JESUS WEEPS OVER LAS VEGAS:

## Recognizing the Sign of Our Visitation

by Emily Neufeld

*God gave Noah the rainbow sign: No more water, the fire next time.* On April twenty-ninth national media announced a "not guilty" verdict in the trial of the four white Los Angeles police officers accused of, and indeed videotaped while, brutally beating a Black man. And on the night of April thirtieth, the riots began in Las Vegas. We sat in a candle-lit room of our house on a back street of the city, watching through the window blinds as fires destroyed a local gas station and shopping strip, listening to gunshots and dogs barking, and we prayed.

Ironically, the most provocative incident of that night for me was not the fires on the next block, nor the repeated gunshots, nor the endless minutes we sat and listened to the nighttime noises. Instead, it was a short warning we saw issued by a television news reporter before our power went out. The announcer showed several spectacular scenes of the occurrences in our city, and then cautioned viewers to stay out of the volatile area at all costs.

I am sure that the warning came from heart-felt concern, but it was no less a sign of these terribly dehumanizing times than the police officers' acquittal, or the rioting that followed. In fact, even more than the outcome of the trial, this statement revealed the very cause of the rioting. How shocking it is that even as the area bubbled over in rage-filled self-destructiveness, its residents remained invisible to the media and to the dominant culture of Las Vegas and the United States. "Don't go into that area," the person said. But nothing was said to those who already were in that area, to those all around us who *live* in the middle of it. What were *they* to do?

Rioting is an ugly symptom of the destructive thread that runs through our nation's socio-political system and corrupts our hearts. It is unpalatable not just for the violence involved, but also because it confronts us with our own participation in the evils of economic discrimination and racial hatred, the ways in which we reject those who will become the cornerstone of God's Kingdom. We so often devote ourselves to money instead of justice and compassion, and our priorities include a form of "security" that means seclusion in a homogenous world without the discomfort of self-reflection.

Our city has been broken, but with the pain comes a chance for awareness and transformation. We have the

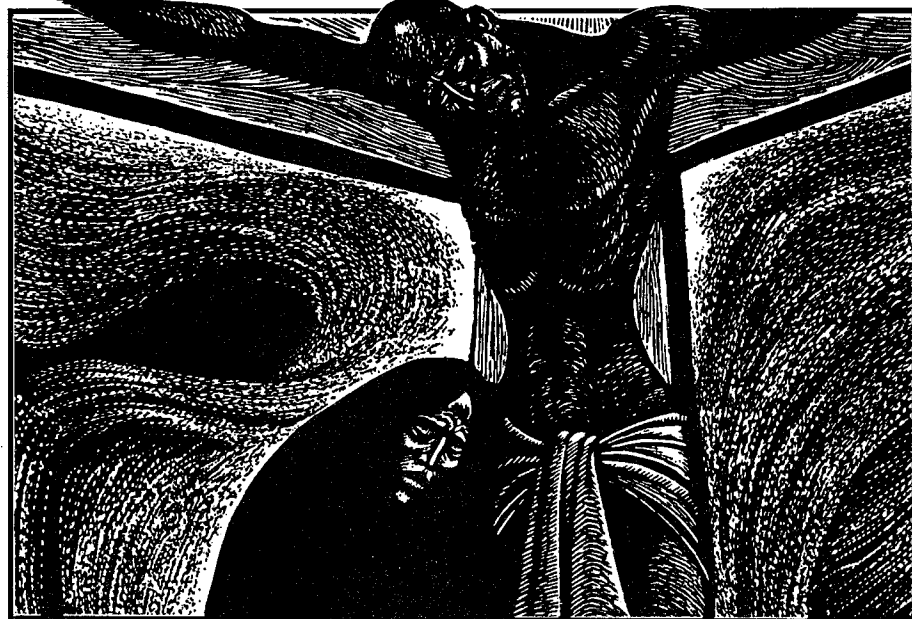
opportunity now to acknowledge that our hearts have grown coarse and our eyes and ears dulled; we have shut our eyes tight to avoid using them to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts to understand. With this knowledge we gain the power to change our ways and be healed by God.

Perhaps Jesus weeps today over Las Vegas as he once lamented over Jerusalem.

If we too had only recognized the way to peace! In fact it was

hidden from our eyes. The destruction that our city has begun to experience will leave not one stone standing on another if we do not open ourselves to conversion. Let us recognize the moment of our visitation!

*Emily Neufeld took spring semester off from studying theology at Notre Dame to help us here at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker.*



THE BLACK CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST BY FRITZ EICHENBERG, 1963

## Caught in the Crossfire

by Gary Cavalier

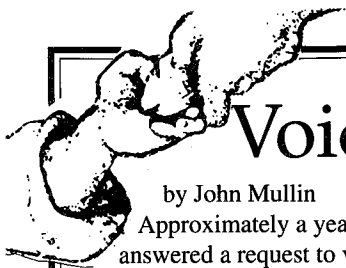
Our Catholic Worker community had expressed our anger over the Rodney King verdict with protest signs in front of the Federal Building, one of us secretly lowering the flag to half-mast and draping a shroud over the marble Federal Building sign. Now, later that night, I kept peeking through the blinds nervously watching the red glow from the stores burning down three blocks from our house as fellow community members Julia and Emily prayed the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary for the second time.

The Drug-Rehab Center and Community Health Clinic had also been looted, and we were trying to keep our imaginations hopeful and centered on God's love and protection, but they kept focusing on the mob out there and the dreaded knock on our door. The police had sectorized off our part of town, the poor Black neighborhood in Las Vegas; they were protecting the rest of the city, but police and fire departments were not entering our section of town. As the power went out, we felt more alone and isolated. None of us slept that night, and at daylight we "escaped" to a friend's house in a safe neighborhood, taking those posses-

sions with us that we didn't want burned or looted. The next night we returned, but the Catholic Worker house and our neighborhood don't feel the same, even after the armies of post-riot police have left.

I no longer jog to Mass at the Franciscan's in the morning, our community feeling it is too much of a tease or provocation as I scoot by on the sidewalks of the all-Black neighborhoods. I walked once to the store since the riot, but didn't know how to deal with comments such as, "Hey, White Boy, what are you doing in this neighborhood?" and "My grandfather was white. You don't believe me, do you?" No longer feeling safe to run or walk here, the Catholic Worker van becomes the umbilical cord linking our little white Catholic Worker island with the "safe world" a few blocks away. I am more aware that our old two-story stone mansion with its green lawn and trees and birds also seems out-of-place, like a bright island amid a dark sea of decaying tract houses and empty junk covered lots.

(see *Crossfire*, *backpage*)



# Voice of a Catholic Worker Volunteer

by John Mullin

Approximately a year ago I answered a request to volunteer to assist the Las Vegas Catholic Worker in serving breakfast. Upon my arrival I was introduced to Julia as my contact and given the position of providing bowls to the people in line awaiting the daily menu. Seeing people waiting to consume a meager meal out in a simple park gave me new insight in regard to the poor. They ate gratefully even without the luxury of seating. Afterwards some left to search out a day's labor, while others looked for a night's lodging.

Many months have passed since my initial exposure to the homeless in Las Vegas. In that time I have become aware of the work of the Catholic Worker. They show concern for the individual person by counseling people and helping them look at ways to better their particular circumstance. Life in the home at Van Buren is quite active. Early rising in the morning is required

to cook the recipes and make the thirty gallons of coffee. After the van is loaded and the daily prayer said, everyone drives to the serving site.

During the morning meal Catholic Workers talk to people in the line and try to provide an assortment of miscellaneous services. Showers are scheduled once a week for small groups. Haircuts and laundry services are also available. Transportation is provided by volunteers for those seeking rides to clinics, hospitals, and work.

At the conclusion of the morning meal the Catholic Workers return to their home to clean the pots and pans. After morning Mass at the Franciscan Chapel, the Workers meet to coordinate the days tasks among themselves. Sometimes this includes food preparation, responding to knocks on the door for groceries and housing, prescriptions, etc. They also attend in a limited way to the recreational needs of the children of the neighborhood.

I also spent Good Friday with the Catholic Worker in the desert outside the

Nuclear Test Site honoring the death of Christ on the Cross. I considered this event to be the outstanding moment of my life; to share the reenactment of Christ's death and in the same environment to focus on the possibility of total destruction. I did not attempt to cross into the Test Site because I felt it was a violation of Federal law, but members who did cross the line were treated with dignity and cited and released immediately in what appeared to be a symbolic gesture rather than a rebellious act.

The Franciscan priests are a great spiritual and physical support to the Catholic Worker. Together they inspire the volunteers and make life rewarding for all those who participate.

*John Mullin is a loyal volunteer who is always happy to assist with a helping hand. Little does he know how much his humility and authentic goodness are gifts of the Spirit that enrich our lives and the Gospel witness. Thank you John for your constant support.*

*(Crossfire, continued)*

I am more aware of being white in a Black community. In the morning, as we serve soup to 300 or so mostly Black people in the local park, I feel awkward noticing that all of us serving (our community and ten or so volunteers) are white. I know I would feel uncomfortable going to one of the many Black Baptist churches in the area; I would feel like I was intruding on something private, the place where Blacks can let out their pain in safety. Now, living in their neighborhood, amidst their homes and lives and pain, am I intruding on something personal and private?

I am believing more in a central concept of liberation theology, the idea that the oppressed group has to articulate and define their own problems and solutions in their own way. I, as a white male, can't tell women, Central Americans, or young Black males how to solve their problems, or what those

problems are. They certainly did articulate their anger, pain and hopelessness in a strong way that night, and I am encouraged by the coming together of Black gangs recently to work on problems and solutions. I prayerfully search for ways to move from

being an intruder to sharing fully in my community and learning from my neighbors here.

*Gary Cavalier is a member of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker community.*



EMILY NEUFELD AT FAREWELL LITURGY (LEFT TO RIGHT: JOHN MULLIN, EMILY, FRANK STRABALA AND FR. ALAIN RICHARD)

## Goodbye Emily and Thank you!

Thanks Emily for taking a semester off from studying Theology at Notre Dame to volunteer with us full-time here at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. We hope to see you back soon.

### WE ARE NOT TAX EXEMPT

All gifts to the Catholic Worker go to a common fund which is used to meet the daily expenses of our work.

As a community, we have never sought tax-exempt status since we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience which come at a personal sacrifice, without governmental approval, regulation or reward. We believe it would be a misuse of our limited resources of time and personnel (as well as a violation of our understanding of the meaning of community) to create the paperwork necessary for obtaining tax-deductible status. Also, since much of what we do might be considered "political," in the sense that we strive to question, challenge and confront our present society and many of its structures and values, some would deem us technically ineligible for tax-deductible, charitable status.

### OUR SCHEDULE

**Monday - Saturday, 6:30 - 7:30 a.m.**

Serve breakfast at E and Washington St.

**Thursday, 4:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.**

Prayer Vigil in front of downtown Federal Building.

**Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.**

Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker house, 500 W. Van Buren, potluck following.

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St. John the Baptist House  
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Las Vegas, NV 89106  
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