



Harvey Milk of San Francisco

By Br. Robert Lentz OFM

Harvey Milk was the first openly gay person to be elected to high public office in the U.S. He was not a professional politician, but ran for City Supervisor in San Francisco because he felt ordinary people were being pushed aside there by monied interests. "It takes no money to respect the individual," he said. "The people are more important than words." As supervisor he fought consistently for the rights of all of those without a voice. These people included blue-collar workers, the elderly, racial minorities, and gay men and women.

Cardinal Juan Fresno of Chile has said, "Whosoever stands up for human rights stands up for the rights of God." His words are an echo of what Christ has told us He will say at the Last Judgement. "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to Me." Despite all the emphasis Christians put on their sexual ethics, Christ's one question at the end of time will deal with concrete acts of love and compassion.

The day of his election, Harvey tape-recorded his last testament, in which he acknowledged that he would most probably die violently. The last words of that message were "You gotta give them hope." On November 27, 1978, he was shot five times at close range by another politician who was infuriated by his defense of gay and lesbian people. That night 40,000 people, men and women, old and young, gay and

straight, kept candlelight vigil outside City Hall.

In this icon he holds a candle, keeping vigil himself for the oppressed of the world. He wears a black armband with a pink triangle. This was a Nazi symbol for homosexuals and represents all those who have been tortured or killed because of cultural fears regarding human sexuality. Their number continues to grow with each passing year, and the compassionate Christ continues to say, "As long as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to Me."