

Holiness is wholeness. It is being alive at the very core of one's being. It is making a free and mature response to one's own world. (NC Photo from Peace Corps.)

## On Reading God's Word

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

U.S. Catholics have by now worshipped for several weeks according to the revised Order of Mass. The experience probably proved a bit awkward at the beginning, even for parishioners well instructed in these changes.

But repetition makes a procedure familiar, familiarity helps us feel secure, and persons with a sense of security about the words they say, the songs they sing, and the actions they perform tend to find Sunday worship more satisfying.

The most substantial innovation centers around the lectionary and its 2,300 scriptural readings. A somewhat involved three-year cycle of biblical excerpts will introduce greater variety (not annually the same epistle, the same gospel) and three selections each Sunday (one from the Old Testament, one from the Epistles, Acts of the Apostles or Apocalypse, one from the gospels) will result in richer use of the Bible at Mass.

We start out in a spirit of freedom — three translations have been approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops: the Jerusalem Bible, a completely fresh CCD version known as the New American Bible, and the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

Better planned and more ample scriptural readings by themselves should improve the

### Worship and The World

quality of our Sunday celebrations. However, if those selections are properly introduced, carefully proclaimed, and attentively heard their impact upon the congregation will be even more pronounced.

The lector who gives one or two sentence introductions before each reading sets the stage, creates a mood, puts the text in focus. We understand more clearly what God has to say when this has been done. The official lectionary supplies such a precis, but comments composed especially for an occasion by the homilist and in which he links preaching message with biblical excerpts would be preferable.

The commentator or leader of song immediately after a reading instructs the congregation to use a period of quiet reflection. The General Instruction, article 23, encourages silence at times within Mass and specifically states "at the conclusion of a reading or homily, each one meditates briefly on what he has heard."

We hold the words of Jesus at the Gospel in special esteem. The liturgy dramatizes that respect by directing us to stand

(out of reverence), catching our attention (through a greeting), surrounding the event with two special acclamations ("Glory to you, Lord" and "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ") which address the Lord directly as present in the sacred words, and command the reader to sign before and kiss afterwards the printed page.

Lectors, clerical or lay, concerned about such proficiency, could find beneficial a brief, inexpensive leaflet, "Reading the Word of God," (United States Catholic Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, 15c each, \$4 per hundred). It contains theological and practical recommendations for reading God's Word and praying or speaking aloud.

This quotation typifies the content: "The manner of speaking and tone of voice should be clear and firm, never indifferent or uncertain. The reader should not draw attention to himself either by being nervous and awkward or by being obviously conscious of a talent for dramatic reading. It is the message that should be remembered, not the one who reads it."

"The voice should be reverent without being unctuous, loud without shouting, authoritative without being offensive or overbearing. The pace must be geared to understanding — never hurried, never dragged."

# KNOW YOUR FAITH

## Is the Gospel The Good News?

By FR. JOHN T. BYRNE

It is obvious from a study of the New Testament that the early Christian Church did not equate the preaching of the "Gospel" or the "Good News" primarily with the giving of moral instruction or exhortation. While the church was concerned about the latter it was not in this way that it made converts.

It was by the proclamation of the saving events in Christ's life and especially his death and resurrection. This was the "Good News."

The speeches of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles outline this Good News somewhat in detail:

1. The Age of fulfillment has dawned.
2. This has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
3. By virtue of the resurrection Jesus is established as "Lord."
4. The Holy Spirit is in the Church.
5. Christ will come again.
6. Finally there is an appeal for repentance and the promise of "SALVATION."

These facts had tremendous significance for the early Christians. They believed that out of these events the Christian Church was born. By them God visited and redeemed his people and in the corporate life of the Church the value of

what happened was preserved and re-enacted.

Or to put it simply: the proclamation of the Good News insisted that in the death of Jesus Christ there took place a unique encounter between God and the powers of evil out of which a new life came for man. St. John expressed it: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

This was the Good News. This was the Gospel of the first century.

Basically it is the same Gospel today although admittedly some development has taken place. Development is not bad — in fact it is necessary. The important thing is that the development take place in accordance with and not contrary to the core message. In fact development took place in Apostolic times.

The outline of the "core" which we have given above stems from the Palestinian or Jerusalem Community and is found mainly in the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

The Pauline Epistles and St. John's gospel show a mystical development also. Both of these latter accounts begin to clarify the concept of the "Second Coming of Christ" and emphasize the permanent nature of the Church — the community of believers.

All of this development took place within the community of the Church whose hierarchical structure appears in the pastoral epistles and is most evident by the turn of the first century in the Epistles of St. Clement and St. Ignatius of Antioch.

It is the Church that presents Jesus Christ and his teachings to us. It was the Church that did this to the early Christians. In fact the writings of the New Testament represent the thinking and the faith of the first-century Church.

This is one of the great obstacles to Faith. Jesus Christ entrusted his message to an institution which, although divinely assisted, nevertheless gives an all too human appearance throughout the ages. At some times of course it appears better than others.

But these thoughts certainly highlight the importance of Christian witness for bishops, priest and laity. They are the Church and if the Church is to be credible their lives must more and more reflect the Gospel message. It is by this Christian witness that the Church is made credible.

### Editor's Note

The Courier - Journal attempts, by the wide variety of opinion columns, to give both sides of the major issues of our day.

No one column, however, is indicative of the editorial position of the paper.

## What Really Matters

By DR. MONIKA HELLOWIG

Most of us can look back to a time when questions about faith were simpler. Either a person believed in God or he did not. Either he believed in Jesus Christ as divine savior or he did not. Either he believed in the Catholic Church or he did not.

There were non-believers who might be atheists or agnostics or pagans. There were believers who might be Catholic, or Christian but non-Catholic, or non-Christian like Jews and Muslims.

When we came to explain Catholic faith it was more or less like this: believing God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ and the Church. Because Jesus and the Church are central to this understanding of faith, it follows that faith means believing whatever the Church proposes as revealed by God.

Some people are quite worried when they see prayers changing, and the Mass changing. Parents may be really upset when they see their children's catechisms and these seem to be saying much less than the old catechisms.

Actually, the apostles and the earliest Christians looked at it differently. Their preaching

and catechesis was so simple, that if someone could have shown them the Baltimore catechism, they would very probably have condemned it as heresy because it was complicated and full of philosophical ideas and too difficult for ordinary people to understand properly. At that time they were speaking of Christianity not as a belief but as "The Way."

Faith for them meant not so much a matter of believing that something you were told was true, but putting your trust in a person, Jesus, as a way of expressing trust in God. It had to do with the way people lived and with what really mattered to them.

The biblical words for "truth" and "true" that Jesus used in sayings like "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jo. 14:6) have a meaning rather like trustworthiness. Moreover, the evangelists made quite an issue of some sayings of Jesus to the effect that the words and ideas people use are not nearly as important as their actions.

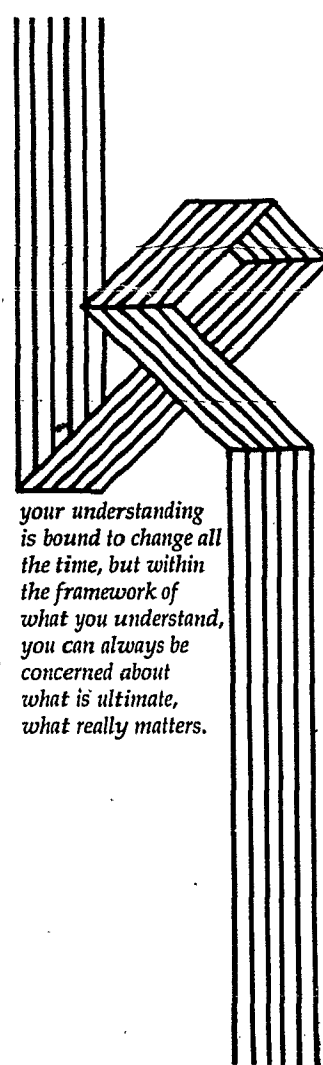
There is the famous picture, for instance, of the judgment in terms of sorting out the sheep and the goats in Matt. 25, and there is the shorter allusion to the judgment in Matt. 7: 21-23;

about the people who say "Lord, Lord" (that is, confess the divinity of Jesus) and do all sorts of officially religious things but do not do the will of the father.

Obviously, it would not be possible for people in our time to have faith in Jesus as savior, if the Church had not been passing on the teaching about Jesus from generation to generation. Just as obviously, we have to continue to be concerned to learn the doctrine and to pass it on.

On the other hand, it is quite reassuring to know that the words we use to express faith are the top layer of a reality that goes much deeper than words in a person's life. It is reassuring to people who have "lapsed Catholics" in the family. It is reassuring to parents of teenagers who are wondering what they did wrong because the young people say they no longer know what they believe and refuse to go to church.

If faith were only a question of believing that what you were told is true, then people who begin to question the meaning of catechism answers and to reformulate religious ideas for themselves, would be in danger of losing their faith.



your understanding is bound to change all the time, but within the framework of what you understand, you can always be concerned about what is ultimate, what really matters.

If faith is more a matter of trust in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God, and a matter of living so as to try to follow The Way of Jesus, then the questioning might be rather the point where they begin to find faith.