

The Word for Sunday

Sacraments --
New Reality

By Father Albert Shamon



At a lecture not too long ago someone asked me, "When did Christ institute the sacrament of confirmation?"

The question betrayed a misunderstanding. Sometimes one gets the impression that Catholics think the institution of the sacraments was a specific act done by Christ at isolated moments in a methodical way, so that at one moment there were no sacraments but after another moment there were. Actually the institution of the sacraments did not happen that way.

Historically, rituals were used long before Christ. A rite of baptism existed long before Christ. Ancient tribes solemnized marriages, God's action in history has constantly been one of transforming man — of transforming the whole meaning of human life. In the Old Testament God took natural religions and philosophies, and placed them in a different context. He took a nomad's agricultural feast and transformed it into a Passover Meal. He took the Sabbath day, which ancient peoples celebrated, but too often with orgies, and made it a holy.

When the Son of God came into the world, He instituted the Christian sacraments in a sense. In passing through birth, education, growth, experience, suffering, human communication, love, death and new life, He put His meaning into human life. Human life can never again be the same because the

Son of God lived it, died and passed into His glorified life.

A beautiful example of this process is found in the institution of the sacrament of penance. Christ took an ancient custom and showed the Church how to put new meaning into it. A custom of all countries and ages is to greet one another. The joyous Greeks hailed each other with Chaire! Chaire meant "be happy, rejoice, take a cheerful view of what is before you." The sturdy Roman's greeting was, Ave! Salve! Vale! Be alive! Be healthy! Be strong to surmount the enemies and difficulties on the road. Override and trample them down. The serious Saxon race used to say, "Farewell!" Fare on, walk well and wisely on the mysterious road of life and all will go well with you. The Christian chirps, "Good morning" and "Goodbye." May the day be good for you. May God be with you; we commend you, as you leave us, to a better guidance than ours. But there is another form of greeting, still universal in the East. It is Shalom Alachem! Peace be with you. Peace on your travels amid the incessant wars and feuds of the desert. Peace from robbers at night. Peace from quarrels at day.

This was the greeting Christ used to express His best wishes to the apostles. He took a conventional phrase. But He did not use it conventionally. A sincere, authentic person means what he says, even when what he says is prescribed by eti-

quette or custom. Great teachers do not employ new languages so much as breath new meaning into old words. So Christ took an old custom like a greeting and transformed it, sacramentalized it.

The greeting of peace which falls so unthinkingly from the lips of men, He restored to its original power and sanctity. For peace originally meant wellbeing — a person being as he should be. When Christ uttered "Peace be to you," He made the apostles as they should be — at one with Himself. He rescued the greeting of peace from unmeaning formalism. He did this with other significant events of life as birth, death, marriage, feasting. By bringing new meaning and new reality into the great experiences of life, He was instituting sacraments. Instituting them to transform our lives and to bring new meaning and new reality into life itself.

Letters to the Editor

'New Mass'
Praised

Editor:

It's getting a little tiresome listening to people complain about the "new Mass", and bemoan the passing of the Latin. It is true that previously we heard the Mass in the same language in all nations — and understood it in none, unless we had our heads buried in the Missal.

As for "knowing what was coming next" have we not eyes to see and ears to hear? How much more meaningful to see the priest wash his hands and say, "Lord, wash my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin" rather than "Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas," which we never understood without the translation. While it is true if I go to Germany, I won't understand the words, my eyes will tell me all. Most of us will probably never cross the ocean anyway.

The Mass to me has more meaning and beauty with a language I can understand. If more of us attended Mass out of love for God than because of our Sunday duty, we might come to love it more and come

away feeling a new life within us rather than a complaint on our lips. Our children are no more "subjected totally to the new liberal way" than we were subjected to watching the back of a priest for a half hour, looking up only when the bell signaled something happening.

Anne C. Erdle
Canandaigua

Mass 'Reform'
Regretted

Editor:

Congratulations, Father Cuddy, on your article "On the Right Side."

For many, you lit a candle in the darkness caused by Vatican II "reforms." Love of Mass had nothing to do with language. It was spawned by beauty of liturgy and the feeling of reverence and devotion it inspired. I regret that my child will grow up never knowing the devotional experience that was mine, at least for a few years.

Ad multos annos, Father Cuddy.

Richard Ford
Ellington Road
Rochester

On the Line

Who'll Preserve
The Saints?

By Bob Considine



(Editor's Note: Considine is a Knight of Malta, a Catholic Honorary order that dates from the 11th Century.)

St. Barbara carries many unfair burdens. The Catholic Encyclopedia says of her:

"She is said to have been the daughter of Dioscorus, a wealthy Roman, who imprisoned her in a tower. Workmen were constructing two windows in the tower — or perhaps in a building nearby — and she persuaded them to construct a third. This, understood as the sign of the Trinity, demonstrated to her father that she had become a Christian. Tortured and condemned to death, she was beheaded by her father, who was immediately struck dead by lightning."

She may have lived her short, pure life in the 200s, A.D. There was little or no mention of her until 400 years later. But in the ninth century she became one of the most popular saints and was declared by various Popes to be a protector against storms and patroness of architects, builders, and masons. (That's spelled with a small "m," Mr. Printer.)

Now if the flippant National Catholic Reporter is permitted to be circulated in Heaven, the dear little saint will learn that the Greeks have a word for her:

The commander of a NATO missile installation in Greece, Brig. Gen. Argyrios Lagarias,

issued an Order of the Day concerning her:

"Officers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, sailors and airmen. Today, the artillerymen of the Christian countries all over the world assemble to honor in solemn ceremony the traditional patron saint of the Artillery, St. Barbara.

"Scientific developments during recent years have added to the fire power of the cannons, the rockets and guided missiles. Consequently, St. Barbara does not only symbolize the protectress of the artillery, but the modern means of fire power, the rockets and the guided missiles as well. N A M F I (NATO Missile Firing Installation) prescribed that from this year, St. Barbara will be its patron, and from this time forward the memory of the Saint will be celebrated."

"At this formal moment of the ceremony in the memory of St. Barbara, our patron, let us reverently turn our thoughts toward the glorious past of the artillery. May the example of the immortal heroes of our Armed Forces enlighten and direct our actions and the favor of St. Barbara protect and help our work. Long live the Artillery, Rocket and Guided Missile Units!"

The Reporter added a thought in italics:

"And a short life to their targets!"

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