

FR. ALBERT SHAMON

Word For Sunday



Sunday Readings: (R1) Is. 49:3, 5-6. (R2) 1 Cor. 1: 1-3. (R3) Jn. 1:29-34.

Last Sunday the Church commemorated the baptism of Jesus. This Sunday she penetrates more deeply into the mystery of that baptism. For the Baptist the sign of the Spirit descending and remaining upon Christ told him clearly that Jesus was the One who was to come. But how did John look upon the Messiah at this time?

The next day after the baptism, when Jesus was passing by, John pointed him out and exclaimed: "Look! There He is! The One I was telling you about who, though He comes after me, ranks ahead of me. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

The Baptist at that time saw Jesus as the Lamb of God. The word "lamb" immediately brings to our minds the idea of sacrifice. I do not think this idea was in John's mind when he called Jesus "the Lamb of God." A lamb is also known for its docility. In fact lambs are so docile, they are led to the slaughter, not driven.

When John protested against baptizing Jesus, John saw a similar docility in Him. Jesus insisted on John's baptizing Him on the grounds of obedience. "Let this be for now," Jesus said. "to fulfill God's demands." Obedience, too, was what Isaiah had stressed about the Messiah. Three times Isaiah refers to the Messiah as servant (R1). The Responsorial Refrain echoes this same obedience: "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will."

Only later, in hindsight, did John the Evangelist, as was his style, see the richer implications in the word "lamb." From Israel's beginning "lamb" connoted more than obedience. When God called Abraham to sacrifice his son and Abraham obeyed, God substituted a lamb to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Through the centuries the lamb remained the symbol of sacrifice. In Egypt, lambs' blood literally saved God's people — human blood was not spilt where there was lambs' blood. The lamb was substituted for man. Only with the prophet Isaiah was it first intimated that the symbol would one day be reversed: that no

longer would the lamb replace man, but a man would replace the lamb; blood of man, instead of blood of lamb. Little did the Baptist realize that this too was implied in his phrase "Lamb of God."

Three times at Mass the phrase "Lamb of God" occurs — at the Gloria, the breaking of the bread, and the giving of Holy Communion. It is interesting to note that in the Gloria, the Lamb is said to "take away the sin of the world," but in the other two places to "take away the sins of the world." Why?

"The sin of the world" is the alienation between man and God caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. It is the original sin: the Pandora's box from which spews out the ugly acts of self love. This infection of the world through disobedience is taken away by the obedience of the Lamb — sacrificial obedience, unto death on a cross. This

sacrificial obedience is represented at the Consecration in the Mass. Since the Gloria comes before this action, the original sin is mentioned in it as though still holding sway.

"The sins of the world" are our personal acts of disobedience. All personal sins spring from a lack of love for God and for fellow men. Holy Communion is the sacrament of love. It transforms us by the love of Him whom we receive, so that, like Him, we come to serve in love both God and man. Thus Holy Communion helps us to take away our sins. Unlike ordinary bread which becomes part of us, the bread of life transforms us into Christ. As Augustine has Christ say, "You will not change me into thee as thou dost ordinary bread; but thou wilt be changed into Me" — obedient servants! His obedience takes away the sin of the world; our loving obedience takes away our sins.

LETTERS

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor, Courier-Journal, Richford Building, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. They should be no longer than 1½ pages, typed double-spaced. Names and addresses should be included. The paper reserves the right to edit all letters.

Nuns Garb Discussed

Editor:

Replying to the letter of Father Widman (Courier-Journal 1-5-72) I believe that Father Widman did not read my letter of Dec. 22 very carefully.

1. I made a statement which is self-evident and irrefutable: "Regardless of the reasons which may be given for laying aside the religious garb, it is obvious that these Sisters are no longer appearing before the public as women who have dedicated their lives to God."

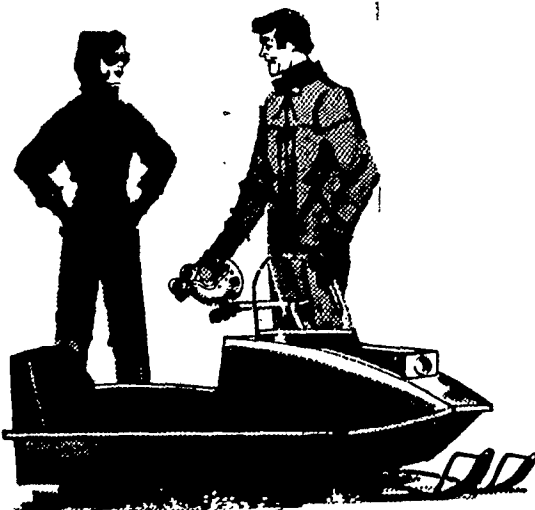
This is not a "public 'poke'" at our Sisterhoods generally, or at the Mercy nuns in particular, as Father Widman states. It is a plain statement of fact that the religious dress of nuns, as well as of priests, is a witness to the world that they have dedicated their lives to Christ. That these same people may be very dedicated in their personal lives and public actions was not discussed.

I expressed regret that wom-

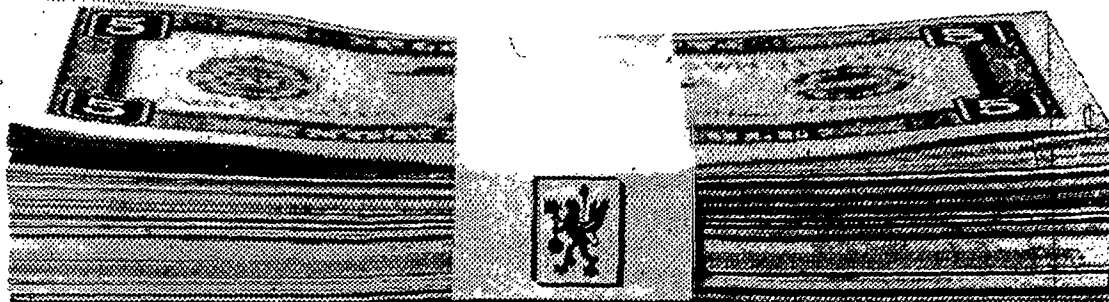
en who are dedicated to Christ should fail to give witness to this fact by wearing the traditional religious habit which has always been an inspiration to our Catholic laity and a source of vocations among our Catholic girls who often were inspired by the habit to join the sisterhoods before they really understood the meaning of a vocation.

2. I stated that our Catholic school system was built upon the sacrifices of religious women who bound themselves under the vow of obedience to serve a common cause — the religious development of the children in the parochial schools. Today the Catholic school is in danger of collapse because the sacrifice implied in the vow of obedience is becoming ever more unpopular in our religious communities. Father Widman quotes Scripture. "Judge not least you be judged." Has he forgotten another verse, "By their fruits shall you know them?"

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