

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. **Albert Shamon**

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 24:37-44 (R1) Is. 2:1-5 (R2) Rom. 13:11-14

At the beginning of the new Church Year, it is well to consider once again some of the changes made in the Liturgy of the Word since Vatican II and the why of these changes.

As everyone must have noted by now, there are three readings on Sundays. One is from the gospels (R3), one from the Old Testament (R1), and one from the epistles or the Book of Revelation (R2). The use of the Old and New Testaments underscores the unity between the two Testaments and the continuity of salvation and revelation: what was begun in the Old Testament was realized in the Gospel and proclaimed by the apostles. But even more important, the use of the old Testament shows that Christianity is built not on some philosophical system, like other world religions, but on the actions of God in human history.

Also the readings follow a three-year cycle. Before the Mass changes, a one-year cycle prevailed — the same Gospel reappeared every year on the same Sunday. Now, it will appear only once in three years. There were two reasons for adopting a three-year cycle. One reason was to give God's people a greater exposure to His word. Vatican II directed that "the treasures of the Bible . . . be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word" (Const. on Lit. #51).

A three-year cycle also makes it possible to devote an entire year to one of the three evangelists: Matthew, Mark and Luke. (John's Gospel is used annually during mid-Lent, Eastertide and for five Sundays in the Marcan cycle.) By having one Gospel predominate each year, God's people can better grasp the particular insight of each evangelist. Sometimes we may think of the gospels as documentaries of our Lord's life. Actually, the gospels are an interpretation of our Lord's life made by the Christian community of faith and by men inspired by the Holy Spirit. Each evangelist had a particular point of view to present regarding Christ.

This year, for instance, the gospel according to St. Matthew will predominate. Now Matthew wrote for the Jews. He wished to prove to them that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. Hence Matthew will quote the prophets profusely to prove his point. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a second Moses, so Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses. Hence in the Infancy narrative, he pictures Jesus as fleeing from Herod as Moses did from Pharaoh. It was Joseph who led Israel into Egypt, so Matthew has the angel command Joseph, not Mary, to carry the Child Jesus into Egypt. As an angel guided Israel out of Egypt, so an angel enlightens Joseph to take the Child and his mother back to Israel. Moses redeemed Israel by leading her through the Reed Sea; Jesus begins his redemptive work at the Jordan. Israel wandered in the desert for forty years and was tempted; Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, and was tempted. At Sinai, Moses gave the Law that forged Israel into a nation; Jesus gives the Law on the Mount of the Beatitudes. (Luke situates this incident on a plain; Matthew puts it on a mountain to keep the Moses-Jesus parallel.) Ten plagues led to the Sinai event;

Matthew describes ten miracles after the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew even structured his Gospel to underline the fact that Jesus is the new Moses. The books in the Bible attributed to Moses are five in number, so Matthew divided the discourses of Jesus into five booklets. Incidentally, this Sunday's Gospel is extracted from the fifth booklet. It tells of the end of the world. That's always a good way to begin anything — at the end! Were I to take a trip, the first thing I'd decide on would be the end, the destination — Hawaii or Alaska. That would determine all my preparations — the ticket I buy, the clothing I carry, and so on. So the First Sunday of Advent begins by telling us where this world is going to end. It's a good way to dispose us to get ready properly and "stay awake" as Jesus advised. To get back to Matthew, the mind of the Church is that this year we focus our study on Matthew's Gospel. Commentaries are available by the dozen. Why not get one, like the Jerome Biblical Commentary or A New Catholic Commentary (Nelson) and get to know the mind of Matthew. We shall be hearing a lot from him this year. He's the Evangelist of the Year.



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Nazareth Academy students Mary McMahon, Sharon Evanson and Sue Vargo, left to right, at right, do their part for the national Campaign for Human Development during the school's Human Development week Nov. 18-22. The week of activities brought a variety of speakers and films to the school, and saw students conducting sales to raise money in behalf of the campaign. Gretta Ferrell, above, speaks on women's issues.



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