

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 3:1-12; (R1) Is. 11:1-10; (R2) Rom. 15:4-9

The Second Sunday of Advent introduces John the Baptist — "the advance agent" of the Messiah. Now Matthew does something remarkable: he identifies John the Baptist as the mysterious "voice" foretold by Isaiah crying out in the desert to prepare the way of the Lord (Is. 42:3). The allusion here is not immediately obvious to a non-biblical reader.

First of all, the Isaiah quoted by Matthew is not the Isaiah from whom the first reading in Sunday's liturgy is taken. There were at least two prophets who go by the name of Isaiah: One who is called "First" — Isaiah wrote Chapters one; to thirty-nine of the book that bears his name. He was an aristocrat, who wrote in classic Hebrew and lived from 742 B.C. to 689 B.C., during the terrible times when Assyria was terrorizing the then known world. The other, who is called Second-Isaiah, authored Chapters forty to fifty-five of the same book. This Second-Isaiah lived among the exiled Jews in Babylon, was a profound thinker and an unparalleled poet. He wrote from 550 B.C. on. Second-Isaiah is the prophet quoted by Matthew.

If you open to the book of Isaiah in your Bibles and riffle through to Chapter 40, you will find a subtitle: "The Book of Consolation." Second-Isaiah, unlike all the other prophets before him, did not inveigh against social injustice. God called him to deliver a message of comfort and consolation to His people. After seventy years in exile, the Jews were like reeds bruised by cruel Babylon and wicks smoldering, all but quenched, by tyranny. They had had enough. So God missioned Isaiah to speak tenderly to Jerusalem, to proclaim the good news that her guilt was expiated and her liberation would be soon — so soon that already a voice was crying out, "in the desert prepare the way of the Lord" (Is. 40:3). Another exodus, preached Isaiah, was in the making — one even greater than the exodus from Egypt. "The Lord goes forth like a warrior he stirs up his ardor; He shouts out his battle cry" (Is. 42:13).

Matthew re-interprets Second-Isaiah: He sees John the Baptizer, the greatest of the prophets, as the one sent to prepare a king's highway for a still newer Exodus — God's definitive rescue of His people from the slavery of sin through Christ.

Thus in Scripture there are three exoduses: two from political slavery — the exodus from Egypt and the one from Babylon; and the third from the more terrible slavery of sin by Jesus going out of this world to the Father.

Advent is a time of joyful anticipation of the Redeemer and His redemption. Only in the light of the biblical exoduses can we arrive at the total concept of redemption. Redemption is not an act on the part of Jesus to change the Father's attitude toward us. It is the other way around. Redemption is meant to

change us in both our being and our becoming. Hence redemption is both an act and a process. Essentially it is an act of liberation from sin (typified by the deliverances from Egypt and Babylon) effected once and for all by baptism. Hence John the Baptizer. Baptism changes our very being and makes us be sons of God.

But that transformation is only the beginning of redemption. For after baptism man still remains a very disorganized person — his knowledge often ends in error; his love in selfishness and lust; his acts in crime (typified by the rebellions in the desert after the Egyptian Exodus and by the apathy after the Restoration from Babylon).

Redemption, therefore, must also be a lifelong, ongoing process, a becoming as well as a being, a daily dying and rising, a dying to selfishness and a rising to otherness, till hopefully at the time of physical death, we shall be truly liberated, redeemed, passing over to that land where "the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together."

Advent celebrates His coming to further our becoming what He is!

Life Group Asks Ford: Reconsider Rockefeller

Albany — The New York State Right to Life Committee has called on President Ford to respond to the thousands of pro-life votes by re-examining his nomination of Nelson Rockefeller, supporting passage of a Human Life Amendment, and insuring that a national health insurance program is based on the right to life.

In a letter to the President, the organization calls attention to the fact that the Conservative U.S. senatorial candidate, Barbara Keating, received over 600,000 votes, campaigning on a staunch pro-life platform.

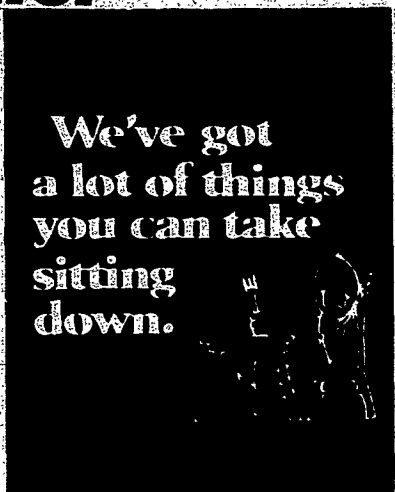
"On this basis we again urge you to re-examine Mr. Rockefeller's nomination and put forward a vice president designate who stands for respect for all human life," the letter states.

Questioned about the election results, Jack St. Leger, state

executive director, stated, "The main battle ground for restoring respect for life will be in the Congress and we are delighted to see the return of pro-life men such as Hamilton Fish, William Walsh, and Donald Mitchell.

"On the state level, we are preparing to introduce a broad program of pro-life legislation. Some proposals, such as comprehensive maternity insurance and education on abortion alternatives are very similar to programs which, during the campaign, Governor-Elect Carey stated he supported," said St. Leger.

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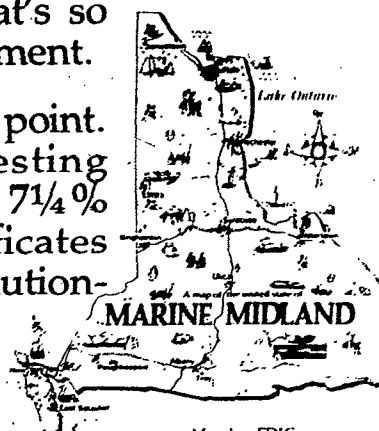
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