



Photo by Anthony J. Costello

New Altar Stone

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan blesses a new altar stone for St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit. Assisting him are Father Michael Conboy and Msgr. Richard K. Burns, pastor of St. Thomas. The altar stone includes relics from St. John the Baptist, Ss. Peter and Paul, St. Thomas the Apostle, and the Uganda martyrs. The blessing and placing of the stone took place Sunday, Dec. 21.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 2:1-12. (R1) Is. 60:1-6. (R2) Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6.

"Epiphany" means "manifestation" or "demonstration." There is nothing esoteric about Christianity; God enters human history openly, not in a subtle, hidden, invisible way.

The first reading of this Sunday's liturgy is attributed to the prophet Isaiah. Let us not forget that there were probably three Isaiahs. The first wrote around 742 B.C. (Chapters 1-39), the second about 549 B.C. (Chapters 40-55), and the third around 520 B.C. (Chapters 56-66). It is from the third Isaiah that the first reading is culled.

It is important to realize that the first reading is from the third Isaiah. Only then will you understand how strange his words must have sounded to the Jews. The prophet proclaimed, "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem!" At the time Jerusalem was still a heap of rubble. "Nations shall come to you." Actually, surrounding nations bitterly resented the return of the Jews to their homeland. The Temple still lay in ruins. The walls of the city had not been rebuilt. It was darkest night for the Jews. How then could Isaiah wax so lyrical about Jerusalem?

Isaiah could speak the way he did, because he knew God and he believed in God. He knew God is great — so great that He needs no fireworks, no screechy propaganda. He knew God is all-powerful — so powerful He can do without human power, political or economic. To Him, it mattered not how helpless the community was to which He revealed His saving plan. The mighty power of Babylon had not hampered nor hindered His plan in the least in the previous 70

years. Isaiah knew this. Isaiah knew God. He believed in God!

What Isaiah was trying to do, however, was to convey a bit of his trust and belief in God to a disheartened people. He invited them to rise above a dry acceptance to God's omnipotence. He did not deny the unpleasant realities surrounding them, but he asked them to open their eyes to the greatest reality there is, namely, to their God.

In his book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells of the "luminous women" whom no torture, threat, deprivation, humiliation or indignity could break in Lenin's and Stalin's concentration camps — because they believed in God. He tells of signs of kindness extended to prisoners on the way to these hellish camps, signs that could easily land those who gave them into prison. The main "culprits" guilty of these kindnesses were old women, for "the old women are bolder than the rest. You couldn't turn them bad. They believed in God" (p. 525). They believed in God in an environment charged with hostility and contempt.

We do not have to live — as yet — in this kind of situation; yet we are liable to give way to a stifling apathy and discouragement, because God's glory seems to be so invisible in our own environment. But we must be like the wise men, the representatives of the many pagan nations.

The wise men were filled with delight when they saw the star. They went naturally to the place where they expected the King of the Jews to be born — to Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews. They were told there to go to Bethlehem. What they saw in Bethlehem was only a child and his mother, Mary. Yet their faith was so strong they fell to their knees in homage.

God is with His Church. He has redeemed the world. He won't go back on what He has done and promised. So no matter the situation in the world, in our little world, we ought always to have the optimism bred of faith: G. K. Chesterton once said that faith meant to go gaily in the dark, to face serenely and confidently the day-to-day and decade-to-decade problems and difficulties. "The glory of the Lord shines upon you." In the light, the terrors of the night vanish.

Mother Seton Called Model For Church

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardini of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, described the impending canonization of Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton as "a singular grace" for the U.S. Catholic Church.

"This extraordinary woman, whom the Church will honor as a convert, a housewife, a parent, an educator, and the dynamic foundress of a religious community which continues to be a vital element in the Church apostolate of service today," the Archbishop said. "She might be termed a woman ahead of her time were it not more accurate to say she is a woman for all time."

He predicted that the entire Catholic Church will look upon Mother Seton "as a model, and pray for her intercession," and noted that "this is an honor for our country and for all our Catholic people."

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Plymouth Gardens Has Ecumenical Christmas Rite

The elderly residents of Plymouth Gardens had their own Christmas service Monday afternoon, Dec. 23, in a lounge of the apartment house. Nine clergymen from neighborhood churches offered an ecumenical service of scripture readings, hymns and sermon. Refreshments were served afterwards.

Sister Barbara Moore, pastoral assistant at St. Monica's, said that the effort she began two years ago, to have religious services in Plymouth Gardens, had borne fruit only after it was taken up by the Southwest Ecumenical Ministry (SWEM). Rochester Management, Inc., has informed SWEM representatives, she said, that they may have Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving celebrations in the building.

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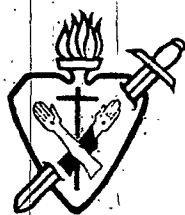
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