

Secular Readings at Mass?

By Father Robert F. McNamara

Lately I have heard pastors raise the question, "If people ask that certain secular readings be read in place of scripture readings at a particular Mass what answer are we to give them?" I gather that requests of this nature usually come from couples who are planning their nuptial Masses; and that they are made rather frequently. Although pastors have to maintain certain ground rules for matrimonial services, they are understandably willing to bend the rules a bit here and there to favor a program already projected in detail by the devoted couple for their day of days — so long as canon law is satisfied and nobody throws confetti in the vestibule.

I think it will be helpful both to pastors and to prospective brides

and grooms to have this information: it is absolutely forbidden by the Church to replace the scriptural readings at nuptial or any other Masses with writings of non-scriptural origin, no matter how poetic, profound, or devotional such writings may be.

Who said so? The Congregation for Divine Worship, the Pope's special department in charge of matters liturgical. Where and in what terms did the Congregation speak? In its "Third Instruction on the Correct Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" (Liturgiae Instaurationes, 5 September, 1970).

Here is the text: "Full importance must be given to the Liturgy of the Word in the Mass. Other readings, whether from sacred or profane

authors, past or present, may never be substituted for the Word of God." (2a)

The ruling of 1970 was not dictated by whim. It is based on the fundamental role of the "Liturgy of the Word" in the Mass. In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II described the significance of the use of bible readings at Mass in these terms: "In the liturgy God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his gospel." (33)

"Sacred Scripture," the Fathers explain, "is of paramount importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration, and it is from scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus if the restoration, progress and adaptation of the sacred liturgy is to be achieved, it is necessary to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western rites gives testimony" (24).

That is why the Council ordered that in the revision of the Mass there should be a far wider use of scripture than ever before. "The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of the Lord's Word" (51).

Khalil Gibran and other secular writers may well have written thoughtfully on marriage, so, in fact, could the engaged couple themselves. Unquestionably, popes, theologians and saints have left on record profound and moving reflections on matrimony and the whole range of divine and human relations.

But in the fore-part of the Mass, the "table of the Lord's Word" is God's own pulpit, from which he announces the message ever old yet ever new: the Law, the Prophets, and the Good News of our salvation. From that pulpit nothing should be proclaimed of which the reader cannot affirm, "This is the Word of the Lord."

of Jerusalem. Jericho was a bedroom town for many of the 20,000 priests and Levites who took turns serving in the Temple. On His way out of Jericho, Jesus was surrounded by a sizable crowd. They made sufficient noise to cause a blind man sitting by the roadside to ask, "What's up?" Hearing it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to call out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" (our old **Kyrie eleison**). Many tried to silence him, till Jesus Himself asked to see the man. He needed no second invitation: he threw aside his cloak, jumped up, and groped toward the voice that had called him. A dramatic exchange ensued. Made to express his desire, the blind man, like Magdalene, addressed Jesus as "Rabboni (good Master), I want to see!" It was done, and he followed Jesus.

What a wonderful allegory to illustrate the steps of conversion: conversion from sin or to the faith.

Conversions always begin with God. He makes Himself felt in some mysterious way. It was Jesus' passing by, His presence that excited the blind man. The one to be converted, like the blind man, doesn't see Jesus, but he feels His presence and responds by asking for pity.

When someone starts turning to God, some people don't like it. They scold, nag, can even get hostile, like those who tried to squelch Bartimaeus. When so confronted, it takes courage to persist. Persistence is important! Bartimaeus had it.


When someone persists, there are others who step in to assist. These ought to be the followers of Christ. From experience, they can assure one: "You've nothing to fear from Him! Get up! He is calling you!" Calling to baptism or to confession, to throw off the old life, like a cloak, and to go to the Light to recover one's sight, and follow Jesus.

All this, of course, must be freely done. Hence the exchange, "What do you want?"

"I want to see"; that is, "I want forgiveness," or "I want faith." In a word, "I want to change." "I want to be restored!"

Vision always follows such burning desire. What remains is the following of Christ.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. **Albert Shamon**

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 10:46-52. (R1) Jer. 31:7-9. (R2) Hebr. 5:1-6.

A word found in the dictionary is "jeremiad." It means deepest woe, a tale of inconsolable sorrow. The word derives from the prophet Jeremiah. He was indeed a prophet of gloom and doom, probably the author of the Book of Lamentations. Yet this doom-predicting prophet was the first one to offer consolation to Israel (Jer. 30-31).

The destruction of Israel and the deportations which followed occurred a hundred years before Jeremiah began his prophetic work (721 BC). Probably in 622 BC, when Josiah, King of Judah, began his religious reforms, Jeremiah spoke of a restoration of Israel, the Northern Kingdom (R1). "I am a father to Israel, Ephraim is my firstborn" — dear to God as the prodigal son was to his father. Therefore, "I will bring them back . . . will console them . . ." (R1). Because it was done, the refrain is, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy."

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus, our High Priest, deals with us as His Father did with Israel: "He is able to deal patiently with erring sinners" (R2).

This theme of restoration runs through the gospel. Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem followed the cure of the blind man, and that entry began our Lord's passion: the restoration of all mankind (the spiritually blind and afflicted) from the slavery of sin.

The beautiful Sunday gospel can be allegorized to illustrate restorations: from sin or to the faith.

The main road from the east to Jerusalem ran right through Jericho, which is about 15 miles northeast

St. Charles Borromeo DEWEY AVE. PHARMACY
 Prescription Specialists
 COSMETICS — TOILETRIES
 PHOTO FINISHING
 2910 Dewey Avenue 865-2210


M. L. ALLEN & SON
 Corning, N.Y.
 Quality Furniture
 62 Bridge St.
 Phone 936-8431

YOUR CHURCH OR FAVORITE CHARITY may be able to obtain 1 1/2 to 2 Full Times as Much BENEFIT as it is now receiving from your current gift or offering.

You may be able to INCREASE YOUR SPENDABLE INCOME Hundreds or even Thousands of dollars through a tax Deductible Retirement Plan. (However, time is running out for 1976!)

Interested? Want Details? Consult a Financial Specialist.

Nannette Andrews Amish, 183 East Main Street, Rochester. 325-3585 * 467-4669



"Cut Home Fuel Costs 30%!"

with revolutionary **Rapco-Foam Insulation...**

Foam Insulation Company

The Homefoamers
 Rapco-Foam Insulation

501 W. COMMERCIAL STREET
 EAST ROCHESTER, N.Y. 14445
 716-381-9434

FIRST FROM HALLMAN'S '77 CHEVYS



77 Chevrolet 4-door Caprice

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY PRICE - LIMITED OFFER

Just delivered '77 Chevys Available Immediately at high savings made possible by our huge volume sales. Caprice - Impala - Chevelle - Concours - Vega - Wagons - Chevettes. Spectacular Price-Beating Limited Offer.

\$776*

OVER OUR COST except Corvettes

48 MONTH FINANCING

more of what you need today.

hallman's
 100 SUNNY AVENUE, DOWNTOWN CHEVROLET



MR MIKE'S

LUNCHEONS IN OUR NEW LOUNGE:
 Tiffany Lamps, Log-Burning Fireplace
DRINK DAILY at the Piano Bar
 MON. through FRI. NITES

DINNERS IN OUR BEAUTIFUL DINING ROOM.

Enjoy the **CONTINENTALS**
 Fri. & Sat. Nites 9:30-1:30

1405 N.W. BEARD Near Lexington 455-0420