

Christian Initiation of Adults

BY MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

Christians are not born, they are made. The new rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults, promulgated in 1973 by the Vatican, but not yet introduced into the United States, details the process whereby they are made. The rite provides a period of pre-baptismal catechesis leading to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and first Eucharist) and a period of post-baptismal catechesis which follows initiation.

The process of making a Christian involves four stages of a spiritual journey. These four stages are preceded by a period of

preparation called the pre-catechumenate or the period of evangelization. This is the time for hearing the first preaching of the Gospel, a time when the desire to follow Christ and to seek baptism gradually matures in the heart of the seeker after God.

With maturation of the desire to be a Christian the person enters into the first stage of the initiation process which is called the catechumenate. This is a time of formation in Christian living. The catechumens are given an intimate understanding of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to share. During this time the whole community of the

Church is implicated in helping the catechumens on their journey. Not only are the catechumens given a fitting formation by priests, deacons, catechists and other lay persons, they also take part in celebrations of the Word of God. Indeed they join the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word and thus prepare themselves for participation in the Eucharist in time to come. In company with the faithful, they learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the testimony of their lives and the profession of their faith.

The catechumenate is followed by the stage of enlightenment and election. The catechumens are called the elect (chosen by God for baptism). They are also called competentes, that is mature catechumens (ready to take the final step of entrance into the Christian community). This stage coincides with Lent, a time of more intense preparation for initiation into the community. It involves spiritual recollection more than catechesis and is intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of the catechumens with "a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior." Once again the whole Church is implicated in the process the entire community of the faithful are involved with the catechumens, as all prepare for the celebration of the Easter mysteries.

The sacraments of baptism, Confirmation and first Eucharist received at the Easter Vigil represent the climactic stage of initiation in which the elect are admitted into the people of God, receive the sealing of the Holy Spirit and join with the other faithful in full participation in the Eucharistic Meal.

Following the sacraments of initiation there is a period of post-baptismal catechesis (called in the early Church "mystagogia") during which the newly baptized and the whole Christian community "move forward together, meditating on the Gospel, sharing in Eucharist and performing works of charity. In this way they understand the paschal mystery more fully and bring it into their lives more and more."

This, in brief, is the process by which Christians are made. It takes a long time - in fact, a life-time. That is why this rite of the Initiation of Adults is of the greatest importance for the entire community of the Church. It helps to create an awareness that the conversion process does not end with the sacraments of initiation. It is an ongoing process not just for the newly baptized, but for all of us who are Church.

[To be continued next week.]

CHURCH SCHEDULE

St. Boniface Church has scheduled an extra Mass on the First Friday, Nov. 5. Also, on Nov. 7, rosary and Benediction devotions will be held at 3 p.m.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 12:38-44; (R1) 1 Kgs. 17:10-17; (R2) Hebr. 9:24-28.

Once the Emperor Theodosius wanted to build a great church. The rich gave lavishly toward its construction. After nearly two years, the edifice was completed. Everyone gathered for the dedication of the church and the unveiling of a plaque with the inscription: The temple the Emperor Theodosius built. The great day came. When the plaque was unveiled, the inscription, to the consternation of everyone, had been changed. It read: The temple the widow Euphrosia built.

The window was searched out and brought trembling before the Emperor. She swore she had no money to hire an engraver. However, she did say she badly wanted to contribute toward the building of the church, but was so poor that she had nothing to give. So each day, she took some of the straw from her mattress and fed the oxen hauling the large blocks of marble. That was all she had done, she said. The Emperor was profoundly touched and confessed, "God has taught me a lesson. The inscription shall stand as it is."

Sunday's readings treat of two other widows who gave, not of their excess, but of their very substance.

The Elijah stories were handed down by word of mouth. They are of the same style as Butler's *Lives of the Saints* in which exaggeration and color abound. The author of the books of Kings inserted the prophetic cycles to show the irrepressible activity and presence of God's word in the life-events of His people.

The miracle for the widow is such a story. The widow has been a victim of a drought caused by the sinfulness of Ahab. But through Elijah, the abundance of God was given her.

The widow of the gospel put two of the smallest Jewish coins into the

receptacles in the Court of the Women for such offerings. Ironically these 13 receptacles were trumpet-shaped. If heavy silver were placed into them, as by the rich, the trumpets would boom and everyone would look to see who had given so much. Our Lord said, when you give an alms, sound not a trumpet before you to be seen by men. Let not your left hand know what your right hand does. The widow's tiny mites hardly tinkled. Yet Jesus noticed the widow. She had given more than the others. For sacrifice is determined, not solely by the motive, but by what one has left. The virtue of philanthropy is in how much one gives. The virtue of Christianity is in how much one has left. The widow gave from her want, all that she had to live on.

In this era when so many preach a social gospel, it is significant that Jesus did not direct attention to what ought to be done for the poor, but instead He pointed out that we emulate what a poor person (in spite of her poverty) had done. Instead of teaching His disciples liberality toward the poor, He bade all men learn from the liberality of the poor.

Consider what Elijah had asked the widow of Zarephath. He asked her to prefer him to himself and son. His needs to their needs. Put the prophet, the mouthpiece of God, before herself and her own son.

In the gospel the same kind of commitment elicited Jesus' commendation. A widow there preferred God's need (His temple's upkeep) to her own. God to herself. Jesus did not disparage the giving of the others. He simply pointed out their relative value. She gave most who sacrificed most. Not what she gave but what she had left made her small gift so considerable.

A Christian cannot set limits to his commitment to Christ. He cannot reserve anything to himself in his giving to Christ. Selfishness must be avoided! St. Ignatius prayed: "Jesus, teach me to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, for it is in giving that we receive, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Sibley's Given Arts Award

Sibley Lindsay & Curr Co. has received the first annual Rochester Business Committee for the Arts award for support of the arts.

The award was presented at a dinner at the George Eastman House. Featured speaker was Robert W. Samoff, chairman of the national Business Committee for the Arts and former chairman of the Radio Corporation of America.

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