

# WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 3:1-6. (R1) Baruch 5:1-9. (R2) Phil. 1:4-6, 8-11.

The Advent season is a season of preparation for the coming of the Lord. Sunday's readings echo and re-echo this theme. John the Baptist preached, "Get ready, prepare His way, the Lord is coming" (R3). "Until he comes in glory," Paul urged, "live in such a way that you may be found rich in the harvest of justice" (R2). And to all this reading of ourselves, Baruch adds the note of joy. Advent is a joyful preparation for the coming of the Lord. "Be joyful, for the Lord has done great things for us" (R1 & Response).

Luke dates the ministry of John precisely by cataloguing the contemporary world-rulers. He meant by this to show that Christ is the central event of history. Having been a disciple of Paul, Luke also learned that the call to prepare the way for the Lord goes forth to all man and woman, rich and poor, Samaritan and Roman, as well as Jewish priest and levite. "All mankind shall see the salvation of God."

But what is the preparation to which all are called in Advent? John spoke of it as "a baptism of repentance." We refer to it as conversion.

Sometimes we see conversion as turning away from a life of sin to a life of virtue. It is reduced to the practice of the moral virtues.

Was this what John meant when he preached conversion?

Sometimes we see conversion as the aim of missionary activity. We see it as interrupting a person's spiritual progress or uprooting a

people's culture. Since such things are not right to do, the work of evangelization has often been abandoned wrongly. Consider how conversions to the Catholic Faith have declined in the last decade.

John did not mean these things when he spoke of conversion.

John was preparing the way for the Lord. The Lord was coming! Conversion was a turning away from sinning so that one could turn to the Lord!

The man filled with self can never encounter the Lord because the Lord calls His followers to a radical openness to all mankind. With Jesus, the love of God became identified with the love of neighbor. Conversion means emptying ourselves of our pettiness, our littleness, the cramping confines of our egocentricity, in order to share in the realization of God's plan of love, which embraces all mankind.

Conversion, therefore, is more than the practice of the moral virtues. It is living the life of faith, hope and charity. Conversion is not interference with the spiritual progress of a person, but fulfillment. A middle-aged Protestant couple came to me for instructions in the Faith. I discovered they had a magnificent prayer life. They prayed so devoutly, so unceasingly, so under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, that my one dread was that they might interpret conversion as a giving up of that prayer life. Repeatedly, I warned them against this mistake. Conversion, I told them, was a call to intensify this prayer life. What their new-found faith would bring them, among other things, was the sacraments, especially the most Holy Eucharist and Penance. Conversion was not an ending of their spiritual life but its enrichment.

Nor is conversion the uprooting of the culture of a people, but rather its enhancement. Whenever the preaching of the gospel sought to impose an alien culture, it failed. The diverse rites in the Church are a monument that conversion touches the heart and lets culture alone to modify cult as its faith dictates.

Man is converted, is liberated from self and sin, so as to be free to bring his best to the world. Paradoxically, as it may seem, conversion to Jesus is the ultimate source of human progress.

# Mission Christmas Appeal Begun

"Mother and child is the essence of Christmas," said Father Joseph Reinhart, diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in launching his annual Christmas appeal. "Mother and child in Bangladesh, waiting in a rehabilitation camp. Mother and child in Malawi, suffering from leprosy. Mother and child in New Guinea, malnourished. Mother and child in Peru, begging on a streetcorner to survive. These mothers and children are part of the Christmas picture too."

helping to carry on its many functions of caring for the poorest of the poor.

"First of course is the spiritual comfort extended through Mass and the Sacraments. Although Christ was born almost 2,000 years ago, 2 billion people in the world today have not yet heard the Good News of His love! Almost half of all humanity! That in itself is enough to spur us on to greater generosity of

prayer and sacrifice. Particularly in this Christmas season, think of all the mothers and children who have no Christmas to look forward to. Then open your hearts to them. Make Christmas in the missions a part of your Christmas! Pray for them.

Gifts may be sent to Father Joseph F. Reinhart, diocesan director, Propagation of the Faith, 123 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. 716-454-2926.

Yet the picture is not quite so bleak. Missionaries serving the local church are there, helping to ease the anguish of body and soul," continued Father Reinhart. "They are enabled to do all that by your generosity to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. The Society in turn supports the local church where it is most in need,

## Father D'Arcy Dies, Famed Jesuit Scholar

LONDON (RNS) — Father Martin Cyril D'Arcy, an English Jesuit with a worldwide reputation as a leading Christian thinker of his day, died here Nov. 21, following a long illness. He was 88.

Master of Campion Hall, a Jesuit residence at Oxford University from 1933 to 1945, and head of the Jesuits in England from 1945 to 1950, Father D'Arcy achieved a reputation as a brilliant conversationalist and man of letters.

His writings spanned more than half a century, from the first World War to the present decade, ranging from the Nature of Belief (1931) and the Problem of Evil (1957) to the Mind and Heart of Love (1945) and Humanism and Christianity (1971).

He counted among his friends such leading minds of the time as Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and T.S. Eliot. Evelyn Waugh and Dame Edith Sitwell were among his better known converts to Roman Catholicism.

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