

Insights into Liturgy

Ashes to Easter

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

We begin Lent with the symbol of ashes. It is worth noting that ashes are not first and foremost a Christian symbol; rather they are a universal symbol that men have used since the dawn of history to express basic realities of human existence. Ashes

speak to men, first of all, of their mortality. They say in symbol what Genesis says in words: "You are dust and unto dust you shall return." Sign of mortality, ashes are also the sign of human sinfulness. From time immemorial men have sprinkled ashes on their heads to acknowledge publicly that they have sinned. The Old Testament

offers many instances of this gesture of sinfulness and repentance.

This universal symbol of man's mortality and sinfulness has been embraced by Christian Faith, which, without changing its basic natural symbolism, has vested it with hope — hope in the Good News that a risen Christ has overcome our mortality and a sinless Christ has overthrown our sinfulness.

When on Ash Wednesday the priest signs our foreheads with the ashes, he may use one of two formulas. He may say: "Remember, man, that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." Or he may say: "Repent and believe the Good News." The first formula suggests the universal symbolism of ashes; the second formula expresses the new hope that the coming of Christ has brought into our lives. Thus, the ashes express, on the one hand, our need for deliverance from death and sin and, on the other hand, the possibility of such deliverance held out to us because Jesus has become one of us.

This is what Lent is all about. Lent holds out new possibilities for us: the possibility of death being able to choose life; the possibility of sin being able to choose conversion. Lent means man searing in the ashes the sign of his mortality, yet able to exchange it for endless life; it means man wearing the sign of sinfulness, yet able to undergo the process of conversion. Lent means baptized man opening his eyes to the full implications of his baptismal encounter with Christ, realizing his Baptism as a radical call to conversion of spirit, becoming fully alive to the truth that conversion is a life-long commitment, seeing Lent not only as a time of conversion but as a time of celebrating the fact that the whole of life is a process of conversion. We will not be converted during Lent, if we are not undergoing conversion in the rest of our lives. Lent is the celebration and intensification of what is a life-long process. Lent is a time of doing with particular concern what we ought to be doing at all times.

The ashes we receive on Wednesday are a symbol. Symbols are never neutral.


not a Messianic Kingdom, but what so many men desire: power and glory. In the third temptation, Satan asks Jesus to take the easy way out. In suggesting that Jesus cast himself from the parapet of the temple, Satan is asking for no ostentatious gesture before an assembled crowd, for no spectators are mentioned. Probably Satan is referring to the Ark in the temple surmounted by angels over which the shekina (the divine glory) hovered.

The Ark was Israel's palladium in battle — their miraculous guide and defense in the desert. Satan was asking Jesus to have recourse to the divine, to the miraculous in fulfilling His mission. It was the same temptation Jesus referred to in Gethsemane, "Put up your sword." He said to Peter, "could I not ask my Father and he would send me 12 legions of angels?" (Mt. 26:53). In the temptations, He refused to make such a request and accepted the human condition: He would be a suffering Servant.

Luke concludes his narrative by pointing out that the temptations of Jesus will recur and will assail everyman. Man wants to eat the fruit of knowledge of good and evil; he desires to be the ultimate norm of what is right and what is wrong. Consider how many today challenge the Vicar of Christ on earth when he speaks on matters of morals.

The other great temptation is for security — to seek it in power and glory, to make human solutions absolute, to view this life as though it will never end. We resist this temptation by living with the realization that man is born to die as the bird is born to fly. To live any other way is folly. Dramatically, the Church sought to impress this message on us on Ash Wednesday.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 4:1-13. (R1) Dt. 26:4-10. (R2) Rom. 10:18-13.

In this first Sunday of Lent, the Church reminds us that life is a struggle, full of trouble. Yet her focus is on confidence. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

That they might never forget that God is a saving God, every Jew when offering first fruits confessed how God had once delivered them from slavery (R1).

Offering first fruits was man's primitive way of saying that he recognized that nature helps him, because God is kind to man. Modern man misses this relationship, since he sees himself as master of nature. The Jews, however, stood in between: they saw God as more than a nature god; they saw Him as God of history, who had freed them from Egyptian slavery. He had revealed Himself, not by the laws of nature, but by a covenant made after He had freed them from trouble.

In Jesus we see one kind of trouble that can assail everyman, namely, temptation — "He was tempted by the devil." Luke's account of the temptations of our Lord closely resembles Matthew's. Both give three. Luke, however, switches the sequence of the second and third temptations. Matthew's account has a geographic bias: the desert, Jerusalem, the entire world, in that order. Matthew is concerned to present his narrative as a parallel of the temptations in the desert (Ex. 16:17 & 32). Matthew saw Jesus as the representative of the new Israel, the remnant of the chosen people loyal to God. Thus whereas the chosen people failed in the desert, Jesus did not.

Luke, of course, had no such anxiety. He was writing for Gentile Christians. Matthew in his genealogy of Jesus goes back only to Abraham, father of the chosen people; Luke, on the contrary, goes back to Adam, father of the human race. Also, Luke prefers to recall the temptations of the first man, Adam — temptations habitual to all human beings. Thus in the second temptation (Matthew's third) Satan offers,

Shults Center Drive Closes

Nazareth College's fund drive, launched more than three years ago, to pay for the construction of the new Otto A. Shults Community Center, has come to a successful completion with a total of more than \$3,759,000 in gifts and pledges credited against the building's final costs.

ending reception held recently at the institution by Joseph P. King and Alfred J. Murrer, campaign co-chairmen.

The largest single campaign contributor was the Eastman-Kodak Company with a grant of \$350,000.

The announcement was made at a special campaign-

King said that approximately 1,670 donors contributed to the drive.

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They call for a response. Accepting the ashes, therefore, must be no idle gesture on our part. It must mean saying "Yes" to the conversion-experience — that turning from sin and pettiness and selfishness, that turning to God in praise for His presence among us, that turning to others in gratitude for their involvement in our lives. Accepting the ashes means starting out, once again, on the road that leads from death to life — a road which the author of the Imitation of Christ calls "the royal road of the cross." That "royal road" is for us what it was for Jesus — the only road to Easter.

2 Named To Board At Seminary

John J. Considine Jr. and Allen R. Lewis have been named to the Board of Trustees at St. Bernard's Seminary.

Considine is a member of the law firm of Lines, Wilkens, Osborn and Beck in Rochester. He is a member of Our Lady of Lourdes parish, a graduate of LeMoyne College and Cornell Law School, and a member of the boards at Catholic Family Center and the Brighton Chamber of Commerce.

Lewis is a vice president of Lincoln First Bank.

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SOUTHERN EUROPE & GERMANY — Lisbon, Fatima, Santiago de Compostella, Toledo, Madrid, Zaragoza, Lourdes, Rome, Assisi, Florence, Padua, Venice, Munich — 22 DAYS — 7 departure dates, May thru September. \$1317 from N.Y. \$1492 from L.A.

SHRINES OF EUROPE & HOLY LAND — Lourdes, Rome, Assisi, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho, Dead Sea, Galilee, Nazareth, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Lisbon, Fatima — 16 DAYS — 11 departure dates, March thru October. \$1298 from N.Y. \$1473 from L.A.

HOLY LAND & EUROPE — Rome, Assisi, Athens, Corinth, Cairo, Pyramids, Amman, Petra, Jericho, Dead Sea, Galilee, Nazareth, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Lourdes, Paris, Lizeux — 22 DAYS — 9 departure dates, March thru Sept. \$1648 from N.Y. \$1823 from L.A.

HOLY LAND, GREECE & ITALY — Athens, Corinth, Cairo, Pyramids, Luxor (optional), Amman, Petra, Jericho, Dead Sea, Galilee, Nazareth, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome — 17 DAYS — 12 departure dates, March thru December. \$1488 from N.Y. \$1663 from L.A.

BEST OF HOLY LAND — Athens, Corinth, Istanbul, Damascus, Cairo, Pyramids, Luxor (optional), Amman, Petra, Jericho, Dead Sea, Galilee, Nazareth, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome — 22 DAYS — 10 departure dates, March thru December. \$1699 from N.Y. \$1874 from L.A.

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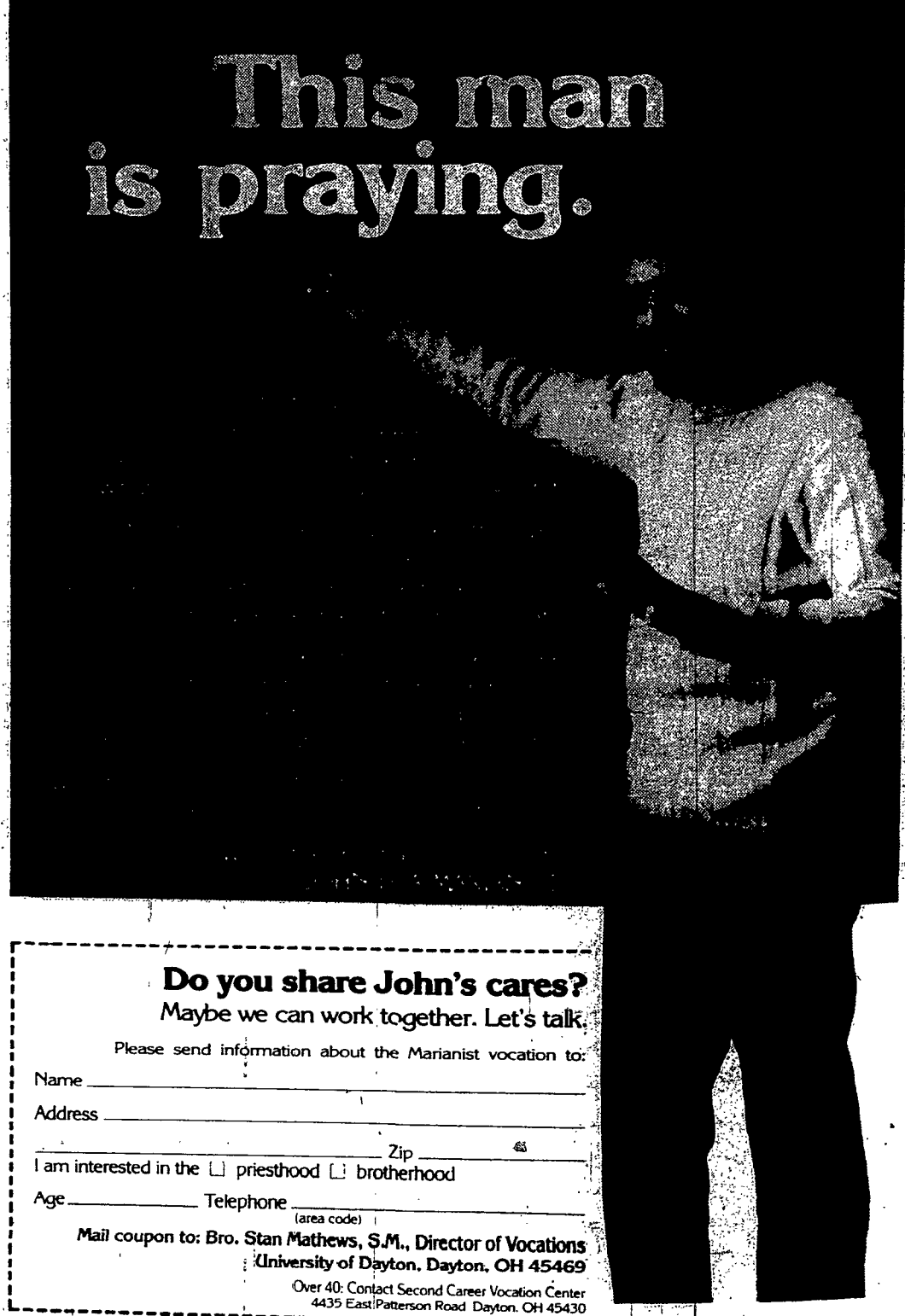
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