

Insights in Liturgy

Eucharist Primary Sacrament Of Reconciliation

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

It would seem that for several centuries in the Church, we have not been sufficiently aware of the dimension of reconciliation with God and with one another that takes place in the Eucharistic celebration. As a result, there has been perhaps an exaggerated amount of attention given to sacramental penance to the detriment of a more balanced view of the whole sacramental economy of forgiveness.

The Council of Trent, in the 16th Century, offers us a right perspective. It speaks of the power of the Eucharistic sacrifice to remit "the sins that we daily commit." And, it should be noted, Trent is not speaking simply of slight sins. For it says: "The Lord, pleased by this offering, and granting us the grace of penitence, forgives us our offenses and sins, even our very great ones (crimina et peccata, etiam ingentia, dimittit)." The council thus makes it clear that, when we think of the process of reconciliation

that goes on in the Church, we must not restrict our thinking simply to the sacramental activity that is proper to the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. Indeed, it is good Catholic teaching that the Eucharist, even more than Penance, is the primary sacrament of reconciliation.

We are reminded of this when, in the third Eucharistic Prayer, the priest addresses the Father: "Look with favor on your Church's offering and see the Victim whose death has

reconciled us to yourself." Not only the Eucharistic Prayer, but the Lord's Prayer, the prayer of deliverance from evil that follows it, the prayer for peace and the gesture of all — all express this aspect of pardon and reconciliation that belongs to the Eucharistic celebration. We need to have the conviction, therefore, that one of the reasons we come to the Eucharist is that the Lord may forgive us the sins that we commit daily.

It is worth remembering

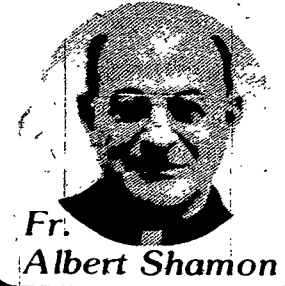
that for the first 800 years in the Church's history, Penance could be received only once in a lifetime. It was the sacrament for the forgiveness of certain serious and public sins. For these 800 years and for a good while longer the Eucharist was the normal channel for the remission of the daily sins that men committed.

Indeed, someone might well ask the question: if the Eucharist is the primary sacrament for the

forgiveness of sins, why do we need the Sacrament of Penance at all?

One possible answer to this question is that the Sacrament of Penance gives a density and intensification to the experience of reconciliation effected in the Eucharist. The Eucharist reconciles; the Sacrament of Penance concentrates on the process of reconciliation that takes place in the Eucharist and that is a continuous reality in the Christian life.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 22:39-23:56. (R1) Is. 50:4-7. (R2) Phil. 2:6-11.

The first reading next Sunday is from the Suffering Servant poems. There are four of these poems, awkwardly inserted into the works of Second Isaiah. Sunday's reading is the third of these poems.

The Servant speaks of himself. In the words of Ezechiel and Jeremiah, he tells how he, though innocent, has suffered in fulfilling his mission. One of the enigmas to Jews was, "Why do the innocent suffer?" The Servant answered this perplexing question by suggesting that suffering can be vicarious — "in expiation for others." The Servant suffers in this way; and, because he does, he knows God will exalt him. "I shall not be put to shame."

No doubt Jesus found in the Servant's teaching much strength to accept His passion and death. St. Luke tells the story of our Lord's passion from the viewpoint of God's love and mercy. Dante called Luke "the scribe of the gentleness of Christ" (scriba mansuetudinis Christi).

Consequently, in the passion story according to Luke, no one is blamed — Jew, Gentile, or disciples. Luke seems to reason, why blame anyone — the blood of Jesus takes away the sins of the world. Thus Luke omits the fact that the apostles slept three times and fled Gethsemane. Judas' betrayal is glossed over. Peter's swearing at his denial is not mentioned. Even the enemies of Jesus

Death Bills Opposed

Albany — In a letter to every member of the Legislature, the State Catholic Conference has objected strenuously to proposed "death bills" 2175 (Lewis) and A3282 (Hevesi) now pending in the legislature.

The bills "actually authorize the killing of a person if he or she has previously signed a formal so-called will document," said Charles J. Tobin, the conference executive secretary.

are depicted in less hostile terms. We are not told that they spat on Jesus or bound Him to bring Him to Pilate. Even the dreadful death on Calvary is tempered by the fact that the friends of Jesus are there!

So in the glow of the great pardon of the cross, practically everyone is absolved. Jesus heals the severed ear of an enemy. Peter repents of his betrayal. The thief is pardoned. The centurion is converted to believe that Jesus is innocent. Even Herod and Pilate are reconciled on Good Friday. All fruits of the cross!

The Pauline passage in the second reading was probably an early hymn to the emptying (kenosis) and glorification of Jesus. St. Paul used it to teach that our charity should have a self-renouncement like Jesus'. "Love one another," Jesus asked on the eve of His passion, "as I have loved you." And how is that? To the point of laying down one's life.

Loving with the love of Jesus means loving the other, in the full recognition of his otherness. All the difference in the world may exist between us and the other. No matter. Christian charity must cut across all the barriers which we are constantly building up between one another. It means embracing the suffering that rejection by the other will bring, the sentence of death for having loved!

But such love, because it is in emulation of Christ, will — like the love of the Suffering Servant and Jesus' love — be both victorious and productive.

In fine, love, suffering and death, in Christian terms are intimately, connected. Not that the Christian looks for suffering and death. If these come, above all if they are inflicted by the other, for the love of God and men, he will welcome them, as Jesus Himself did. And, like Jesus', these sufferings will be redemptive — "He saved others."

He says that whether it is called a "death will" or a "living will," it amounts to legalizing the death of a person at his or her own wish.

He feels that declaration of death should continue to be a medical decision unimpaired by "legalizing a previously signed formal will paper" which he says "actually prevents a doctor from providing the best medicine he is capable of providing."

ALL IN THE FAMILY



A little of this and some of that...

Item: It is amazing just how much a mother can learn from her children's homework. This week alone I discovered that Nathan Hale was not a very good spy (he got caught, didn't he?); that in 1935 Iran notified the world it no longer wished to be known as Persia; and that the innovative Dr. Suzuki of violin fame refers to the bowing area on the instrument as "the great Chrysler highway" (Fritz Kreisler?).

Item: Listening to the youngsters in the house who tend to imitate without discrimination can be uncomfortable. The seven-year-old approached her father before supper one night as he was about to finish a glass of Beaujolais and asked for a taste! It is very dry, he warned her, whereupon that pseudosophisticate tipped up the glass, drank and proclaimed, "Dry... but very nice."

Item: With the snow finally gone, it is time to take measure of the winter's toll on the yard. All 18 little evergreens have appeared to come through the recent onslaught in good form. The lilacs are in bud, the pachysandra are beginning to turn green, ditto the

euyonomus. The worst damage seems to be large patches of lawn riddled by moles.

Item: Speaking of moles, the puppy, supposedly three quarters American water spaniel and therefore a retriever of sorts, showed her mettle a couple of weeks ago by bringing a very limp rodent to the back door. As soon as the screaming died down, the children's father dispatched the mole with shovel and a few piles of dirt from the garden area. Puppy, obviously delighted with the new game, promptly resurrected her prize and returned with it for new approval.

Item: The nine-year-old has learned a lesson about the rites of spring the hard way. Rolling around on still wet ground and tying one's coat around one's waist leads to sore throats, hacking cough and unsympathetic mother.

Item: It is a fact of human nature, I suppose, that the higher the price of coffee goes, the greater the desire to imbibe. If we could be sure that the peasants are truly benefitting from the inflationary spiral as the coffee growers would have us believe, then I would cheerfully hand over the price of a pound each week, instead of eyeballing the cashier with loathing although I know full well she has to do with neither the price nor my addiction.

Item: If our house is typical as to national consumption then I am thinking it might be a wise idea to invest in saltine crackers (good for an on-the-run snack), ice cream and band-aids (why use one when four will do?).

Education Workshop

"Parents as Partners in Education," a workshop co-sponsored by the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents and the National Forum of Catholic Parent Organizations, is scheduled for Saturday, May 21.

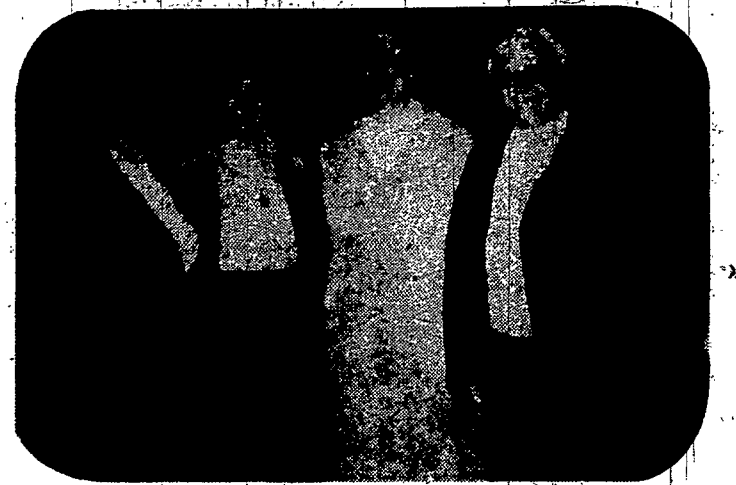
The program slated for 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, N.Y., features guest speakers and separate sessions dealing with Catholic education.

Some of these sessions include: Funding Catholic Educational Programs - Coping with the Bottom Line; Recruiting for Students - Helping Others to Share our Good Fortune; children's Literature in Christian Perspective - Parental Guidance Recommended; Parental

Involvement in the Educational Process - You're Not in this Alone; and Catholic Sex Education - A Partnership Responsibility of the Parent and the Church.

Reservations can be made by writing to Executive Director, New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents, 232 Main St., Binghamton, N.Y. 13905. The cost for the workshop is \$5, which includes coffee breaks and a picnic lunch.

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Education Seminar

In March the Sisters of Mercy sponsored an Education as Total Ministry Day out at Our Lady of Mercy High School. Shown are the members of the planning committee: Sister M. Edwardine; Sister Elinor Ford, guest speaker; Sister Roberta Rodenhouse, principal of St. Thomas Apostle School; Sister M. Bonaventure, principal of Mercy High School.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Anyone who would like to become a school board member is invited to attend a workshop on the subject Saturday morning, April 2, at the Sheraton-Brittany, near the airport. This is the third such seminar sponsored by the Monroe County School Boards Association. Speakers will include district board members from Brockport, Greece, East Rochester and Pittsford.

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