

Insights in Liturgy

Easter and The Church

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

We tend to think that the Church came into being because of something that Jesus did. As a matter of fact, it would be more accurate to say that the Church came into being because of something that happened to Jesus, namely, that God raised Him from the dead.

It was the "Easter Event" that launched the Church. For the Easter experience of the disciples of Jesus overwhelmed them with the conviction that the Jesus whom they had known during his earthly ministry was alive and in their midst. They believed that Jesus had gained permanent victory over death and that

participation in this victory was open to all who would acknowledge Jesus as Lord. It was their Easter-faith, their belief in the "Good News" of Jesus dead and risen, that impelled the disciples to begin their preaching and to initiate men and women into the community of those who believed in the victory of Jesus and acknowledged Him as Lord and Saviour. In other words, it was the Easter-faith of the disciples that brought the Church into existence.

What I am suggesting is that Christian Faith did not begin as a religion that possessed a new ethical doctrine derived from the teachings of Jesus. It began rather with the transformation of Jesus whereby

He became the risen Lord and the transformation of the disciples of Jesus whereby they came to see themselves as living the new life that flowed from the permanent victory of Jesus over death.

Christianity, in other words, is not, in the first instance, the religion of Jesus, but rather the religion about Jesus. It was the disciples' conviction about what had happened to Jesus, namely, that He had been exalted by the Father as risen Lord, that moved the disciples to inaugurate the Church.

All this has important implications for our understanding of the Church. The Church is not simply a community of people with a new ethic; it is a community of men and women with a new life — a share in the risen life of Jesus. Baptism is our initial incorporation into this new life that sets us on the road of dying and rising. The Eucharist is the weekly celebration in word and meal of the dying and rising that constitute the rhythm of the daily lives of Christian people.

The Church is thus an event: it is the living out in the daily lives of Christians today of the alleluia-faith that first came to the disciples in their experience of Easter. The Church began because the disciples came to believe in Jesus as risen Lord. The Church continues to exist as long as Christian people share that Easter faith.

word, resurrection has given him a new kind of bodily existence. Consequently a new means of making contact with Him is needed.

Mary Magdalene on Easter morn did not at first recognize the risen Jesus. Neither did the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The reason was that through His resurrection Christ has entered into a wholly new life; so He can no longer be known along the old human lines.

And what is this new way of knowing Jesus? It is through signs: the visible Church with her sacramental life.


But signs are not signs unless they speak to him who sees them. Were I to open a book written in Sanskrit, I would see signs, but the book would say, nothing to me, because I do not know how to read Sanskrit. For signs to have meaning, one must know how to read them.

So it is with the signs of the Church and her sacraments. They can be signs of contradiction for the rise and fall of many, as was Christ, depending on whether or not one has the power to read them aright. This power comes with the gift of faith.

Each of us has a capacity for God, as a light bulb has for light. The light bulb needs two things to go on: a current of electricity and a snapping on of the switch. So with the light of faith. For it to go on to help us read the signs, we need the current of electricity, which is the Holy Spirit; and we need to snap the switch on, which is minimal good will — our desire to want to see the risen Christ, to want to follow Him. Only those saw Christ who wanted to see Him. Those who wanted Him dead never did see Him.

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WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:19-31. (R1) Acts 5:12-16. (R2) Rev. 1:9-13, 17-19.

Instead of looking back to the past to confirm the resurrection, as St. Luke does, John in the resurrection story focuses on the future. He presents a risen Christ as anxious to set up the ways and means necessary for continuing His salvific work on earth. Thus He establishes a hierarchy by conferring the primacy on Peter ("Feed my lambs") and He confirms His presence in the sacramental life of the Church by breaking bread on Sundays with His own, by conferring the sacrament of reconciliation ("if you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them") and by commissioning them to go teach all nations, baptizing them.

The first reading is one of three summaries of the life of the early Church. These summaries punctuate the first few chapters of the Acts (the other two are in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35).

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The book of Revelation (R2) is also a book of signs. The seven lampstands of gold symbolize the Church; the one like a Son of Man standing among the lampstands represents Christ present in His Church. He is priest (ankle-length robe) and king (sash of gold).

St. John wrote his gospel with the express purpose of showing the connection between signs and faith. The apparitions of our risen Lord were used to show that Jesus would be present in a new way among His people — through signs! Because He could pass through walls, He is no longer a man like other men. Yet He is not spirit, because He can be seen and touched. In a



JUDGE VAN GRAAFEILAND

Lawyers Guild Plan Forum

Judge Ellsworth Van Graafeiland of the U.S. Court of Appeals (2nd Circuit) will be the featured speaker at a forum on "Critical Issues of Law and Morality" sponsored by the St. Thomas More Lawyer's Guild at 7:45 p.m., Monday, April 18 at St. John Fisher College.

Judge Van Graafeiland was formerly a partner in the local firm of Harter, Secrest and Emery and is well known for his leadership role in national, state and local legal associations.

The St. Thomas More Lawyer's Guild which sponsors the annual Red Mass plans to conduct a series of similar forums dealing with current moral-legal issues, such as capital punishment, pornography and the First Amendment, and experimentation upon live non-consenting human beings.

The public is invited.


VATICAN NEWS

"And now, a word from the Vatican" is the title of a talk to be given by Nancy Murphy at 8 p.m. April 19 at St. John of Rochester Church, 18 Wickford Way, Fairport. Mrs. Murphy is a columnist for the Courier-Journal.

BREAKFAST

Women of the Altar Society of Our Lady of Victory-St. Joseph Church will assemble at the Holiday Inn after the 9 o'clock Mass Sunday, April 17, for their annual communion breakfast

Life, Liberty and Law



Nancy Murphy

With the single exception of the Planned Parenthood-dominated U.S. delegation, every nation attending the UN World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974 stressed the absolute need for human development as the one path toward the elimination of poverty and starvation. Not one nation, except the U.S., focussed on "family planning" as the answer.

Echoing and supporting the conclusions of the conference Father Pedro Arrupe SJ, superior general of the Society of Jesus, noted in the L'Osservatore Romano: "It is over ten years since Vatican II made the following shameful comment on our modern world: 'Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power. Yet a huge portion of the world's citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty.' (Yes, for the first time in human history we have the resources and the technology to provide adequate food for every person on earth... We can do it. Mankind is in a position to move from an era of survival of the fittest to one of affluence and plenty. But the abundance has benefitted only a few... The world has reached a total military expenditure of almost one billion dollars per day on weapons of destruction... Little more than one per cent of this gigantic sum would provide supplementary protein goods for 200,000,000 malnourished children to ensure full brain development; (another) one per cent would provide increased agricultural investment to significantly enlarge food production in the poorest countries; and much less than one per cent would provide a comprehensive emergency aid system with a permanent international relief force to assist disaster-stricken countries... If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is incomplete everywhere in the world."

If the Catholic youth of America were to challenge the "overpopulation birth control sterilization dwindling food resources"

textbooks, this generation could rise to challenge history. This generation could feed and clothe and educate the following generations. It is within the grasp of this generation of Catholic youth. The choice is theirs.

Or will our youth say to their brothers, "I do not need you so I will not help you; I do not know you so I will not help you; I do not see you so I will not feed you or clothe you or teach you."

I wonder how many students and teachers will follow up on the dozens of research suggestions listed in this series during the past six weeks. And how many will challenge the text books.

Next Week: Planned Parenthood.

Don't Help IRA, Papers Ask Americans

Belfast (RNS) — Following two more terrorist bombings here, leading Irish newspapers have appealed to Irish-Americans to stop giving financial aid and support to the Irish Republican Army provisionals.

IRA terrorists bombed two restaurants, injuring 33 civilians, including a 6-month-old baby and several other children.

The explosions, within a minute of each other in neighboring restaurants, were part of the IRA's stepped up campaign to force the British army out of Northern Ireland.

The Irish Times wrote: "The greatest contribution that Irish-Americans can make to the welfare of the Mother Country is, quite simply, to refuse all aid and comfort to an organization whose influence on Irish life and politics is so uniformly harmful and evil."

Said the Irish Independent: "The provisionals can be stopped if, on the one hand, uninformed, misguided, and very dangerous Irish-Americans withdraw their financial support... and if we make it obvious that we want nothing to do with the provisionals or their aims."

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Deaths

Jon Gerling

A memorial service was held at Webster Presbyterian Church last Friday evening, April 8, for Jon Gerling who died, at the age of 35, on Tuesday, April 5. Mr. Gerling was vice president and business manager for Empire State Weeklies, Inc, publishers of the Webster Herald, Fairport Herald Mail, Penfield Press, Wayne County Mail, Ontario County Times Journal and the Sodus Record.

His death was described as "a great loss to the area's weekly publishing community as well as to the New York Press Association," by Anthony J. Costello, general manager of the Courier-Journal.

Mr. Gerling is survived by his wife, Sheila, and two sons, Robert and James. Other survivors are his father, G. Curtis Gerling, and a brother, William C.

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