

Insights in Liturgy

Lent and the Penitents

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

We have seen that Lent had its beginnings in the need of the early Church to prepare the catechumens for Baptism. But Lent was destined to take on another character also. It was to become a time of penance and reconciliation for those who had forsaken the spiritual journey.

The overriding concern of the early Church was with

the process of conversion. But there were some Christians who betrayed the conversion-experience, that is to say, they fell from grace and underwent a totally alienating experience: they sinned grievously. But in the midst of this betrayal of their faith-commitment, they had a new experience: an experience of the universal and undefeated love of God. They had the experience of being saved a second time. Such an ex-

perience filled them with joy. They felt the need of praising and thanking God who had in His loving mercy forgiven them a second time. It was this need of expressing praise and thanks to God on the part of the penitents that transformed Lent into a season of penance and reconciliation.

At the beginning of Lent those who were guilty of grievous and public sins would come before the bishop. He would impose hands on them, sprinkle them with ashes, give them a penitential garb and receive them in to the order of penitents. In addition, he would impose a penance on them that they would carry out during Lent (sometimes for a longer period of time). These penances would be for the penitents a way of ritualizing their praise and thanks to God for having forgiven them a second time.

During the Lenten liturgies the penitents would occupy a special place in the church. Like the catechumens they would be the object of special prayers on the part of the faithful. Also like the catechumens, they would be dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word.

On Holy Thursday there would be a special Mass during which the penitents would once again come before the bishop. He would impose hands on them a second time, reconciling them to the community of the faithful. Following their reconciliation, they would once again participate fully in the Eucharist, sharing in the meal with the rest of the faithful. It was an occasion of great joy for them: once again they were one with the community.

The need of the penitents not only gave a new meaning to the season of Lent, it also brought into being the earliest form of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation.

THE SACRAMENTS

Sunday homilies at Most Precious Blood Church during Lent are focussing on the seven sacraments, taken one at a time. The parish liturgy committee has been making banners symbolizing the sacraments.

Business in the Diocese

Mary Kay Ingenthron has been appointed public relations director for the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, the museum announced last week. She held a similar position at Ohio Dominican College in Columbus from 1974 to 1976 and for the past two years has been director of publications at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Mrs. Ingenthron is a native of Rochester and an alumna of Mercy High School. She has a journalism degree from Marquette University and has studied art history.

Some Thoughts to Consider

By Ed Sulowski

The value of your presence (to talk or not to visit). Just as the funeral is a ceremony where none is invited but all may attend so is the condolence or sympathy visit. And not only is a visit appreciated but it is often most helpful to the bereaved. What the caller must overcome is the mistaken belief that the mourners prefer to be alone. The visitor should understand that pain suffered in solitude is heavier to bear than pain which is shared. Just by being there the relative, friend or neighbor testifies to the reality of the death as well as to the support of the living community. NO.

SCHAUMAN FUNERAL HOME, INC. 2100 St. Paul St. 342-3400

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 4:4-42. (R1) Ex. 17:3-7. (R2) Rom. 5:1-2, 5-8.

The theme of next Sunday's beautiful liturgy is water. In the desert God's people feared death by thirst. A thirsting Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. How apposite these passages must have been to those preparing to receive on Easter eve the Sacrament of Faith, baptism, that gives the living water—the Holy Spirit.

Water, however, brought to mind the newly canonized saint, Father Charbel Machlouf, the first member of an Eastern Rite—the Maronite—to be canonized in 400 years.

I belonged to the Maronite Rite before being transferred to the Roman Rite. My father was born in Beirut. He had great devotion to Father Charbel. When my brother, Father Ed, and I were in the seminary, my good father showed us pictures of Fr. Charbel and a relic of him. He told of the incredible miracles worked by the monk. But Father would also rhapsodize about the temperate climate in Lebanon—"the most beautiful in the world," he used to say. Well, wise in our young conceits, we used to attribute all these superlatives to Oriental hyperbole. We'd listen respectfully, but we'd take it all with a grain of salt. How wrong we were!

I can well imagine how related my father would have been had he lived to see Fr. Charbel canonized, Oct. 9, 1977. He'd have every right to boast, "I told you so."

Well, what has all this got to do with water?

Fr. Charbel was born Youssef (Joseph) Machlouf in 1828 of peasant farmers. As a boy he tended sheep. When 23, he decided to join an order of Maronite monks. At 31, he was ordained. People noted his great humility. He gained a reputation for holiness. Sick people would touch him and be cured. But they were peasants, and peasants are gullible.

The last 20 years of Fr. Charbel's life were spent in contemplative prayer. On Christmas Eve, 1898, this

saintly monk died and was buried in the monastery crypt in the town of Anaya, about 30 miles north of Beirut.

In 1921, it began to rain in Anaya more than usual. It rained so much that the cemetery stood under water. The Superior of the Maronite monastery requested permission from the Patriarch to remove whatever was left of the monks' bodies to higher ground.

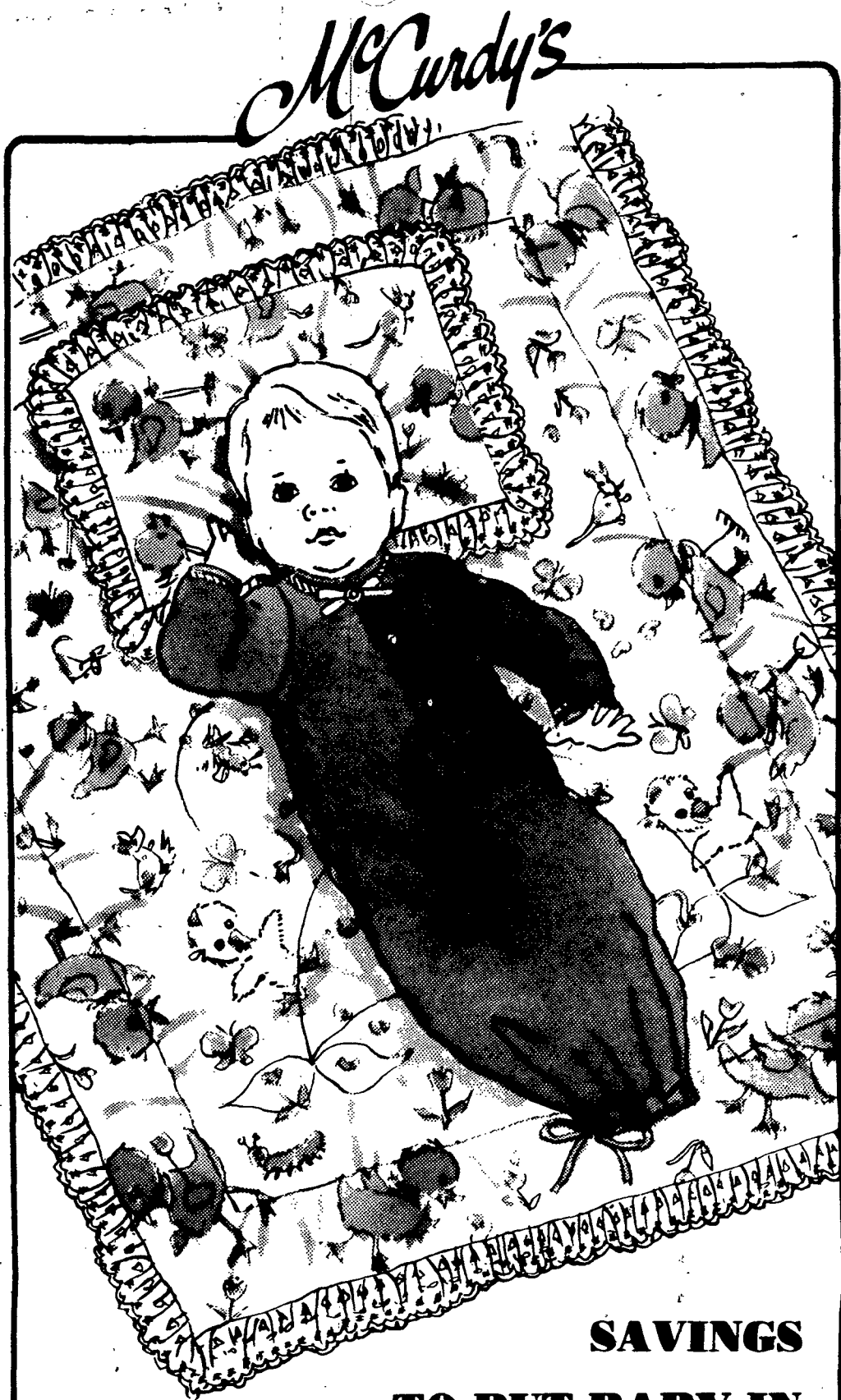
Water had to be bailed out of the crypt in which Fr. Charbel's body lay. The monks found it perfectly preserved—"virtually untouched by death." So the Superior kept it in the monastery overnight.

The next morning the monks found the washed corpse as healthy as that of a living person. Then miracles began to happen.

There was a seamstress who had lived in Beirut all her life, Mountaha Boulas, age 41. She was good at her work. Everyone knew her. But she was a hunchback. "Everybody," Miss Boulas said, "used to touch the hump for luck." In 1953 she decided to make a pilgrimage on foot up the steep slope to Fr. Charbel's tomb. He worked miracles for everybody, even Moslems; why not for her, a Christian? She stayed an entire day in prayer at his shrine. She went home, still deformed but still with faith. That night she thought she was dreaming—of stretching her back as someone does in fitful sleep—and in the morning she saw the miracle. The hump was gone. Her deformity had vanished.

Last November in the terrible civil war that racked Beirut, a young man, Maktaa el-Sekke, was shot in the back. He lost the use of his legs. French surgeons treated him with no success. He crawled to Fr. Charbel's tomb, but walked away.

Throngs today are swarming to Fr. Charbel. His canonization has heartened Christians everywhere and injected a sense of overriding reconciliation in the East. God works His miracles not so much to convert the unbeliever as to encourage His friends that all things are possible with Him and that not even death, nor water, has power over those who love Him.



SAVINGS TO PUT BABY IN THE PINK FOR SPRING!

Ducky Comforter and Pillow Set
reg. \$15 **11.97**

Delightful yellow ducky design on snowy white nylon with deep polyester fiberfilling. Even ruffled bordered to make it a charming gift. Machine washable, of course.

Drawstring Gown
reg. 3.25 **2.57**

Soft knit with fold-over mittens and snap closing. White, maize or aqua.

Blanket Sleeper
reg. 6.50 **5.27**

Flame resistant, cuddly fleece with full zipper front, plastic reinforced soles. Choice of bright pastels. S, M, L, XL.

Infant's Wear (D28), Third Floor, Midtown and Long Ridge, Northgate, Eastview, Geneva.

ORDER BY MAIL, OR PHONE 232-1000