

# Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

## Wait For the Lord

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 20:1-16. (R1) Is. 55:6-9. (R2) Phil. 1:20-24, 27.

Mark Twain once said, "God created man to his image and likeness; and ever since man has been trying to repay the compliment by creating God to man's image and likeness."



Fr. Shamon: God has tried to set man straight by saying, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." (R1)

One of man's great follies is to try to cut God down to human size. Someone asked, "How big is your God?" For some, not even so big as a man.

Sunday's readings show how different God's thoughts are from ours. "I will never forgive him," is the language of the man who has been wronged. Yet God says, "Let the scoundrel forsake his way and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy—He is generous in forgiving." And in the parable of Laborers in the Vineyard God also shows how

generous He is in giving.

O. Henry wrote: "Life is made up of sobs, sniffles and smiles with the sobs predominating." For many life is a prolonged agony—a burden, a pain, a puzzle. Yet behind the pain, the tears, the misery, there is God with the best of possible plans for us.

If we look at a tapestry from the underside, it seems to be a meaningless maze. Turn it over and a beautiful design is revealed.

My life is but a weaving,

Between my God and me.

I may but choose the colors;

He weaveth steadily.

Full oft, He weaveth sorrow;

And I, in foolish pride,

Forget He sees the upper

And I the underside.

How shallow the man is who says, "I can accept nothing I do not understand." Who knoweth the mind of God? Socrates once said, "What God is, I know not. What He is not, I know."

We know what God is not. He is not cruel. He is not heartless, unloving, pitiless. "The Lord is

gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness."

Give God time, therefore, for Him to reveal Himself. Often He'll come before the dawn walking on stormy seas bringing quiet, peace, and joy. All the Lord asks of us is that we wait on Him.

One of my Old Testament heroes is David. How great a warrior, a leader he was! But above all, how great a saint! Sometimes we may think David's life was a bed of roses. Actually, few men suffered as much as David. For years he was a fugitive, hunted and hounded by Saul. Often, he wandered weaponless and reduced to such hunger that he had to eat leftover holy bread. He brought misery to his entire family. They became fugitives with him and dwelt in the caves of Adullam in Edom. Yet in all these troubles, David never forgot God and God never forgot David. David waited on the Lord—"for you I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:5). And what happened? Hear David's confession: "No one who waits for you shall be put to shame."

David's years of preparation were hard and long; King Saul had no such preparation. Saul failed in life; David did not. Suffering for him was a blessing in disguise.

Therefore, wait on the Lord. "His thoughts are not our thoughts." If we do, we shall never be put to shame.

## Insights in Liturgy

### Local Church: Place Of Forgiveness

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

Last week's article suggested that despite the presence of Jesus, the local Church is the place of sin. St. Paul tells us that "all men have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). But he also tells us that "where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more." (Rom. 5:20). That is to say that, if the local Church is the place of sin, it is, in an even more abundant way, the place of forgiveness. Jesus came to reconcile us to the Father and has entrusted to the Church the ministry of reconciliation.

The official ministry of reconciliation is carried out in the local Church when priest and people gather to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is carried out each week when the community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, for the Eucharist makes present in our midst the saving act of the Lord Jesus that unites us with the Father and with one another.

But reconciliation in the local Church is not limited to sacramental moments. It also takes place in the day-to-day living of Christian faith. For besides sacramental penance, there is another tradition about

reconciliation in the Church—a tradition about lay confession and lay forgiveness in the Church.

The practice of lay confession has its roots in Sacred Scripture. In the Epistle of St. James we read the following admonition:

"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another... any one who can bring back a sinner from the wrong way that he has taken will be saving a soul from death and covering up a great number of sins." (James 5:16-19).

The concept of reconciliation within the community through lay confession and lay forgiveness is implicit in the words of Jesus, when he tells us:

"If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first and then come back and present your offering." (Matthew 5:23-24).

It should be noted that this action does not belong to sacramental penance in the strict sense, for no official minister of the Church is involved. Yet the Scriptures clearly suggest that the practice of

lay confession and lay forgiveness is an important means of achieving reconciliation within the Christian community.

It would appear that up until the late Middle Ages lay confession was a not uncommon practice in the Church. Indeed, it seems to have been regarded as the ordinary means of achieving peace in the community after minor sins. Though it was not regarded as a sacrament, it was considered a relevant part of the process of salvation. St. Thomas Aquinas refers to it (Summa Theologica, Suppl., Q8, art. 2,3) and calls it "an incomplete or quasi-sacrament" and urges its practice for the forgiveness of venial sins.

In the late Middle Ages lay confession became increasingly rarer, and, with the advent of the Reformation, this valuable tradition was lost altogether. Today, in the light of the increased problems arising in family life and in husband and wife relationships, we might well ask the question: would not the revival of this long and fruitful tradition in the life of the Church be productive of great good for the Christian community? Would it not be wisdom on our part once again to see lay confession and lay forgiveness as a part of the whole process of reconciliation within the community?

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