

Be Faithful to the Word of God

Last month, Pope John Paul II spoke at the shrine of St. Maria Goretti, a 20th Century martyr who was raped and slain. Following are excerpts from the pontiff's address.

The Word of God sets forth in the first place the identity and behavior of the Christian.

Who is the Christian? How must the Christian behave? What are his ideals and concerns?



These are questions of all times, but they become all the more relevant today in our consumer and permissive society, in which the Christian particularly may be tempted to yield to the common mentality, relegating to the background his noble and heroic vocation as a messenger and witness of the Good News.

In his letter, the apostle St. James clearly specifies the identity of the Christian: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

The Christian is therefore quite a special creature of God, because, by means of grace, he participates in the life of the Trinity itself. The Christian is a gift of the Almighty to the world: he comes down from above, from the Father of lights!

There could be no better description of the admirable dignity of the Christian and also of his responsibility!

The Christian therefore must commit his will thoroughly and live his vocation consistently. St. James says further: "Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

These are very serious and severe statements: the Christian must not betray, he must not deceive himself with empty words, he must not cheat. His mission is an extremely delicate one, because he must be the leaven in society, the light in the world, the salt of the earth.

The Christian is convinced more and more every day of the enormous difficulty of his commitment. He must go against the tide, he must bear witness to truths that are absolute but not visible, he must lose his earthly life to win eternity, he must make himself responsible also for his neighbor, to enlighten him, edify him, save him. But he knows he is not alone. What Moses said to the Jewish people is far truer for the Christian people: "For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?"

The Christian knows that Jesus Christ, the Word of

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God, not only became incarnate to reveal the salvific truth and to redeem mankind, but has remained with us on this earth, renewing mystically the Sacrifice of the Cross by means of the Eucharist, and becoming the spiritual food for the soul and a companion along the way of life.

That is who the Christian is: first fruits of God's creatures, who must keep his faith and life pure and stainless.

The Word of God, consequently, throws light also on the phenomenon of tourism.

All human realities, in fact, are illuminated and interpreted by the revelation of Christ, who came to save the whole man and every man.

Also the reality of tourism must be seen in the light of Christ.

Undoubtedly, tourism is now a mass phenomenon, of the times. It has become a mentality and a custom, because it is a cultural phenomenon, caused by the increase of knowledge, free time and the possibility of movement. It is also a psychological phenomenon, easily understandable, in view of the structures of modern society: industrialization, urbanization, depersonalization, as a result of which every individual feels the need of relaxation, diversion, change, especially in contact with nature. Then, too, it is an economic phenomenon, a cause of prosperity and riches.

Also tourism, however, like all human realities, is an ambiguous phenomenon, that is useful and positive if directed and controlled by reason and by some ideals; negative if it deteriorates to a mere phenomenon of the consumer society, to frenzy, to alienating and amoral attitudes, with painful consequences for the individual and for society.

An individual and collective education to tourism is therefore necessary, in order that it may always be maintained at the level of a positive value of formation of the human person, that is, of just and merited relaxation, elevation of the spirit, and communion with one's neighbor and with God.

A deep and convinced humanistic education to acceptance and respect for one's neighbor, to kindness, mutual understanding and goodness, is, therefore, necessary. An ecological education is necessary, for respect of environment and of nature, for healthy and sober enjoyment of natural beauties, so restful and exalting for souls thirsty for harmony and security; and above all a religious education is necessary in order that tourism will never disturb consciences and never degrade the spirit, but on the contrary elevate it, purify it, and raise it to dialogue with the Absolute and to contemplation of the immense mystery that enfolds us and attracts us.

This is the conception of tourism in the light of Christ, an irreversible phenomenon and an instrument of concord and friendship.

Finally in this particular place we are all called to turn our eyes to the figure of St. Maria Goretti.

Not far from here, on July 6, 1902, there took place the tragedy of her killing, and at the same time also the glory of her sanctification through martyrdom to defend her purity. We are close to the Church dedicated to her, where her mortal remains rest, and we must stop for a moment in silent meditation.

Maria Goretti, an adolescent, barely 12 years old, kept herself pure from this world — as St. James writes, even at the cost of life itself. She preferred to die, rather than offend God.

"No," she said to her killer, who had lost all self-control. "It is a sin! It is against the will of God! You'll go to hell!"

Unfortunately her faith was unavailing to stop her tempter. Later, thanks to her forgiveness and intercession, he repented and was converted. She died a martyr to save her purity.

"A virgin's fortitude (Pius XII said a martyr's fortitude) which youth sets in a brighter and more radiant light . . . is at the same time the protection and the fruit of virginity."

Maria Goretti, luminous in her spiritual beauty and in her eternal happiness already attained, calls upon us precisely to have firm and sure faith in the Word of God, the only source of truth; and to be strong against the insinuating and enveloping temptations of the world. A culture that is deliberately anti-metaphysical, logically produces an agnostic and neo-paganistic society, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts of honest persons concerned about the destiny of mankind.

Today the Christian is up against a continual struggle. He too becomes a "sign of contradiction" because of the choices he must make.

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

Married Couples Are Chosen

Sunday's Reading: (R3) Mk. 10:2-16. (R1) Gn. 2:18-24. (R2) Heb. 2:9-11.

I was talking with a woman the other day who was complaining about the helplessness of her husband. "If I didn't keep after him all the time," she told me, "why he wouldn't take his medicine or even the proper foods; Men are such babies." Then she went on and asked, "Do you



F. Shamon

know, Father, why God created women?" I listened. Then she said, "When God created man, He looked at the man and exclaimed, 'Good heavens, he'll never make it alone' — so He created woman." I laughed.

The Talmud writes that God did not create woman from man's feet, to teach that man is not to dominate her; nor from man's head, to teach she is not to dominate him; but from his side, to teach that she is to walk beside him in the journey of life as his equal and his helpmate.

A point, I think, we are liable to forget about the Bible story of the first marriage and the gospel story about the permanency of the marriage bond is this:

it was God who instituted marriage. It is God who brings marriage partners together. I have heard it said that marriages are made in heaven, but I have never understood how truly they are until I started penning this article. For the first time, it struck me that it was God who brought the first woman in marriage to the first man — "he (God) brought her to the man." And that was precisely the way Jesus understood it. "Let no man separate," He said, "what God has joined" — God, not man!

So often we hear at a wedding that he or she has made a good "choice." But married life, like the Christian life, has nothing to do with choice. A married person who believes he or she has chosen their partner is like the Christian who thinks he has chosen God. If married partners think they have chosen each other,

their love will soon evaporate into choosiness or self-satisfaction. The marriage vows do not speak of choosing, but of taking — "Will you take?" If we do not realize this, then love will be reduced to the worst kind of taking: taking for granted.

Married life is based above all on the realization that one has been chosen. The married person who recognizes this is like the Christian who realizes that he has been chosen by God. Only the realization that God has His hand in marriage, that "God has joined (spouses) together," can married lovers find love, joy and peace.

But man and woman are two totally different kinds of persons. There is bound to be personality friction. Rub two sticks together and you get fire. Run your car without oil and you will ruin

the motor. Put a man and a woman under the same roof for a long while and there will be murder — literally. Statistics for husbands and wives killing each other tops the murder list.

What is needed: A lubricant. Virtue — Christian virtue. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Marriage, therefore, is not so much getting the right person as being the right person.

The right person in marriage is he or she who is imbued with the Christian concept that God has brought two persons together, to love one another until death; that neither person is perfect: there will be crosses. Sometimes one will have to make up for the other's weakness by being strong enough for two. But there will be other times when one is forced to draw

on the love of the other because he or she needs someone to "lean on." Sure, this will be hard, but this is how we grow, become fully human — by learning to depend on others and by being dependable, by loving and discovering love. For this reason God said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

ME Slates Convention

The Rochester Worldwide Marriage Encounter groups will hold their annual convention Oct. 13 and 14 at Aquinas Institute.

The event opens at 11 a.m. on Saturday and at noon on Sunday. A reception will be held on Saturday evening.