

Encounter of Gospel And Culture

Following are excerpts from an address given by Pope John Paul on the occasion of an "ad limina" visit by the bishops of Japan.

This is a moment when the Church in Rome respectfully greets in your persons the entire Japanese people, of whom you are illustrious and noble sons. All of you remember with what faithful attention, with what great love, Paul VI welcomed Japanese visitors and pilgrims during all the years of his pontificate.



This is a celebration of faith: the faith of the whole Church in Japan, the faith of which you, in union with the Successor of Peter, are guardians and authentic teachers. On my part today I wish to render homage to this faith, which through missionary effort was implanted by God as his gift in the hearts of the faithful. This

gift of faith was generously accepted and genuinely lived. It became the object of the witnessing of Paul Miki and his martyr companions, who went to their death proclaiming the names of Jesus and Mary, and who, by their martyrdom, confirmed the faith as an everlasting heritage in Japan.

By the grace of God and the help of his Blessed Mother, this Catholic faith was, moreover, preserved throughout generations by the Japanese laity who maintained by the instinct of faith their unbreakable attachment to the See of Peter.

And today this faith is still expressed in action, nurtured by prayer and offered freely to all who may wish to embrace the Gospel. Through their faith, manifested by fraternal love and by the consistency of their lives, the Christian people of Japan are called to give witness to Jesus Christ in their families, in the neighborhoods, and in all the milieux in which they live; they are called to communicate Jesus Christ to anyone who may wish to know him or embrace his message of salvation and life.

Precisely by reason of the central dimension of faith we see the great value that prayer has in the Church: faith is kept alive and fortified by prayer. By prayer,

hearts are opened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to the Message and action of Christ's Church.

It follows that fidelity to prayer is an essential element in the Church's life. In this regard, Japan has been blessed with contemplative vocations, with religious who carry on Christ's loving praise of his Father. And in this contemplative aspect of the Church's life in Japan is there not an excellent element of dialogue with your non-Christian brethren, who in their own ancient traditions, have given a place of prominence to contemplation? Is not the desire to be united with God in purity of heart one of those elements in which the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ so naturally inculcated into the lives of so many of your people?

It is a great credit to Japan how generations of Christians, steeped in their own culture, have been able to contribute by their activities to the uplifting of society.

In the midst of their community, when Christians show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, when they share the life and destiny of their brothers and sisters and show solidarity with all that is good and noble, and at the same time give expression to their faith in higher values and to their hope in a life yet unfolded in God — then they are fulfilling a task of initial evangelization with regard to culture, a task consistent with their vocation and the obligations that flow therefrom.

In God's providence the primary witness of life must be coupled with an explicit proclamation of the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Christ.

The encounter between the Gospel and culture can take place only on the condition that the Church faithfully proclaims and lives the Gospel.

The universal Church has been deeply enriched by the contribution of the Church in Japan. The "little flock" has been a credit to the grace of Christ the Savior and it continues to give praise to his Father. The future is in the hands of Jesus. It is he, Jesus, who is the Lord of History; it is he who definitively decides the destiny of his Church in each generation.



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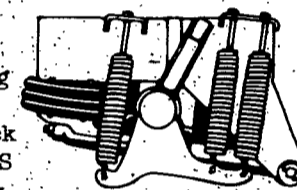
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Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Each Has A Place

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 10:38-42. (R1) Gn. 18:1-10. (R2) Col. 1:24-28.

In next Sunday's readings we have two beautiful domestic scenes: one in a tent and one in a home.

The first scene is about Abraham and Sarah. Three strangers visited them. It was the hottest time of day — probably siesta time. But no matter. So hospitable was Abraham, that he insisted that the strangers rest and dine. After they had agreed, Abraham rushed into Sarah and excitedly ordered her to bake bread and make a banquet for the strangers, come from nowhere out in the desert. Imagine! And what happened? One of the visitors, turned out to be God.

God doesn't need a temple to visit us. Nor a lofty mountain. He doesn't even need a perfect marriage. — Abraham and Sarah had their ups and downs. Nor does He need youth — Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of child-bearing. All He needs is kindness, hospitality and love on our part toward

others. He found these in the tent of Abraham and Sarah and promised them a child — a child from whom the Messiah would come.

The second scene is a picture of the home of Mary and Martha. To this home, God again came — not as a stranger, but as a friend. He came not to work any miracle, but to teach a wonderful lesson — a lesson Christianity has been teaching long before any women's liberation movement ever existed — a lesson the Church has always taught; namely, that women have equal rights with men.

Martha's complaint about her sister not helping had a thousand years tradition in it. In the ancient world a woman's place was not only in the home, but in the background in the home — her place was to keep busy in the background! Where was Sarah at the banquet she had prepared for the three strangers? In the tent. Only men could sit at the feet of great masters as disciples. Never in the ancient history, except perhaps for a few women, like Sappho or Aspasia, did women sit at the feet of teachers. That was a man's place. So Martha complained.

But our Lord in His remarks to Martha liberated women that day. First He championed Mary by saying, "Martha, leave her alone; Mary has as much right to sit at my feet and listen to me as any man." Then He liberated Martha herself when He said, "Only one thing is required." This could well mean, "Don't make a fuss. I don't need much." If Martha continued, then she would be doing it, not because women were expected to, but because she wanted to.

In homes we often find two temperaments that often cause misunderstanding: the active and the contemplative — the ones who want to do, the others who want to think and pray; those whose work is their prayer and others who work at prayer. Neither the one nor the other is right or wrong. Both are needed in homes, both are needed in the Church. Both serve Christ.

In a church bulletin, after the listing of masses, there was this reminder: "The end of worship, the beginning of service." Worship should end in service. At worship we meet Christ; in service we wait on Him in others. Thus at every mass, we are dismissed with the words: "The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord." To serve is to love; to love Christ in others — in strangers, as Abraham and Sarah did, and in friends, as Mary and Martha did. This is the mystery of Christ: He is present in strangers at work and on the streets; He is present in friends, at home and away from home.

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