

Editorials

Grumblers

We hesitate to use Scriptural context to editorialize. Too often, the words of the Good Book can be malleated to fit the shape of either side of the same argument.

However, we feel there is a direct lesson for many of us in the Advent readings, so full of the warmth of hope, of the essential message of Good News for each of us.

We refer particularly to the letter of James which will be read at next Sunday's liturgy. "Steady your

hearts," he tells us, "because the coming of the Lord is at hand: Do not grumble against one another, my brothers, lest you be condemned."

Those words are not only appropriate for this time of the Church year but all the time, for we live in a very real sense, in perpetual Advent.

Unfortunately, these are times of disputation, of contention, of tangential argumentation, leading us away from the proffered path. The especially sad part is that in engaging in such verbal confrontation many of us attack personalities rather than issues.

Those who engage in character detraction, especially in public, should realize that they are

diminished more than their brothers or sisters whom they seek to defame. A psychology degree isn't needed to point out, and most people recognize, that people who attempt to tear others down, do so to make themselves appear taller.

As we said, we are wary of using Scripture, except in its most obvious and direct meanings — such as the Lord's admonishment about casting stones.

In that spirit of justice and in the greater spirit of charity, we ask all to pay particular heed to James next Sunday. When the reader intones the word of the Lord, "Do not grumble against one another, my brothers, lest you be condemned," take it to heart. He may be speaking directly to you.

and Opinions

Honoring Christ

Editor:

Now that the Advent season is upon us we should be more aware of the coming of Christ's Kingdom on Earth. What greater way to bring about this plan of God than by the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in our homes, churches, schools and institutions.

This being the year of the family, the enthronement would bring to families an effective love and an enlightening faith. It propogates above all the Christian spirit in the home by setting up in each family the reign and the love of Jesus Christ. And in doing this you are obeying our Divine Lord himself who promised to shower his blessings upon the homes where the image of his Sacred Heart should be exposed and devoutly honored. And because following Christ does not consist in allowing ourselves to be swayed by a superficial religious sentiment that easily moves weak and tender hearts to tears but leaves vice intact — it is necessary to know Christ, to know his doctrines, his life, his passion, his glory. To follow Christ is to be permeated with a lively and constant faith which not only acts upon the mind and hearts but likewise governs and directs our conduct. The enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home is God's remedy against the

proverbial attacks directed against the family today which are aimed at paganizing and secularizing the very germ of civil society.

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On Prison Reform

Editor:

Corrections Commissioner Thomas Coughlin recently stated that our state must spend more to improve educational and vocational programs at its prisons. Governor Carey and key lawmakers have indicated their agreement. Coughlin has asked for \$30 million for a program designed to help in the rehabilitation of our prisoners. We believe this would be another step toward what should be our ultimate goal: Rehabilitation.

Writing your legislators favoring this program would be a small way of taking seriously Jesus's words about our duty to those in prison (Matt. 25: 34).

If you want to be pragmatic about it, remember that we could buy a lot of program with the money we spend when one prisoner is discharged, then soon comes back in again.

Missioners Thankful

Editor:

At this time of profound wonder when we rejoice in the knowledge of Christ's coming again into our world, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to you, our friends, for your faithful and generous response to the needs of your sisters and brothers in Brazil.

Be sure you are remembered in our prayers and those of our people. Pray in union with us that one day all people in all lands will experience the

freedom and justice which are the promise of the Prince of Peace.

May you and your families be blessed with peace and happiness during this joyful season and in the coming year.

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Vocation Prayer

Editor:

Did you ever wonder why your four-year-old son wants to be a fireman, a policeman or a doctor? Or why your daughter wants to be a nurse? Do you remember when every little boy wanted to be a priest? Perhaps the idea crossed your mind, just as the idea crossed my mind to become a nun.

I remember as a small child, my aunt (a Sister of St. Joseph), visiting us and how she always went to Mass, she had a long Rosary at her side and told me she was married to Jesus. I was fascinated with all the layers of clothing, her simplicity and the great love she has for Jesus and Mary. One night as she was dressed for bed, I crept to her room, closed the door and marveled over her habit. Before I knew it, I was dressed as a nun. I didn't even realize I was doing this until I heard a noise at the door and my aunt walked in. I was so scared I was sobbing. She cradled me in her arms and told me what a beautiful bride of Jesus I was. She let me wear the habit the rest of the night.

As the years went by, I often thought of that day: The veil hanging half across the room, the skirt dragging the floor, and the clank of those monster-size Rosary beads banging the floor with every step I took. Those black, fat heel shoes flopping on my feet, but I was "beautiful." I felt beautiful, but most of all I felt I was a Bride of Jesus.

After my junior year of high school, my cousin (a missionary priest from Venezuela) came to visit us. Again I was fascinated by his simplicity, his love of God and what a sense of humor! I wouldn't give Father Tom a free moment. I pestered him

all week and just before his departure, he told me he had everything arranged for me to join him in Venezuela after I graduated from high school.

I was shocked. I had no idea he was doing this. My senior year seemed to drag. I wanted to meet Father Tom. I had

things to do. Finally the end came — graduation day. Now only to get my passport in order and be on my way. Well, one thing after another happened. I was needed at home and my beautiful life was postponed and postponed.

I know now that God did not choose me for that beautiful, hard life, but that I was to be a wife and mother. I had the chance, I had the encouragement of family and of priests and nuns that were and were not related. Most of all, I had what every child is first fascinated with: I had a "uniform" to catch my eye.

Today, a child (or adult) can't tell a priest from a barber or a nun from a businesswoman. Come on, priests and nuns! The responsibility is yours, too. I know of priests and nuns who say they do not wear their habit in public because people treat them differently. Well, you are different. You were chosen by God and you should be proud of it. Don't

lower yourselves to our level, but raise us up a bit to a higher level.

How many priests go out of their way to say hello to a child, to make small talk with a child? I know of two young boys in my small community that tell their mothers they want to be a priest when they grow up — and these mothers are doing everything they know how to encourage these boys.

It is up to the priests to approach these children, to make time in their busy schedule to spend time with these boys and go as far as taking them for a hamburger, but for God's sake, make some effort! Not all these children will carry this dream to adulthood and not all those entering the religious order will make their final vows, but give them a chance. Give God a chance.

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Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Advent Rises to The Light

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 1:18-24; (R1) (Is. 7:10-14); (R2) Rom. 1:1-7.

The rhythm of Advent differs from that of Lent. Lent descends from Ash Wednesday through the penitential season to the dark abyss of Passion Week — then Easter bursts out suddenly like an atom bomb flash. Advent on the contrary rises in a steady crescendo toward the full light of Christmas. — twilight, dawn, daybreak, daylight! This rhythm is aptly symbolized by the German custom of the Advent wreath and is reflected in the liturgical readings which begin with the prophecies of Isaiah and John the Baptizer and finally culminate on the Fourth Sunday of Advent with the Virgin and Child. On this Sunday, all the readings prepare for Christmas, the birth of Jesus. A tender portrait is drawn of the Virgin and her Child.

The first reading declares "the virgin (almah in Hebrew, "young maiden") shall be with child."

The time of the prophecy

was wartime. On Judah's throne sat a young king, Ahaz (735-715 B.C.). His youthfulness tempted the Kings of Israel and Syria to invade Judah and set on its throne a puppet king of their own in order to provide a united front against fierce Assyria then on the march. Isaiah tells us Ahaz and his people "tremble as the trees of the forest tremble in the wind" at this threat. Ahaz decided to ask Assyria for help. It was here that Isaiah stepped in. He told Ahaz that reliance on God, not alliance with Assyria, was the solution to the crisis. Then to elicit faith in his words, Isaiah offered a sign that would prove God would keep his promises. Ahaz wouldn't listen. But Isaiah gave a sign anyway.

The sign very likely was this: Isaiah foretold that Ahaz's young wife would have a child (perhaps Hezekiah) and before the child was able to do for himself, the invading kings would be destroyed.

This promise of a continuation of the royal line was for Israel an assurance that God was still with his people, protecting them. Even though a scion of David had wearied of God, God would not weary of the house of David. He would remain faithful to it and to

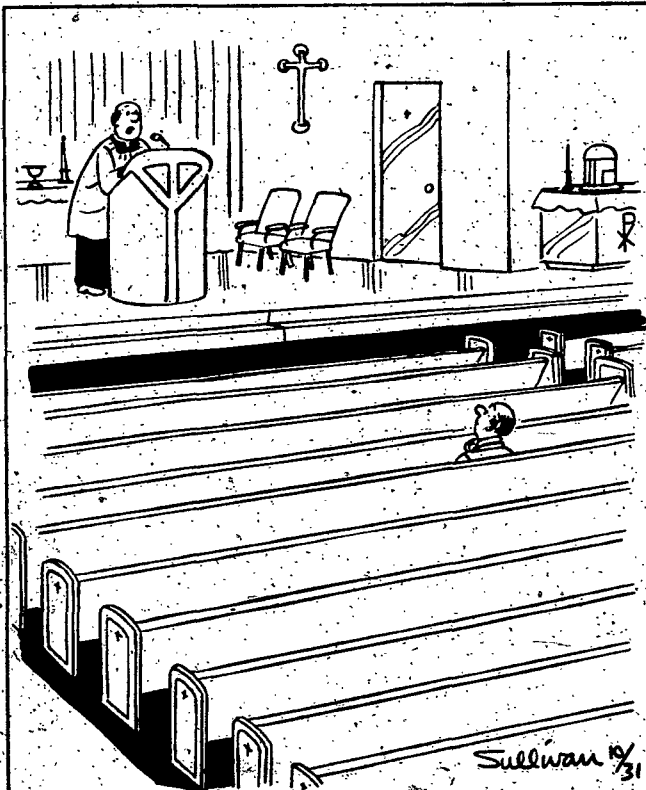
Israel, hence the symbolic name — Emmanuel, God is with us.

Matthew saw the deeper meaning in this sign: In the young maiden of Isaiah he saw the Virgin (parthenos in Greek); and in the child, Emmanuel, Jesus, who saves His people (not from Assyria) but from their sins.

St. Paul in the second reading describes who this child really is. Even though the passage is the opening of his letter to the Romans, it has in it the early Church's creed about Jesus. According to the letter-style of his day, Paul names himself, the writer, then the addressee — "Paul . . . to all in Rome." Because he had not founded the church in Rome, Paul inserted in his greeting a creedal statement regarding Jesus to show he preached the same gospel as their founders. "Descended from David according to the flesh" — He is the Messiah. "Was made Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead" — He is the son of God.

So the child in the crib is the Messiah, the Son of God.

How annoying to talk to someone and then to learn that he has not been listening! How frustrating to come to someone with good news only to discover that he is not interested! Ahaz wasn't interested in good news; but Joseph was. Ahaz did not listen to the prophet, but Joseph did to the angel. Ahaz drew God's judgment on himself. Joseph, God's glory and love. To us the Church says, "Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory."



"I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT POOR MASS ATTENDANCE, AND FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY, MR. HENSHAW!"