

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

The Other Wise Man

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 1:26-38. (R1) 2 Sm. 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16. (R2) Rom. 16:25-27.

The Church, year in and year out, celebrates the same seasons and feasts — Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter. Why? Because, having ears, we hear not. It is one thing to hear and another to hear and understand! The Church seems to battologize, but she knows that repetition is the heart of understanding.

That is why it is not useless to repeat the old Christmas stories each year. One such story is that of The Other Wise Man. Repetition may one day teach us the lesson of Christmas: to give to others for the sake of Christ.

Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul
May keep the path, but will not reach the goal;
While he who walks in love may wander far,
Yet God will bring him where the blessed are.

The other or the fourth Wise Man was a Medean, Artaban. He set out to follow the star. He took with him a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl beyond price as gifts for the King. He was riding hard to meet his friends, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, at the agreed meeting place. The three were 600 miles away in Persia and promised to wait 10 days for Artaban to join them. If he were late, they would leave him, for the time was short.

Artaban rode fast to his tryst. On the tenth day when only a few hours away from

the meeting place, a poor man stricken with marsh fever begged Artaban for help. If Artaban stayed to help, he would be late. He did stay; he helped and healed the man. But in so doing, he missed his friends and their caravan. To cross the fierce Arabian desert now, he needed camels and bearers. So to get them, he sold his sapphire. He was glad, because he had helped a man; but sad, because the King would never have his gem.

Yet he journeyed on. In due time he came to Bethlehem. But again, he was too late. Joseph, Mary and the baby had gone into Egypt. Soldiers came with orders from Herod to kill all children two years and under in Bethlehem. Artaban was lodging in a home where there was one such tiny child. When the soldiers came to the door, Artaban

stood in the doorway, tall and dark, with a ruby in his hand. When the captain came, Artaban bribed him with his ruby not to enter. The child was saved, the mother overjoyed; but Artaban was sad, because, as he thought, the King would never have his ruby now.

For years he wandered looking for the King. More than 30 years later, he came to Jerusalem. There was a crucifixion that day. When Artaban heard about this Jesus, it sounded to him as though He were that King. Maybe his pearl, the loveliest pearl in all the world, could buy the life of the King. So he headed toward Calvary. But on the way, a girl fleeing from soldiers ran into Artaban and cried, "My father is in

debt and they are trying to sell me as a slave to pay the debt. Save me!" Artaban hesitated, then sadly took out the pearl and bought the girl's freedom.

Then on a sudden the skies were dark, the earth quaked, and a flying tile hit Artaban on the head. He sank half conscious to the ground. The girl pillowed his head on her lap. Suddenly his lips began to move. "Not so, my Lord. When saw I Thee hungry and fed Thee? Or thirsty and gave Thee drink? Thirty and three years I have looked for

Thee, but I have never seen Thy face." And then like a whisper from far away, there came low and sweet a voice: "What thou didst unto

others, thou didst unto me." And Artaban smiled in death, because he knew the King had received his gifts. His journey was ended.

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