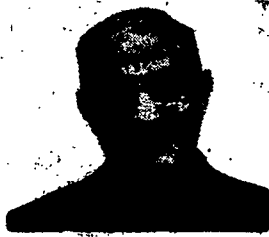


# A Word for Sunday

With Father Albert Shamon



**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mark 8:27-35; (R1) Isaiah 50:4-9; (R2) James 2:14-18.

One of the reasons St. Mark's gospel may have been neglected in the past is that it is uncompromisingly uncomfortable.

Mark was writing for Christians of his day. They believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God — just as we do. But they had much yet to learn — just as we do. St. Mark sets out in the first half of his gospel to prove Jesus is the Messiah, the expectation of the Jews, and the one Christians worship as Son of God.

But what is almost equally as important is what that confession meant to Christians of Mark's day and to us of this day. It doesn't take much to be a disciple of a risen Lord — victorious and triumphant over death. We all find triumph and glory congenial. But Mark takes an uncompromising stand. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Then he devotes the second half of his gospel (8:31 ff.) in setting forth that Jesus is also the suffering Son of Man — one rejected, killed and risen. Christians had better grasp this, for only those who come to terms with the cross can be His disciples.

In other words, Jesus is the Messiah, but a disconcerting Messiah, a suffering Messiah. Neither the disciples, nor Mark's contemporaries — and often we ourselves — can grasp this. Jesus is the Messiah — but one who did not come to condemn but to redeem through the scandal of the cross.

So, in the second half of his gospel, Mark sets out to present his understanding of discipleship through his theology of the cross. The way of discipleship is firmly traced by Jesus himself; it is the way of the cross: "Deny self, take up the cross and follow me." The disciple must walk the same road Jesus walked. Without the cross, there is no hope of knowing Jesus. Yet for all of us there is hope, because we have the model of our Lord's own disciples. All of them — save the women — failed Him. Peter denied Him in His suffering; the other disciples abandoned Him. Yet He bore with them in loving patience. In the end, they came to terms with the scandal of the cross.

That is why Sunday's gospel is a hinge

passage. The first half (Mark 8:27-30) is the climax of the first part of Jesus' life — His identity as Messiah; the second half (Mark 8:31-35) is a transition to the other half of our Lord's life — His teaching that He must be a suffering Messiah. "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer much." The details — be rejected, be put to death and rise three days later — were probably colored by the actual events of Jesus' Passion. The point was "the Son of Man had to suffer much ... And He said this quite openly." This was a turning point in the self-revelation of Jesus. Up to that point, He had said nothing explicitly about His Messiahship. But from that point on, on the way to Jerusalem, He spoke three times, like the tolling of a bell, of His coming death and resurrection and firmly stated: "If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps."

What Mark is showing is that the Messianic story is not one of uninterrupted success. In fact, it is a story of suffering, rejection and failure. The disciple is not above the Master. Peter had set himself apart from people when he confessed Jesus as the Messiah; but when he rejected a suffering Messiah, Jesus reprimanded him for now thinking as people do — as many of the Christians of Mark's time did (around 70 A.D.) and as we often think. His reaction to suffering is not unlike ours. We, too, shrink from a salvation based upon suffering. We want victory and triumph.

The rebuke of Peter and the disciples did not change them. Peter denied the suffering Messiah, and the disciples, save the women, abandoned Him.

We, too, must resist the temptation to reinterpret the gospel scene only in terms of triumph. Jesus was the triumphant failure! According to the standards of people, He failed. The prediction of victory did not soften the stark reality of suffering and death. It is a warning to us of the too-human tendency of exalting only the victorious. Victory is through suffering. And that is the first condition of discipleship. *Per aspera ad astra* — through bitter paths to the stars.

# On the Right Side

With Father Paul J. Cuddy



## Quid re Rock Hudson

**Q:** What do you think of the Rock Hudson affair?

**A:** Sad. In 1956, I was stationed at SAC (Strategic Air Command), Biggs Air Field in El Paso, Texas, and went into the city to see the three-hour movie "Giant." Hudson was so handsome; Elizabeth Taylor so great an actress. I think the film almost equals Alec Guinness' "Bridge Over the River Kwai." Now to see Hudson's magnificent body reduced to advancing disease of AIDS is sad from a natural point of view. My sadness is less that he is dying and more from another aspect.

**Q:** What other aspect?

**A:** The August 26 Rochester Times-Union had a lengthy interview with Hudson, written by freelance writer Nancy Collins. Hudson's childhood was hard: the depression, poverty, his mother's remarriage and subsequent divorce. He said: "By that time, I was a wild teenager. I just was wild. And I loved it." Not an auspicious background for a stable adulthood.

**Q:** What bothered you most?

**A:** He seems devoid of a belief in God and future life. Collins asked him about any "spiritual perspective" he might have about life. He replied: "I'm fatalistic. Whatever is going to be is going to be." Before surgery, he looked out on beautiful Los Angeles and thought: "This might be the last time I see this sight. If I make it, terrific; if I don't, I'll never know the difference anyway." A pitiable approach to meeting the Lord God.

**Q:** Don't you think he's getting what he deserves?

**A:** If I am sad about Hudson's lack of faith, I am sadder still that some Christians are so calloused about the problems of gays. I was in the Air Force from 1942 to 1946. I knew the moral climate of the troops, and there was practically no homosexuality. I was recalled to the Air Force from 1952 to 1956. There was some then, but it was rare. Some men claimed to be gay just to get discharged from the service, but they were not biologically so. Even Corporal Klinger of "M\*A\*S\*H" refused to use that as a way out of the service.

Much is written of widespread homosexuality in prisons. But this condition comes from a prison segregation that impels normal men to abnormal sex manifestations because the normal outlets of social life are stymied. Does it seem likely that a tremendous biological change has swept over American men these past 30 years? I think it is exaggerated through publicity and cleverness of promoters. In 1955, an airman I knew — a simple, good-hearted chap — came back to his barracks quite drunk. He propositioned the young CQ (Charge of Quarters), who then reported the lad. One promiscuous pass from a drunk does not mean a congenital gayness, and if the CQ had been a girl, I think the same pass would have been made. The military gave the airman a dishonorable discharge and sent him on his way the next day.

**Q:** Do you have any solution?

**A:** No, excepting to recommend "The Devil's Advocate" by Morris West. It was the first book I ever ran into that alluded to homosexuality, and this in 1959. It became a best-seller. Included in cast were: Nerone, killed by the communists in Italy, whose saintliness was being investigated; an English monsignor sent by Rome as the Devil's advocate; and a foppish English deviate who denounces God, the Church and nature for fashioning him as he was, in the agonized cry of a helpless man. The book might help people of good will to be less harsh in their judgments.

**Q:** Well, what about Rock Hudson?

**A:** May he get that glimmer of faith necessary for salvation as he approaches our sovereign Lord. I heard recently that Cardinal O'Connor has set a section of a hospital for the care of AIDS victims, and Mother Teresa's sisters are going to care for them. Anyway, let us pray for Rock that he will have a holy death, and for all AIDS victims. They are our suffering brothers and sisters, and when you think of it, have special opportunities to prepare for death and for meeting our Lord in eternity. Imagine how blessed those men will be who will have care from the Missionary Sisters of Charity.

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