



# A Word for Sunday

## Father Albert Shamon

**Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3:10-18, (R1) Zephaniah 3:14-18; (R2) Phillipians 4:4.**

Last week John proclaimed repentance. This week he offers practical advice on how to repent. His burning proclamation ignited hearts. So the crowds — the tax collectors and the soldiers, like Saul on the road to Damascus, like the Philippian jailor, and like the crowds on Pentecost — all asked the same question. "What ought we to do."

John answered each according to each's calling. Temptation comes either from within oneself or from one's business or profession — from outside oneself.

The temptation of the crowds spring from within — from selfishness. To them, John said, "Be generous. Share with the needy." John was very reasonable. He did not ask that one deprive oneself of necessities. But if one had two coats, then give one away — not one's castaways, but a coat just like the one kept. If one had food, and so was not in danger of starving, then one was to relieve the hungry. Again, the relief was to be with the same kind of food one ate, not with food of a lesser quality as if to say, "This is good enough for the likes of them." We need not be rich to share. If we do not share of our scantiness, we will not share of our abundance. If we do not share when we have little to share, we will never share when we have much. Unfortunately, it seems that generosity diminishes with the acquisition of wealth.

The temptation of the businessman and the professional often comes from without, from their calling.

So to the tax collectors, John said, "Be honest." One of the keys to the greatness of one of our greatest Presidents of the United States was his honesty. Carl Sandburg, in his "Life of Lincoln," wrote that as a young man, Lincoln walked six miles to pay back a few cents to a woman who had overpaid him for some dry goods. So many stories circulated about his honesty, that people nicknamed him "Honest Abe." And yet, today, needy people are often exploited and taken advantage of by businesses. One blatant example that

springs to mind is that of the usurious rates of interest being charged for loans, mortgages, time-payments and late payments. This is unfettered capitalism at its worst.

Then there are the professionals. John spoke to soldiers. One thing he did not tell them was to stop soldiering. If soldiering were wrong, John would have most certainly told them to give it up. He didn't. What he did tell them was to be content with their pay. They were not to use blackmail — to extort through the use of fear of raw power. Today, John would say to doctors, lawyers, mechanics, skilled craftsmen, "Be content with your pay." — Costs are spiraling, are they not? But why must they spiral? One lad said to a philosopher, "What a blessing it is to possess all that one wishes!" The philosopher corrected him, saying, "It is a greater blessing not to desire what one does not possess." Be content.

All of John's answers were down-to-earth. He did not say, "Change your calling in life." He said, instead, "Do the right things in the situations where you find yourselves. Do right!" Thus, he paved the way to the high spirituality of Jesus. Grace builds on nature. Fill the water pots, and give and do all one can. Then Jesus will affect a change, wondrous and strange. In a word, religion should enter life, businesses and the professions. Sunday should penetrate the weekdays, rather than the weekdays penetrating Sunday.

Naturally, people began to wonder who this John was — who got to the causes of evil. John read their thoughts, and told them outright that he was not the Messiah.

In fact, he said he was not worthy even to loosen the sandal strap of the Messiah. John's baptism was with water only and symbolized a change of heart. But the baptism of the One to come would confer the Holy Spirit, who would, with the fire of His love, cleanse and transform hearts. Those who will not accept Him will be judged, and by the winnowing fan of His word He will separate the chaff from the wheat — the bad from the good.

# On the Right Side

## Father Paul J. Cuddy



My heart goes out to those people who are afflicted by histrionic clerics who hold the directions of the church about worship, especially the Mass, in disdain. Frequently, I receive anguished letters from some poor men and women about the ritual extravagances at Mass their parishes. The only consolation I can offer them is either to offer the pain in union with the passion of Christ, or go to a parish where the soul can be at peace with a correct celebration of Holy Mass.

Among the liturgical enthusiasts, there is a higher percentage of kooks than among ordinary people. Genuine liturgists need take no umbrage about this observation. These kooks are uptight enthusiasts. They are not authentic liturgists.

I think the reason for the high percentage of kooky people among liturgists is not because of the liturgy, but because a liturgical rite — if it is free-wheeling enough — gives the kooks a chance to show off their self-centered propensities. They seem to have three compulsions:

The first is an aversion to Church law and Institutional Church. So, no matter what the pope or the bishop or the diocesan Liturgical Commission or Vatican II say, they disregard their directives.

The second is hostility toward the status quo, which includes traditions that make for community and distinction. If these enthusiasts were in the Salvation Army, they would arrive sans uniform, sporting a true anti-uniform sentiment, with violin or zither under their arms. As clerics, they figuratively burn their collars, wear anti-uniforms and compose their own Eucharistic prayers.

The third compulsion is a childish pleasure in their personal histrionics before a captive audience — an audience that comes to worship with the community and go home in peace. One devout Catholic was bemoaning to me a Sunday

Mass she attended: "Father, the loud guitars and the teen-age racket was bad enough, but the priest danced a little jig as he raised the Sacred Host. I was so upset that I got sick to my stomach." I suppose the celebrant was emulating David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. How silly could he be. My sympathy is with those civilized persons who rebel against ugliness and dissonance as a substitute for the beauty and sublime in the worship of God.

It has always interested me that these free wheelers TALK much about love and concern, SING much about love and concern, and WRITE violently about the unloving of those who do not appreciate their personal "things." What could I say to this distraught woman, except, "Well, I know it's tough, but be patient. These people are like Saul before he became Paul. They race around harassing the people, excepting their own coterie, and they think they do great service to God. Saul did improve."

From these observations, the suspicious will conclude, "He's anti-liturgy." What nonsense. No, the point — and the pity — is that those who present ritualistic eccentricities as liturgy have given genuine liturgy a bad name among many of the faithful. Of true liturgy, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy says, "It is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. In order that liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. (#11)."

It is pretty hard for a normal Catholic to keep these "proper dispositions and their voices attuned to the sacred," when some cleric is using the Holy Mass to do his "thing," rather than celebrating as the Church directs.

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