



A Word for Sunday Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21; (R1) Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

The real baptism was not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Afterwards, the Spirit drove Him into the desert to be tempted, in order that He might learn, as Man, the power that was His through the Spirit. After that, He remained for a time in Judea, and then "returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee." There, at Cana of Galilee, He changed water into wine and later cured a royal official's son lying sick at Capernaum.

Finally, Jesus came to Nazareth to formally initiate His mission (R3). On the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue "as He was in the habit of doing." What a wonderful home training He had been given! Likewise, when children are brought up in the habit of going to Sunday Mass and frequent confession, they will continue to do so when they are away from home.

A synagogue service was much like our Liturgy of the Mass today. In fact, the Liturgy of the Word is simply a Christian version of the synagogue service. That service consisted of two prayers, two readings (one from the Law and one from the Prophets), a homily and a concluding priestly blessing.

Since Jesus had been making a name for Himself and His reputation had been widespread, He was asked to do the reading. Jesus chose the second reading from the Prophets. The Book of Isaiah was given to Him. Jesus unrolled the scroll to the passage where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ..." He had seen the Spirit come upon Him at the Jordan. He had experienced the power of the Spirit in His clash with Satan at the desert; He had exercised that power at Cana and from Cana. He had been proclaiming glad tidings to the poor, drawing Nicodemus and a Samaritan woman to Him; His truth would give sight to the blind and liberty to the captives of sin. All this had happened before His first return to Nazareth.

So when He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down to preach, He could truly say, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." It is interesting that Jesus stopped reading where He did, for the

next verse in Isaiah announces a divine day of vengeance (61:26) — and this was not part of His mission.

The mission of Jesus was teaching — "He was teaching in their synagogues to bring glad tidings ... to proclaim liberty" — a teaching of reconciliation and forgiveness of sins. He taught in their synagogues and places of prayer and study. Ezra, about whom Nehemiah wrote in the first reading, is credited with having originated the synagogue service. In that reading, we can see the synagogue in embryonic form: a prayer blessing God, a reading from the Law, and a homily interpreting the reading. The Ezra incident took place about 399 B.C., long after the Jews had returned from their Babylonian exile. Ezra came from Babylon to lift up their spirits, since they were discouraged. It is significant that he tried to do this by reading the word of God. "Your words, Lord, are spirit and life." God's word gives joy, and joy gives strength.

And that is exactly what Isaiah said the teachings of Jesus would bring: "a year of favor from the Lord." The reference here is to the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-55). The Jubilee Year was celebrated every 50 years, and began with the blowing of trumpets, as on our New Year's Eve (the Hebrew word for trumpet is *jobel*, hence "jubilee"). Moses said of this year, "You shall make it sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants" (the same inscription that is on our modern-day Liberty Bell). In this Jubilee Year, all debts were forgiven, all alienated properties restored, and all enslaved people freed — so we can well imagine the jubilation.

Isaiah described the return of the exiles in Babylon in terms of this gladness, and foreshadowed the joy the Messiah would bring. It would be a "second spring." As was written in Song of Songs 2:10-12, "The winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth ... the song of the dove is heard in our land."

The teachings of Jesus might sound poetic, but they will really cure poverty, open up jails, and root out sickness, especially of the heart. They will — if each of us takes His words seriously and lives them. The early Church tried it — and it worked.

On the Right Side Father Paul J. Cuddy



Letter to a Seminarian

"Thank you for your letter, and the good news that you are standing fast in the faith, and firm in your vocation. After 50 years in the priesthood, I do not know of one day or even one moment when I did not regard the priesthood as the greatest calling, and am humbly grateful. I once wrote: 'I must confess that I have always been mystified that He did,' and got some flack from it, but I quite candidly included myself among the poor sticks, and humbly thank God for His calling."

"You ask for suggestions about spiritual reading. What profits one need not profit another, but if some books have been commonly used by holy men and women, they are worth our using. Since your purpose is a growth in piety — especially in charity rather than in intellectual matters — these have helped many."

"The Bible: I am aghast at the way this inspired book is used by well-meaning people. No book has so divided Christians as the Bible. The most extreme, such as the Witnesses, Adventists, Bible Baptists and other ultra-fundamentalists, have a hang-up on the mysterious Book of Revelations. Since your purpose is devotion, why not use the Gospels, the Acts, Ephesians and Corinthians, and since you aspire to the priesthood, Timothy?

"The Imitation of Christ (a Kempis): The book itself is considered the first in importance after the Bible. It was used for spiritual growth by many great saints, including St. Ignatius of Loyola. It was used by John Wesley, the holy founder of Methodism. And curiously enough, also by Auguste Comte, the French positivist who loved it not so much for its spiritual insights as for its insights into human nature.

"The Imitation is denounced by many religious today, as demeaning of one's self-importance. Did you read the short article in the January 9, 1986, edition of the Courier-Journal, which records:

"Chicago (NC) — The National Coalition of American Nuns has called for "retired and zealous Catholic bishops" to begin ordaining women priests. Retired bishops "have nothing to lose," the Chicago-based group said in a front-page editorial in the January edition of the monthly newsletter. How would you like to be a bishop with a bunch of hostile women in your back yard? They thirst for power. May you thirst for holiness.

"Some old, tried-and-true classics include *This Tremendous Lover* and *Difficulties in Mental Prayer*, both by Cistercian Father Eugene Boylan. Do get some lives of the saints that interest you: Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, Francis Xavier, Peter Canisius, Vincent DePaul, Mother Seton, The Little Flower, St. Therese, and Dom Bosco. Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the Capuchin Padre Pio, Cardinal John Henry Newman, G.K. Chesterton, and Monsignor Knox are inspiring.

"Of more contemporary writings, Father Thomas Green, SJ, and Father John Walchurs, SJ, are good; and both have given retreats at our Rochester Kenace. The couple of books I have read of my critic, Father O'Malley, are good, and should be disseminated especially among the youth, who need them so. Morris West and Bruce Marshall both write novels with a spiritual theme, and are inspiring to me.

"Any time one gives a kind of list or some suggestions on books, there is always a reaction: 'Why did he omit this or that?' detractors will say, depending on their own interests. Well; the main thing is to read what edifies you, and spend some time in the Divine Presence in the tabernacle, confirming your devotion to God, Our Lady and the Church.

"In your prayers, remember me, please, and remember those dreadful women who defy the Church, are filled with self-will, and thirst for a power that is certainly not from the Holy Spirit.

Life Beyond the Empty Nest

Parents whose children are leaving or have left home are invited to a series of Tuesday night classes to help them weather the transition and build a new life. Alice Slinn, M.S.W., will lead the program, which will be

held at the Greece Office of Family Service of Rochester, 550 Latona Rd., Bldg. C, from 3-4:30 p.m., February 4-25.

The cost is \$28 per person, \$40 per couple. Call (716)225-3660.

Pope warns bishops of 'deviations' in aspects of liberation theology

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II warned a group of Brazilian bishops Jan. 17 that some theologies of liberation contain "grave deviations" that are incompatible with the faith.

In its work for the poor, the Church cannot be reduced to a "socio-political" role, the pope said. Its special commitment to the poor is to bring them the "message of full liberation: the message of salvation," he said.

Referring to Brazilian priests, the pope said they should understand that they are expected to work for their people, but "in matters concerning God."

The pope spoke to bishops from southern Brazil during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican. "Ad limina" visits are made by heads of dioceses every five years, and several groups of Brazilian bishops have met with the pope over the last several months.

This was the first such meeting, however, in which the pope has publicly criticized some forms of liberation theology, which is popular in Brazil and other Latin American countries.

The pope outlined many of the social ills facing Brazil, including overcrowded cities, unemployment, profound cultural changes and poor agriculture. The Church's pastoral response should be to aim its message, with "priority" but not exclusively, at the poor, he said.

The poor should be reminded that "they are close to the kingdom of God, and that it is not allowed for them to remain in poverty, that they should do all that is permissible to overcome it," the pope said.

At the same time, those better-off should be encouraged not to isolate themselves, but share with the needy, he said.

But in doing all this, the Church needs to remember its primary goal — the "an-

nouncement of the liberation from sin and of the communion with God," the pope said.

"In this way, to feel as a church is not compatible with accepting the grave deviations that some 'theologies of liberation' maintain," the pope said without elaboration.

In 1984, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document warning that liberation theologies which borrow uncritically from Marxist concepts are against Church teaching.

The document prompted sharp debate among Church leaders in Latin America and around the world. A second document, expected to concentrate on the positive aspects of liberation theology, is being prepared by the Vatican.

Liberation theologies developed in Latin America in the 1960s as a theological reflection on material poverty and the need to provide concrete aid to the poor as a part of evangelization.

At the 1985 extraordinary Synod of Bishops, liberation theology was strongly defended by Bishop Jose Ivo Lorscheiter, head of the Brazilian bishops' conference. He said liberation theology "does not justify Marxist ideology or break with Catholic theological tradition."

In his talk, the pope also emphasized the need to carefully guide the education of priests and seminarians. The Second Vatican Council, in its decree on priestly ministry, pointed out the priests' responsibility to work in a special way among their people "on behalf of men, yes, but in matters concerning God," the pope said.

Besides Brazil's social problems, the pope noted several Church issues: an aging and dwindling number of priests, a decrease in religious practice and the growth of religious sects.

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