

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

# A Closer Look



## Mid-life reflections

Last week, I turned 35 and quietly slipped into middle age. The anniversary was marked with small events, but ones that richly added to my day. Maureen — the woman at the Bagel Shop, who is probably my age — gave me a discount and told me I didn't look 35. Our secretary said I looked more like 25 and that it was all right to go around saying that. Ironically, a notice in the parish bulletin invited people between the ages of 35 to 60 to a program on mid-life crisis. I thought about how I just qualified. I passed a balding, aged man walking along Winton Road and wondered what his life had been like at 35 compared to what it is like today. Was he ready to die, I wondered?

I also thought about how my daughter's age numerically patterned my own and that of my wife. When I was 31, for example, Lynn was one; when I was 32, Lynn was two; and so forth. When my wife died, she and I were both 33, while Lynn was three. Actually, numerical configurations are fun to play with but otherwise rather meaningless.

Last week also marked the second time a birthday has passed for me since my wife's death. Birthdays obviously are not the times of celebration they once were because they speak more of absence than of fullness. Again, I am more conscious that I am getting older.

But as I reflected on my life and my age, I thought about the old man I'd seen on Winton Road. Seeing him reminded me of the timelessness of aging. The timelessness of aging for me comes from my own need and desire to spend my life in service to God. In that respect, there is no such thing as aging, since service to God is measured in

eternal standards.

Service for God also speaks strongly about establishing purpose and identity in our lives. For me, my work, my ministry helps to anchor my life; it helps me to understand why I was made and why I exist.

No, I am not being overly spiritual in a heady sense, since I believe that serving God means that every day I must dress and feed my daughter. Every day, I must go to meetings; every day I must read and write; and every day I must pray. Those concrete, rather ordinary things are done in relationship to God, who is my creator and friend.

Life is passing all too quickly, I'm afraid. I learned in philosophy that all things exist in a constant state of flux. How true that is for our world.

Nothing appears permanent; all is change. With that in mind, we are challenged to find reality, to find that unchanging entity we can grasp and hold onto and call our own. That entity helps to center us. It helps us to find out what our lives are about. It helps us to discover who we are.

These ruminations are not new. These are the thoughts of every generation since the beginning of time.

But now it's our turn. Now it's my turn. Turning 35 should really be a time of rejoicing. Wrinkles and gray hair are nothing to have a party over, but birthdays are occasions for rejoicing, because they bring us one step closer to finding truth, to discovering our real selves, to coming face to face with the entity that brings us closer to the reality around which we are invited to wrap ourselves. And that entity, of course, is God.

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 9:11-17; (R1) Genesis 14:18-20; (R2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Benedict XI wanted to beautify the papal residence. He had heard of the fame of Giotto, called the Apelles of Florence, and sent an emissary to get a sample of his work. When Giotto received the emissary, he listened to the desire of the pope and, without saying a word, drew a circle with his brush on a sheet of paper. He gave the disappointed emissaries his sample for the pope. That was all the evidence the pope needed, because the circle was exquisitely perfect.

Proof of skill and artistry lies not in quantity but in quality. Giotto had put into the circle all the beauty of his art.

One "circle" — a tiny host — is enough to capture for us all of God's power and love. Corpus Christi, the feast of the body and blood of Christ in a "circle," celebrates this wonder of power and love.

The first reading of this feast is used because there is mention of the offering of bread and wine. The response points out that the Messiah would be a priest and a king, like Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem. Like that of Melchizedek, the Messiah's priesthood would be shrouded in mystery.

Historically, Melchizedek was one of many priest-kings of Canaanite cities. It was natural that Abram would want to enter into a treaty of friendship with him, for they were neighbors. So a covenant was made. Abram offered a tithe of the spoils taken in his victory over the four kings from Mesopotamia. Melchizedek, for his part, brought out bread and wine — the food for the covenant banquet — to celebrate the treaty. Melchizedek exercised his priesthood by blessing Abram and Abram's God, through whom Abram had crushed the invading kings.

In the gospel, Jesus shows he is priest-king by offering both healing and nourishment to the crowds. The miracle of the loaves followed upon the mission of the apostles (Luke 9:1-6). The missioning of Simon Peter followed upon an abundant catch of fish to signify the extraordinary growth of the Church (John 21:11). Here, the abundant multiplication of the loaves, fol-

lowing upon the missioning of the apostles, focused upon their need to nourish the community by the bread of the word and the bread of life — Corpus Christi.

The whole afternoon, Jesus spoke to the crowds about the reign of God, and He healed all who were in need of healing. He fed them with the bread of the word. Then, as sunset approached, the apostles came to Him and asked Him to dismiss the crowd so they could find food and lodging.

Jesus did not accept their suggestion. Instead, He answered, "Why do you not give them something to eat yourselves?" The apostles protested, but Jesus insisted. So, following His instructions, the apostles got the crowd to sit down, and they set the loaves of bread and fish before them. It was Jesus' way of teaching the apostles that their role henceforth was to be one of service — to nourish the community through Jesus and His word. Through their successors, Jesus continues to nourish the crowds with the bread of the word and the bread of life, Corpus Christi.

The second reading of the feast is taken from St. Paul's account of the Eucharist. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a problem-solving letter. In the play *The Music Man*, one line was, "You've got troubles in River City." After Paul had left Corinth, the people had trouble — much trouble. And one of their troubles was division — division among those gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

In the early Church, the Eucharist was celebrated as part of an evening meal or right after one. The meal was supposed to be shared, but it wasn't, and some even got drunk.

Paul told the Corinthians that they remembered Christ's death at each Eucharist, but they were forgetting why He died. They remembered His sacrifice, but forgot all about their own sacrifices. They gathered to celebrate the "body and blood" of Christ, but were unaware of the "body of Christ" as the Church.

Evelyn wrote: "We can't swallow Christ, if we can't swallow our neighbor." To forget that each is the body of Christ is not to remember in the Eucharist "the body of Christ."

### Spaghetti dinner to benefit program for Irish children

A spaghetti dinner on Saturday, May 31, will benefit the Irish Children's Program, a non-denominational, non-political and non-profit organization that brings Irish children to Rochester each summer to enjoy peaceful vacations with local families.

Contact Bill and Shellyn Mey, Spaghetti Dinner Benefit, Irish Children's Program, P.O. Box 22983, Rochester, N.Y. 14692, (716)227-4086.

### Country dance scheduled to aid sanctuary legal fund

The Sanctuary Legal Defense Fund of Rochester will be the recipient of funds raised at a country dance sponsored by ACCT of the Downtown Presbyterian Church on Saturday, May 31.

Tickets for the dance — which will run from 7:30 to 10 p.m. at 121 N. Fitzhugh St., (across from City Hall) — are priced at \$5. For information, call Sue Clark at (716)442-5294.

The dinner, which is linked to the second annual Lake Ontario Marathon, will be at the Greece Legion Post, 344 Dorsey Road, Greece. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$2.50 for children under 10. The dinner runs from 5 to 9 p.m. and includes a performance of Irish music and dance.

Tickets may be purchased at the Irish Import Shop, Greece, and Vigen and O'Shaughnessy, Ltd., Pittsford. Tickets may also be reserved by mail and telephone.

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