

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 12:32-48; (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9; (R2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19.

One of the fascinations of observing the super-rich is discovering how, and sometimes why, they spend incredible sums of money on small interludes of pleasure. A few years ago, Father Elmer Heindl, my brother and I stayed at Sand Ridge Hotel in Barbados, just a few homes down from Claudette Colbert's own summer home. Our hotel expenses hardly came to more than \$600 each. Yet not too long ago, President Reagan spent a very short vacation at Colbert's home. It cost over \$300,000. Why?

One of the classic explanations for the lavish expenditures of the wealthy on vacations and enjoyments — what one writer labeled "conspicuous consumption" — is to win the world's esteem. For "esteem is awarded only on evidence."

Today the super-rich go in not for yachts or polo, but for buying football and baseball teams or running for the Senate. They are seeking esteem through personal expenditure and adornment, much the same as back in the days of the Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Rockefellers, Astors and Morgans. Property, assets and other accoutrements of the gilded life are means to power.

When one wishes to gain and win the esteem of others, it is not enough to possess wealth and power; the wealth and the power must become visible — for esteem is awarded only on evidence.

This theory of the leisure class is in direct contrast with that of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus talks about in Sunday's gospel. The Kingdom is the core of His gospel. He speaks of it over 100 times. His first words were, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." His last 40 days on earth were devoted to speaking about the reign (kingdom) of God.

Jesus says to those who believe in Him, "It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom." Then He tells them how to gain it: "Sell what you have and give alms. Don't amass worldly treasures in tapestries and rugs which moths can destroy, nor in valuable things that thieves can steal or in purses that wear out. Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be."

The philosophy of His kingdom is just the opposite of the philosophy of the leisure class.

The kingdoms of the world are built on a life of acquisition and profits, together with the snobbery and social pretenses that go with it. The kingdoms of the world are founded on greed, selfishness and exploitation, with its consequent strife and confusion.

The Kingdom of God is founded on a higher order: love, mutual aid, justice and fair opportunity for everyone. It is a life of sharing, not hoarding; a life of renunciation, not acquisition; of seeking first God's interests, not one's own.

The wealth of the kingdom of the world will slip through one's fingers like an ice cube. The wealth of the Kingdom of God — relieving human needs in love — will last forever.

However, our Lord never taught that the material doesn't matter and only the spiritual does.

No, we are not only bodies, nor are we only souls. We are persons — animated bodies. We can no more separate the material and the spiritual than Shylock could a pound of flesh from blood.

The tendency is to emphasize the material to the neglect of the spiritual. Our Lord has simply tried to restore the balance. He asks that we not become inordinately dependent on the material. Rather, "seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things (material needs) will be given you besides" (Matthew 6/33).

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



Why don't they call?

Q. When you supply at parishes, do you stay right there?

A. A priest who is a shepherd doesn't sit in the rectory awaiting telephone calls. He goes out and seeks the people as best he can. Names like Father Connors of Blessed Sacrament and Father Schmidt of St. Andrew's, St. Ann's and Holy Family, and Father Dan O'Rourke of Mother of Sorrows are hallowed by older Rochesterians for their seeking out the people. A man chuckled, "When we moved to St. Ann's on Mt. Hope Ave. the furniture van, my family and Father Schmidt all arrived at the same time." With parishes outside Rochester I am less familiar, except for Father Curtin of Clyde and the fabulous Father Straub of Auburn. But I am sure Geneva, Elmira, Corning, Auburn and dozens of villages have been similarly blessed by zealous priests.

Q. Don't you think priests give less personal attention today?

A. Yes, for a variety of reasons. The main one is the great change in American family style. A call during the day finds many houses vacant, everyone working. To call at night means competing with the Cosby Show, Dallas, Dynasty or a ball game. The TV programs make a visiting priest as welcome as mumps. Again, large parishes today have fewer priests to serve. In addition, an ecclesiastical disease called "meeting-itis" nails priests to meetings. The Church today tends to be run more like General Motors than like a family, with bales of reports to be made and received.

Q. But don't priests have plenty of time for golf and recreation?

A. Would you rather have them sick or in the grave? Insurance companies indicate that people who exercise and relax are healthier. A relaxed priest is more effective than one who is up-tight.

Q. When you supply, why do you visit so many neighboring priests?

A. A priest friend, about to be put out to pasture for living 70 years, commented, "Most people, when they retire, retire to their own homes. We priests have to leave ours." Archbishop Sheen emphasized "the fraternity of the priesthood." I usually visit priests at mealtimes, because that is when they are

free to visit.

For example, during my six days supplying at Trumansburg, I had supper Tuesday with the Capuchins at Interlaken, where Superior Father Nelson Rupert, Vicar Dan Brady and the community gave me a fine welcome. On Wednesday, I sought Holy Communion to Steve Schrock in Ithaca, a dozen miles away. I asked Father Kanka: "Why a parishioner from Trumansburg in Ithaca?"

"For years Steve was a most faithful parishioner," Father Kanka replied. "His health failed and he moved to Ithaca. But he is still ours."

After Communion call, I went on to Immaculate Conception rectory for supper with Father Carges, a model of kindness and stability. His assistant, Father Don Curtis, was off to a diocesan meeting in Elmira. Father Bourcy was away. Before leaving, Father Carges asked, "Could you say 12 o'clock Mass Friday noon?"

"I'd be delighted," I responded. "It's been 43 years since I left this parish for the Army."

By arrangement, Father Kress came Thursday from Livonia for 28 hours. We had been stationed in Ithaca together. I phoned St. Catherine of Siena "on the hill," and got Father John Maloney, retired and in residence there. "Father Kress and I would like to join you for supper Friday night," I said. I heard a long pause, then, "Uhhh, I don't think we'll have a cook. Uhhh, but do come. We'll make out." The secretary, Joline DiGiacomo, prepared a dandy dinner. The pastor, Father Michael Hogan and Father Maloney were both in high gear, making a super-cheerful hour together.

On Friday morning, Father Kress and I spent two hours in the Ithaca cemetery where so many of our friends — including Monignor Byrne, Father Tressy and his sister Ann — are laid to rest. We reminisced about these people we had served and loved.

At the noon lay Mass, there were dozens of people I knew from days of yore, and many came to greet me. It was heart-warming.

As my friend said, "Most people, when they retire, stay in their homes. We have to get out." That's one reason this "fraternity of the priesthood" is so special to us.

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