

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 24:37-44; (R1) Isaiah 2:1-5; (R2) Romans 13:11-14.

Isaiah speaks of a time — "in days to come" — when all peoples shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, when one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor train for war again.

In view of the world's situation today, the prophet's words seem almost sarcastic. Christianity has been around for 2,000 years, and yet, since 1945, more than 130 conflicts have occurred which have taken 30 to 50 million lives.

Why? Has Christianity failed?

Our Lord gave the reason in the parable of the sower. The seed is God's word. It is living, vital, and powerful. However, it needs soil — penetrable soil. Constant trespassing can harden soil into a footpath that no seed can penetrate. So the seed is lost, eaten by the birds of the air.

The human heart is like soil. It too can be hardened, conditioned, by the culture in which one lives. The word "culture" derives from "cult;" culture is the virtues, ideals, values, assumptions and priorities a society literally "worships," hold sacred. These values are generally cultivated by years, sometimes centuries of living. They can become sacred cows, like secular education.

Today Christianity is counter-cultural: its values are not at all those of our secular society. In fact, so counter-cultural is our faith that some theologians dare to dissent, not with the culture, but with the faith. God's word not only does not get through; it's not even heard. It isn't that the hardened heart takes the word of God, understands it, and then rejects it. Oh no! Rather, so counter-cultural is it that it hears the word, but does not give it a hearing.

A missionary in Chad, Africa, visiting a native working in his garden, took a head of lettuce in his hand and asked, "Mogumbo, is the world round or flat?"

Mogumbo looked out over the vast expanse of land that stretched before his eyes, flat as a bedspread, and answered,

"Flat."

The missionary said, "No, it is round, like this head of lettuce."

Mogumbo changed the subject to sweet potatoes.

How many in Columbus' day turned him off just because his ideas did not fit in with the current culture?

That's the footpath — our secular culture.

That is why we have an Advent season. It is the time to take the pickaxe and break up the soil of our hearts and fit it for the seed of God's word.

St. Paul says, "You know the time." Here he used the Greek word *kairos* for time. In other words, Paul was not speaking of calendar time (*kronos*), but of God's time (*kairos*): the time between God's first and second coming. This in-between time is critical, for it is a time of preparation, the time to awaken from sleep.

Fire prevention doesn't begin when the fire starts. So Advent is a call to be ready — to take out the pickaxe now, in this preparation time.

We must, Paul warns, put off the works of darkness: drunkenness, sex in excess or lust, dissension and quarreling, especially within the Body of Christ. Such internal dissension has recently been termed "irresponsible" by our Holy Father, in view of all that the Church has to give to the world.

In the days of Noah, people were preoccupied. Their big sin was they had made no preparation for the end. And so the flood caught them swallowed up in ordinary things that had crowded out God.

Two men working in a field or two women working in a mill — one too busy for God, the other not — and only one is saved. Like a thief the end will come, warned Jesus. Again the conclusion — be ready!

Some people worry about when the end of the world will come. Other people worry about how to make ends meet in this world. Advent calls the follower of Christ to avoid these extremes, not to worry, but to live in such a way that when the end does come, he or she will be ready.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



Must it be a saint's name?

Almost the oldest Catholic weekly in the United States is Our Sunday Visitor. It began publication under the guidance of a famous Bishop Noll, to counteract anti-Catholic attacks, widespread in the country. A bit of humor illustrates how pulpit announcements can be misunderstood.

When I was a child in Auburn, my folks had a camp on the towpath in Cayuga. Each Sunday, Father John Crowley or his assistant celebrated Mass at St. Joseph's, Cayuga, which was a mission to St. Aloysius, Auburn. Each Sunday the priest brought a bundle of Our Sunday Visitors for the congregation.

One fall Sunday an uncle of mine with friends went fishing at Cayuga, and as practically all Catholics did then, they went to Sunday Mass. Father Crowley, in making the announcements, said, "You will find the Sunday Visitors at the back of the church as usual."

Our hunters stood in the back in rough fishing clothes, and my uncle was flustered, thinking that they were being singled out as back-of-the-church men, whereas Father Crowley was really referring to the weekly publication.

The Visitor has a weekly "question box," entitled "Ask Me Another," by Father Sheedy. In the September 28 issue the question was asked: "Do you watch Webster on TV? My daughter is expecting a baby, and she says if it's a boy, she's going to name him Webster. I think that's ridiculous. Don't we have to use a saint's name?"

The response surprised me. "While tradition prefers us to use the name of a saint in baptism, your daughter is free to name her child as she wills, as long as it is not contrary to Christian significance. (Years ago during one revolution in Mexico one of the revolutionists named his children Lenin, Stalin and Lucifer.) However, there is a saint named Webster. He is St. Augustine Webster, a Carthusian monk, who was arrested by Thomas Cromwell and imprisoned in the Tower of Lon-

don. He refused to deny the authority of the pope, and was dragged through the streets of London and executed at Tyburn on May 4, 1535. He was canonized in 1970 by Pope Paul VI."

A funny story illustrates the folly of a certain priest. In 1947, I was baptizing a beautiful baby at the chapel of Sampson College, near Geneva. Taking the statistics for the baptismal book, I asked the mother, "What are you calling the baby?"

With a challenge in her voice and eyes she replied, "Rosalma, *one word*."

"Rose," I remarked. "There's a St. Rose of Lima, and Alma is a form of Our Blessed Mother, so they are saints' names all right. *But*," said I with superlative stupidity, "Rosalma, one word, may be cute while she is a baby, but I don't think it will be so good when she grows up."

The mother glared at me and said, "Well, that's my name!" How would you have answered that?

In the early years of the Rochester Cenacle, I gave a retreat for the senior girls of Nazareth College. To lighten a conference, I told that story, illustrating how foolish well-meaning people can be. There was a titter from the girls.

Later, I asked, "What was the joke?" It turned out that there was a Sister Rosalma Hayes connected with Nazareth, whom they liked especially well. Sister Rosalma is still working away in research for the Central Administration of the Sisters of St. Joseph. She is a first cousin of Father Bart O'Brien, both of whom are from Waverly, as is Father Joseph F. Hogan.

"Sister," I asked her, "how do you account for the vocations and the strong sense of religion from Waverly?"

"Well," she replied, "we had wonderful parents, and fine priests. And we had a strong religion class all during our childhood."

I suppose that means that they memorized the catechism, the prayers and the practices, and we have the beautiful results.

Obituaries

Blessed Sacrament teacher, counselor

"And when he shall die, take him and cut him out in little stars, and he will make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun."

"Romeo and Juliet"

William Ranney, a counselor, teacher, parent, storyteller and friend, died Tuesday, October 29, at the age of 50.

Ranney had officially served as a guidance counselor at Blessed Sacrament Junior High School for the past three years. Unofficially, he did everything but wash windows, according to Sister Elizabeth Snyder, principal at Blessed Sacrament.

"He was a guidance counselor in the sense of teaching values and choices," she said. "Any student could talk to him any time and he was also there for parents whenever they needed him ... He had an impact I've never experienced before in my 25 years (of teaching). He stayed with a kid, even when everyone else was ready to give up."

Prior to joining the faculty at Blessed Sacrament, Ranney, a Victor resident, had

worked for the Rochester City School District.

For the past eight months, as he wrestled with cancer, Ranney continued to live the ideals he had upheld during better times, Sister Elizabeth said. "It wasn't just words. When he got sick, he lived out what he always advised everyone else to do," she said.

Ranney's impact was evident at his funeral October 31, when nearly 150 of his present and former students served as an honor guard.

"The returning of high school kids (to Blessed Sacrament) when he died for just a hug and a smile was really something," Sister Elizabeth said.

At the request of the Ranney family, a memorial scholarship fund for Blessed Sacrament Junior High School has been established in his memory.

Ranney is survived by his wife Patricia; five children, William, Karen, Maureen, Christine and Mark; daughter-in-law Maria; and two grandchildren.

Sister Mary Philomena, Rexville native

A funeral Mass was celebrated for Sister Mary Philomena Sweeney, OSF, on Tuesday, November 11, at St. Elizabeth Motherhouse in Allegany. Sister Mary Philomena died on Friday, November 7. She was the daughter of the late John and Marcella (Kilduff) Sweeney, formerly of Rexville.

Sister Mary Philomena was born in Rexville and was received into the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany in Jamaica, West Indies, on August 15, 1917.

She served as a teacher for more than 40 years, teaching in Jamaica until 1950. After

teaching in North Carolina for a short time, Sister Mary Philomena returned to Jamaica in 1952 for three more years. She returned to New York, where she taught in Croghan and Prince of Peace schools in Niagara Falls. Sister Mary Philomena came to St. Elizabeth Motherhouse, where she lived until the time of her death.

The only immediate survivor is Sister Mary Giovanna Sweeney, also of St. Elizabeth Motherhouse in Allegany.

Sister Mary Philomena was buried in St. Bonaventure Cemetery in Allegany.



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