

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday Readings: (R3) John 11:1-45; (R1) Ezekiel 37:12-14; (R2) Romans 8:8-11.

Lent is the time when the rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) goes into high gear. On the first Sunday of Lent, catechumens become the elect. On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays, the elect "scrutinize" themselves by taking a long, careful look at their lives in order to confirm their decision and purify their intention, and to envision Christ as the living water (third Sunday), the light (fourth Sunday) and the life (fifth Sunday).

The Lazarus story offers fruit for meditation for the elect as well as for the rest of us.

Bethany is a short two miles east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. It was the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and Simon the Leper. Today it is named El-Azariéh, the Arabic form of Lazarus, which is itself a clipped form of Eleazar.

Here at the Bethany home of the prosaic Martha, the poetic Mary and the silent Lazarus, Jesus could relax among friends.

But friendship with Jesus is no guarantee against calamity. Lazarus, after all, was stricken.

Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is sick." They did not say, "Why, Lord, is the one you love sick?" Nor did they say, "Lord, the one who loves you is sick."

It is far better to rely on Jesus' perfect love than to count on our own imperfect love. Because of His love, affliction comes, not as the lightning bolt that blasts the tree, but as the strokes of the sculptor on marble, forming an image of beauty and loveliness.

So Jesus delayed two days before responding to Mary's and Martha's request. He had let them suffer. He permitted Lazarus to die and be buried, without one single word of comfort — He who had often healed the sick and raised the dead, unasked.

Can you imagine how Mary and Martha felt? Yet He delayed. Why? To bring about a far greater good for them, for the Jews who had come to comfort them, for His disciples and for all of us. Three times, He revealed that He did this to strengthen the faith of all, "that they may believe that you sent me."

When Jesus did decide to come, He

said, "Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep." Jesus always equated death with sleep. In fact, the word "cemetery" comes from the Greek word Jesus used here (*kekoimētoi*); cemetery means a "dormitory." Animals die, but men sleep, because for men there is a resurrection. And still, death has an advantage over sleep: sleep is only a parenthesis in the cares of life; death is an end of them!

When our Lord arrived at Bethany, Martha was the first to run to Him. She cried out, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died." Later, when Mary came to Jesus, she said exactly the same thing. They both must have said over and over again, during those four awful days, "If only He had been here!"

With that one exception, everything else each of them did was in keeping with her character. Martha, the active, busy one, engaged Jesus in a discussion of faith; but Mary, the contemplative, quiet one, used only the language of love: she wept. Again, it was Mary who touched Jesus, who also wept. And the people said, "See how much He loved him!" Why? Because He had shed a few tears. Yet for us He shed not a few tears, but His blood. "See how much He loved us!"

As always, the love of Jesus is no idle thing, neither mere sentimentality nor crocodile tears. His love erupts in great deeds for the beloved. Jesus approached the tomb of Lazarus and, in a loud voice, called him back to life, as though He were doing nothing more remarkable than lighting a candle or rekindling the embers of an extinguished fire.

Before the miracle, Jesus directed others to take away the stone; after the miracle, He said, "Untie him and let him go free." God never does directly what can be done by others. He wills that we remove the stone that blocks conversion — the stone of ignorance, doubt, fear and evil habits.

As He did Himself, He would have us weep, pray and call loudly to God for the conversion of sinners. When we have done all we can do, then God will step in and do what He alone can do; namely, give new life to the one spiritually dead.

Then we can untie him on Easter Eve and let him go free, to live a new and "grace-full" life with and in the family of God — the Church.

Central America

Continued from Page 6

plastic and cardboard lean-tos on the sidewalks, she said. Thousands remain homeless, while water supplies are contaminated, and medicine is in short supply.

"The people have begun to see clearly how much interest their government has in them," Swedish said.

In lieu of leadership from their government, many Salvadorans have begun organizing their own reconstruction efforts, she reported. In some neighborhoods, people have reactivated the Christian Base Communities that had disbanded because their members feared repression.

Military forces and death squads have, in turn, grown suspicious of the base communities' efforts, and are taking increasingly repressive measures against them, Swedish said.

Although media attention has focused on conditions in El Salvador and Nicaragua, Swedish cautioned the audience not to ignore equally pressing concerns in neighboring countries.

She reported that in Guatemala, the civilian government of newly elected president Vinicio Cerezo has remained powerless to oppose or prosecute the country's military leaders and members of CACIF, a confederation of wealthy landowners and agricultural

Graduate symposium on education slated for Nazareth College

A wide range of educational topics will be explored during an upcoming graduate symposium at Nazareth College. Graduate students working toward a master of science degree in education will present papers at the symposium, to be held Tuesday, April 7, 6-9 p.m., at the Otto A. Shults Community Center on the Nazareth campus, 4245 East Avenue, Rochester.

Nazareth alumna Mary Ann Handlan O'Brien, coordinator of communication services for BOCES I, will deliver the opening remarks at the symposium, which is free and open to the public.

Topics and presenters will include "An Independent Home-Based Art School," Roberta Kappel; "The Regents Action Plan, A Step in the Right Direction," Anne Brown, Vytautas Butrim, Maggie Politte, Lew Rice and Liz Stenglein; "Black English in The Color Purple," Wilhelmina Gaenzle; "Normal Development of Children from Birth to Three: The Foundation for Recognizing Handicapping Conditions," Anne M. Hoenig; "The Effects of a Cooperative

exporters.

In Honduras, meanwhile, an estimated 12,000 people have been displaced by the fighting between Nicaraguan and contra forces.

"It is very bad news," Swedish said. "We have to wonder what all our efforts have accomplished in the past seven years, when our policy hasn't changed."

According to Swedish, one measure of the progress that church-based movements and organizations have made toward peace in Central America is the extent to which the FBI and other United States government agencies have infiltrated Bible study groups, threatened and harassed refugees and their advocates, and documented their activities.

She offered the detention of eight Salvadorans by border police outside Rochester earlier this month as one example of that harassment.

Recalling Archbishop Romero's statement that "we will run the risks that this ministry demands," Swedish encouraged audience members to continue their efforts despite the risks such activities entail.

"The man we are remembering tonight, Oscar Romero, died not only for the people of Central America. He died for us, too," Swedish said. "(Oscar Romero) said he was a voice for the voiceless. We too have become the voice of the voiceless. It has not died. They could not kill it."

Learning Structure in a Classroom for Severely Handicapped Adolescents," Charlotte Schmiedeskamp; and "Journeys: An Oral History of Americans Who Immigrated Through Ellis Island," Marianne Kroon.

Family planning course set

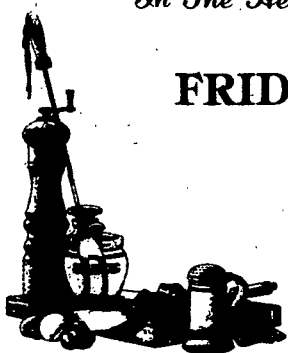
Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester will offer a class for couples trying to achieve pregnancies. The class will begin Monday, April 6, at 7:30 p.m. at St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester.

The class is designed for those who may have fertility problems and for those who would simply like to plan a pregnancy in the future. The information taught in the class can be used in conjunction with medical treatment for fertility problems.

The couple instructing the class will help clients identify the days of a woman's cycle when conception is most likely to occur. They will teach clients how to interpret and record the natural signs of fertility.

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