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A terrible prophecy fulfilled

By Cindy Bassett

During the reign of Israel's King Saul, the faithful prophet Samuel died. All the Hebrews mourned his loss, but none so much as the king.

"Where shall I go to obtain advice?" he lamented.

Lately, a great, choking fear had crept into the country and seized it by the neck. The cause of this trepidation was the Philistines, the longstanding enemies of the Hebrews. The Philistines had greatly increased their forces and were closing in on Israel from all sides.

King Saul and his army had camped for the night on Mount Gilboa to plan their strategy for the upcoming battles. But the king did not seem capable of making clear decisions. For many years, a troubling spirit had clouded Saul's mind, and now the pressure of impending war increased his paranoia.

The next morning, King Saul's men informed him that the Philistines were camped in nearby Shunem. "By tomorrow, they will attack us. I must decide today what to do. Oh, why aren't you here, Samuel?" Saul cried, wringing his hands in despair.

Late that afternoon, Saul thought of a plan and called two of his closest aides. "Are there any mediums nearby?" he asked.

The two men exchanged wary looks. "King Saul, don't you remember? You ordered that all mediums be driven out of Israel when you first came to power," one of the men stated.

"The law of Moses forbids trying to communicate with the spirit world," the other aide added.

"What do I care about the law of Moses in the middle of a war? There must be a medium left somewhere!" Saul snapped. "Find a medium at once! I command you under penalty of death!"

A short time later, King Saul's aides returned, saying, "We have learned that there is a witch who lives in a cave near Endor. She has had some luck conjuring up spirits of the dead."

"We leave at nightfall," the king replied.

When the three men arrived at the entrance to the witch's cave, Saul hesitated to go in. "Are you certain the witch lives in this dark place?" he asked.

"For those with eyes to see, there is no need of light as you suppose it to be," a voice near the entrance cackled. "Why do you come here?"

"I must talk with the dead," Saul explained.

The long road to sainthood

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12; (R1) Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; (R2) 1 John 3:1-3.

Sunday is the Feast of All Saints. What is a saint?

There are all kinds of definitions. I like the one I formulated in my book *First Steps to Sanctity*. A saint is one who loves good perseveringly — not one who does good necessarily, but one who loves good! Sanctity is in the heart.

However, the adverb "perseveringly" is all-important. The word "sanctity" comes from the Latin *sancio*, meaning "to fix unalterably." The difference between a saint and the non-saint is perseverance in the pursuit of good. "Cowards, wayward and weak, / We change with the changing sky: / One day eager and brave, / The next not caring to try."

A saint is not at all like that. He sets his face like flint toward one goal. Like the compass needle, he always points toward one direction — God's will.

Sunday's liturgy gives another definition: a saint is one who has the attitudes of the beatitudes and lives them. A saint is poor in spirit, meek, merciful, clean of heart, single-minded, a peacemaker, and so on.

More important than what a saint is, is the question: How does one become a saint?

When St. Thomas' sister asked how she could become a saint, the great genius from Dry Rock (Rocca Sicca) answered her in two words, "Will it!" It's that simple. The first step to sanctity is to want it. You get only what you go after, and you go after only what you want. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness, they shall have their fill!"

How does one get that hunger? First, by reading. Read the Bible each day. The word of God is a two-edged sword. And read the lives of the saints. "Lives of great men all remind us, / We can make our lives sublime!"

Secondly, pray! When Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive," He most probably had in mind our asking for the ability, the grace to pray. Prayer is so necessary that St. Alphon-

The Bible Corner

"We have heard that you are skilled in such matters?"

"Whoever told you that was mistaken," the witch replied. "King Saul has strictly forbidden this practice. Now go away!"

"I will pay you well," Saul said anxiously.

All was silent and dark. A few minutes later, the old woman came back to the entrance of the cave carrying a candle. The scant light cast bizarre shadows on the wall, and the three men felt uneasy as they followed the witch deeper into the cave.

"Whom shall I bring back for you to speak to?" she asked Saul.

"I must talk to the prophet Samuel," he replied.

The witch fell into a trance-like state. Suddenly she came back to attention. "An old man tells me that you are King Saul! You have deceived me!" she screamed. "Why have you come here to kill me?"

"I promise that no harm will come to you. Just tell me what Samuel says," Saul pleaded.

The witch continued: "The prophet wants to know why you have disturbed the dead by conjuring up his spirit."

"Because I have nowhere else to turn! I have prayed, Samuel, but the Lord doesn't answer. I am in deep trouble. Tomorrow the Philistines will attack. This is the eve of our destruction!" Saul cried.

"Yes, King Saul, the Lord left you to your own foolish devices years ago because of your disobedience," the witch said in a voice that sounded like Samuel's. "You were never sorry for your sins, but continued on doing things your own way. So this is the eve of your death. Tomorrow both you and your sons will be here in death with me."

The next day, the terrible prophecy was fulfilled. King Saul was badly wounded in the battle against the Philistines — a battle in which he saw all three of his sons die. Rather than be taken captive by his enemies, King Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword.

Scripture reference: Samuel 28 and 31.

A Word for Sunday

sus Ligouri said, "If I had only one sermon to preach, it would be on prayer!"

The third step to sanctity is fidelity in the practice of virtue. At first this is hard: it requires much self-discipline and asceticism. But if we persevere, the practice of virtue becomes a delight. The grind of the grammar; then the joys of literature. We call virtuous deeds done with delight "fruits of the Holy Spirit," for they are the final product of our efforts and, like ripe fruit, are a delight to savor.

When we have gotten this far, Holy Spirit begins to take over our spiritual lives, just as Jesus did at Cana after the servants had done all they could in filling the waterpots. The direct intervention of the Holy Spirit activates the seven gifts. Prayer becomes contemplative. We begin to taste and see what creatures really are through the gift of knowledge; what the truths of our faith really mean through the gift of understanding; and what God really is through the gift of wisdom.

Gradually, this action of the Holy Spirit begins to transform us so that your attitudes are those of the beatitudes and we become poor in spirit, meek, etc. Thus the psalmist said God is wonderful in His saints, for saints are the work of God.

The work of sanctity, however, is a lifelong journey. As the Holy Father said recently at Miami, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary!"

One final point. St. Francis de Sales said "A sad saint is a sorry saint." Why? Because if he's sad, it means he hasn't arrived at the beatitudes. The beatitudes make one joyful. That is what "blest" means — "to experience joy!"