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# Living by the law of the Lord

By Father Albert Shamon  
Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 2:22-40; (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

The first reading for next Sunday is taken from the book of Sirach (SIGH-rack). Sirach used to be called Ecclesiasticus or the "Church Book" because it was used extensively by the Church in instructing catechumens on the moral life. The book was written around 175 B.C. in Hebrew, and then translated into Greek about 132 B.C. by Sirach's grandson. The Jews of Jamnia (c. A.D. 85) did not accept the book as inspired. The Church always has.

To a Jew, the family is the bedrock institution of the nation, which I believe is as it should be. Sirach tells us something about the family that all of us would do well to rediscover today — namely that the family is no man-made institution. It is God who has established the family! God did not establish the state, but He established the family. "The Lord sets a father ... over his children; a mother's authority ... over her sons."

As always, God knows best. When children honor, revere and love their parents, they will find happiness. "Happy are those who walk in the way of the Lord."

Perhaps family relationships are the most difficult to keep in peace. Rub two pieces of wood together and you get fire. Remember that each person is a unique individual and it is easy to understand that when you put them under the same roof, you get friction that can and often does end in murder. Read *The Brothers Karamazov* or the more recent *Blood and Money* by Thomas Thompson.

A lubricant is needed to prevent the pistons in a car engine from rubbing against the cylinders and destroying the engine. In the same way, personality friction can destroy a family unless the family's life is "lubricated." That lubricant is a virtue!

## A Word for Sunday

St. Paul has enumerated in the second reading the virtues that make a family's life together run smoothly: mercy — which means having a heart for the shortcomings of others or stooping down to lift another up in love; kindness — to be on fire with the urge to seek the other's good; humility — to know one's limitations and to accept them; meekness — to forgive and not to strike back; patience — to bear with one another, to be tolerant; love — the overall spirit that makes the practice of virtue a delight. The result is peace — the tranquility of calm that comes from right order.

Lastly, St. Luke tells us what is the root and source of all virtue. It is God! The family of Nazareth was happy because it was holy. It was holy because it was God-fearing. Mary and Joseph went to the temple. They offered sacrifice "in accord with the dictate of the law of the Lord." When the pair had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they went home!

There are so many divorces today, so much marital unhappiness, so many needing Ann Landers. Why? Too often God and His laws have no room in family homes. From my years of pastoral experience, I know how many families — unlike the Holy Family — do not fulfill the prescriptions of the law of the Lord. They miss Sunday Mass without the least qualm of conscience. They neglect prayers, and live as if God did not exist. How sad! For, "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it!" (Psalms 127:1).

## The gentle, peaceful king

By Cindy Bassett

I followed the three kings, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar at a safe distance after they left King Herod's palace. It would not have mattered if I had lost them in the crowds of people who were traveling that day. I was already certain that the journey would again take me to Bethlehem.

My only question was where in the small village would our journey end? Although Bethlehem lacked in the splendor of Jerusalem, I imagined that at least one of its residences was suitable to be the birthplace of a king.

I was so preoccupied with these thoughts that I failed to notice that the kings had abruptly stopped on the road. Not until I stood face to face with them did I realize my mistake.

"I was right," one of them nodded to the other two. "Herod did have us followed. This is one of his servants."

"I am Claudius," I stammered, "and you are correct in assuming Herod sent me. But my motives in following you are far different from what Herod intended!"

The three kings stared at me, waiting for the rest of my explanation. "I have come seeking this new king so that I may worship him," I said. "And when I do find him, I shall never return to the life I knew at Herod's palace. King Herod is a cruel, selfish man who cares nothing about others."

"It is good that you have come," Melchior said. "But do not have false illusions about this new kingdom."

"The new king will change the whole as we know it!" I exclaimed. "The Roman government will be brought to its knees as he leads the people against it!"

My outburst was met with silence. Finally, Balthasar told the other two kings to bring forth the precious boxes they had carried from their distant countries. "Perhaps you will understand more fully if we reveal to you our gifts for this king," he said.

"I bring the gift of gold for him," Caspar stated, "for he is to be a king of great virtue."

"And I have brought the gift of frankincense," Melchior said as he opened his box. "He is truly divine!"

Balthasar waited several minutes before rev-

## The Bible Corner

ealing the contents of his box. As he slowly opened it, the aroma of myrrh filled the air. "Claudius, this gift is given because the king is destined for great suffering. He will die for all who believe in him."

"Die? He can't die!" I shouted. "You are wrong. He is divine. I don't believe you!" I turned and left the three kings standing there in the road.

I wandered aimlessly for the rest of the day through the streets of Bethlehem. As darkness fell, the brilliant star appeared faithfully in the sky. Tonight, it was so bright that it seemed almost day in the village.

Suddenly, I was determined to follow the star right to the source. My journey led me out of the village, perhaps I thought, to a rich man's estate. On and on I walked, until the star appeared to rest over an old stable for animals.

From where I stood, I could see shepherds kneeling. A baby had been born and there, in the corner of the stable, were the three kings presenting their gifts. Then I heard someone calling my name.

"Claudius, do not be afraid," the voice said. "You are trying to understand with your mind. But, you must listen to your heart. The kingdom you seek is here. It belongs to all who choose to follow this king. You have found it, for God has guided you here to Him!"

The Messiah who was born that night did change the entire world as I had known it: But, he did not do it by overthrowing the Roman government; He did it with gentleness and peace.

And, I, Claudius, have tried to faithfully set forth my story so that many others will come to know of this new kingdom which is still open to all and which will endure even to the end of time.

## Cluster parishioners to gather for family Christmas celebration

The Catholic communities of St. Gregory in Marion and St. Anne in Palmyra will gather for a Cluster Family Christmas Party on Saturday evening, Jan. 2, at 7:30 p.m.

The Nick Gillette Band will provide music

for singing and dancing. Confirmation candidates will supply refreshments and decorations. For information, contact the Palmyra rectory, (315)597-4571, or the Marion convent, (315)926-4323.

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