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An invitation to eternal life

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 1:14-20; (R1) Jonah 3:1-5, 10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

To get a call from someone important to do something big elates one, does it not? Yet God is calling us. God, through Jonah, called Israel's ancient enemy, Assyria, to repentance. "All ... put on sackcloth" — the garment of repentance. And God, in turn, repented of the evil He had threatened (R1).

Sunday's Gospel contains two calls: a call to everyone to "reform ... and believe in the good news;" and a call for four special people to "come after me."

As always, the Gospel is an invitation and a response. It is an invitation to turn from sin ("reform your lives") and to turn, or return, to God ("believe in the good news").

The disciples, who responded by leaving all, lost nothing and gained everything.

Recently, in touring the city of Rome, ... I was struck by the many monuments to the Twelve Apostles. Christendom's greatest church is erected to the fisherman Peter. Crowning the facade of this basilica are 19-foot high statues of the Savior and the Apostles. Daily, thousands of pilgrims come from all over the world to honor those who had followed Christ as His apostles and him who walks in the shoes of the fisherman. Those who have followed Christ have gained the whole world.

The invitation still goes out to each of us. But so few respond as did the Ninevites and the fisherman. Consequently, in the last two centuries, Mary, our Mother, has been appearing all over the world to invite us personally to follow her Son.

Throughout the history of the Church, apparitions have been granted when something important has been forgotten. Human as we are, we tend to forget some elemental truths of religion. Apparitions do not give new truths, but only recall truths forgotten, and they prod us to respond to these truths here and now.

For me, apparitions are simply homilies from heaven: a mother's advice to her children

A Word for Sunday

— simple, clear, straightforward and achievable. Thus, in the apparitions taking place at Medjugorje, Our Lady asks that we go to monthly confession and daily Mass, and pray the rosary daily, and fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. You see, these are not new truths — only forgotten truths!

Of course, we have the doubting Thomases who pooh-pooh any apparition. Yet the Church needs apparitions. Our Lord laid the very foundations of the Church during His appearances after Easter — apparitions!

In every one of her messages at Mejugorje, Mary begins thus: "Dear children, I invite you..." She invites as Jesus did, as the Gospel does. Her respect for our liberty is one of the strongest signs of the authenticity of the apparitions.

God never overrides our liberty. He knocks at the door of our hearts, seeking entrance. Satan, on the contrary, uses force and violence. Not so at Medjugorje. Our Lady knocks there at the door and says: "I am here. I am ready. Are you ready to accept me?"

Both the October and November messages to the world, like all the others, reveal the utmost respect for our free will. "Dear children, I wish to invite all of you to decide for paradise ..." Note her words: "I invite you ... to decide" (10-25-87).

She invites, as Jesus invites. And who can fault what she asks — monthly confession, Mass, daily rosary and fasting? Please God, may we all respond as the Ninevites and disciples did, for her invitation is to life eternal.

How will history view the pope?

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Should God continue to grant him good health and shield him from further attacks upon his life, Pope John Paul II will celebrate the 10th anniversary of his election to the papacy on October 16 of this year.

How history will view this extraordinary bishop of Rome, the first non-Italian pope since Hadrian VI (1522-1523), is impossible to say at this point — impossible at least for those who are not blinded by adulation on the one hand or cynicism on the other.

To guess at history's eventual judgment of him, one would need a crystal ball to determine how much longer John Paul II will serve as pope, what major events and challenges he will encounter in his remaining years, and how he will deal with these matters.

Will conservative historians of the future refer to him as the pope who nipped the Vatican II revolution in the bud, correcting just in time the nearly disastrous errors Popes John XXIII and Paul VI created by initiating and then encouraging a dangerous new course in Catholic thought and practice?

Will the future's liberal historians perceive him as the pope who crushed the Vatican II renewal, demoralizing the Church's progressive bishops, clergy, religious and laity, and precipitating a catastrophic, centuries-long decline in Catholic membership and influence?

Or will this pontificate have little or no lasting impact on the Vatican II renewal, regardless of the pope's intentions? Will his reign be seen instead as an aberrant interlude between Paul VI and John Paul II's own successor — a determined but failed effort to reverse the new course of Catholic history laid down by the council?

With the first decade of his pontificate almost completed, what is clear is that so much about Pope John Paul II is unclear.

He has shown himself to be committed in principle to the agenda of the Second Vatican Council, but never in quite the way the majority of the council fathers seems to have understood that agenda. Thus, Pope John Paul II is ecumenically minded, but with an approach that favors the Orthodox of the East over the Reformation of the West.

The pope acknowledges the council's call to dialogue, but not without discrimination. He reaches out to the flagrantly disobedient Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who has been sus-

ended, and refuses an audience to censured theologian Father Hans Kung, who remains a priest in good standing.

And during his recent U.S. tour, he ignored in his own responses the central concerns of the substantive yet respectful addresses on the state of the Church in America, which were given by Father Frank McNulty, Donna Hanson and four American archbishops.

John Paul II accepts the central conciliar teaching that we are all members of the People of God with a true equality in human and Christian dignity, but continues to assert and emphasize traditional pre-Vatican II claims of hierarchical and, especially, papal authority over the rest of the Church.

He accepts the Vatican II teaching on collegiality — that the universal Church is really a college of local churches — but he seems often to sidestep the pastoral concerns and judgments of local bishops when making important decisions and appointments affecting their countries.

He endorses the council's emphasis on "the Church of the poor;" but issued a *monitum* on liberation theology; maintained a long, disheartening silence about the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador; and gave special ecclesiastical prominence to the politically right-wing Cardinal Lopez Trujillo of Colombia.

Although as a young bishop, Karol Wojtyla observed and, on occasion, participated in the many sharp debates at Vatican II, he seems to regard post-conciliar debates — indeed, the very idea of debates within the Church — as inconsistent with the Church's mission to preserve and proclaim the Gospel.

But this is only 1988. How will this pontificate look 100 years from now, or 1,000 years from now? And what will the people of those times say about the quality of our own participation in the Church today?

History, after all, judges more than popes.

Essays in Theology

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