



Columnists

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Washing away the lesions of sin

By Father Albert Shamon
 Sunday's readings: (R3) Mark 1:40-45; (R1) Leviticus 13:1-2, 45-46; (R2) 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1.

A charming story by Mark Twain is his *The Prince and the Pauper*. The prince was Edward VI, only son of Henry VIII. The pauper was Tom Canty. The prince was reared in the luxury of the royal palace. The pauper eked out a sordid existence in the verminous slum of Offal Court. An old priest taught Tom his letters, and the imaginative boy read what he could and dreamed of being a prince.

One day, Tom stood at Westminster Palace, admiring the boy prince, Edward. The guards there started to drive Tom away, but Edward intervened and invited Tom to a private room in the palace. There, both boys exchanged the stories of their lives. Edward found himself envying Tom's freedom, and Tom envied Edward's wealth and high estate. The two changed clothes and, to their surprise, discovered that they bore an amazing resemblance to each other.

Edward, in Tom's shabby clothes, strayed outside the palace, but could convince no one that he was the prince. Tom, left behind in the palace, could convince no one that he was not the prince. The boys had traded places. Their adventures in their new roles makes delightful reading. In the end, the rightful prince is returned to his throne, and Tom, his mother and sisters live happily ever after as wards of the king.

The story of Jesus was much like that. He, the Prince, became a pauper to make paupers princes: "Through he was in the form of God... he emptied himself and took the form of a slave (Philippians 2:6-7)." He traded places with us.

This exchange happens even in the Gospel of the leper. The leper came to Jesus, and in so doing, broke the quarantine imposed by God (R1). In curing the leper, Jesus traded places with him, one might say. Cured, the leper became free to enter cities and renew his contact with people. Because of the leper's disclosure of his cure, Jesus, on the other hand, could no longer enter a town openly. Celebrity

A Word for Sunday

quarantined Him, like a leper, to desert places. On a retreat he was conducting, Father Stephano Gobbi told priests that Our Lady showed him the Church. The Church was like a leper, covered with hideous sores. Father Gobbi exclaimed to Our Lady: "This cannot be the bride of Christ!" Mary answered: "Sacriligious communions have reduced (the Church) to such plight." And there are so many sacriligious communions because confession is being neglected.

On August 2, 1981, while the visionaries of Medjugorje were praying in a woods with 40 or 50 people, Our Lady appeared. When the people saw the visionaries in ecstasy, some of them asked if they could touch Our Lady. The visionaries asked her, and she replied, "Yes." One after the other drew near, and some reported really feeling the presence of a being.

After the apparitions, the visionary Marija started to cry, and a man asked her why. "The people have made Our Lady all dirty," she replied. "When some of them touched her, they soiled her garments." Then Marija asked Our Lady why this happened. Mary replied. "Those who live in sin have dirtied me. Tell people to go to confession and to make amends for their sins."

One of the forgotten truths in the Church today is confession. Our Lady asked for monthly confession — not a superficial or ritualistic confession, but a confession from the heart — a confession that involves a change in attitudes toward God, neighbor, self, problems, crosses, and so on.

Confession involving a change of lifestyle takes away the leprosy of sin and converts spiritual paupers into princes, children once more of the King of Kings.

The trials of a just man: Part II

By Cindy Bassett

"What shall we say to Job when we find him?" Eliphaz asked his two companions as they traveled to the outskirts of Uz. "We've been Job's friends for 20 years," Bildad replied. "Perhaps if we can determine the reason for his suffering we can help him."

When the three men arrived at the dump, they nearly failed to recognize their old friend, who had dwelt there seven days. He was covered with huge boils and sat hunched over in the ashes. Job didn't even raise his head to acknowledge their arrival. Finally, he cried, "If only I could die! What is the use of living, anyway? It would be better if I had never been born at all!"

"Job, you must calm yourself, my friend," Eliphaz said. "Yes, you have suffered much, but no life is completely without hope. God does not punish the innocent; you must have sinned. If you confess now, God will surely deliver you."

"You falsely accuse!" Job cried. "I have done nothing wrong and have no sin for which to repent!"

The three men exchanged wary glances. This time, Bildad spoke: "God is merciful, Job. He will not cast out a good man."

"What, you too?" Job shouted. "Even my wife told me to curse God and end it all. But I refused to do so. If only I could go before God and plead my case. I could ask Him why I am being punished without cause."

"Job, Job," Zophar interjected, "it will do you no good to keep claiming innocence. Even now you sin by refusing to ask forgiveness."

"I tell you, I don't need forgiveness. It's justice I want," Job persisted. "And until I die, I will continue to proclaim my innocence."

"Then there is nothing any of us can do for you," Eliphaz stated coldly as he turned to leave. The three men hastily departed, leaving Job to sit among the ashes.

For the rest of the day, he continued to debate his situation out loud. "Lord, please tell me what I have done," he begged. "Why has this happened to me? I have not lied or cheated anyone. I have not mistreated my servants. Although I was once greatly blessed with material possessions, I never placed my trust in them."

Suddenly, Job heard God call to him. "You demand answers from me, Job, but do you

The Bible Corner

really know me?" the Lord asked. "Were you there when I created the world? Do you know how to hold back a mighty ocean so that dry land appears? Can you cause a flower to bloom or a bird to sing? Can you make a cloud? Have you ever caused the sun rise or set?"

For a long time, Job was silent. Then slowly he said, "Lord, please forgive me for speaking so angrily. I have nothing left but you. If you forsake me now, I might as well be dead."

"Job, don't you know that you can never lose me?" the Lord replied. "Even when all else is gone from your life, I shall still be with you. But even when you don't understand, you must continue to trust me. Even at the worst times of your life."

The Lord's words gave comfort to Job. But God did not have kind words for Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. He called out to them, saying, "Go back now and ask Job to pray for you. And on behalf of him, I will forgive your harsh accusations."

God accepted Job's prayers. Soon Job was cured of his terrible ailment, and his possessions were restored in double measure. But Job's greatest happiness was again his family. He was blessed with seven more sons and three more daughters. Job lived 140 more years, long enough to see the births of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Scripture reference: Job, chapters 3-42.

Fisher plans February lectures

The future of NATO in the face of worldwide developments will be the focus of three guest lectures February 16-18, at St. John Fisher College. The talks will take place as part of the college's International Studies Speaker Week.

All three lectures, which are free and open to the public, will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the college's Kearney Auditorium, 3690 East Ave.