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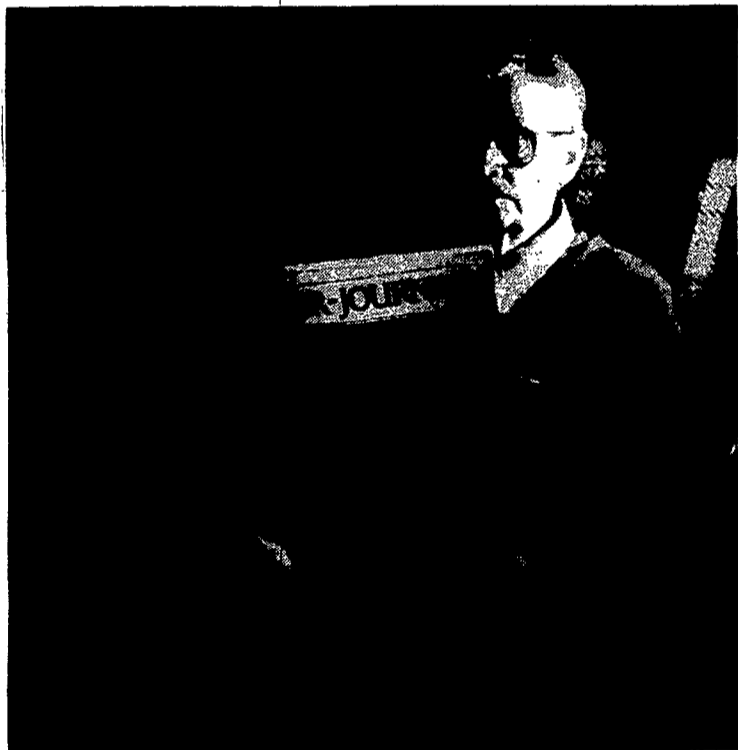
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The Courier-Journal
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Columnists

Making time to honor the Lord

By Father Albert Shamon
Sunday's readings: (R3) John 3:14-21; (R2) 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; (R2) Ephesians 2:4-10.

"Lifting up" expresses the theme of Sunday's readings. God lifted up His people from the Babylonian captivity (R2), raised up the dead from their sins through baptism (R2), and Jesus — lifted up on the cross — was lifted up from death to the right hand of His Father, lifting up the whole world with Himself (R3). It is the Paschal rhythm of dying and rising, rising and dying — being down and being lifted up.

In the book of Chronicles, the last book in the Jewish Canon, God's people fell down through desecrating the Sabbath. God in His mercy had sent a long succession of prophets to warn His people of the inevitable consequences of disloyalty and disobedience. When they stubbornly persisted in their ways, God had to inflict the punishment that their behavior deserved.

Somewhat ironically, Jeremiah said the captivity would last until the desolated land of Israel would enjoy all the Sabbaths its inhabitants had failed to observe during the preceding centuries — 10 times seven years of desecrated Sabbaths. "It shall have rest while 70 years are fulfilled ... until the land has retrieved its lost Sabbaths." This period lasted from 587 B.C., the year the temple was destroyed, until 517 B.C., when the temple was rebuilt.

As for the faithless people themselves, they would languish in exile a sabbath of sabbath years — seven times seven, or 49 years — from 587 to 538, the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia.

Since Sunday has supplanted the Jewish sabbath, we, too, ought to be on guard against desecrating the Lord's Day. Unfortunately, we differ in this matter little from the Jews addressed by Jeremiah. We have often turned Sunday into a day for tourism. One goes to one short Mass, and that's about it.

The new Code of Canon Law states that "On Sundays and holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass" (#1247). The law does not express the gravity of this obligation, but it uses the words "are bound" — *obligatione tenentur* — strong

A Word for Sunday

words! Catechisms used to say it was a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sunday. Properly understood, that teaching was correct.

Those who wrote the catechisms based their authority on the canon law of the Church. The law regarding adoration was in turn based on the Ten Commandments in Scripture — the first of which was to love God. To adore God is an absolute obligation. The canon law specified certain times — Sundays and holy days of obligation — to ensure as far as possible that the faithful would, indeed, adore God.

To miss Mass deliberately on Sunday is not in itself a refusal ever to adore God, but it is a denial of the Church's right and commission from Christ to rule the people of God. Challenging this right puts one in the same class as those who publicly dissent from the mainline moral teachings of the Church.

To miss Mass deliberately on Sunday denies the Church's authority to teach in the name of Christ, attacks the unity of the Church and deprives the person of great graces. Therefore, it should be a serious — mortal — sin in the conscience of anyone who thinks himself a Catholic.

The same canon also spells out how the faithful should keep the Lord's Day. Besides attendance at Mass, the law requires abstention "from those labors and businesses that impede worship, joy or relaxation of mind and body." Even if one's work is not "servile," it is forbidden on Sunday if it impedes worship, joy or relaxation. How often I have heard a teenager give as an excuse for skipping Sunday Mass: "I've got to work," generally at a fast-food place.

Remember this: If you don't have time for God, you'll not have time for anything else. If you have time for God, you'll have more than time enough.

Don't be afraid; put your trust in me

By Cindy Bassett

"Is our daughter any better?" Jairus' wife asked him anxiously.

"No, the fever has not left. I feel so helpless! Of what use is it that I can quote the Scriptures and know the law by heart if ... " his voice trailed off.

"...if God doesn't answer your prayers?" his wife broke in. "Perhaps even the leader of the synagogue does not have enough faith. I have heard you discussing Jesus with the elders. You were all quick to dismiss him as just another charlatan. But the people of Capernaum talk of nothing else. Jesus has healed all of the sick and still more keep coming."

"Some members of the synagogue would like to have Jesus arrested as a heretic," Jairus replied. "I have not judged him so harshly, but as president of the synagogue, I must be careful where my loyalties lie. We've had many false prophets in Capernaum before."

"Your daughter is near death!" his wife cried. "You should be willing to try anything to make her well. Jesus is preaching in Capernaum today, and I know if he comes, Anna will be cured!"

A short time later, Jairus did go in search of Jesus. He had only seen him once before, but he would never forget what had happened. Jesus was reading from the law in the synagogue and suddenly a man in the back had rushed forward. "Why are you here, Jesus of Nazareth? Will you destroy us demons?" the man demanded.

In front of the entire assembly, Jesus commanded the demon to come out of this man. A horrible scream was heard, and the man fell face down before the evil spirit departed. After that, the Pharisees were certain that Jesus was some sort of Satan because the demon had obeyed him.

Now, as Jairus approached, Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many of these people recognized Jairus as he made his way to the front. "What could he be doing here?" they asked.

But Jairus saw only Jesus and he knew what he must do. He knelt humbly before Jesus, saying, "Please, my daughter is very ill. If you will

The Bible Corner

just come and place your hands on her, I know she will get well!"

A short time later, Jesus, Peter, James and John went with Jairus. A messenger met them before they had even arrived. "Jairus, I'm sorry. It's too late; your daughter has died. The mourners have already come to your house."

Jesus said nothing to the messenger, but instead turned to Jairus and said, "Don't be afraid. Just trust me."

As they neared Jairus' house, a great wailing could be heard. Jesus went up to the mourners, asking, "Why do you cry? The little girl is not dead, only sleeping."

"Sleeping?" they asked. "She has been dead an hour already." And the crowd of mourners began to laugh at Jesus.

"Do you still trust me?" Jesus asked Jairus.

"Yes, I believe you can heal my daughter," Jairus replied.

"Then send these people away," Jesus advised.

Only five people — Peter, James, John, Jairus and his wife — were witnesses to the great miracle that day. Jesus went over to where the child was lying and took her hand. "Anna, get up!" He commanded, and the child was on her feet immediately.

Before Jesus left, he told Jairus not to tell anyone about the healing. But news of the miracle spread all over the region, and many more came to believe in Jesus. The Pharisees dismissed all of these claims and continued to seek a way to have Jesus arrested.

Scripture Reference: Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:41-56.

Meditation for Lent: Dear Jesus, in times of trouble, help me to trust in only you.