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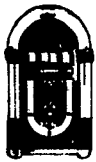
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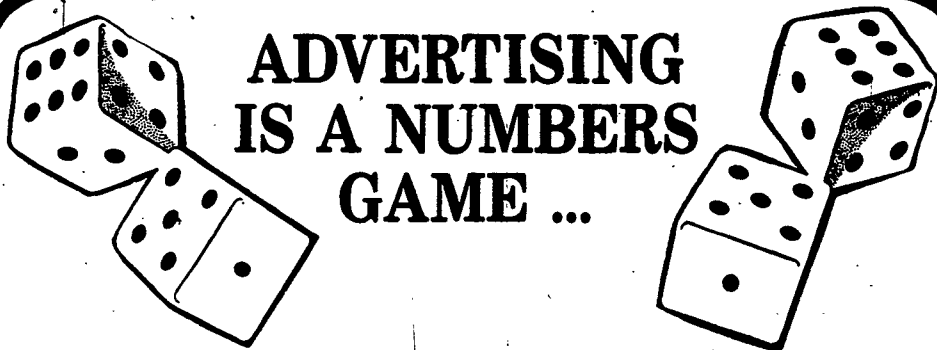
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The germination of faith in God

By Father Albert Shamon
 Sunday's readings: (R3) John 12:20-33; (R1) Jeremiah 31:31-34; (R2) Hebrews 5:7-9.

In his Gospel John does not set the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, for in his Passion narrative, John depicts Jesus as a king. Thus in Gethsemane, it is Jesus, not His would-be murderers, who is in control of the situation. They retreat before Him and fall to the ground; He orders them to let the disciples go, and heals the ear of Malchus. They take Him only when He lets them (cp. John 18:1-11).

The garden reminded John of Eden; it could not be a place of agony. So John placed the agony of Jesus in the incident recorded in this Sunday's Gospel. When Philip and Andrew told Jesus that some Greeks would like to see Him, Jesus answered: "The hour has come," referring to the hour of His agony and death. His soul was troubled. He was pressed to ask the Father to save Him from this hour. But here, as in Gethsemane, Jesus bowed to the Father's will; He did not pray to be saved from death.

No angel of the agony appeared here, but the voice of the Father thundered that His Son's obedience would glorify His name. The crowd of bystanders heard the voice, and some of them maintained that it was an angel speaking.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews described Jesus' prayers in His agony in Gethsemane: "He offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to God." And the author said that Jesus was heard because of His reverence and His obedience. So God raised Him from the dead, bringing eternal salvation to all who obey Him (R2).

The hour of Jesus' death, then, is the hour of His rising as well. Like the scales of justice, the cross beams also represent a moment of judgment. Satan and his followers will be outdone — "now will this world's prince be driven out." And Jesus said that, once lifted up in death and resurrection, "I will draw all men to myself." This promise was symbolized by the Greeks who wanted to see Him.

Only John said that a garden was nearby

A Word for Sunday

when Jesus died on Calvary. On Easter morning, in fact, Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus for a gardener. Yet she was not really mistaken. The Lord had planted a garden in Eden; Jesus, truly Lord and God after His resurrection, planted a new garden near Calvary. As God had breathed new life into Adam, so the risen Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into the apostles, giving them power to forgive sins, to breathe new life into all who believe in Jesus and to create new hearts.

I have often asked this question in classes I've given on Scripture: "What is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament?"

Jeremiah spelled out the difference in the first reading. In the Old Testament, God gave His people the law amid the thunder of Mt. Sinai. The law tells what must be done. It is something external to a person. But the law does not assist the person in obeying the Lord. Thus God's people broke His covenant.

In the New Testament, however, God put the law within His people and wrote it on their hearts by giving them the Holy Spirit, the God of love. Observing civil law poses no problem for the good citizen, who loves law and order. Thanks to the Holy Spirit — given to us to change our hearts into loving ones — observing God's law now offers less difficulty it did for the people of the Old Testament.

What must we do? We must do as Jesus did. He sacrificed His will for the Father's — the seed died and the harvest resulted. Similarly, obedience to God's will — even when it means death to our own wills — is the condition for being lifted up with Christ to glory. We can do this because we have the Spirit.

Episcopal appointments: A legacy

By Father Richard P. McBrien
 Just as U.S. presidents make a lasting mark on the nation through judicial appointments, so also do popes make a lasting mark on the Church through their episcopal appointments. But there are some important differences.

Despite the power of his office and his own personal popularity, Ronald Reagan could not force his nomination of Robert Bork through the Senate. On the other hand, Pope John Paul II could, if he so desired, name 100 men as controversial as Bork to major archdioceses around the world and nothing, not even the collective opposition of a particular nation's bishops, could deter him.

Some Catholics, innocent of Church history, believe that this is the way Christ intended the Church to be run; namely, that the pope alone should appoint all bishops. As a matter of fact, the papal appointment of bishops is a relatively recent development in the history of the Church, not becoming generally universal until the 19th century.

Before that time, bishops were selected by the clergy and people of a diocese, and later by such diverse agents as the head of state or the cathedral chapter (a body of clergy responsible for the administration of a cathedral church).

With the increased centralization of authority during the pontificate of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), the power of episcopal appointment passed almost entirely into the ruling pope's.

This shift in practice was given formal legal status in 1917 with the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law. According to that Code, "The Roman Pontiff freely names ... bishops" (Canon 329, n.2). Significantly, the Revised Code of 1983 adds the words, "or confirms those who have been legitimately elected" (Canon 377, n.1).

Vesting the appointive power exclusively in the papal office causes theological, canonical, historical and pastoral problems.

First, the Church is the whole People of God. It is not composed of the hierarchy alone, nor of the pope alone. In principle, the faithful have an important role to play in decisions affecting the life and mission of the Church.

Secondly, in accordance with an ancient canonical principle, those who rule over all should be chosen by all either directly or through some other representative means.

Essays in Theology

Thirdly, historical precedent is on the side of these theological and canonical principles. Indeed, restricting the appointive power to the pope is the untraditional practice. Key ecclesiastical documents from the earliest centuries of the Church simply take it for granted that the selection of bishops requires the participation and consent of the faithful.

Finally, serious pastoral difficulties arise when a community feels, rightly or wrongly, that a bishop has been imposed upon them, without regard for their needs, their situation, or their desires.

The newly appointed bishop himself suffers because he begins his work without a base of support and may even face some measure of resentment over the way his appointment was handled.

And the community is "let off the hook" if the bishop were later to stumble in the exercise of his pastoral ministry. Because the community had no hand at all in his selection, its members conclude that they have no responsibility to come to his assistance when it becomes obvious that he's not fully up to the job.

Thirty or 40 years ago most Catholics wouldn't have even seen this as a problem. We simply took for granted the system of appointment with which we had all grown up. But there has been an ecumenical council in the meantime, as well as an extraordinary flowering of historical, theological and biblical scholarship within the Catholic Church. We know better now, or at least we should.

That is why so many Catholics are disturbed by the pattern of recent episcopal appointments, whether in Vienna, Austria; in Dublin, Ireland; in various Latin American dioceses; or indeed in the United States and Canada.

Bishops in too many instances are still being selected by a process that is not genuinely consultative, and according to criteria that seem to place greater emphasis on institutional than on pastoral considerations.

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