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Columnists

Saints, sacraments and sacramentals

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 5:21-43; (R1) Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; (R2) 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15.

Theodore Maynard told the inspiring story of the first American citizen to be sainted, Mother Frances Cabrini, in his book *Too Small a World*. He writes of one of the first followers of Mother Cabrini to die — saintly Sister Ancilla.

One of Sister Ancilla's admirers, a young lady who was dying of consumption and hoping for a cure, begged to be a pallbearer. As she helped carry the coffin to the grave, the woman felt herself growing stronger with every step. When she returned from the cemetery, she was completely healed. She had literally walked in faith, and gloriously exemplified the power of that faith!

The Gospel stories describe what it means to come to Jesus with faith. To come to Him is to come to life, for Jesus is God, and God is the source of life.

The Wisdom reading (R1) — probably the latest book of the Old Testament — is important background to the Gospel. Wisdom states clearly that God is not the author of death — either physical or moral. "God did not make death ... God formed man to be imperishable." And Jesus confirmed this truth by the double miracle in the Gospel.

As usual, Mark's stories are vivid with concrete details. Here, he inserts one story within the other — perhaps to give Jairus time to grow in faith.

Jairus had exhausted all resources for his daughter, so he came to Jesus as a last resort. His faith was not all that strong, for he thought Jesus' physical presence and touch were needed to cure his daughter. Still, Jesus graciously acceded to his wish.

En route, a woman afflicted with a hemorrhage for a dozen years decided to come to Jesus. She had spent all her savings on doctors, and had gotten no relief. However, she had faith! She believed contact with Jesus would cure her. She stole up behind Him, touched Him, and was cured.

Jesus stopped. He asked, "Who touched me?"

A Word for Sunday

Finally, she came forward and Jesus addressed her as Jairus did his own child. "Daughter," He said, "your faith has cured you."

At that critical moment, news was brought to Jairus about his daughter's death. Note the newsbearers' lack of faith. "Why trouble the Teacher further?" they asked, as though death were beyond the power of Jesus.

Jairus, on the contrary, had witnessed a cure and the power of faith. Regardless of the message, he became only the more anxious to have Jesus come to his home. Once there, Jesus took the girl by the hand and said, in Aramaic, "Talitha, koum."

The cure was instant. Of course everyone was excited and forgot the girl, but not Jesus. "Give her something to eat," He said.

These two miracles illustrate the difference between sacraments and sacramentals.

In raising Jairus's daughter to life, Jesus did everything: He took the girl's hand, He spoke, and what He said followed instantly. All that was required was the father's faith.

Sacraments are like that: encounters with Christ through the ministry of the Church. In the Sacraments, Christ acts and we believe.

The woman with the hemorrhage of blood, however, did all the acting. She believed. She touched Christ and the effect followed.

Sacramentals are like that, deriving their power from our faith and the prayers of Mother Church. Christ acts, but in response to our faith and the prayers of the Church.

We need the sacraments, especially Eucharist and reconciliation, and the sacramentals, especially the rosary and the scapular. We also need faith: Christ to touch us in the sacraments and ourselves to touch Christ in the sacramentals.

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Timon: a witness to the Good News

By Cindy Bassett

The dim light that foreshadowed dawn in Lystra today revealed a peculiar sight — a man crawling and dragging himself to the edge of the town square.

The man, whose name was Timon, had planned his quest for this hour. He wanted no one to witness the humiliation of a cripple in the clear light of day.

Timon was a handsome man, perhaps even tall. But he had never taken a single step in his life or stood to his full height because of the odd, twisted shape of his feet.

He knew no other way, but being crippled from birth was not the worst of it. Rather it was the judgment made about his condition, first by the local priest, and then echoed by everyone else in Lystra: "Your parents have sinned against the gods. This crippled state is the result of their offense."

"My parents are not guilty!" Timon cried. "And neither am I!" He wanted no part of gods who could be provoked like common people with all of their petty grievances. The God he imagined was merciful and loving.

A couple of years earlier, Timon had heard about Jesus Christ. Some said he was the Messiah promised long ago to the people of Israel. Timon had hoped to meet the Christ someday. But Jesus had been executed as a criminal in Jerusalem.

Those who followed Jesus still continued his work, and in Antioch they were known as Christians. Today, two of the Christian leaders were coming to speak to the people of Lystra.

The sun had risen high in the sky when Paul and Barnabas finally stood before the large crowd in the town square. Paul came forward on the platform to address the people.

"Citizens of Lystra, we come bearing a message for you like no other. Long ago, in Israel, God promised to send a Savior for his people. This Messiah, Jesus Christ, did come in our own lifetime. But most people did not recognize him. They put Jesus to death by nailing him to a cross."

"This, too, was part of God's plan and he brought Jesus back to life again. I am here today to tell you that Jesus is a Savior for everyone — both Jew and Gentile alike," Paul proclaimed. "Everyone who believes in Jesus will be given eternal life. Those who trust Jesus are freed from their sins. You must put

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aside these false gods that you have been worshipping."

All during the speech, Timon had kept his head lowered over his huddled form. But, suddenly, as Paul paused for a moment, the young man raised his head and smiled. Then he echoed his approval of Paul's words by applauding heartily.

For a brief moment, no one was certain what had created this stir, but, as soon as they saw Timon, some of the people tried to silence him. Paul reacted differently. He looked over at Timon sitting on the ground and shouted, "Stand up!"

The response was immediate. Timon was on his feet, taking steps for the first time in his life!

When the crowd saw the miracle, they began clapping and shouting. "These men are gods in human bodies!" they cried, and they rushed forward with gifts.

"Stop! We are only human beings like the rest of you!" Paul yelled as he tried to restrain them. "This miracle is only a sign for you that everything we said is true. You must give the glory to God!"

Soon people came with oxen so that a sacrifice could be made in honor of the Christians. But Paul sent them all away.

Only Timon remained in the town square with Paul and Barnabas. "Do not be discouraged," Timon told them. "It will take some time for these people to understand. Nevertheless, your work here has produced fruit. Where will you go now?"

"We have our commission," Paul replied. "The Good News, no matter how it is received, must be brought before all nations. And what will you do?"

"I will be a witness to your work here for the rest of my life," Timon said, smiling. "I'm a Christian now."

"Then I am encouraged," Paul replied. "The Church in Lystra can grow from even one small seed!"