


Columnists

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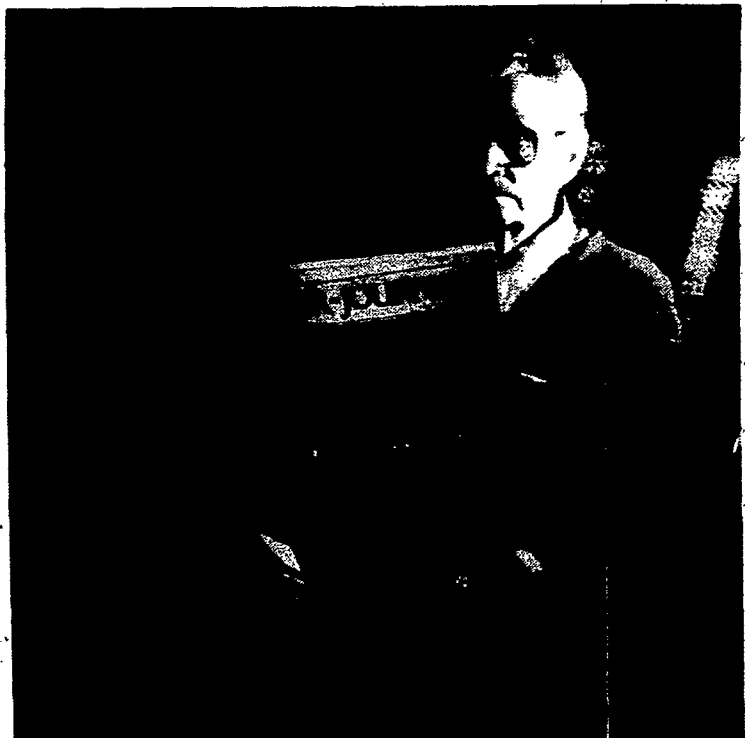
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Miracles reflect mystery of faith

By Father Albert Shamon
 Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:1-15; (R1) 2 Kings 4:42-44; (R2) Ephesians 4:1-6.

The Gospels for the next five Sundays are going to talk of Our Lord as the Bread of Life. As you know, this is the Marian Year (Year B), which means that Mark's Gospel is the predominant Sunday reading. Mark's Gospel, however, is very brief. So at this time of year, from July 24 to August 21, the Gospels will be taken from St. John's sixth chapter on the Eucharist.

John was writing at the end of the first century, and so enjoyed the insights that can come from hindsight. He saw clearly that the Eucharist is the mystery of faith, and so he situates his theology on this matter within two miracles.

This Sunday's Gospel tells of one of those miracles: the multiplication of the loaves — a miracle 50 times greater than the miracle worked by the prophet Elisha (R1).

In the next verses, 16 to 24, John tells of the miracle of Christ walking on water. John begins his chapter on the Eucharist with these two miracles because the Eucharist demands faith, and because miracles like these demonstrate that one's faith in the Eucharist is a plausible and a reasonable thing to have.

The miracle of the loaves proved that Jesus could do anything He wanted with bread. His walking on water proved He could defy the laws of nature with His body. The conclusion to be drawn, according to John, is that anyone who could do things like that with bread with the human body ought certainly be believed when He promised to give His own body as the Bread of Life. It was as simple as that.

Paul, in the second reading, appeals for unity in the Church — "make every effort to preserve unity." He says that the source of unity is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given at baptism. But He is given again and again at holy Mass.

In Mass, there are two invocations of the Holy Spirit. One is before the consecration. The priest holds his hands over the gifts of bread and wine and prays: "Let your Spirit

A Word for Sunday

come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ."

Wow! What a request! And it is always infallibly granted. Hence, right after these words, the priest holds up the host and the people of God confess, "my Lord and my God." Then, the priest genuflects to testify that he too believes that the risen Jesus is now become present on the altar.

The Eucharistic acclamation follows, addressed to Christ now on the altar — thus it should always be in the second person "you," as in "Dying you destroyed..." Then comes our sacrifice in the Mass: "We offer you, Father, this life-giving bread..."

Right after this offering, our sacrifice, comes the second invocation of the Holy Spirit. At this point, I generally hold my hands over the congregation just as I held them over the gifts of bread and wine in the first invocation. While doing this, I pray, as does every other priest, "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit" (Eucharistic Prayer II). Imagine! The bond of unity is love, and the sources of love are the God of love, the Holy Spirit, and the sacrament of love, Holy Communion.

Every holy Mass pours out the Holy Spirit on all those who receive Holy Communion in the state of grace. The purpose is to help us grow in love, which is the bond of unity.

It was this love which makes the Church a sacrament, a sign of God's presence on earth. This unity, created by love, attracted pagans to the Christian faith: "See how these Christians love one another."

A loving woman finds forgiveness

By Cindy Bassett

Mary Magdalene paused just outside the courtyard gates. Simon, the owner of this house, was a wealthy man and a leading citizen in Capernaum. If seen in the clear light of day, a woman with Mary's past would have been quickly shuffled away to a less desirable section of the city. But it was evening, and her presence was well hidden by the shadows.

Mary crossed the courtyard quickly and stopped in front of the large windows that graced the front of the house. From this vantage point, she had a good view of the dining hall. It was crowded with many guests, but she sought only one. As she saw Jesus, all fear left her just like the first day she had met him.

Mary remembered that day well. She had been dragged into the temple courts to stand before the Pharisees and other teachers of the law. It was not she who was on trial that day, but Jesus. She had merely been used as a snare to trap him.

"What say you, Teacher?" the Pharisees asked Jesus. "This woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses is very clear on the punishment for this crime — death by stoning!"

Instead of replying, Jesus bent down and traced on the ground. The Pharisees persisted in questioning him, but still he said nothing to Mary's accusers.

Meanwhile, a large crowd had gathered in the temple court to view the spectacle. Finally, Jesus stood and said, "If anyone here is without sin, let this person be the first to cast a stone at this woman."

Mary waited for the first rock to be hurled from the onlookers. Before long, only Jesus was left. "Has no one condemned you?" he asked her softly.

"No one, sir," she replied.
 "And neither do I condemn you," Jesus said.
 "Go now and sin no more."

As Mary reflected on these things, she slipped into the dining hall. Some of Simon's friends turned away in embarrassment. They knew by more than heresy that she had been a prostitute.

When Simon saw Mary, he smirked, anticipating the little drama about to be played

The Bible Corner

out. If Jesus was a prophet, he'd send this harlot packing. And if the Galilean didn't recognize this sinner for what she was, Simon would have plenty to report to the Sanhedrin.

Mary said nothing to Jesus, but instead began to weep and sob, washing his feet with her tears. After she poured an expensive perfume over Jesus' feet, she unwound her long hair and began wiping them dry.

Suddenly, the drama took an unexpected twist. "Simon," Jesus said, "I have something to tell you."

"There were two men who each owed a sum of money to a moneylender. One owed \$500 and the other's debt was \$5000. Neither one could repay the moneylender, so he cancelled both men's debts. Now which of these two men will love the moneylender more?"

"I suppose the man with the larger debt," Simon answered as everyone in the dining hall strained to hear.

"You are correct, Simon," Jesus said.
 Then Jesus stood and addressed his host in front of all of his guests. "Simon, when I came here tonight, you did not offer me any of the usual courtesies. You gave me no water for my feet, nor a kiss of greeting when I entered your home. But this woman, whom you all seek to cast out, hasn't stopped kissing my feet since she arrived. Therefore, her many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much. Those who have little to ask forgiveness for show little love."

Jesus then turned to Mary and said, "Your sins are forgiven."

Mary Magdalene followed Jesus the rest of the days of her life. She stood weeping with the other women at the foot of his cross and she was one of the first people to see Jesus after his resurrection.

Scripture reference: Luke 7:36-50.