

Columnists

Lighting a candle in the darkness

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

The Art Wilberts have a huge auto parts garage just outside of the village of Webster. On the walls of the garage are many eye-catching mottos. One which caught my eye and mind and funny bone reads: "Lead, or Follow, or Get the hell out of the way."

Since we are social beings, each has a personal part in society: civic, religious, family, economic. And just as the human body is affected by every part — organ and cell and bone — so the body of society is affected by our actions, reactions and non-actions.

Non-action, like a non-functioning kidney, can be more damaging than actual action. That's why in the Confiteor we say: "I confess that I have sinned ... in what I have failed to do."

A popular name is Christopher. Poor St. Christopher got demoted from the calendar of the saints by Pope John XXIII because so much legend surrounds his name. However, he remains a firm reality among many Catholics and non-Catholics, and his protection is sought by many. Recently, while supplying in Wayland for Father Paul Schnacky, I brought my "traveling store," a supply of religious articles — prayer books, rosaries, medals, children's religious books. In villages where there is no Catholic religious goods store, this set up, placed in the back of the church for perusal after Mass, is very popular. In Wayland, a lady said: "I need three St. Christopher medals for friends. They drive trailer-trucks!" Fortunately, there were four in the "store." She got three. Another lady got the fourth.

Whence comes the devotion to St. Christopher? The legend goes thus. In early Christian times, roads were bad or nonexistent, and bridges were few. To fulfill the corporal works of mercy, some made it their Christian work to assist travelers on the road. A huge bulk of a man set up a shack by the ford of a river in the east, where there was no bridge, and carried passengers over on his mighty shoulders. One night, there was a knock on the door. Strange that a traveler should be out on such a night. A storm had broken. The rain was a downpour. The river was swollen. The

On the Right Side

wind was bitter. The human ferryman opened the door.

A little boy stood, asking passage across. Asking no questions, the giant tossed the child on his shoulders and started across. As he advanced, the child became heavier. In mid-stream, he was hardly bearable. Yet, staggering on, they reached the opposite bank.

Setting the child on the ground, the giant stared wonderingly at him, saying: "What manner of child are you? I have carried many people, but none so heavy as you."

The boy smiled and said: "I am the Christ Child, and He whom you have carried is the Christ with all the cares and sorrows of the world." From that time on, the giant was called "Christopher," which means Christ-bearer.

From this story derives devotion to St. Christopher as patron of travelers. And from this also comes the famous Christopher movement, founded some 40 years ago by Maryknoll Father Keller, with his Chinese proverb: "Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." More than a million Christopher Notes — little folders encouraging people to lead, or to follow, and never just get in the way of a good to be done — go to cover a million people, a million candles encouraging each to be Christ-bearers, each in one's own way. Such is the message of Our Lord: "Let your light shine before men, that men may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5).

An irate teacher, exasperated at the lethargy of his class, roared at his students: "If you were each a candle, this room would be in utter darkness. Wake up and light your candles!" So we go back particularly to the prayer: "I confess that I have failed to do what I ought to do."

Spiritual sight leads straight to Jesus

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's readings: (R3) Mark 10:46-52; (R1) Jeremiah 31:7-9; (R2) Hebrews 5:1-6.

We might call the incident in Sunday's Gospel about the cure of the blind man, Bartimaeus, a parable in action.

Remember, prior to this incident, Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem. Three times on this journey, He announced that He must be a suffering Messiah. Three times the disciples failed to understand. They were "blinder" than Bartimaeus.

As Jesus leaves Jericho for the last 15 miles to Jerusalem, He meets the blind man, Bartimaeus. Though blind, Bartimaeus has sharp ears and a shrill voice. He hears the crowd around the rabbi, and inquires who it is. When told, he raises such a din that Jesus stops and calls him over.

Pat once asked his Jewish friend Herman why it was that Jews always answered a question by asking one. Herman said, "And why shouldn't we?" So Our Lord invariably answered a question by asking one. Here He asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus knew precisely what he wanted. If we go to a doctor, we go to cure a very definite ache or pain. If we go to a dentist, we don't ask him to extract any tooth, but one that is diseased. So when Bartimaeus went to Jesus, he knew what he wanted, "I want to see!"

And what he wanted, he wanted with great desire. Despite the rebukes of those who had "sight," Bartimaeus persisted in his pursuit. He was determined to meet Jesus despite all opposition. And his persistence paid off. He received his sight. Likewise, perseverance in prayer is one of the conditions for its being answered.

For Mark, this miracle is a parable in action as I have already said. For what Mark is saying is that the disciples were blinder than Bartimaeus regarding their knowledge of Jesus as Messiah. But as Bartimaeus' eyes were opened,

A Word for Sunday

so within a week in Jerusalem, the eyes of the disciples would be opened; they would "see" through the cross the real role of the Messiah. And as the cured Bartimaeus followed Jesus, so would the disciples.

Being blind is an affliction, but being spiritually blind is a greater affliction. Bartimaeus could not see Jesus with his bodily eyes, but he saw with his heart that Jesus was the answer to his prayers. Others having sight have no insight regarding Jesus.

A child had shoved his hand into the narrow opening of an expensive Chinese vase, and then was not able to pull it out. Frantic parents were unable to get the hand out no matter how hard they pulled. Under pressure of the crying, hurt child, the parents made the hard decision to smash the precious vase. It turned out that the child was clutching a penny which he had seen in the bottom of the vase, and then would not let go of it.

Sometimes, aren't we just as blind? For the sake of a wretched penny in our grasp that we want to keep, we do not hesitate to smash the temple of God that we are. We reach for pennies instead of the hand of God. We want small change and reject what is of real worth.

How often today we need the saving work of Christ! We need Him to open the eyes of our understanding and to give spiritual sight to enable us to see life and its true values clearly, to see our duties in relation to God and man. And how often people are around, clamoring to keep us from religion and from Jesus. Yet there is but one answer: go straight to Jesus, no matter the opposition.

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