

Columnists



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God does so much with so little

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's readings: (R3) Mark 12:38-44 (R1) 1 Kings 7:10-16; (R2) Hebrews 9:24-28.

Between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women in the temple, there was a gate called the Gate Beautiful. One day Jesus sat by this gate and peered into the Court of the Women. Against the wall of the women's court were placed 13 trumpet-shaped chests for alms to support the various worship services conducted in the temple. The alms bought corn, wine, oil needed for the temple sacrifices and paid for other expenses. These contributions were voluntary, over and above the temple tax.

Many people threw considerable sums into the trumpet chests. And apparently, many did this just to be seen. Our Lord on another occasion warned, "When you give alms do not sound a trumpet before you."

Well, this day, besides the showy givers there came a widow with only two small copper coins. She cast both of these coins into one of the trumpets. They hardly made a tinkle. It attracted no attention at all. Nobody noticed her — except Jesus!

Giving, to be real, must be sacrificial. We have heard it said, "Give till it hurts." Someone quipped, "When they say, 'Give till it hurts,' some church people have an awfully low pain threshold!"

One day coming out of K-Mart, I noticed a lady sitting near the cashiers with a cup for donations to the Salvation Army. I happened to have a handful of change from my purchase. I hadn't pocketed it yet when I saw the lady. I tossed the change into her cup. It didn't hurt one bit. In fact, I was glad to get rid of the change. It was of my superfluity. Now I know how little one gives who gives like that.

The other day I was very touched by a get-well card from three friends of mine from Seneca Falls: Shirley Porcelli, Theresa Martarella and Jerry Burns. With the card was a

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check for \$30 to help in my Perpetual Rosary Crusade. When Jerry gave me the card, she said, "Father, the check in it is for your rosary work. Each of us gave \$10.00. It was money we raised by fasting. What we did not spend on food on our fast days, we saved till each had our \$10.00." That cost! That hurt! How wonderful! I bet you Jesus has seen this gift and will in His own great way reward it.

In the Gospel the widow had two coins. She could have kept one, and no one would have faulted her. In fact she could have kept them both, for that was all she had to live on. What a lesson for us! How often we give just so much and no more to Christ. We do not love with all our heart, all our mind, with all ...!

It is interesting that the person whom Jesus gave us as a pattern of generosity was a person who had literally only a cent to her name. The point Jesus wanted to make was that it is not what we give that counts, but how we give. Those who give much — but give out of pride — give little. Whereas one who gives little — but gives out of love — gives much. And God can do much with that little.

The widow in the first reading gave only a biscuit, but she gave like the widow in the Gospel: from her heart and from her need. And God rewarded her gift by giving her and her son and the prophet food for the duration of the famine. The widow in the Gospel gave only two coins, and Jesus immortalized her!

God can do so much with so little — provided the little be given with love and sacrifice. Try it and see!

The pope's second visit to the USA

By Father Richard McBrien

It has been just over a year since Pope John Paul II visited the United States for a second time, arriving in Miami on September 10, departing from Detroit nine days later, and delivering 49 speeches in between.

The air was filled with speculation beforehand. Was the pope coming to scold and reprimand us? How would he be received? Would there be any unpleasant incidents, as occurred during his earlier trip to Holland?

What effects would the visit have in the United States? Would there be sufficient spiritual benefits to justify the costs in terms of money, time, and effort?

The passage of more than 13 months has provided a higher vantage point from which to survey the trip and its results.

Three groups of Catholics were shown to have been mistaken in their predictions about this second papal visit.

First, there were the militantly right-of-center Catholics who expected and wanted the pope to come over and read the ecclesiastical riot act to American Catholics. He would lay down the law, challenging us all to take it or leave it.

The pope disappointed this crowd. He did not scold. He did not cajole. He did not censure and condemn. In fact, he didn't even do all the talking.

Among the most remarkable scenes of this second pastoral visit was the sight of the pope sitting and listening intently to frank talks addressed specifically to himself about the state of the Church in this country.

The positive theme of the whole visit was set in the pope's remarks at the Miami airport. "I come as a pilgrim," he said, "a pilgrim in the cause of justice and peace and human solidarity, striving to build up the one human family."

Only one of his 49 addresses could have been described as hard-line in content. That was his speech, in closed session, to the U.S. bishops in Los Angeles.

But several of the bishops who were present testified privately that the pope's tone did not match the text.

This was in some contrast to his address to the hierarchy in Chicago, 1979, where he dwelt on matters of sexual ethics and where his tone was noticeable more stern.

On the left, there was a second group of Catholics, as militant as their counterparts on the right, who predicted mass demonstrations

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and protests — from married priests, gays, women, and all others bearing a grievance against the present government of the Church.

However, apart from two or three relatively tame demonstrations in San Francisco by gays, feminists, and Jewish militants upset by the audience the pope had just granted to Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, John Paul II encountered no significant public protests.

For the most part, those who disagreed with his policies simply stayed away. Those who came out to greet him did so with enthusiasm and genuine affection.

A third group of Catholics, more pious than ideological, predicted that this papal visit would spiritually rejuvenate the Church in the United States.

Presumably, vocations to the priesthood and religious life would increase. Lapsed Catholics would return to the sacraments. Practicing Catholics would intensify their commitment to Christ and the Gospel. And people outside the Church, in all walks of life, would gain a new measure of respect for religion in general and Catholicism in particular.

While one would like to think that some of these effects may have been realized, there is little or no hard evidence that they were.

To the extent that there were long-term positive results from this second papal visit, those results were felt at the local level rather than nationally.

The *Houston Chronicle* recently reported, for example, that the pope's visit to San Antonio "galvanized an already blossoming ecumenical movement" in that city.

Whatever the precise long-term impact, the second papal visit to the United States was surely a more positive, less polarizing experience for all concerned than was the first visit.

To that extent, Pope John Paul II fulfilled two of the historic tasks of the Bishop of Rome: to symbolize the unity of the universal Church and to offer support and encouragement to the local churches.

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