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**Columnists**

**Describing an apocalyptic vision**

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's readings; (R3) Mark 13:24-32; (R1) Daniel 12:1-3; (R2) Hebrews 10:11-14.

As we approach the end of the Church's year, the theme is very much the resurrection of the body and the end of the world.

Since the Son of Man image in the Gospel is taken from the Book of Daniel, the first reading is from the same book.

The Book of Daniel belongs to a class of literature called "apocalyptic;" with the exception of the Book of Revelation, it is the best-known example of such literature. Apocalyptic means "an unfolding," "an unveiling." For a couple of centuries before Christ, apocalyptic writing was very popular. It became popular during difficult times, times of persecution. Apocalyptic literature uses strange symbols, full of meaning to those "in the know" and meaningless to all others. It was, therefore, good underground literature. The persecuted would get the message, but the persecutor would not.

The Book of Daniel falls into two main parts; chapters 1-7 are stories of Daniel and his three companions; chapters 8-12 are a series of four visions of the future.

It is these visions that are written in the apocalyptic style, as is the entire 13th Chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, from which this Sunday's Gospel is taken. Both passages speak of the end of the world — or, more accurately, the end of a world: the world of the persecutor. "I assure you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (R3).

The Book of Daniel was written around 165 B.C. to bolster the Jews suffering for their faith under the terrible persecutor, Antiochus IV. Antiochus was one of the most ruthless tyrants to strut across the stage of history. He called himself Epiphanes (god manifest); but his victims called him Epimanes (the madman). He had attacked Jerusalem; slaughtered the Jews, men, women and children; and plundered the temple, setting up the statue of Zeus there — "the abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel.

The passage in Sunday's first reading was in answer to those who objected to the author's appeal that they stand firm in their faith. Their objection was that those who had stood firm in their faith were put to death. The author of Daniel answered by stating for the first time in the Old Testament a belief in the resurrec-

**A Word for Sunday**

tion of the dead. "So, you die now," he wrote. "So what? Do you not know that those who so die will live forever and shall shine ... like the stars forever? Whereas those who apostatize shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace" (R1). Here you have a clear statement of belief in an afterlife with eternal rewards and eternal punishments.

Daniel concludes his book by prophesying that Antiochus will be only for a time. Then he will die and there will be an end of a world — the world of Antiochus, the persecutor.

In Mark, Chapter 13, Jesus uses the imagery and the apparatus of apocalyptic literature. He used it to try to make people understand. He was working with the only ideas that people knew.

In this 13th Chapter, Mark has collected all the sayings of Jesus about the future: about the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecutions to come, the dangers of the last days, the Second Coming, and warnings about being on guard.

In Sunday's Gospel Jesus speaks about His Second Coming. He gives no timetable. He simply foretold that He would come again — God only knows when. Jesus uses apocalyptic terms here. He starts with sun, moon, stars; He ends with wind, earth and sky. Sandwiched in between, He speaks of clouds, symbol of God's presence over the Ark and on the Mount of Transfiguration — "then men will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." At His return, Jesus will not come as Suffering Messiah, but as Son of Man, King of Glory.

Before that coming, terrible things will happen. The disciples will see many of these catastrophes. However, they are to look out for false rumors about the end of the world; they are to remember that one day they will look up and behold Christ coming, but in the meantime, they are to keep looking around to see what they must do to be ready and to do it!

**Suggestions for your Christmas list**

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

An Arkansas grandmother wrote to Dear Abby:

"I am a widow in my 70s, and I have enough scarves, sweaters, colognes and dusting powder to last me a lifetime. But let me tell you what most people my age would really appreciate for Christmas. Cash! Don't think me greedy, but I enjoy going out for a nice lunch once a week, and it would be nice to be able to treat a friend.

"Also, if I had a few extra dollars, I would be able to buy something I really need. It would also come in handy when I want to send someone a card.

"Perhaps your readers will appreciate this suggestion. It would save them racking their brains, wondering what to give an older person for Christmas. And they need not be concerned that a cash gift of \$4 or \$5 would seem small. It would please me more than a \$109 gift for which I had no use!"

Arkansas Grandma

Last year, with a smile, I said to the secretary at St. John's Church, Clyde: "Connie, when my birthday comes, many people send me a birthday card, and pay a dollar for it. I would rather they send me the dollar, and I can send that to the missions." She was amused, and told others about it. Eight people from Clyde sent me a dollar each with a note which tickled their funny bones, and that helped the missions.

I thought of this after reading the letter from Arkansas Grandma. Now, as Christmas approaches, one good gift would be a subscription to a good Catholic magazine. I have 21 nieces and nephews and 84 grand nieces and nephews, and send 40 subscriptions to the *Catholic Digest* to them at Christmas. It is a monthly reminder of the affection of their ancient uncle, as well as an edifying family magazine. Here are a few Christmas suggestions.

*Courier-Journal*: Our own diocesan paper, with emphasis on our diocesan activities. Bishop Clark writes a weekly column which is always upbeat. Letters to the editor give vent to strong and diverse points of view. A friend wrote: "I read the *Courier* with greater interest than when I lived in Rochester. In fact, it is

**On the Right Side**

almost my only contact with the diocese, and I appreciate it more!"

*Liguorian*: Published by the Redemptorists. Edifying and instructive, with definite conservative tendencies. It also has a good humor page.

*America*: Jesuit weekly, sophisticated and scholarly, liberal in its direction. Very influential among liberal makers and shakers within the Church.

*30 Days*: A brand new monthly. It is the American edition of similar editions which have been published for years in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and South America. It has superb reporting of events and trends within the Universal Church, with insights regarding ecumenism, political trends, and a main feature each month: e.g. recently an interview with the Irish secretary to the last four popes, and another on the Lefebvre affair. It has superb pictures. The articles are written by knowledgeable people who are in the inside. It is to the Church what William F. Buckley's *National Review* is to U.S. politics. It is expensive; \$44 a year. But a special rate of \$29.95 is given for new subscribers. This is a magazine for brainy, conservative people. It has intellectually conservative tendencies. Address: 30 Days, Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 6718, Syracuse, N.Y., 13217.

*Catholic Digest*: One of the best family Catholic magazines for adults and for teenagers. Address: Catholic Digest, P.O. Box 1812, Des Moines, Iowa, 50381.

*Share the Word*: A good monthly commentary, explaining the Scripture of the Masses during the months. Address: Share the Word, 3031 Fourth St., N.E., Washington, D.C., 20017.

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