

Love truly tested by deeds, not words

By Father Albert Shamon
Catholic Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) John 14:23-29; (R1) Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; (R2) Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23.

On this Sunday before the Ascension of Our Lord, the liturgy logically selects an excerpt on the departure of Jesus. The entire 14th chapter in John deals with the problem of what will happen to the disciples after Jesus departs from them. Sunday's Gospel passage is the end of that chapter.

Jesus tells the disciples two things. First, He is going to leave them, but if they love Him and keep His words, both the Father and He will come and dwell with them. Secondly, He tells them that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send them, will instruct them in everything. There is no cause for worry; He will still be present to them, and His Spirit will guide them.

So real is this presence of God in His church that John likens it to a city seated on a very high mountain — compact, radiant, sparkling like a diamond. The entrance into it is through the gates of apostolic preaching and teaching (R2).

This wonderful church is not left on its own to bring love and peace into the world. It is guided by the Spirit of God. Thus, when dissension threatened to tear the church apart in the first century, it was healed by a decision of the Council of Jerusalem — a decision inspired by the Holy Spirit. "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too ..." was how the first document of the first council of the church began.

In this way, Our Lord fulfills the promise made the night before He died: "The

Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything." These great gifts of God to us and to the church ought to fill our hearts with grateful love.

St. Francis of Assisi had a great love for God and man. One day he met a fellow who admitted he had no love for God. As they walked along, they met a third man who was blind and paralyzed. St. Francis asked the sightless cripple: "Tell me, if I were to restore your eyesight and the use of your limbs, would you love me?"

"Ah," replied the beggar, "I would not only love you; I would be your slave for the rest of my life."

"See," said Francis to the man who maintained he could not love God, "this man would love me if I gave him his sight and his health. Why don't you love God

who has given you your sight and a strong healthy body?"

God asks the same question of each one of us. Why don't you love Me? I have given you not only sight and health and life, but also the Holy Spirit, the faith, the sacraments and the church?

A Colorado dentist moved into a new house and soon discovered that some unruly teenagers lived in the neighborhood. They littered his yard, rode their bicycles through it, and made life miserable for him. He found it a little difficult to "love thy neighbor."

One night, the ringleader of the group had an excruciating toothache and his mother asked the dentist to examine him. The dentist offered to extract the tooth, but the boy refused, saying they could not pay the bill. But after a great deal of persua-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

sion, he agreed. The dentist did not send a bill and forgot the incident.

Later, he returned from a month-long vacation to find that his lawn had been well cared for by the teenager. When the dentist tried to pay the young man, he refused the money, commenting shyly, "A tooth for a tooth."

We all know the old two-line rhyme: "To love the world to me's no chore, My big trouble's the person next door." The test of love is how you treat the unlovely person next door, or down the street, or across the aisle in church, or in the same office.

A new deacon spreads good news about Jesus



THE BIBLE CORNER

By Cindy Bassett
Catholic Courier columnist

"How can I help to gain new followers for Jesus?" I asked Peter on the day I was chosen to serve as a deacon in the new church.

"Receive the Holy Spirit," Peter said as he blessed me and the six other deacons. "Do not worry about what you will say or do. For the Spirit will help you."

I never doubted Peter's words to me. For

before Jesus ascended to his Father in heaven, he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with all of his followers.

When the persecution of the new church began in Jerusalem, many of us fled to other areas. Even so, we kept on telling everyone about Jesus and the number of his followers continued to grow.

One morning, as I prayed, I heard the Lord speak to me: "You are to travel south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza." When I arrived there, I found myself on a lonely road in the middle of the desert. I began to wonder how God could possibly use me in such a desolate place.

Then I remembered Peter's words to me about the Holy Spirit, and I began to pray. As I looked down the road, I could see a huge cloud of dust being raised by an approaching chariot. As it came closer, I saw a man alone carrying a scroll. Again, I heard the Lord speaking to me in my heart: "Go over to the chariot."

The man in the chariot was as surprised as I had been to see someone in this remote place. I learned that he was a minister of state and served under Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. Just now, he was returning from Jerusalem where he had gone to worship at the temple. While there, he had purchased the scroll.

"What strange words," he commented to me indicating this scroll.

"Do you understand what you have read?" I asked.

"No, why don't you explain it to me," he replied. "Is the prophet, Isaiah, talking about himself or someone else?"

"Isaiah is talking about God's own son, Jesus Christ," I replied.

So there, in the middle of the desert, I began to tell this man all about Jesus. Before I had even finished, he said, "Look, there is water nearby. Please baptize me."

"Do you believe that Jesus Christ is truly God's son?" I asked.

"Yes, and I would like to become one of his followers," he answered.

After I had baptized him, the Ethiopian official promised that he would go back to his own country and tell everyone about Jesus. Perhaps my encounter with one man on a lonely road in the middle of the desert would bring Jesus many new followers.

Meditation: "I have told you this while I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you" (John 14:25-26).

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