

# Can only disaster reveal the essentials?

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

What if a nuclear holocaust devastated the entire face of the earth, leaving no nation or society unscathed? Not a church left standing. Not an altar. Not a single holy-water font or bank of vigil lights.

Not a Catholic college or seminary. Not even one parochial school. Not a bishop. Not one cleric or religious. Not a catechist. Not an usher. Not a parish council. Not a single parish committee. No Curia. No Vatican. No pope, and not a single cardinal to elect a new one.

Not one book. Even the Bible is gone — in every edition, in every language, in every motel room.

Only a handful of Catholics remains. And all that they have left, besides the few rags on their backs and some makeshift shelters, is their memories, their hopes, their faith and each other. They remember

what it was like to have been a Catholic in happier, pre-nuclear times. But memories are all they have left of Catholicism; everything else is destroyed.

As they survey the destruction around them and remember what they once had, they are forced back into themselves, probing into their real values and hopes, coming to terms with what human existence is fundamentally all about.

They gather around an open fire and are about to eat what little food they have managed to collect and cook. What prayer do they say, if any, and who leads it? If they decide to pray other than at mealtimes, what kind of prayer-service will it be, and who will lead it? What role, if any will the others have?

Apart from prayer, how well will our hypothetical survivors get on with one another in this time of deprivation? On what basis will they share their limited resour-

ces? And what if strangers should come along — people in equal or greater need than they? Will they share with the strangers as well, even at the risk of depriving themselves?

In a situation as extreme as this scenario, every value, every institution, every tradition would be up for grabs. Will there be marriage, and will it be monogamous and permanent? Will the nuclear family survive the nuclear holocaust? Will property be private or held in common? Will there be formal education and, if so, what resources will be employed in its service? Will only the fittest be allowed to survive? What will be done about the aged, the sick, the incompetent, the lazy, the selfish and the troublesome?

Forced by terrible and terrifying circumstances to return to square one, both socially and religiously, these people would realize soon enough that issues that trou-



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

bled them so much in pre-nuclear times — papal infallibility, magisterial dissent, loyalty oaths and other matters — now pale into insignificance. Do we need a nuclear holocaust to make us ask what really and finally matters about our faith in Jesus Christ and his Gospel?

Distinctions between laity and clergy, pope and bishops, bishops and priests, priests and nuns would be meaningless in circumstances of that sort. The primary task of the church would certainly not be the preservation of orthodoxy but the nurturing of a way of life based on love (John 15:12).

Do we need a mushroom cloud to make us grasp that simple truth?

# A priest's slave experiences the healing power of Jesus Christ

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

From an upper room in the Temple, the high priest Caiaphas surveyed the crowd below. It was time for the Passover celebration, and the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem were clearly good for business. In the courtyard just outside the Temple, where merchants sold sacrificial animals and the money changers worked, a snarl of people and animals had gathered.

"Malchus, come quickly," Caiaphas called to his chief servant. "Go below and collect the tithes. The collection boxes must certainly be overflowing."

When Malchus arrived below, the courtyard merchants seemed to be involved in a commotion. "Have you no respect for my



## THE BIBLE CORNER

Father's house?" a man was shouting. "The Temple is meant to be a place of prayer and worship. You have turned it into a robber's den!"

The man did not stop yelling until he had driven all of the animals from the courtyard and overturned the tables of the greedy merchants. Then without a word, he went into the Temple.

"Where have you been all of this time?" Caiaphas snapped when Malchus returned. "I followed the man who drove away the merchants," Malchus began.

"That was the prophet Jesus, you fool!" Caiaphas shouted. "What right did he have to ruin a perfectly good day for business? Jesus has gone too far this time, and I am going to call a meeting of all of the priests and elders. We will deal with this problem once and for all!"

The council members decided to have Jesus arrested. When he discovered that Jesus had gone with his apostles to a garden, Caiaphas sent Malchus with the Temple police to arrest him. The police were armed with clubs and torches as if in pursuit of a dangerous criminal.

Jesus offered no resistance. But just before the police took Jesus away, one of his followers rushed forward with a sword and struck at Malchus, cutting off his ear.

"Put your sword away!" Jesus told the disciple. "Don't you realize that I must die for the people?"

And then Jesus gently touched Malchus and restored his ear.

The trial took place at Caiaphas' house. Malchus heard the prophet's accusers say, "Jesus thinks that he is God. People call him the Messiah. He forgives sin."

Sometime during the night, Malchus decided that these charges were true. How could anyone meet Jesus and not know it?"

Roman justice was harsh in the case of runaway slaves, and Caiaphas would be certain to press charges if Malchus was caught. Nevertheless, Malchus left that night. He had met Jesus and there was no other choice now for his life.

Scripture Reference: Matthew 21:12-14; 26:47-56.



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