

A brief critique of the Joshua book

By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

Many have asked: "What of the book, *Joshua*, by Father Joseph Girzone." Here is a brief critique, beginning with the *dramatis personae*.

Joshua: Jesus returned to earth as a carpenter, full of compassion, kindness, love. Strong on freedom, against rules and regulations.

Father Kavanaugh: Local pastor. Narrow-minded, selfish, jealous of his power.

Father Pat, Father Kavanaugh's assistant: a cheerful alcoholic. The only priest in the whole book who has the spirit of the Gospel.

The bishop: a shifty, manipulating fox.

The chancery priests: worldly, professional clerics devoid of the spirit of Our Lord. "The dining room table in the chancery was the grand tribunal where personalities were discussed and reputations of priests made and destroyed." (p.190)

Father Jeremy Darby: Episcopalian priest. A supercilious snob.

Reverend Rowland: a kindly

black minister of fundamentalist persuasion. Very poor. Very humble. An authentic Christian.

The pope: Recognized by Joshua as Peter. Hardly like any of the popes since the Reformation. "The Holy Father blushed, and was embarrassed by the audacity of this simple man's rudeness in giving him a sermon." (p.263)

The Jews: All grand people. The coffee hour after services a model of Christian fellowship. All the virtues lacking in priests, the bishop and the pope flourish in the Jews.

The townspeople: small-town, unsophisticated, blue-collar workers, diamonds in the rough, with good family life, faithful to the church despite their pastor, Father Kavanaugh.

For an author bubbling with kindness, understanding and love, Father Girzone displays a selective judgmentalism. What of his Catholicism?

"Religious leaders always felt they had to organize people and structure the practice of religion in such a way they would become respected mediaries with God; and religion, then became the practice of doing what religious leaders told them to do, and deteriorated into the immeasurable observance of man-made laws ... Over the centuries religious leaders have twisted the law into a code that is irrelevant to man's nature, and thereby restricts the natural freedom people should have." (p.139)

"Take the Christian denominations. It is not their following of Jesus that makes them different from one another. It is the denominational practices that you have created that make them different from one another, and keep them apart." (p.139)

My thinking about the enthusiasm for the book is this: good-hearted people with high ideals are entranced by the love and compassion of Joshua; some feel strongly about arbitrary priests and many have suffered from them, so Joshua's trashing them strikes a sympathetic cord; some resent the code of Canon Law, which is really to protect the rights of the people, who are the church.

If readers of Joshua are inspired to be holier and kinder, I give thanks to God. But if readers conclude that Christ did not give us the church — which Vatican II describes as "one, holy, Catholic and apostolic" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) — I should be greatly saddened, and recommend that such read that wonderful document describing our spiritual inheritance.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Those who are repentant avoid, abhor sin

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3:1-6; (R1) Baruch 5:1-9; (R2) Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11.

Four figures dominate the preparation for Christmas: David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of God.

Luke saw John chiefly as a prophet. Thus, he describes his vocation after the manner of that of the other prophets. First, he gives the world situation — politically and religiously; then his call. "In the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar ... the word of God was spoken to John the son of Zechariah."

And why was he called? To get people ready for Jesus. So often people miss Jesus because they are not ready to receive Him. They have their own preconceived ideas not only of Jesus, but also of religion. If those ideas do not conform to their own it's too bad for Jesus and religion.

Once there was a wife who always dropped hints to her forgetful

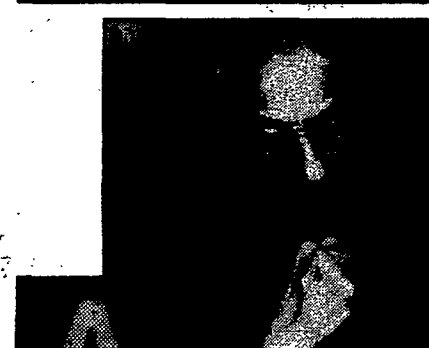
husband when their wedding anniversary came round. One year she decided not to do this. For once, she wanted him to remember their special day on his own. The anniversary came and went, and there was no remembrance. A week passed, still no signs.

Then some days later, her husband came home early from the office, gave her a box of candy, a dozen of roses, an invitation to the theater, plus dinner tickets for two. He didn't say a word, but handed her everything with a grin. She said nothing, but responded with a stony stare.

When he handed her a greeting card, she smirked, "What's this for?" Opening the card, she read: "Today we have been married exactly 14 years, two weeks, and two days. Love, Mike."

He really loved his wife, but not according to her timing. She wasn't ready for it.

Often we play the same game with God. We aren't ready for Him. We tend to box Him in to our ways of doing things. And He said: "My



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

ways are not your ways."

So, what does "getting ready" mean to us this Advent? It means making ourselves always open to respond to God, no matter when, where or how He comes into our lives. That demands our removing the obstacles flung up by a disordered self-love.

So John has called us to get ready

for God by removing the obstacles in our lives: to level the mountains of our pride; to fill up the valleys of discouragement and despair with joy and hope; and to make straight the crooked paths of sin; and above all to repent.

What does repentance mean? Once a lady walked in her garden to gather some roses. She went to a bush laden with them and proceeded to pluck the most beautiful flowers. As she did, a black snake, hidden in the bush, coiled itself around her arm. The lady was terrified and ran screaming from the garden, almost in convulsions. It was a long time before she could be quieted. The lady did not die, but she could not be persuaded to go near the rose bushes in her garden, much less to pluck them.

Similarly, one who is repentant thinks of sin as a serpent that once had wrapped itself around him. He hates it, dreads it, flees from it, shuns the places where it dwells. He will now no more play with sin than would the woman play with snakes. That's repentance.



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