

Church must not be 'lukewarm'

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:11-19; (R1) Acts 5:12-16; (R2) Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19.

During the Easter season, the second reading comes from the most wondered about and least understood book of the Bible: the Book of Revelation.

According to its style, the book is divided into two parts: epistolary and apocalyptic.

The epistolary part (chapters 1-3) consists of seven letters to seven churches. In addition, it is introduced with a vision of Christ on Earth in the midst of these churches.

The apocalyptic part (chapters 4-22) consists of the conflict between good and evil. This part is introduced with vision of the lamb in heaven, standing between God the Father and the church.

Sunday's passage deals with the first vision. On the Lord's day, John, who was exiled for his faith to the isle of Patmos — located 30 miles southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea, was caught up in ecstasy and told to write what he saw.

He saw "seven lampstands of gold and among the lampstands

One like a Son of Man wearing an ankle-length robe, with a sash of gold about his breast."

At the time the book was written, the early church was in the throes of the terrible persecution of Domitian (81-96 A.D.). Nero's persecution was restricted only to the city of Rome; Domitian's was throughout the whole empire. Nero was an insane devil; Domitian was a sane devil.

The great danger to the church then was apostasy or compromise or lukewarmness. To avoid death, one needed only to offer a pinch of incense before a statue of the emperor and proclaim, *Caesar est Dominus et Deus* ("Caesar is Lord and God").

To avoid economic suicide, all one needed to do was join one of the guilds. When the business guilds met, they celebrated in the temples of their gods and banqueted with foods offered to the gods. It was easy to compromise for business reasons, just as some so-called Catholic politicians compromise with abortion — they go along to get along.

John wrote his book to combat this danger of apostasy and compromise. He began the book with the vision of Christ, magnificent in-

deed. John portrays Christ as priest (ankle-length robe) and king (sash of gold). He stands amidst the seven lampstands of gold. The lampstands symbolize the churches in Asia Minor, lights to the world. Seven denotes that what applies to these seven churches — the universal church.

What John is saying to wavering Christians is that Christ is in His Church. Just as people were mistaken for seeing Jesus only as a man, so people are equally mistaken who see the church as only a human organization.

The church is Christ. He stands in her midst, enlightening her, guaranteeing her victory over the powers of evil for He is the beginning and end of history. Once dead, He now lives. He holds the keys of death. He's got the whole wide world in His hands — especially His Church. Therefore, "there is nothing to fear."

The consoling issue for us today is that Christ, dead and risen, is still in the midst of His Church: in her head, Peter (R1); and in her sacraments, especially in her sacrament of Reconciliation (R3).

Regardless of public dissent with the vicar of Christ, one must never



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

waver in loyalty and love for the Holy Father. Regardless of how much some people put down the great sacrament of Reconciliation, one must go at least monthly to this sacrament of mercy. In fact, Christ asked Sister Faustina to urge that this Sunday be called "Mercy Sunday."

As John wrote to the church in Laodicea, "I wish you were hot or cold. If lukewarm, I'll spit you out of my mouth."

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