

Moving 'right' up the economic ladder

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

In the decades before Vatican II, U.S. Catholics were, for the most part, first- and second-generation Americans of European origin, filling blue-collar, lunch-pail jobs.

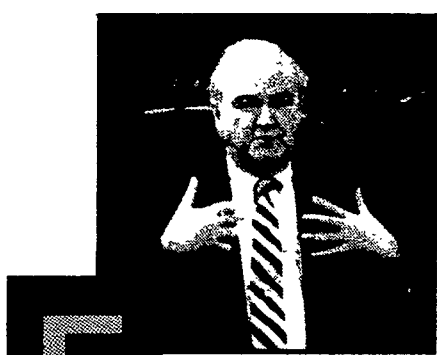
They served in fire and police departments, worked in factories, or were employed as nurses, secretaries, teachers, sales personnel, and the like.

Relatively few had become presidents and vice presidents of major corporations, or had made their mark in science, medicine, engineering and higher education — at least not outside of the self-contained network of Catholic colleges and universities.

Mostly members of the working class, Catholics in those days tended to be sympathetic to the social teachings of their church, even if they did not actually read the encyclicals.

But the situation is different now. Many Catholics of European origin have "made it" in America, the current recession notwithstanding. And some have made it big.

As their net worth increased so, too, did their shift to the political right. Contrary to the habits of their parents and grandparents, they



ESSAYS
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have been voting Republican in recent elections.

But the increase in Catholic net worth has had a religious as well as a political effect. Well-to-do Catholics — with many exceptions, of course — look with suspicion and even resentment upon their church's intensified commitment to the cause of social justice.

For such Catholics, the disliked "new church" of Vatican II isn't just a matter of guitar Masses, nuns in secular dress, women lectors and

eucharistic ministers, independent-minded theologians, assertive laity or a too-chummy attitude toward non-Catholics.

Catholic social teachings insist that property and wealth are always encumbered by social responsibility, and that government has an obligation to intervene in the economic order on behalf of the poor and the powerless, both at home and abroad.

Pope John Paul II regularly cites the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) to bring home the full force of the Gospel as it applies to individuals and nations alike.

Indeed, Jesus himself warned that it will be "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).

Some of the most prominent conservative Catholics today are people of wealth. They may express strong views on abortion, the liturgy or the catechetical training of the young, but what really brings them out of their box is anything that touches critically upon the issue of money and property.

They don't want to hear sermons about it. They don't want to read pastoral letters about it. They don't want to read papal encyclicals about

it. They don't want to read editorials and columns about it. And they don't want to have missionaries stressing it in places like Latin America.

When the bishops were preparing their 1986 pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, a small delegation, led by one of the richest Catholics in America, went to see the chairman of the drafting committee to protest the direction the letter seemed to be taking.

And when Pope John Paul II issued his three major social encyclicals — which conflict in so many ways with these Catholics' social, economic and political interests — they either ignored the documents or attempted to put their own conservative spin on them.

The era of public disclosure is especially unkind to such Catholics, some of whom have received honors and awards from the church. Ordinary Catholics can see for themselves the correlation between conservative political and religious views, on the one hand, and personal income and net worth on the other.

Thus, not all opposition to change in the church can be understood in purely theological or spiritual terms. One also has to follow the money trail.

Jesus demands all-embracing love

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 21:11-19; (R2) Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; (R2) Revelation 5:11-14.

The first readings for the entire Easter Season are drawn from the Acts of the Apostles, one of the greatest books in the New Testament. Acts is the story of the Holy Spirit's triumph in the world. At the same time, it is the story of how God works in the world in partnership with man. God wills to save mankind through man.

In the opening scene of Acts, Jesus tells the apostles, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem..." Peter does precisely that before the Sanhedrin; he witnesses to Jesus' Resurrection.

The passage from Revelation is a vision of the risen Christ in heaven — "the Lamb that was slain" (R2). With the Father, "the One seated on the throne," the Lamb is the object of adoration, because in His Resurrection all creation and all life find meaning. "If Christ has not

been raised, then empty (too) is our preachings; empty, too, your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

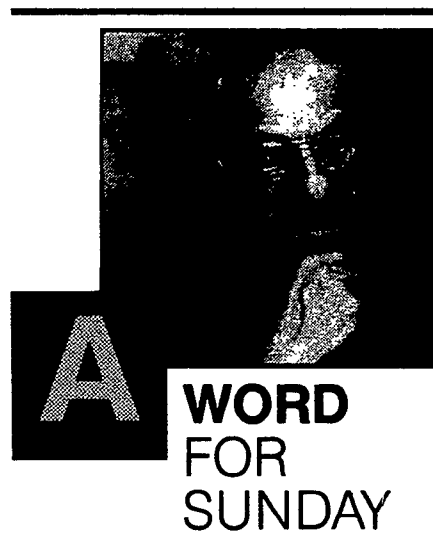
The Gospel passage describes a Resurrection appearance of Jesus to some of His apostles by the Sea of Tiberias. It abounds in signs and symbols full of meaning. For instance:

Fishermen symbolizes the ministry of the apostles. Our Lord made a pun when He told Peter and Andrew, James and John, "I will make you fishermen 'fishers of men.'" Their success will depend on Jesus who will show them where to cast their nets.

The 153 fish symbolize the catholicity of the church, its ministry to all nations, because Greek zoologists in John's day knew of only 153 kinds of fish in all the world.

The net not torn signifies that the church's unity would not be fractured, despite its diversity and variety of peoples.

The triple question to Peter about his love was simply a chance to repair his triple denial and boastful claim to be more loyal to Jesus than



the rest of the apostles.

When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Peter answered that he did. But they were talking about two different kinds of love. Jesus used the Greek word *agape* the first two times He asked Peter if he loved Him. But both times Peter answered with the Greek word *philein*. Peter was not professing the love of

Jesus requested. *Agape* demands much more than *philein*.

Philein is more emotional, a love of friendship, a love one has for those near and dear.

Agape, on the contrary, is more than an emotion that rises unbidden from our hearts. It demands that the lover love as God does.

So, the third time, Jesus used Peter's word for love, *philein*. "Are you really attached to me, then prove it by *agape*, a love that is all-embracing, that feeds my lambs and my sheep, regardless of who they might be."

By His life and death, Jesus had inaugurated the reign of God's love, *agape*. He wished His church, led by Peter, to become the visible sign of this love.

The primacy is not a sort of recompense for the love Peter displayed. Rather it is an institution that is meant to manifest Christ's love for all men.

Peter's love for all and the Christians' love for all are meant to be the sign of Christ's love for all, and to draw all to the love of Christ.

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