

'Let's Pretend' plays well today

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

When I was a child, we used to listen to a popular radio program every Saturday morning called *Let's Pretend*. I can still hum the theme-song. This week's essay is an exercise in let's-pretend.

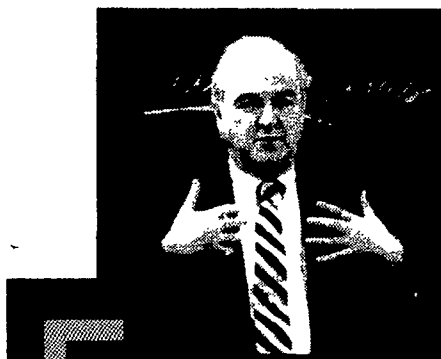
Let's pretend that all of the current controversies within the Catholic Church have peacefully been resolved — the sorts of issues, for example, mentioned in this column two weeks ago about the Gallup survey of U.S. Catholic attitudes regarding married clergy, women priests, sexual morality, and the like.

Let's pretend that, as we stand on the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium, we face only one challenge: fulfilling the church's mission.

That mission is evangelization in the fullest sense of the word: the proclamation of the Gospel (preaching, teaching, and catechesis); the celebration of the sacraments (including the whole prayer-life of the church); service of those in need (including activity on behalf of social justice, human rights, and peace); and the witnessing of Christ's presence through the internal life and ministries of the faith-community itself (including the church's ongoing renewal and reform).

It's obvious that we'd have more than enough on our missionary agenda to keep us busy.

First, we'd have to work hard at



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continually improving the education and formation of our preachers, teachers and catechists. This would mean making available to them the very best resources in theology, biblical studies, religious education, and communications.

We'd see to it, for example, that every preacher had excellent training in the construction and delivery of homilies, lest the people be subjected to preaching that is poorly conceived, poorly formulated, poorly prepared, and poorly delivered.

We would spare no effort in providing spiritually enriching liturgies, taking care that every presider be equipped to preside, that every lector be capable of proclaiming the Word of God clearly and compellingly, and that the quality of music

be of the highest order, with a healthy balance between congregational and choral singing that are integral to the liturgy itself.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults would remain at the center of parish life, directly engaging and involving the entire parish community in the preparation and ongoing formation of its new members.

We would apply the same high pastoral standards to each of the church's sacraments, attending with particular care to the recruitment, preparation, and evaluation of future priests in order to provide the church with intellectually, psychologically, and spiritually qualified ministers.

Although no longer distracted in our let's-pretend church by arguments about birth control, celibacy, or abortion, we would still face the challenge of developing a credible sexual ethic, one that could truly help married and unmarried Catholics alike to grow and mature as sexually healthy individuals and couples in a faithfully Christian way.

Perhaps no challenge in this let's-pretend, conflict-free church would be greater than that of developing a vital spirituality for every Catholic — laity, clergy, and religious alike.

Spirituality is a matter of being open to, and touched by, the Spirit of God. No Catholic can ever take spirituality for granted.

If some of those who speak for the church seem less credible and com-

elling than we'd like, it may be because their words and public presence betray a certain lack of spiritual depth, without which they cannot ignite the fire of faith, hope, and love in others.

They may loyally defend "company policy," faithfully recite its doctrinal formulae, vigorously reaffirm its rules of moral conduct, and sternly censure its "enemies," inside and outside the church.

But, still, something seems to be missing: that intangible quality known as the life of the Spirit.

The faith-community looks for signs of a real believer, of someone truly and profoundly "converted" by Jesus Christ's Gospel — sensitive, caring, understanding, forgiving, patient, hopeful, and aflame with a passion for justice on behalf of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the oppressed. (Indeed, I haven't even begun to touch upon the church's abidingly crucial missionary challenges in this last area.)

It would be wonderful, of course, if all of our leaders — and all of us — were perfect, as our heavenly Creator is perfect.

But there is no defect-free, let's-pretend church, and there never will be. By the time our current controversies are over, other controversies will have already taken their place.

So it always was in the church, so it is now, and so it will be, until the Lord returns to gather all the faithful into the heavenly communion of saints.

Though death is certain, its hour is not

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

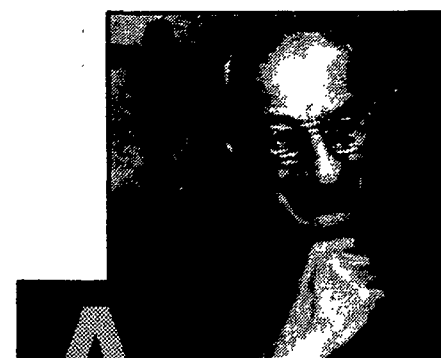
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 12:32-48; (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9; (R2) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19.

Sunday's Gospel covers two separate topics: the use of possessions (the conclusion of last Sunday's Gospel), and an admonition to us as God's servants.

Last Sunday's Gospel told about the rich fool. The point was that only a fool would make wealth consist in amassing possessions. True wealth consists in giving to the poor. Our Lord said, "Sell, do not hoard like the rich fool."

A very devout queen of Sweden sold her jewels to provide hospitals, orphanages and convalescent homes for her people. Once she visited a woman in a convalescent home that she had founded. The poor bed-ridden woman thanked the queen for her kindness and care.

As she sat by the woman's side, one or more tears of gratitude fell on the queen's hand. Seeing the glittering tokens of a thankful heart, the queen sweetly said, "God is sending me my jewels back again." It is in giving that we receive.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Then our Lord gave a word of advice to us all: be ready and be up and doing. For nothing is more certain than death; yet nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death. Our Lord, therefore, said be ready for death at all times, because what may come at any time must come at some time or another.

Being ready does not hasten death; it only sweetens it. It does not make one die sooner, but the

better. The Greeks had a saying that the gods have feet like noiseless wool. "The Son of man will come when you least expect him ..." Therefore, be ready.

Readiness means doing God's will day in and day out, doing what one is supposed to do. Once the eminent philosopher John Dewey found his son in the bathroom. The floor was flooded. The professor began thinking, trying to understand the situation. His son, after working a few minutes, said, "Dad, this is not the time to philosophize. It is time to mop up."

"Let your belts be fastened around your waists ..." The long robes of Jesus' day would hinder work. It was necessary to tuck them in one's belt to give greater freedom of movement. Now is the time for work, for the night comes when no man can work.

The big danger is that we think we have plenty of time to put things right before the Master comes.

One day the devils were having a meeting in hell — business had been slow. The agenda concerned how to drum up more business. A young devil said, "Let's go to earth and tell people that hell's not so

bad." Lucifer said, "No, that won't work. We've tried that before." Another young devil said, "Let's tell people that heaven is not so good." Again Lucifer vetoed the suggestion.

Then an old, wily devil said, "Let's go to earth and tell people, they have plenty of time, so don't worry." Lucifer lit up and said, "That's it."

We say never put off to tomorrow what we can do today, for tomorrow may never come. Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.

When he was old, Sir James Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, would never make arrangements for a far-away date. "Short notice now!" he would say. One of the most dangerous days in a man's life is when he discovers the word "tomorrow."

Longfellow wrote in his *Psalm of Life*:

*Trust no Future, how'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, — act in the living Present!
Hear within, and God o'erhead!*

Benjamin Franklin put it this way: "Work as if you were to live 100 years. Pray as if you were to die tomorrow."

Kids' Chronicle

A biweekly Catholic Courier page for kids ages 6 to 12. Kids' Chronicle presents a Bible story, and such features as "King Solomon's Wisdom," the "Bible Times," and a weekly contest. Another way to help you bring faith home to your kids.

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