

Church is the community of the baptized

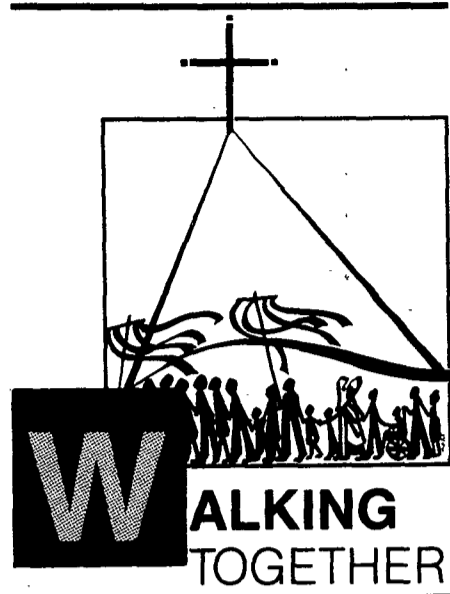
By Monsignor William H. Shannon
Guest contributor

On June 3, 1962, Pope John XXIII, "the Pope of the Council" as he liked to call himself, died into God's peace. During the council's second session in autumn of that year, a Mass was celebrated for him.

During the course of his tribute to Pope John, Cardinal Suenens, the homilist at the Mass, said: "The greatest day in the life of Pope John was not the day he became pope or the day he was ordained a bishop; neither was it the day he was ordained a priest. The greatest day in the life of Pope John was the day on which he was baptized into Christ."

It could well be said that this statement sums up the council's fundamental emphasis and offers us the reason for having a diocesan Synod. The church must not be seen as divided into clergy and laity. The church is the communion of those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus. Ministry, whether lay or ordained — far from separating ministers from the rest of the baptized — calls them to serve their sisters and brothers.

The Second Vatican Council stated that, just as the laity have Christ for their brother, who became servant of all, so they have for their brothers those in the sacred ministry. (LG #32) The same council speaks of the "apostolate of the laity," but it is no longer described — as in the past — as a



"participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy." Rather it is "a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself." "Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself ..." (#33)

In his general audience of June 24, 1992, Pope John Paul II spoke of the importance of lay involvement in the church's life. He discussed various "charisms" that exist in the church. The Holy Spirit, he said, distributed these "special graces among the faithful of every rank," in other words, to all the baptized.

"By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and build-

ing up of the church," he said.

The vision of these gifts operating in the church enables us to realize, as the pope said, that "the universal priesthood of the ecclesial community is led by the Spirit with a sovereign freedom that is often amazing."

Pope John Paul then turns his attention to one gift that St. Paul held in especially high esteem — namely, the gift of prophecy. The church's history continues to make clear the important role this charism has played in its life as "the Holy Spirit inspires prophetic words meant to foster the development or reform of the Christian community."

And there have been times when such words were addressed especially to those in positions of church authority. An obvious example — and one cited by the pope — is that of St. Catherine of Siena in the 14th century calling the pope to return from Avignon to Rome. But this is by no means an isolated instance.

As Pope John Paul said: "There are many faithful and, above all, many saints who have given popes and others pastors of the church the light and strength necessary for fulfilling their mission, especially at difficult times for the church."

Indeed, the pope makes clear that it is precisely this "light and strength," which the faithful are able to contribute to church authorities, that calls for "freedom of speech in the church." This freedom is not only possible in

the church. It is useful to her in carrying out her mission in the world. The pope goes further. He suggests that there are times when this freedom of speech may properly take the form of "constructive criticism." Such critiquing, inspired by a desire for truth and always acting in the service of love, is a boon to the church. For the church is always in need of reform and is always being called to correct the imperfections that mar her identity.

The pope's clear intent to see freedom of speech as a necessary element of the church's charism of prophecy is heartening for Catholics who love the church and who also believe that the church should be a place where freedom is a value highly prized and jealously protected.

When the Diocese of Rochester comes together for the Synod, the Holy Spirit is in our midst. Synod is a special time in which the Spirit invites all the baptized to use their gifts for the building up of the local church. Exercised in freedom, the gifts of all the baptized will place at the service of the entire local church the thoughtful reflections of sincere and loyal members. Thus it is that the Holy Spirit, acting in and through all the faithful, makes the church, in the words of Pope John Paul II, a "communion of charisms."

Monsignor Shannon is emeritus professor of theology at Nazareth College.

Predicting world's end doesn't work

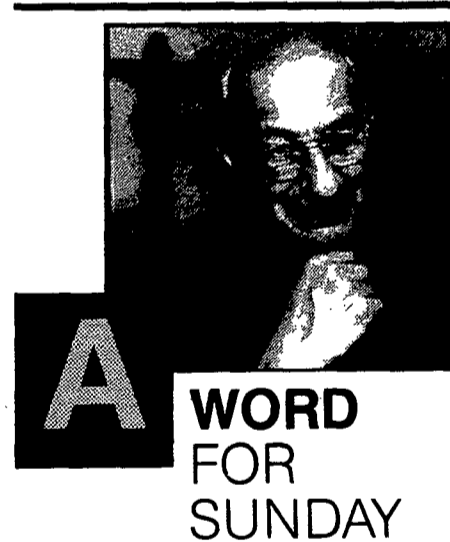
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 21:5-19; (R1) Malachi 3:19-20; (R2) 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12.

A farmer named Luther Gilroy once claimed that while he was out plowing the field he saw a sign in the sky saying: "The end is near." So Luther let his mule and his cow out of their pens, gave his chickens away, and climbed up on his roof to wait.

When the end didn't come, he pouted and refused to come down off the roof. Finally, his wife called the deputy sheriff, who came over and said, "Luther, you idiot, I saw that same sign. It didn't say, 'The end is near.' It said, 'Go drink a beer.' Now come down off that roof before you break your neck."

Ever since Jesus' day people have speculated about when the world would end. We look at the world in which we live and we see violence and crime, child abuse, spousal abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and we say, "Things just can't keep on going the way they are going. The end is near."



Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for what would be Jesus' last week on earth. It was a confusing time for the disciples. They thought once Jesus got to Jerusalem great things would happen, and Jesus would establish his earthly kingdom. Things didn't turn out quite that way.

The disciples were admiring the temple's beauty. The temple had been

restored some 30 years before and workers were still completing the details. Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, wrote that from a distance the temple was like a mountain covered with snow. However, it was a whitened sepulchre for the spirit of religion had gone out of it. It had to be destroyed so Jesus might erect a new temple (in the hearts of men) in a new holy city (the church).

As the disciples rhapsodized over the temple, Jesus said, "... the day will come when not one stone will be left on another, but it will all be torn down."

"Unthinkable!" the disciples thought. Then they asked, "When will this occur, Teacher?" Jesus said, "Take care not to be misled. Many will come ... saying 'The time is at hand.' Do not follow them."

Born in 1850, Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, preached that the Bible clearly pinpointed the end of the world in 1914. The year came and passed, and the world did not end.

What Jesus taught was that when the end of the world occurs is not

important. What is meaningful is patient endurance with the trials and tribulations of daily life. Jesus said not to worry about future problems. Just take those that come each day and accept them, as Jesus did His cross.

St. Paul said Christ's followers are not to sit by and do nothing while waiting for Him. Some of the Thessalonians thought the end of the world was near, so they stopped working.

Instead of keeping busy, they became busybodies, minding everybody else's business. Since they viewed the world's end being at hand, they felt no need to go on working for a living. They were content to rely upon the kindness of others, eating food for which they had not toiled. Quite simply, they were told not to disturb others about the end of time and buckle down and work.

The future does not exist. It is in God's hands and we must leave it there. Only the present is ours. We shall be judged only for the present. Therefore, look to this day. Living well today makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

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