

He came in lowliness, not in power

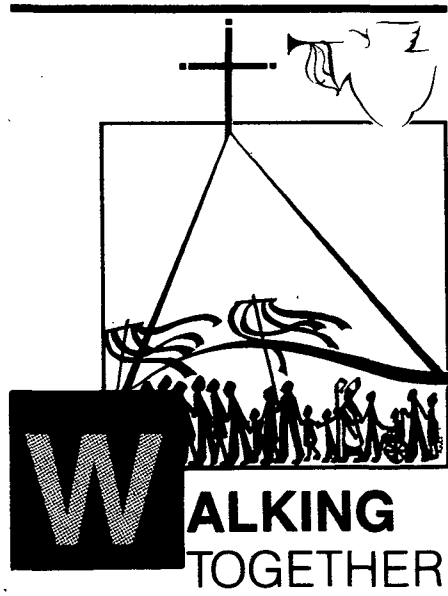
By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

Despite the angelic choirs and the earthly visitors from near and far, the Gospel's portrayal of the infant Jesus lying in a manger is an image of powerlessness. "Though he was in the form of God," the hymn from Philipians reminds us, "... he emptied himself taking upon himself the form of a slave." (2:6-7)

The core meaning of the Christmas mystery is not just that God has visited humankind, but that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life in ransom for the many." (Matthew 20:28)

This is why the church at the beginning never spoke of leadership in the Christian community but of service. All those who exercised any authority were called *diakonoi* — which we translate into servants or ministers. The example of Jesus' life was fresh in their memories and his words burned still in their hearts: "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave." (Matthew 20:26-7)

The church's history is a record of saints and sinners, of servants of God's servants (as St. Augustine called his mother St. Monica), and of



servants who became tyrants lording it over their charges.

Sometimes of late I have heard the comment that all would be well with the church if only the laity had more power. This notion is incorrect for several reasons.

First of all, it misunderstands the church's whole purpose and ministry. It encourages progress down a false alley moving toward a dead end. We as church are about service and not about power. It is one thing to insist that the church's mission be carried on by all the baptized — each accept-

ing his or her role in preaching the Gospel, gathering and building up the community, worshipping God and serving our brothers and sisters — and quite another to pretend that all will be well "if we but share power." In this respect, the church must be radically different from society. In fact, the church is only truly Jesus Christ's when we share *diakonoi*, service, ministry.

Secondly, the synodal process has convinced me that if we just "share power," then the same "lording it over their charges" will take place among the laity, just as has sometimes taken place in the past among the clergy.

I have been amazed at how closed and rigid a couple of synod team members became once they had been given the task of preparing the synod in their local community. They mistook their ministry as power and tried to control every aspect of the process. They did not involve their fellow parishioners or their pastoral leaders in planning or executing the synodal tasks. They kept it all for themselves. That's power not service.

I was surprised when a couple of parishes tried to control closely who would become a synod delegate and who would not. The official process called for a nomination by small dis-

cussion groups, a discernment of those not eligible and finally a random drawing of names. One gentleman, however, told us: "We know who will make the best delegates; we won't leave it to chance." He made sure that he was on the list. That's power not service.

I was surprised when someone began circulating a letter, claiming that some of the recommendations submitted to the regional synods had been those of Bishop Matthew H. Clark himself. This conclusion was reached because some of the recommendations did not agree with this person's preconception of what ordinary diocesan Catholics desired.

I suspect that he does not want to listen to what people have to say or how the Spirit may be leading the local church. He knows already what should be on people's minds and is ready to ignore the rest. That's power not service.

The Christmas mystery that we celebrate this week asks us to radically rethink our understanding of the Incarnation; of Jesus' ministry among us; of the church that gathers in his name. He came in lowliness and not in power. He gave his life in service. "I have given you an example so that you may do as I have done to you." (John 13:15)

Building a holy family is a great vocation

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

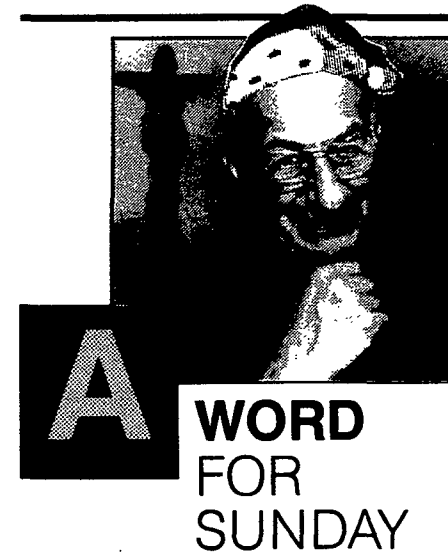
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23; (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

Our Lady reportedly said to a young mother, Mariamante, in 1987: "Satan has targeted the family and the priesthood, because these are the holiest of vocations from which most children come to me in heaven" (*Apostolate of "Divine Motherhood," p.38*).

I asked Ivan, one of the visionaries at Medjugorje, "How can our youth be helped today?" He said, "Build up the family. As the plant needs soil, so youth needs the support of the family."

To build up the family, parents must create an environment of love, unity, harmony, and togetherness. Of course this demands sacrifice on everyone's part.

Moreover, the family is a society



and, therefore, needs a head. Everybody can't call the signals on a football team — only the quarterback can. But he does this after a huddle. Parents call the plays in the family, but

only after they huddle with each other.

Now what is good for the goose is good for the gander. Paul said, "Wives should be submissive to your husbands as to the Lord," but he goes on and says, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church." And how did Christ love the church? He died for her. Husbands should love their wives so much that they would be willing to die for them.

Another element needed to create love, unity, harmony and togetherness in the family is the daily compliment. A groom once asked his father-in-law what he could do to make his wife happy. After the wedding, his father-in-law gave him a small package.

"This," he said, "is all you need to know to make your marriage work." He handed him a golden wrist watch and cross the watch's face were the words: "Say something nice to Sarah today."

Two final elements for building up the family are virtue and prayer. Just as a car's pistons experience friction and require oil, so does the personality friction generated by two people living together demand a lubricant.

This is the practice of virtue and prayer. Paul enumerates these virtues: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; bear with one another, forgive, love (R2). Then prayer, especially the family rosary. The family that prays together does stay together.

As for the children, love them. They aren't pets. Don't take what they say or do too personally. Tell them once in a while that you love them. Don't worry that they never listen to you; worry rather that they are always watching you. The apple won't fall far from the tree.

Give them time. Dare to discipline them. Remember, building a holy family is one of the greatest vocations on earth.

May the holiday season
bring to all the fulfillment of its
promise of joy and peace.

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