

# To be or not to be 'prophetic'

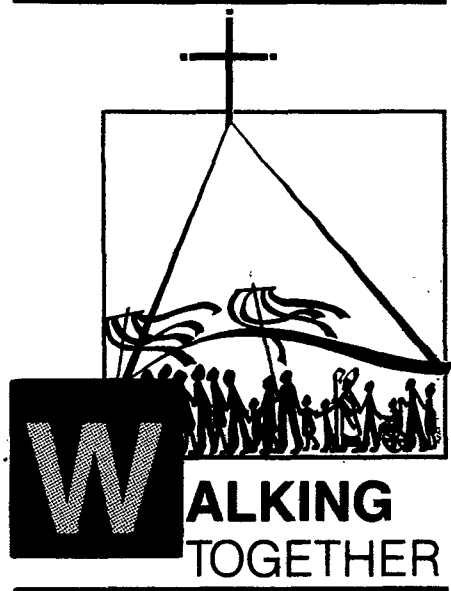
By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

The Synod Agenda Committee met this past week to review the recommendations that will be submitted to the May 22 Regional Synods. These seven diverse people meet briefly at each stage in our Synod journey to make absolutely certain that what is submitted for consideration at the Regional and General Synods is "doable" by our local church.

Looking at the text of the recommendations from every point of view, they concern themselves with each proposal's clarity of language and clarity of purpose. Their aim is not to eliminate recommendations but to make sure that they are proposed in such a way that they can be implemented if finally put forward by the Regional and General Synods.

This is not an academic exercise. In reviewing 46 proposals submitted last fall, this group found that two recommendations — one proposing the abolition of priestly celibacy and another calling for the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood — were not able to be implemented by the local church.

The Agenda Committee labeled these two initiatives "prophetic recommendations" (since they were seen to come from the people at the Holy Spirit's prompting) and put them aside for further discussion at October's General Synod after the ordinary synodal work is completed.



Although the committee reviewed 44 new recommendations at its recent meeting and clarified the phrasing of a few, they set aside no such prophetic recommendations this spring.

Some people in our local church will be relieved at this news because they consider the term "prophetic recommendations" to be misleading. Because "prophetic" in our culture has the connotation of "prediction," they suggest that some people might be misled into thinking that the Synod was predicting that these recommendations will definitely come to pass.

Others have asked how the Agenda Committee could already label the two proposals as "prophetic" before the local church has had a chance to discern whether they are of the Spirit or

not. Although recognizing that these recommendations have no status until voted on at the General Synod, they feel that the average parishioner could be misled into thinking that it was a foregone conclusion that the Spirit of God has prompted the local church to bring these matters to the universal church's attention.

Still others thought it very presumptuous in any event to assume that the God's Spirit would be speaking to our local church about such matters that are clearly reserved to the pope.

The word for prophet in Hebrew is *nabi*, which has both a passive and an active meaning reflecting both aspects of the prophet's vocation. As the "one who has been called" by God, the prophet is in some way made conscious of having been singled out by God for a special mission. As "the one who calls," the prophet fulfills a special role in the community, calling the community to act, to reform or to repent.

In Christianity, our firm belief is that the Holy Spirit's gift is not given to only a few individuals in the community but is freely given to all the baptized. In fact, at baptism the minister prays, "As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live as a member of his body." Thus the Christian community is a community of prophets, anointed in baptism by God's Holy Spirit. As a community of prophets we are both conscious of the Spirit's action in our midst and

conscious of our vocation to call each other and our institutions to right action, to necessary reform and to sincere repentance.

In the July 1, 1992 (English edition) of *L'Osservatore Romano*, Pope John Paul II said: "It appears from the history of the Church and particularly from the lives of the saints that frequently the Holy Spirit inspires prophetic words meant to foster the development or the reform of the Christian community's life ... There are many faithful and, above all, many saints who have given Popes and other pastors of the Church the light and strength necessary for fulfilling their mission, especially at difficult times for the Church."

It is in the context of the pope's words that the Agenda Committee understood that the two recommendations originating separately from the prayerful proposals of more than 50 faith communities and calling for a change in the church's discipline could rightly be called prophetic.

But the pope also notes that what appears to have been prompted by the Holy Spirit needs to be tested by the Spirit's gift of discernment, which guides the church along the way of truth and wisdom.

For this reason, these two prophetic recommendations will be submitted to the General Synod for discussion and prayerful discernment, "not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and to hold fast to what is good." (1 Th 5:21)

## Beware of the bad sirens in today's world

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 10:1-10; (R1) Acts 2:14, 36-41; (R2) 1 Peter 2:20-25.

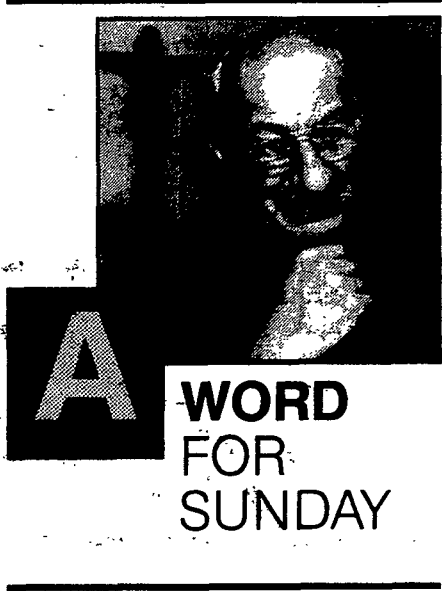
Sundays' readings are about sheep and shepherd and strays.

NBC aired a three-hour news special titled, "Of Men and Women" on Jan. 9, 1975. Among those interviewed was a teen-aged girl, who told how she had lived with different boys at different times without being married.

She pictured her way of life as ideal. This was a sample of one of the program's main themes, "The Liberation of Women."

"What do you think of that?" a mother asked her unmarried daughter, Betty, in her early 20s.

"Sounds pretty sharp the way that girl tells it," answered Betty. "But is also looks pretty wrong to me — sleeping with every and any guy that comes along."



"I'm glad you said that, Betty," her mother added. "It is the very opposite of what our Lord has said. And ultimately, it leads to grief, not happiness."

This is exactly what our Lord is talking about in this Sunday's Gospel. Two voices call all of us in the world: the voice of Christ; the Good Shepherd; and the voice of the stranger, the thief and the robber. The stranger calls us to steal, slaughter and destroy.

Every age has its strays — sheep who have listened to the stranger's voice in lieu of the Good Shepherd's voice. But perhaps no age has had so luring a voice as has ours. We have television. Despite all of its potentially good points, TV is the most clever sheep stealer in the world. It pictures marriage as taboo, infidelity as fun, and the unattached career woman living in luxury and false happiness as the really "liberated" woman. It shows murder and violence as the normal way to get what you want.

In his journeys after the Trojan War, Odysseus had to pass the island of the sirens, beautiful nymphs whose sweet songs would cause sailors to leap overboard in quest of the singers.

These sailors would then be drowned in the turbulent seas off Italy's coast.

Odysseus wanted to hear the sirens' song. Always resourceful, Odysseus sealed his crew's ears with wax and had himself bound to the ship's mast to escape death. The sailors, therefore, could not hear the sirens, and Odysseus could not jump overboard.

Don't watch everything on TV; don't read or listening to everything. Be as careful about these things as you are about the food you eat.

If you cannot seal off the world's siren voices, do as Odysseus did and make temptations remote by tying yourself to the mast, to Peter's bark — the church. Give equal time to the voices of truth: the church teaching every Sunday in the Liturgy of the Word; Catholic papers and magazines; and especially the pronouncements of the Vicar of Christ, the pope.

Follow those voices. If the Lord is my Shepherd, then there will be nothing I shall want.

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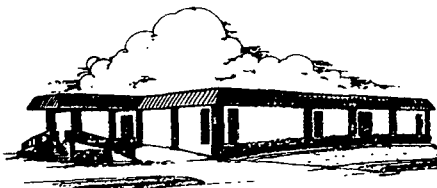
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