

Synods discover unity in diversity

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

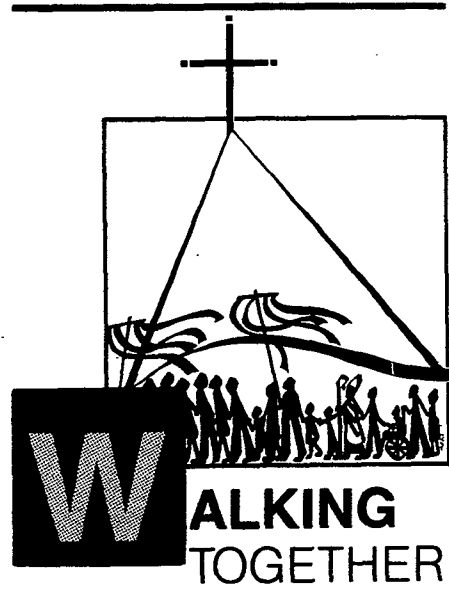
What a shock to hear of Monica Seles' senseless stabbing while the 19-year-old tennis star rested between tournament games a couple of weeks ago. The perpetrator claimed he was a Steffi Graf fan so he decided to eliminate the only person who stood between Graf and the No. 1 ranking.

Some people will do anything to have their team, candidate, country, idea, corporation, or party win. They will lie, cheat, steal, maim or kill. Winning is everything.

Lately, according to many pastors, this "win at all costs" attitude has invaded the church. Unfortunately, the Synod process has had to deal with this almost from the beginning.

When Bishop Matthew H. Clark chose the six very broad themes based completely on the responses from 20,000 Roman Catholics who answered the Synod questionnaire, a small group of people publicly complained that "the Diocese of Rochester is only going through the motions of conducting a Synod" since the bishop has chosen to "ignore theological and doctrinal matters."

When the bishop named the broadly representative writing committees from the nominations submitted to him by the Presbyteral Council, the Stewardship Council and the Pastoral Council, a small group publicly criti-



cized his inclusion of "too many women," "feminists" and "known dissenters."

After the fall parish Synod discussions, some folks complained of a "flawed procedure" that did not allow the "recommendations submitted by the minority to be heard."

During the first Regional Synods, several vocal representatives held their small discussion groups hostage by berating all the recommendations under discussion and by refusing to vote because "these are not the priorities which should be addressed by the Diocese of Rochester at this time."

Finally, some people have written to the Holy See, urging "the Holy Father

and the appropriate Pontifical agencies to intervene and prevent the discussion of these recommendations at the October 1993 Rochester Synod."

I suspect that no matter what we decide through the Synod process, it will not be good enough for some people because it is not exactly what they wanted and they did not get their way.

The Synod was meant to be a time when our entire local church could put aside differences and come together to set our pastoral priorities for the future.

We began this process in prayer and have carried it on in prayer, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all our planning, deliberations, and decision-making. We have considered prayer the cornerstone of our project. By relying on God's providential care for us, we know we are less inclined to choose our favorite solutions to the complex problems that face us and are more inclined to listen the the Spirit's prompting — even when that prompting leads us to listen to small, unpopular or minority voices.

Because our Synod process is one by which we, as a community, discern God's will for us here and now, I have always hoped that there would be no factions or special-interest groups, no liberals or conservatives, no "in" people or "out" people. I had hoped that there would be only faithful Roman Catholics of every background and

interest searching together for what God wants of us today as a united community of faith.

The Catholic Church in the United States has long prided itself on its unity despite its cultural diversity. Several years ago, the U.S. bishops pointed out that our nation's motto, "E pluribus unum" (out of many, one), is "not a denial of the uniqueness of individual cultures, but a commitment to the dignity of each people and to the peaceful collaboration among persons of different cultural backgrounds, who rejoicing in their uniqueness, affirm together a common identity as people of the United States." (*Origins*, 20:423)

Likewise, our 12-county faith community is a diversity of theologies, histories, cultures and traditions. Some prefer one approach to liturgy, catechetics, or church discipline, while others prefer another. These differences do not have to pull us apart. By acknowledging and respecting these differences, all Synod participants can commit themselves to peaceful collaboration, fully discussing the issues, fully airing differing points of view, but in the end choosing a unified course of action. And certainly not stabbing each other in the back.

Our second group of Regional Synods will take place this Saturday, May 22. As our delegates prepare, I pray once again Jesus' prayer for his disciples: "that all may be one!"

Retreat can serve as strategic withdrawal

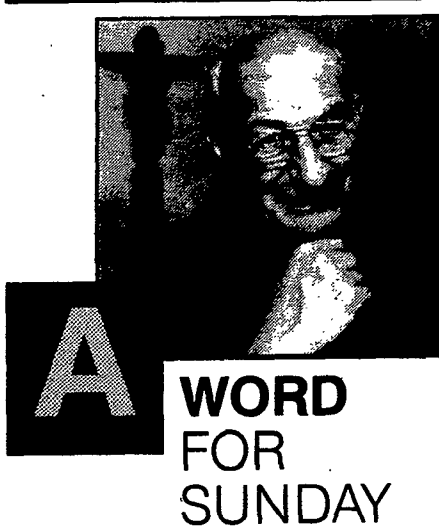
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 17:1-11; (R1) Acts 1:12-14; (R2) 1 Peter 4:13-16.

The church was born on Calvary. St. John Chrysostom said, "As from the side of the sleeping Adam came Eve, so from the side of the dying Christ came the new Eve, the Church."

At first the church was mute, silent, fearful, puzzled, paralyzed, having a job to do and not knowing how to do it. So for 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus kept instructing the eleven. After He left them, they were still immobilized. But they did as He said and stayed in Jerusalem, in an upstairs room. It began to dawn on them that if the church were to renew the world, then they themselves had to be renewed first.

If all the sleeping folks would wake up, / And all the lukewarm folks would fire up, / And all the dishonest folks would confess up, / And all the disgruntled folks would sweeten up, / And all the depressed folks would look up, / And all the discouraged folks would cheer up, / And all the estranged folks would make up, / And all the gossipers would shut



up, / And all the dry bones would shake up, / And all the true soldiers would stand up, / And all the church members would pray up — / Then you could have the world's greatest renewal.

So the church's first members did the two things basic to all renewal.

First, they retreated from the world — "they went to the upstairs room" (R1). As far back as Jesus' time, Jews had an upper room set aside for prayer and the celebration of religious festivals, such as the Passover. How

wrong today to begrudge having church buildings to which people can retreat, large enough to muffle the din of the outside world — a place to be alone with the great Alone in quiet and silence.

A retreat is simply a strategic withdrawal, a going apart from the world's noise and bustle, in order to rethink things through and to refocus on life's purpose and go on from there. Only when milk stands still does the cream rise to the top.

A retreat's silence is only one voice's stilling in order to hear another — the voice of God, who speaks in silences. Surely on this retreat Peter began to realize that to suffer for Christ's sake called for rejoicing (R2) — a great thought.

Secondly, those days of retreat were spent in prayer — fervent, earnest prayer, with Mary, Jesus' mother.

So far removed are we from our Lord's Ascension that we find it hard to experience the state of expectancy, of watchful waiting, that must have gripped the church then. Would He come on the Thursday night of the Ascension? He didn't. Peter brought up old business to relieve the tension. The number 12 was sacrosanct. Judas had defected, so a successor was chosen.

Friday came and went — no baptism of fire. So they began to pray now in earnest. Saturday set in. More prayers. No answer. Then came Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection, surely this would be the day. But evening crept on and all their prayers rose to a silent heaven. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday came and went. Nothing happened.

This time their faith did not fail. Thomas did not doubt. The disciples from Emmaus did not desert the Christian community. No doubt this was so, because Mary, Jesus' mother, was there.

He tarried still. But they waited not indolently, nor easily — who can be at ease waiting for something to happen, something unknown?

Then Thursday came. One week. Still no power from on high. Saturday followed. They remained steadfast in prayer. They had just finished the first novena. Pentecost arrived and He came, the Holy Spirit in an explosion of wind and fire.

Prayerful waiting is always the way to wait for the Holy Spirit. Better to pray and wait for Him than to plunge into action without Him. The Spirit will re-create those who pray to Him and through them renew the earth's face.

"The most infamous among these actions are those designed for the reasoned and methodical extermination of an entire race, nation or ethnic minority. These must be condemned as frightful crimes...."

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

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