

We can't go two ways at same time

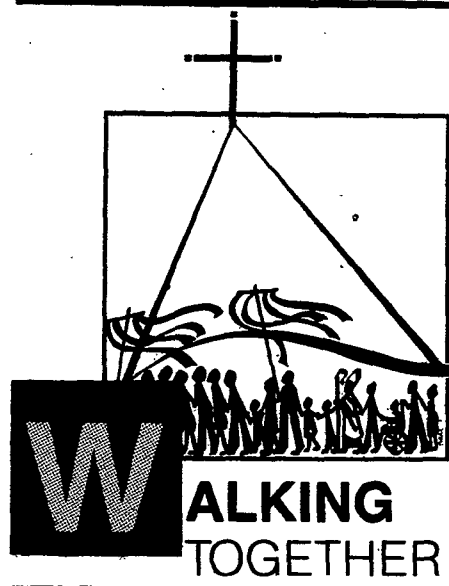
By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

Revelation tells us that God is totally other — completely beyond our thoughts and imagination, distant, removed, transcendent. And yet Revelation also tells us that God is totally near — in the beauty of our world, in the goodness of its creatures, in the truth of human thought. In gracious immanence, God is nearer to us than our breath, St. Augustine says.

In human concepts, one cannot be totally distant and yet totally present, but God is not a human concept.

We try to mirror this paradox in our eucharistic liturgies. In the Mass, we worship the distant God whom we know from Revelation as we celebrate God's presence among us: in the Word of God proclaimed; in the community of the baptized which gathers; in the one who presides; in the eucharistic bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ, God-with-us in sacramental form.

Because we are human, and our liturgies are all too human, we can never adequately present this paradox of our distant-present God. We end up emphasizing one aspect or the other. In some ages, the church has stressed God's immanence, God's abiding presence in the community. In the first centuries, for example, Christians referred to one another as "saints," recognizing each other as God's chosen ones made holy in bap-



tism and sanctified by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, who rendered each Christian a tabernacle, a vessel of God's glory.

Eucharistic liturgies in this age were images of the heavenly banquet with the emphasis put on the banquet: small community celebrations without vestments or incense or formal eucharistic prayers.

These celebrations took place in converted houses where the rooms were small, the community packed closely together, and no permanent altar separated ministers from people. These early Christians celebrated God in their midst. But in stressing God's presence, there was a tendency to "domesticate" God, to reduce God to

a merely creaturely level, to make God and the Eucharist common.

Since in our world for every action there seems to be an equal and opposite reaction, the church in the next era began to stress God's transcendence in the liturgy. Through movement, music, architecture and dress, the church tried to re-create in some reflected way the heavenly banquet with emphasis on heavenly. These liturgies were celebrated in vast basilicas of marble and mosaic, with golden vessels and costly vestments, with fixed altar, throne, choir screen and pulpit.

They reminded worshippers that they were entering into the realm of the sacred and inspired awe and reverence for the distant Godhead. But in so stressing God's transcendence and our unworthiness, Christians felt themselves unable to receive the Eucharist. Many did lifelong penance in hopes that they would be worthy enough to receive Eucharist on their deathbed. In so stressing transcendence, the eucharistic celebration's very purpose was in danger of being lost.

Our General Synod begins the night of Oct. 1. Three years of praying and listening and discerning by our whole local church will come to conclusion. Because the whole process has been rooted in our trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance, I have every confidence that the General Synod will be a success. It will be a wonderful celebration of our reality as local

church, of our baptismal commitment to carry on Christ's mission, of our resolve to use our limited resources in the best way possible to bring God's reign nearer.

But our Synod is also about choices. It involves choosing one ministry, one solution, one approach as a priority over another. In choosing one good, another will suffer. In emphasizing one aspect, another will be downplayed. No matter which way our delegates vote as a body, their choices will hurt some and dishearten others. Here on earth, with all our limitations, it cannot be other: we cannot move in two directions at the same time.

Nevertheless, we must act as a united local church. We have studied, discussed, listened and prayed together. Now it is time to put ourselves together in God's hands and vote. We must avoid the temptation to put the vote aside if my favorites do not make the final cut. The outcome — no matter what it may be — must be *our* outcome. The decisions must be *our* decision. The plan for the future must be *our* plan for the future. Of course it won't be perfect. Of course the next era may set itself to correct our shortcomings.

But for the present our synodal plan to guide our local church into the future must be owned by our whole local church as God's plan for us here and now. For the God who is totally other has promised to walk together with us.

Everything ultimately belongs to God

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

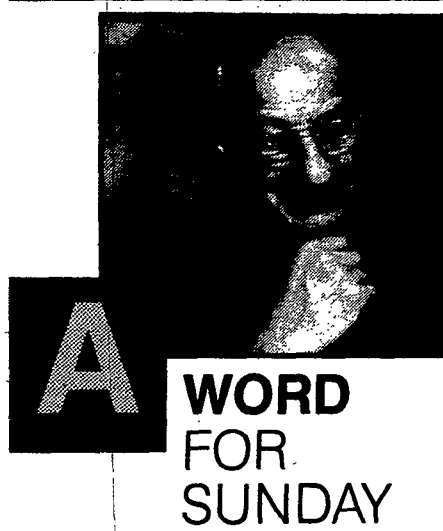
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 21:33-43; (R1) Isaiah 5:11-7; (R2) Philippians 4:6-9.

A parable is a story from everyday life that teaches a lesson. Normally, a parable has only one point and the details are not to be stressed. To give a meaning to every detail would be to reduce the parable to an allegory. The parable of the tenants, however, is different. The details do have meaning.

The vineyard, as Isaiah said, is the house of Israel. The tenants are Israel's religious leaders, in charge of the nation's welfare. The servants sent successively are the prophets, sent by God, and often rejected and killed. The son who came last is none other than Jesus Himself.

The parable tells us much about God. First, it tells us that God trusts people. The master turned over the vineyard to the tenants. He doesn't even tell them how to do their work. Just do it. God gives us each talents and expects us to use them — no more.

Secondly, it tells us of God's patience. The master sent one servant after another. And the master gave them chance after chance. So God



bears with all people and does not cast them off when they sin. He gives them chance after chance to convert.

Thirdly, it tells of God's judgment. In the end the master took the vineyard from the tenants and gave it to others. So when God's graces are rejected, He takes them away and gives them to others, as happened to the man who buried his talent.

The parable also tells us much about Jesus. This parable contains one of the clearest claims of Jesus that He

is the unique Son of God, different from even the greatest of the prophets who had gone before Him.

It also tells us of Jesus' sacrifice. In the parable the wicked tenants killed the son. Jesus knew what lay ahead and went willingly and open-eyed to death.

Finally, the parable tells us much about people. The vineyard was fully equipped: it had a tower which served a dual purpose — it served as a watchtower from which to spot thieves, and it served as a lodging for those who were working in the vineyard. It had a thick thorn hedge to keep out both animals and thieves. It had a wine press to make wine. So God not only gives us each a task, but He also gives to each the wherewithal to do the task.

It tells us of human freedom. The master left the tenants to do the task as they liked. God trusts us to do what we ought to do.

It tells us of human answerability. To all people there comes a day of reckoning. We are answerable for the way in which we carry out the task which God has given us to do.

It tells us what sin is — rebellion against the master; acting as if we were in complete control of every-

thing; doing our own thing when we know full well what is God's thing.

A man had a dream. In his dream three presidential candidates died and went to heaven. They were brought before the Lord, who was seated on His throne. "Who are you and what did you do to deserve to be here?" the Lord asked the first presidential candidate. "I'm George Bush and I'm the former president of the United States." Then he related all the good things he had done. "Welcome," the Lord said. "Take the seat on my right."

He asked the second presidential candidate, "Who are you?" "I'm Bill Clinton and I'm the current president of the United States." He then related his accomplishments. "Welcome," the Lord said. "Take the seat on my left."

Then, turning to the third man, the Lord asked, "Who are you?" "I'm Ross Perot," said the third candidate, "and I believe you're sitting in my seat."

There are times when we act as if we were God. As if this world were ours. We forget that everything we have is on loan to us from God, that we are only temporary tenants. We really don't own anything, even though we act as if we do. Everything ultimately belongs to God.

COBBLESTONE COUNTRY CRAFTS

Fun Autumn Browsing
Cobblestone Country Crafts

5346 West Ridge Road at Trimmer Road, Spencerport, NY
(1 1/2 miles West of Rt. 259, just past Doll Shop)
Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10-5; Sunday, 1-5

716-352-9600

The Medical Arts Pharmacy
Opposite Genesee Hospital
215 Alexander St.

Call or have your doctor Call
454-1474 for FREE County-wide
prescription & drug delivery.

\$5.00 off Any New or
Refilled Prescription with
this ad. EXP. 12 31 93

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a wish fulfilled is a tree of life."

Proverbs 13, 12