

# COLUMNS COMMENTARY

## We are saved by the grace of God

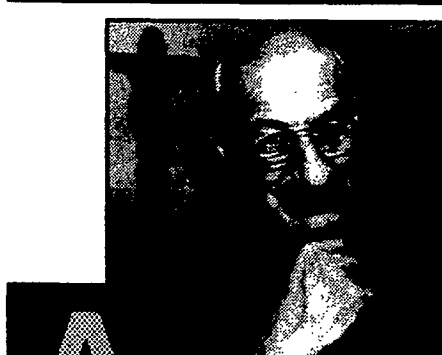
By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

**Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 3:14-21; (R1) 2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23; (R2) Ephesians 2:4-10.**

Once Pope John XXIII was giving an audience to a woman religious who was serving as the supervisor of Rome's Holy Spirit Hospital. She introduced herself to the pope by saying, "I'm Sister Fidelia, the superior of the Holy Spirit." Pope John answered, "Oh, you're lucky. I'm only the vicar of Christ."

Sometimes don't we try to be superiors of the Holy Spirit — rather than His instruments? Sometimes don't we try to control or manipulate God rather than let Him control us? Sometimes, don't we think that every time we perform a good deed, we make God our debtor and oblige Him to hand over so many graces?

We are, by nature, people who want to save ourselves, by ourselves. We want what we want on our terms, rather than God's. Yet our lives are more fragile than we admit. We are utterly dependent upon God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Fortunately, God's love is such that God saves us, not because of who we



**A** WORD FOR SUNDAY

are, but despite who we are. We are saved by God's grace.

As the bronze serpent was lifted up in the wilderness to save the Hebrews, so Christ was lifted up on the cross to be our salvation. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.

You and I enjoy thinking of ourselves as "self-made" women and men. "Mommie, I'd rather do it myself," the little child says. Do-it-yourself hardware stores, automotive-parts stores,

picture-framing shops, etc., are all the rage today.

Jesus told the story about a man who had full barns, a fat bank account, a thriving business and so who said, "Man, you have it made! Take it easy!"

That very night, the man died. We might call him wise and self-made; Jesus called him a "fool" (Lk. 12).

There are two things about ourselves we hate to admit: first, we are much more dependent than we like to admit. None of us is able to establish ourselves on our own. There is no such person as the "self-made" man or woman; and secondly, life is much more precarious, uncertain and risky than we like to admit. Just when we get everything nailed down, fixed, secure, it can be ripped off in a moment. Remember Hurricane Andrew in Florida; the Midwest floods last summer; and the Los Angeles earthquake in January.

Like the Hebrews, we too often forget that our lives are gifts of a loving God. Our salvation is His doing, not ours. We can't be good by our own efforts. We are not, and can never be, "on our own," "self-made." The good news is that God does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. "God so loved the world that He gave

his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life ... God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it through him."

Not to condemn. Although our pride, our silly presumption about ourselves deserves condemnation, we receive not condemnation, but salvation. Our vaunted achievements are but pitiful castles in the sand. Into our darkness, He brings us light, shows us the way to eternal life.

Often we go to Sunday Mass the same way we conduct our business — to achieve, to set ourselves up, to make something of ourselves. No. We go to give thanks to God because, even though we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us. We go to Mass to praise God who gave us His Son, lifted him up high on a cross so that all could see His light, not to condemn but to save. We go to Mass to glorify God that the cross — the symbol of condemnation and humiliation — is transformed by God's grace into a sign of salvation and exaltation.

The sign for the worst the world could do to God becomes a sign of the best God can do for the world. God so loved the world.

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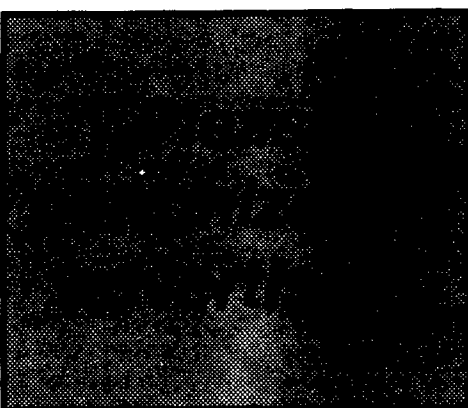
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