

We ascend by descending to serve

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 10:35-45; (R1) Isaiah 53:10-11; (R2) Hebrews 4:14-16.

An MG Midget pulled alongside a Rolls-Royce at a traffic light.

"Do you have a car phone?" the driver of the Midget asked the one in the Rolls.

"Of course I do," replied the haughty driver of the high-priced car.

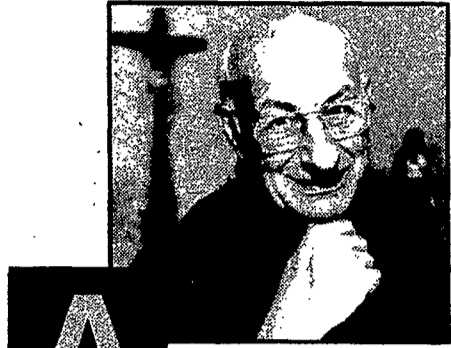
"Well, do you have a fax machine?" asked the Midget driver.

The driver in the Rolls sighed, "I have that too."

"Then do you have a double bed in the back?"

Ashen-faced, the Rolls driver sped off. That afternoon, he had a double bed installed in his car. A week later, the Rolls driver passed the same MG Midget. Parked on the side of the road, the small car's back windows were fogged up and steam was pouring out. The driver of the Rolls got out and banged on the MG's back window until the driver stuck his head out.

"I want you to know that I had a double bed installed," bragged the Rolls driver. Unimpressed, the MG



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

driver asked, "You got me out of the shower to tell me that?"

A ridiculous story to expose a ridiculous emotion. There is a drive within the heart of every one of us to have the biggest and the best: to be No. 1.

Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, made a request of Him, in private, away from the other disciples.

"Teacher," they asked, "we want you to grant our request ... See to it that we sit at your right and your left when

you come into glory." James and John were part of the inner circle with Peter; they felt they should have the top positions when Jesus established His kingdom.

The drive to be number one is one of the most common instincts of humanity. The month of July was named after Julius Caesar. Not to be outdone, the Emperor Augustus called August after himself. Since that month had only 30 days at the time, he borrowed a day from February and added it to August, making sure that his month would not be inferior to Julius Caesar's. Augustus was a spiritual ancestor of James and John.

The other 10 disciples got wind of James' and John's request. As you might imagine, they were upset with these brothers, angry at their sneaking off and cornering Jesus. They themselves longed for the top positions in the coming kingdom. They too dreamed of power and prestige. So they argued among themselves. Ambition so often leads to quarreling.

At this point Jesus called them together. He gave them the law of reversed effort or — as some call it — the "backwards law." "The last shall be first," "whosoever would save his

soul shall lose it." Our salvation, according to the Lord, is usually found in the opposite direction of which we seek. In God's kingdom we ascend by descending, we get going to the rear, we rise through serving. Greatness consists not in reducing others to one's service, not in being able to lord it over others, not in what we can get from others, but in how we can serve others.

That's common sense, isn't it? Doesn't a car dealer try to get customers by advertising, "Not only are our cars the best, but so is our service." Who rises to the top jobs in a firm? The clock-watcher or the one who puts in extra hours? The following appeared in a supervisor's magazine: "Want to move up as a manager? Learn to be a first-class subordinate."

Only when we are filled with the desire to put more into life than we take out — that is, to serve others — will life for ourselves and for others be happy and prosperous. Jesus said that His kingdom's law is service: to serve is to reign.

That is exactly what He did. "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve — to give His life in ransom for the many." He asks us to do the same; and that is following Him.

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This is Andrea Record.

Her stories help couples cope.

Andrea Record says engaged couples appear "more financially sophisticated and cautious about a long-term commitment" than when she and her husband, Mickey, attended Pre-Cana 16 years ago. "They're older, too, and more than half are inter-faith couples."

Still, Andrea and Mickey and seven other volunteer couples who comprise the Pre-Cana team from St. Dominic's Church, Shortsville, believe the personal stories they tell about finances, communications, sexuality, and spirituality will help prepare newlyweds for the real-life situations they'll soon face.



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