

COLUMNS
COMMENTARY

Choose between ways of world, God

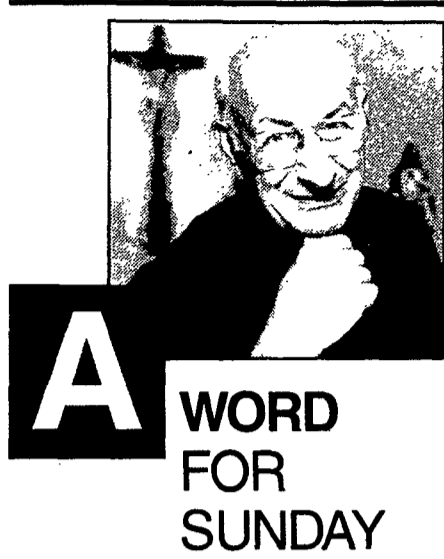
Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 6:17, 20-26; (R1) Jeremiah 17:5-8; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20.

Jesus has often been called a revolutionary; and the connotation has been negative.

There are two kinds of revolutions: the bloody one, which overturns society and is sparked by the incendiary soapbox radical against the Establishment, like Robespierre, Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin and Stalin; then there is the bloodless revolution, a changing of society by sowing ideas that germinate and gradually change people, turn a society around. Jesus was the latter kind of revolutionary: the sower who sows the seeds of truth.

Sunday's Gospel speaks of the Beatitudes, a series of bombshells. We have heard them so often that we have forgotten how revolutionary they are. They are like flashes of lightning, followed by the thunder of surprise. Literally, they take the world's accepted standards and turn them upside down. Those whom the world calls happy, Jesus calls wretched; those whom Jesus calls happy, the world calls wretched.



WORD FOR SUNDAY

Most of us are familiar with the eight beatitudes of Matthew's Gospel. Luke has only four. Matthew was writing for Jews, so he has Jesus giving the beatitudes on a mountain, for he presented Jesus to the Jews as a new Moses, giving a new law.

Luke was writing for the Gentiles, so he avoids all references to matters Jewish and has Jesus speaking from a plain.

Matthew has Jesus speaking only to His disciples. Luke, who wanted to

teach that Jesus came to save everybody, has Him speaking to everyone.

Imagine anyone saying, "Woe to you rich, for your consolation is now." What Jesus was saying is this: If you set your heart and bend all your energies on just what the world values, you'll get what you seek, you'll go places. But that is all you'll get — your consolation is now, not hereafter. In other words, you've had it! On the contrary, Jesus says: If you set your heart and bend all your energies on what He values, you'll run into all kinds of trouble. By the world's standards, you'll be unhappy, but your reward is still to come. God doesn't have to give His paychecks on Friday night.

Fundamentally, the beatitudes tell us that we are confronted with an eternal choice — one that begins at birth and ends at death. The choice between the world's way and Jesus' way. The world's way is the easy way: the broad, primrose path to destruction. Immediate pleasures, profits, power, and satisfaction.

I have a file filled with the names of rock stars and their early deaths. Two in particular come to mind: Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Both died at the age of 27 — Mr. Hendrix from an overdose of sleeping pills, and Ms. Joplin

from an overdose of heroin. Janis Joplin's last song was "Get It While You Can:"

*We may not be here tomorrow,
And if anybody should come along,
He gonna kill you with love and affection,
I say, get it while you can, yeh,
get it while you can.*

How ironic! How sad! For one grape to destroy the vine; for one minute's mirth to forfeit eternity.

Jesus' way is the way of the cross, but it leads to resurrection and happiness. His way may get one into hot water, but, as G.K. Chesterton said, "I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean."

The world thinks only of the here and now. Jesus would have us think of the there and hereafter.

Remember Aesop's fable telling of the ant and the grasshopper. The ant worked all summer by storing up for winter. The grasshopper sang all summer, not thinking of winter. When winter came, the ant was well fed, but the grasshopper starved to death. Jesus said the same thing: "Work now while you have the light for the night comes when no man can work."

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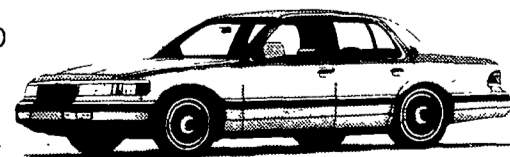
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