

Time is right for encyclical on justice

EDITORS' NOTE: The following column was written before Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life") was released publicly.

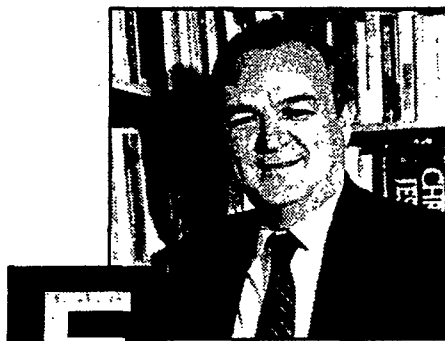
By **Richard P. McBrien**
Syndicated columnist

Perhaps by the time this column appears Pope John Paul II's new encyclical on sexual morality will have appeared. If so the media should be abuzz about it. There will be glowing quotes from some in praise of the Holy Father's countercultural trumpet call to fidelity to God's law, and there will undoubtedly be quotes from others — all the way from guarded to angry — about the pope's "intransigence" or his being "out of step" with the modern world.

The advance word all around is that the encyclical will take a tough, uncompromising moral line on issues such as abortion, contraception and homosexuality.

The document may even be couched in the same "definitive" language as last year's papal letter to the bishops on women's ordination. What makes the use of that word "definitive" so significant — and so troublesome — is that it has ordinarily been understood by theologians as the equivalent of "infallible."

There could be ugly, recriminatory exchanges between Catholics at the two extremes: the one taunting the encyclical's critics to leave the church; the other hurling intemperate epithets about the Holy Father, the Vatican, the all-male hierarchy — you name it.



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Only the tabloid media could take genuine delight in so unhappy a spectacle.

But as I write these lines, the encyclical has not yet been released, so we are reduced to speculation. The primary intent of this week's column, however, is not to speculate about an encyclical that is clearly about to happen, but rather to ruminate about an encyclical that hasn't as yet even been conceived.

I should like to propose to the Holy Father and his closest advisers that, now that their two encyclicals on sexual morality have been completed (*Veritatis Splendor* being the first of the two), they should turn their attention to another topic of at least equal moral and evangelical impor-

tance — namely, justice.

Unlike chastity, justice is one of the "cardinal" virtues, literally a virtue on which many other subordinate virtues are "hinged" (Latin, *cardo*). It is the cardinal virtue that regulates human relationships in accordance with rights and duties.

In Sacred Scripture, justice's virtue is linked with the idea of righteousness and is intimately connected with the Covenant between God and Israel, first, and then between God and the whole human community in Jesus Christ.

Christian righteousness requires of Christians that we live in fidelity to the New Covenant, specifically in a way that is consistent with Christ's death and resurrection and with the new life in the Holy Spirit that flows from Christ's saving work on our behalf.

The cardinal virtue of justice regulates the manner in which we seek to live in fidelity to the New Covenant, as it applies to our relationships with others: with other individuals, with communities and within communities, including the church, with the state, and with society at large.

An encyclical on justice, therefore, would be about rights and duties. It would emphasize those human rights that are most directly under assault today: the right, for example, to respect for one's person regardless of race or gender or sexual orientation; the right to be informed truthfully about matters of concern; the right to gainful employment and decent working conditions; the right of as-

sembly and of association; the right of emigration and immigration; the right to life across the whole spectrum of human development, from the unborn to the elderly.

The encyclical would also challenge the thinking and practice of those, including Catholics of wealth and power, who fail in their duties in justice, that is, who oppose and thwart the rights of others, especially the right of workers to unionize (even in Catholic hospitals and Catholic schools) the rights of immigrants (one thinks of California's Proposition 187, the right to protection from discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation, the right to basic health care, employment shelter befitting a human being, and on and on.

But this encyclical would have no real teeth — nor moral credibility — if it did not also apply its teaching on justice to the church itself, taking its lead from the 1971 World Synod of Bishops' extraordinarily prophetic document, "Justice in the World," and from the lengthy, but courageously honest, 1986 pastoral letter of the U.S. Catholic bishops on the U.S. economy.

As of today, these are the only two official pronouncements of the Catholic Church that touch upon the question of justice inside the church. In more than 100 years of Catholic social teachings, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, that isn't very much.

Who is better able to correct that glaring deficiency than Pope John Paul II himself?

After the thorns came the throne

By **Father Albert Shamon**
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 22:14-23:56; (R1) Isaiah 50:4-7; (R2) Philippians 2:6-11.

Passion or Palm Sunday is the final Sunday of the Lenten season. The Palms mean two things.

First, they commemorate a historical event: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem when people met Him with palm branches (Jn. 12:12-13).

In our Lord's time, the palm tree was always considered a "kingly" tree, because of its lofty height and majestic appearance: its trunk is slender and graceful and rises high in the air and its top is crowned with green branches. Thus the palm tree became the symbol of royalty and victory.

Roman soldiers carried palm branches in their victory parades in Rome. In public games, the winners of these games received palm branches as a sign of their victories. When Jesus was greeted by people as He entered Jerusalem, it was like a ticker-tape parade — a sign of triumph and joy, gen-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

erally given to victorious kings and armies. Jesus was given this accolade because just a short while before He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

The second meaning of palm branches is a sign of victory. Palm Sunday recalls Jesus' victory over sin and death — a victory won only through His sufferings and death.

Therefore on Palm Sunday the Gospel is the narrative of the Jesus' Passion and death. During this week, the church and the whole Catholic community will celebrate the paschal mystery: the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. That is why we take the palms home and entwine them in our crucifixes. They remind us that through our baptism, penance, and Eucharist, we can share in Jesus' victory through His cross.

That victory will be ours if, like Jesus, we learn to accept the crosses of our daily lives, as He did His — to accept them in atonement for our sins, for the poor souls in purgatory, and the conversion of sinners. The palms say "Per crucem ad lucem, Per aspera ad astra" ("through the cross to the light; through bitter paths to the stars.") No pain, no palm; no cross, no crown. We need never fear the Good Fridays of life, for after the thorns, the throne; after the gall, the glory.

Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great, was a pagan. But his wife was the great St. Helen. Constantius knew many Christians held

important jobs in government and in court so he ordered all Christians to "give up Christ or give up your jobs." The majority gave up their positions rather than give up Christ. But a few cowards betrayed Christ for their jobs.

Constantius turned around and gave their jobs to those who had been faithful to Christ and dismissed those who had given up Christ for their jobs, saying: "If you will not be true to Christ, you will not be true to me."

We have the same choice today. Will we be true to Christ this week? Will we make this week a "holy" week — this Thursday holy, this Friday good, and this Saturday holy? Or will we prefer our convenience, our comfort, our shopping, our work, to this week's expressive ceremonies that prepare us and lead us to Easter's triumph?

Our faithfulness to Christ this week will be a barometer of our faithfulness to Him at other times during the year. Fidelity to Christ was rewarded by Constantius; yet a greater One than Constantius promised, "If you confess me before men, I shall confess you before my Father in heaven."

Schauman-Sulewski



introduces

A Video

Presentation Of A
Life Remembered

Together with Tribute Programs, Schauman-Sulewski offers a beautiful and tasteful keepsake video tape of your loved ones.

Schauman-Sulewski

Funeral Home, Inc.

342-3400 • 2100 St. Paul Street

Holland America Line

ALASKA CRUISE

July 11 - 18, 1995

Special discounts

end soon!

call **Bernard Travel**

381-3600

Let It Grow



- Let us care for your loved one's cemetery site
- Order your fresh cut Easter flowers
- Free delivery to all local cemeteries, homes and offices
- We offer flower bouquets, potted blooming plants, interior/exterior maintenance, cemetery site maintenance
- Reasonable rates

Call Chris and Karolyn Shea • 458-0180

DiPonzio Funeral Home Inc.

Across from St. Theodore's Church

Dominic A. DiPonzio - Lic. Mgr.

Christopher B. DiPonzio - L. F. D.

Joseph D. DiPonzio - L. F. D.

219 Spencerport Rd. • Rochester
429-6700