

Lives are enriched by keeping Jesus close

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 21:1-19; (R1) Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; (R2) Revelation 5:11-14.

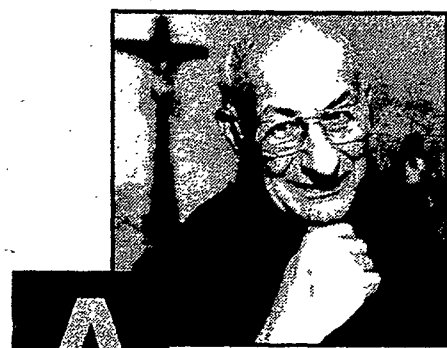
The first readings of the Sunday liturgy during the Easter season are taken from Acts, the Holy Spirit's Gospel.

On the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave Peter and the other apostles understanding and courage. After His coming, they understood the Scriptures, especially as it pertained to Jesus's passion, death and resurrection; and they received the courage of lions to proclaim the Gospel fearlessly.

Imagine how fearful it would be if you or I, untrained in law, had to defend ourselves before the judges of the Supreme Court. Well, unlettered fishermen faced a similar situation before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel.

Note the high priest's words: "We gave you strict orders not to teach about that name, or to make us responsible for that man's blood." Note, they used the expressions "that name" and "that man." They feared Jesus's name.

All hell fears Jesus's name. The devils know its power. So they lure people



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

to profane that name by using it in profanity and cursing. For when used in faith, that name makes even the dying live. In fact, the apostles were before the Sanhedrin precisely because they had cured a beggar lame from birth by the name of Jesus.

Then note the courage the Spirit had given the apostles. Boldly they answered the high priest, "Better for us to obey God than man!" And when they are scourged for their insolence, they are full of joy because they were judged worthy to suffer ill-treatment

for the name of Jesus.

The second readings for the Easter season come from the book of Revelation. This book is difficult, because it is apocalyptic literature.

Prophetic literature is reform literature: national prosperity leads to moral corruption, causing God to send a prophet to call the nation to reform or else!

Apocalyptic literature is crisis literature: it was written in times of persecution and called for resistance; hence it was coded writing.

Revelation was written by John during the persecution of Diocletian. He tells of a vision he had in which this Jesus for whom they are suffering is alive: the Lamb that was slain receives honor and glory and praise. So, persevere! As He lives though slain, so shall you all. After death, resurrection!

The Gospel describes the appearance of the risen Jesus to seven of His disciples at the Sea of Galilee, near Tabgha, two miles south of Capernaum. The apostles had fished all night and had caught nothing. Jesus appears at dawn and tells them to cast their net off to the starboard or right side, and they do. The catch is so great they could not haul in the net. John then recognizes it is Jesus. Pe-

ter, impetuous as always, plunges into the water. Jesus, compassionate as always, has breakfast ready for them. When He asks for some of the fish they had just caught, Peter goes aboard and with his enormous strength hauls in the net loaded with 153 fish. This incident is freighted with meaning.

First, when they fished all night without Jesus, they caught nothing. With Jesus near, they caught 153 fish. So if we live without Jesus, we too shall come up empty-handed in life's journey. With Him, our life will be enriched.

John counted the fish and came up with 153. Greek zoologists of the day knew of only 153 kinds of fish. Thus for John 153 symbolized the whole world. The net is the church; and the church is universal — it embraces all mankind.

After breakfast, Jesus conferred the primacy on Peter. Jesus had said, "I am the good Shepherd." He was going to leave them soon, so He appointed on this occasion another good shepherd, Peter, to feed his lambs and feed his sheep. Peter's proof of love was to shepherd God's people.

Likewise, we prove we love God when we too do what we are supposed to do.

Letter details confirmation's importance

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

My goddaughter, Colleen Sullivan, is getting confirmed in Brookfield, Conn., soon. I can't make the ceremony, so I wrote her the following letter:

Dear Colleen,
I am pleased that you have chosen to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Knowing you, I am sure that you are taking this step seriously. I'm sorry that I won't be able to be there for the ceremony, but you know that I will be with you in the Spirit.

Becoming a confirmed Christian means that you are making an adult decision to be a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. Allow me to share with you what that has meant in my own life.

They say that humans are the only animals that search for meaning in life. I have no idea whether that is true, since I haven't the slightest what goes on in the



FAITH AND WORK

minds of other animals — or some humans, for that matter. I do know, however, that the search for meaning has been important to me and that the older I get the

more important that search becomes.

Where did I discover the meaning of life? Well, I certainly didn't find it in material things. Ask your parents or any adults you respect and they will all back me up. Things are wonderful — a nice home, a beautiful painting, a good meal, etc., etc. They all, in their own way, reflect the glory of creation. But if we try to find meaning there, we are destined to be disappointed.

That is why most people search for meaning in the "spiritual" realm. We instinctively guess that the real meaning of life lies not in material things but in something else. We give that "something else" many names: holy, transcendent, divine, the other, God. What we mean is that reality that we can sense, feel, know but not touch, see or even describe very well.

Now, there are many wise people who have come along to help us understand the world of spirit. Zoroaster, the Buddha, Moses, Mohammed are but a few of the

better known. The one who ultimately made the most sense to me, however, is Jesus of Nazareth. The major difference that I saw between Jesus and the others is his basic message, and that is why I decided to follow him and hope that you do too.

As I understand it, Jesus taught us that the meaning of life lies in the nature of our relationships — our relationships with each other and our relationships with God. If we want to be happy, Jesus said, if we want to know the true meaning of life, it is very simple: love God and love each other.

How do we do that? The answer is easy and hard at the same time. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus said. And how did Jesus love us? "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."

The implications of this message will take you a lifetime to figure out. The Bible will help, as will the other followers of Jesus, whom we call "the church." But primarily it will be your search. May God bless you on it.

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