

Church's worst enemies come from within

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 13:31-35; (R1) Acts 14:21-27; (R2) Revelation 21:1-5.

The true Church of Christ has four marks: it's one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. We might add that the church has a fifth mark: persecution and suffering, for St. Paul says: "We must undergo many trials, if we are to enter into reign of God" (R1).

The first reading narrates the completion of Paul's first missionary journey to the Gentiles. The journey lasted four years, from A.D. 45 to A.D. 49; and it took Paul into what is now known as central Turkey.

His pattern for evangelization was always the same: he preached first to the Jews in their synagogues. A few would accept him; the majority, however, would generally reject him. Only then would Paul turn to the Gentiles, who would receive him with joy. This so angered the Jews that they plotted against Paul, even seeking to kill him. Paul had to often flee for his life. But opposition never stopped him. Instead, he would simply go to another city to preach the good news.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Fearlessly, Paul not only never gave up, but he even returned to the very cities where he had been attacked to install elders there and thus ensure that the church would endure in those places. Only after having done all back home, he reported to the church and told how the Lord had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

We can learn two things from Paul's missionary journey. First, Paul got opposition from where he least expected

it — namely, from God's own people, his people, the Jews. The church's worst enemies are those within it. In the early church the love of Christians for each other converted pagans. Today, many may say sarcastically, "See, how these Christians love one another. They won't even help one another. They backbite, criticize, belittle, not only one another, but even their hierarchy."

Secondly, Paul's journey teaches us that God loves everyone, that He wills the salvation of all. The Jews thought that way because God had chosen them as His people, they had a monopoly on salvation. But God had chosen them precisely that they might be a light of revelation to the Gentiles. When they were not, God rejected them.

Likewise, God has given us the faith that we too might be lights in the world — lights by our good example, our good words and works, our prayers and sacrifices. Seeing these, people will come to glorify God in heaven.

God wills that we make a new heaven and a new earth. How? By observing a new commandment (R3). The commandment is "Love one another." It is a new commandment, because the standard of love is new. To those

not of the faith, Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But to His followers, He gave a much higher standard: "Love one another as I have loved you."

And He loves all unconditionally. He loves us even when we are unlovable — His enemies and sinners. If only we could love like that, this certainly would create a new heaven and a new earth.

Suppose husbands and wives retaliated only with love, how wonderful would be the home. Were children to love their parents and parents their children, no matter what, what a wonderful world this would be. The world would become Catholic. Gandhi once said: "If you Christians were only more like your Christ, then the whole world would be Christian."

We need God's help to be able to love like that. He promises it to all who go to confession at least monthly and who receive holy Communion worthily at least once a week. Confession will arm us against our weaknesses, our wanting to give tit for tat; and holy Communion will pour love into our hearts — Christlike love.

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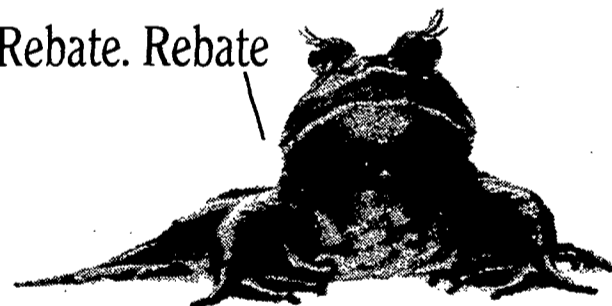
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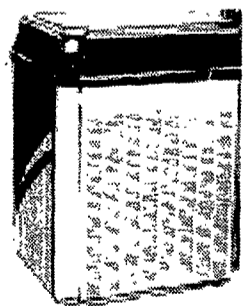


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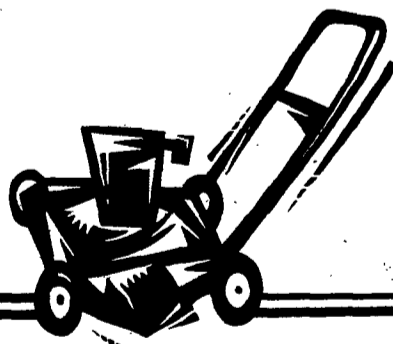
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