

A neighbor is God within our reach

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

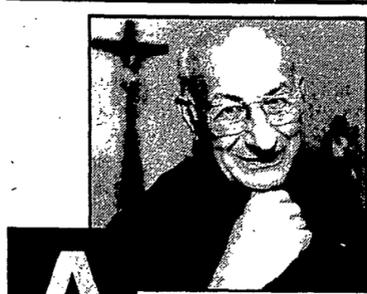
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 10:25-37; (R1) Deuteronomy 30:10-14; (R2) Colossians 1:15-20.

A three-minute film showed a smug woman, impeccably dressed, walking from her apartment to church. On the way she passed a Puerto Rican man. He grinned as if to greet her, but she hurried on, spurning him like a stranger's cur across her threshold.

Farther down the street she met a young couple in Hippie coiffure and couture. Our churchgoer grimaced in scorn. When she arrived at the church, the African-American janitor held the door open for her. His kind act did not elicit even the crumb of a thank-you because she felt that this was as it should be.

As she entered the church, the words on the bulletin board hit her: "If you did not find Him out there, don't look for Him in here."

A young lawyer once asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered the question not by giving a definition of the word "neighbor," but by describing neighborliness. Neighbor, Jesus said in effect, is not such-and-such a person because neighbor is everybody. A neighbor is one who is



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

neighborly.

Significantly, for Jesus, the neighborly man was the one who was not afraid to open up his pocketbook to help a man in need. "He took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper with this request: 'Look after him and if there is any further expense I will repay you on the way back.'"

So often we try to shuffle off collections for the poor and needy with myths. We rationalize, "They would not be in need, if they really wanted to

help themselves. God helps those who help themselves." And yet the "they" who need help are often unborn children, infants, and the aged: persons who are victims of society and as helpless as the grievously wounded man in the Gospel.

That the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho went alone was his fault, but that there were robbers on the road was not his fault. Regardless, it matters not how the need arises — from helplessness, stupidity or injustice — we must be neighborly regardless.

Jesus condemned the priest and the Levite — the churchgoers of His day — and canonized the Samaritan, the heretic, the schismatic, the man for whom the Jews was worse than the pagans. He is the hero, for he alone was neighborly, charitable. "If I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

How often in literature the outcast becomes the hero. Remember Rudyard Kipling's poem "Gunga Din." The old soldier tells of the regimental water boy, Gunga Din, who succored him on the field of battle. Gunga was killed as he gave water to the wounded soldier, but before he died, "I hope you liked your drink," sez Gunga Din. The soldier confessed, "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

Remember "The Unsinkable Molly Brown? She was unsinkable, because she really loved everybody. During the sinking of the Titanic, she gave her own wrap to keep others warm. In Brete Hart's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," the so-called libertines — the "Duchess" and "Mother" Shipton — upstage their so-called "betters." Mother Shipton dies from starvation because she gave her rations so that a young girl might live. Thus Jesus said: "... tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you" (the religious leaders of His day).

Some live religion; some others just practice it. Some separate religion from life, while for others their religion is their life. Since the Son of God became man and since what we do to the least He considers as done to Himself, God's commands are no longer mysterious and remote (R1). They are as near as our neighbor. Love of God without love of neighbor is empty pietism. Love of neighbor without love of God is selfish humanitarianism. But love of God and love of neighbor is Christian realism.

So, never you mind who your neighbor is; rather for love of God, just be neighborly. That was all Jesus was telling the lawyer. Our neighbor is God within our reach.

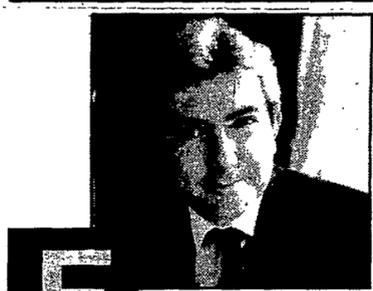
Coaching can have certain spirituality to it

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Having coached tee ball for youths ages 5 to 7 for three full seasons, I feel somewhat qualified to name the starting lineup for the "Coaches of Little Children" team.

Leading off is patience. A coach must be willing to repeat the simplest points over and over again: "Pick up the ball, throw it to first." One day, one of them does it. Then another. And another.

Batting second is discipline. Many a coach has been lost for the season when he or she lets kids lobby for which position they want to play or when they want to bat. If children are allowed to goof off or argue with the umpire or razz members of the oppos-



FAITH AND WORK

ing team, it is always the coach's fault.

In the third slot is enthusiasm. A coach must be able to rally the troops when they are down 23-0 or lead a genuine round of applause for a "good swing" when a team member strikes out for the fifth consecutive time.

Coaching's cleanup spot is teaching. Kids — at least the ones around this age — really don't care much about winning. What they want most from their coach is to learn how to play the game.

Batting fifth is example. A coach must not only know how to demonstrate hitting, running or fielding, but also how to win or lose graciously. (Sometimes this latter lesson is more difficult for parents to learn than kids.)

In the sixth position is concentration. A good coach must be able to focus on the specific skill being taught or the specific needs of each particular child,

rather than on the score or on some other distraction.

Seventh is humor. No coach can succeed without good-naturedly laughing at some of the silly mistakes that kids make when they are learning something new. (My personal favorite is when they start running the wrong way around the bases.)

Batting eighth is wisdom. A coach needs to know when to tell a player "you could have had it" and another "nice try."

Last, but certainly not least, is love. A coach who truly loves his or her players will succeed — even if the eight batters above strike out occasionally. For that matter, if children do not come out of the season in love with the sport, it is the coach who has failed — not them.

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