

Thoughts to consider this Labor Day

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

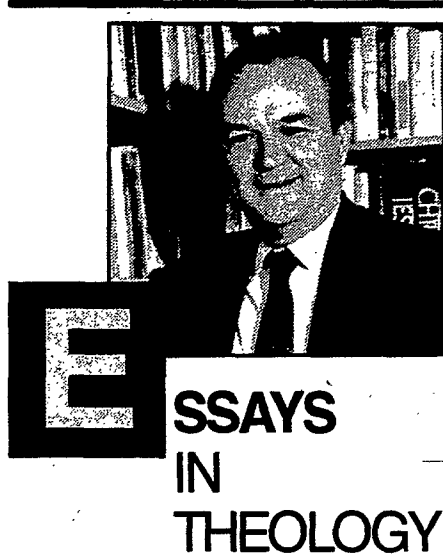
If there were a Book of Virtues compiled by a liberal, it would probably carry no reference to obedience. And when a prominent conservative such as William Bennett, former education secretary, puts together such a book, one isn't terribly surprised to find no chapter on justice, nor even a single mention of the virtue in the index.

If liberals aren't particularly strong on obedience, neither are conservatives especially strong on justice.

To be sure, liberals might want to defend themselves by pointing out that obedience can have a different meaning from the one normally placed on it by conservatives. In an important essay on the subject, the late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner defined obedience in relation to the Kingdom of God. He reminded us that the virtue of obedience can coexist with a posture of resistance to authority, for the Kingdom's sake.

In their turn, conservatives would insist on their own equal commitment to justice but for them justice can also have a different meaning from the one normally placed on it by liberals. Thus, abortion, and not just federal programs to assist the poor, is a justice issue.

But I'm not interested here in taking sides in this dispute. Both justice and obedience are virtues, and both should be practiced as faithfully as one can.



erns relationships between individuals, distributive justice that governs relationships between governments and their citizens, and social justice that governs all social, political, and economic relationships within society at large.

Justice also has two faces: one external and the other internal. Societies, institutions, and communities that are bound by justice are bound not only to be just toward those beyond their own perimeters but also to practice justice within.

The federal government, for example, cannot expect to enforce laws against discrimination in hiring in the business world while practicing discrimination in its own hiring practices.

The same is true — especially true — of the church. Unlike any other society, organization, or group, the church professes itself to be the very Body of Christ on earth, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the People of God.

Its practice of justice, both externally and internally, is held to the highest standard of all, namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is never acceptable for the church to say something like, "Well, we're no worse than other comparable organizations in the community. Our pay scale is more or less on par with theirs, and we're no different in our policy of firing employees than any well-run business. Almost all business employees are at-will rather than contractual, which means they can be fired

for any reason, without just cause. So can our employees.

"Furthermore," the line continues, "unions bring more problems than solutions. They introduce an adversarial atmosphere in the ecclesiastical workplace quite contrary to the whole spirit one should have in serving the church."

"When it's clear that a church employee isn't meeting the particular standards — personal, professional, or theological — of the pastor or other priest in charge, the priest should be free to take action, without answering to anyone else except his bishop."

But the bishops themselves have challenged this line of thinking, particularly in their 1986 pastoral letter on the U.S. economy and Catholic social teaching. In their dealings with their own employees, the bishops declared the church must not only be as good as comparable organizations in the community; it must be "exemplary."

And on the matter of unionization, not only is it a matter of a right for church employees to form a union, but also the bishop cannot refuse to bargain in good faith with whatever agent the employees select.

When these and other basic principles are breached in the church, there is a direct violation of the cardinal virtue of justice and the church's credibility as the Body of Christ is effectively diminished.

These are thoughts worth pondering this Labor Day — and as often as possible during the rest of the year.

Sin involves preferring our will to God's

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

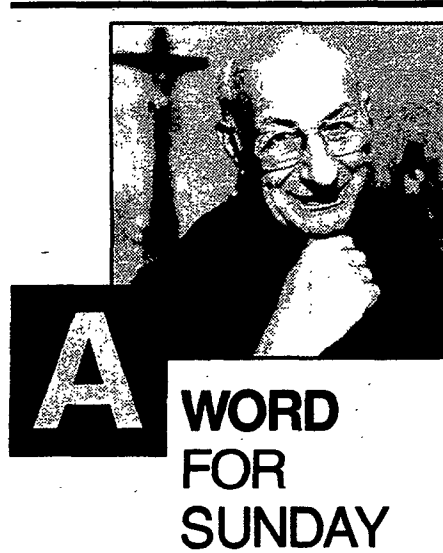
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 14:1, 7-14; (R1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; (R2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24.

The first reading this Sunday is from the Book of Sirach (pronounced SIGH-rak). Like the Book of Proverbs, Sirach is a collection of sayings, the fruit of his observations on life. He wrote the book around 180 B.C. to defend Judaism's religious and cultural heritage against Hellenism's challenge by demonstrating that true wisdom resides in Israel.

One of Sirach's wise sayings was, "My son, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts" (R1).

How true that is today. Nobody likes snobs or the "me-first" people, like those trying to grab the best seats at the banquet Jesus attended in the Pharisee's house. (R3).

Down-to-earth people generally joke about those who think they are God almighty: "Percival is arguing about the cost of his cemetery plot."



Again he answered, "Humility."

"And the third?"

"Humility."

And this is so, because humility is truth. Humility is not servility, groveling in the dust; as Modred pictured it in his cynical aria on the seven deadly virtues:

*I find humility means to be hurt;
It's not the earth the meek inherit,
it's the dirt.*

Nor is humility timidity, serving as a doormat for people to walk all over. Humility is not a horizontal virtue: comparing yourself to your neighbor. Rather, it is a vertical virtue that looks at self in relation to God. It is an I-Thou relationship. The humble man realizes who God is and who he himself is. He sees God as all that is and himself as all that is not — dust and ashes.

Humility comes from the Latin word *humus*, meaning ground. Humble people have their feet on the ground. They are not dreamers, unrealists. They know exactly who they are in reference to God.

But that humility in truth is only half

the truth. The other half is to admit it, to live according to the truth. Mary's humility was revealed not in knowing that she was the Lord's handmaid, but in acting accordingly: "Be it done to me according to thy word."

Jesus' humility was revealed not in emptying himself to take the form of a servant (the Incarnation was an act of love, not humility), but in becoming obedient, even to death on the cross.

As for us, we are dust and ashes. We can do nothing by ourselves. Whatever we have, we have received from God. That's the truth. But knowing that doesn't make us humble. We are humble if we act on these truths.

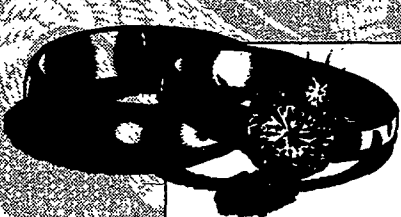
To neglect prayer and the sacraments is pride. It is saying, "I am my own god." To be insensitive to others, to hurt them, or to lord it over them is pride, denying who we really are.

Every sin is a species of pride: preferring my will to God's will.

Truly humble people know that, without God, they can do nothing; and whenever they do perform something, they always refer the glory to God as Mary did in her Magnificat.

Daily Readings

- Friday, Sept. 1:
1 Thes 4:1-8; Mt 25:1-13
- Saturday, Sept. 2:
1 Thes 4:9-11; Mt 25:14-30
- Monday, Sept. 4:
1 Thes 4:13-18; Lk 4:16-30
- Tuesday, Sept. 5:
Thes 5:1-6, 9-11; Lk 4:31-37
- Wednesday, Sept. 6:
Col 1:1-8; Lk 4:38-44
- Thursday, Sept. 7:
Col 1:9-14; Lk 5:1-11
- Friday, Sept. 8:
Mi 5:1-4 or Romans 8:28-30;
Mt 1:1-16, 18-23 or 1:18-23
- Saturday, Sept. 9:
Col 1:21-23; Lk 6:1-5



FALL MARRIAGE

A Catholic Courier Special Supplement

Publication Date: Thursday, September 21st ■ Advertising Deadline: Sept. 7th

The Catholic churches in the Rochester diocese host more than 3,000 marriages each year. This fall you can reach the couples to be married — and their families and friends who will be involved in many aspects of the wedding — through this supplement in the Catholic Courier.

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1150 Buffalo Road n Rochester, NY 14624
Phone: 716-328-4340 n Fax: 716-328-8640