

COLUMNISTS

Don't leave lifelong journey to chance

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 17:1-9. (R1) Genesis 12:1-4. (R2) 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

Some say life begins at 40. For Abraham life began at 75, when God called him.

In salvation history God always takes the initiative. He calls us; we don't call him. That is exactly what Paul tells us in the second reading: "God has saved us and has called us, not because of any merit of ours but according to His own design." That is the message that infant baptism is meant to convey; namely, that God chooses us, not we him.

How good that ought to make us feel! We are hand-picked. Just as God's chosen people, Israel, were a mere handful when you think of the whole ancient world, so we are a people, chosen from all the billion other peoples in the world. That is what the characters of baptism and confirmation tell us. We are a marked-off people to bring the light of truth and love to the rest of the world.

Then there was the Transfiguration. St. Luke said, "He went up the mountain to pray and while he prayed, he was transfigured." Prayer should change us too. If it doesn't, we aren't praying right. Prayer always so changed Jesus that one day the Apostles said, "Lord, teach us to pray."



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Once I was visiting a home of some fallen-away Catholics. I suggested they come back to the church. The man of the house answered, "I'm doing all right without the church, Father. I've got a good job, a good home, a good wife and kids. I really don't need the church."

I left thinking, how do you talk to people like that, what do you say? Then the thought came to me: Sure, they seem to be getting along in this world, but what about the next world — are they making a go of it there? Can they, without the church?

Then it began to dawn on me that many people don't even think about the next world. All many think about is this world: their jobs, promotions, education, degrees — about getting ahead and along in this world only.

One of the great lessons of the Transfiguration is to remind us of the other world — the real world! Moses and Elijah appeared, alive and quite well. Moses had been dead 1,250 years and Elijah 850 years. But there they were on the mount with Jesus, with glorified bodies. And Jesus who had a body like ours let Peter, James and John see the destiny of the bodies of the good: They would shine like the sun and bask in such glory that Peter didn't want to come down the mount.

When people say, "I'm getting along; I don't need the church," I say, "What about the next world?"

And if they say, "I'll take potluck. I really don't worry about it," I say, "How foolish! You never do anything in this life like that. If you are going on a vacation, you make plans, don't you? You don't just trust to luck."

Yet regarding the greatest journey in the world — the journey to eternity, to an eternal heaven or hell — is it not the height of folly to leave it to chance?

Am I making a good Lent? What am I doing about the next life? Am I listening to the church? Am I using her helps? We need supernatural helps to live a supernatural life. Can we really and truly get along without the church? If we can, then Jesus wasted his time building a church. The voice from heaven said,

"Listen to him," to his church, for only then can we make a go of it in the next world.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming, N.Y.

Daily Readings

Monday, Mar. 4

Daniel 9:4-10; Luke 6:36-38

Tuesday, Mar. 5

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20;
Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday, Mar. 6

Jeremiah 18:18-20;
Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday, Mar. 7

Jeremiah 17:5-10;
Luke 16:19-31

Friday, Mar. 8

Gn 37:34, 12-12, 17-28;
Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday, Mar. 9

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20;
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

'Churchaholics' no saintlier than 'pew potatoes'

"Pew Potatoes' lose 61 to parish ministries." So read the headline in my parish newspaper. The article went on to explain that "the 'Pew Potatoes' lost 61 parishioners who got out of their pews, stood up and were counted in with the more than 500 parishioners who already give of their time and talent in the many ministries that make (our parish) the outstanding parish it is."

Let me say first that I do know that this was meant to be humorous, and it is. The idea of equating those who sit at church and never participate in parish life with "couch potatoes" who sit at home and watch television all the time is cute.

Second, let me confess that I have also been guilty of calling other people names in jest when I am trying to make



faith & work

BY GREGORY F. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

a point. For example, I often refer to those who spend an inordinate amount of time in church-related activities as "churchaholics."

I do, however, think that there is an underlying problem with chastising anyone who does not volunteer for church

ministries, mainly because there is no way of knowing why they choose to remain uninvolved.

"I was out of the church completely for several years," says my neighbor Dan, who is one of the so-called "pew potatoes."

"I came back to the church because of my children," he says. "I work for the railroad, which means I work long and irregular hours. I feel that when I am home, I should be with my family, not involved in some activity at church."

"Besides," Dan points out with a certain irony, "if the railroads don't run, the hosts for Communion will never get delivered."

There are many people who belong to a parish who are in circumstances like Dan's. They may be putting in extra hours at work, caring for a sick relative,

or may be involved in some other non-church community activity. They might be burnt out from years of volunteering and taking a year or two "sabbatical." Or they might just be shy, or introverted, or disgusted with the pastor or some other parish staff member or layperson.

None of these reasons mean that these people are any less holy or less worthy parishioners, any more than it is true that someone who puts in long hours at church is necessarily a saint.

One of the many "ministries" that people in my parish could sign up for is (I swear) Adult Volleyball. Perhaps we can arrange a game between the "pew potatoes" and the "churchaholics," winner take all.

Pierce is co-publisher of ACTA Publications, Chicago.

★ ★ COMING ATTRACTIONS ★ ★

PARENTING & FAMILY LIFE

Publication Date: March 21
Adv. Deadline: March 7

Expanding on its monthly feature, the Courier will offer an in-depth look at raising Catholic children in the 1990 — including church teaching on such topics as discipline, faith development and education.



LENTEN DINING

Published Feb. 14-April 7
Adv. Deadlines: 10 days prior

Preparing meatless meals can exhaust anyone's culinary repertoire after a couple of weeks. Catholic Courier advertisers come to the cooks' rescue, offering great discounts on tasty treats from fish fries to veggie pizza.



SPRING SPORTS & RECREATION

Publication Date: April 4
Adv. Deadline: March 21

New to the Courier lineup of supplements, this section will serve as a "pre-game rally" for spring sports programs. In addition to previewing teams and schedules, it will highlight the religious aspect of athletics.



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