

## COLUMNISTS

## Fight holiday heartaches with prayer

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) John 1:6-8, 19-28. (R1) Isaiah 61: 1-2, 10-11. (R2) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

Sunday's Gospel has two parts: One describes what John the Evangelist has to say about John the Baptist; and the other tells us what the Baptist says about himself.

John the Evangelist kind of puts down the Baptist, because some people thought, even in John's day, that the Baptist was greater than Jesus. After all, the Baptist came out of the desert, clad in a beautiful seamless garment made by his mother Mary. He looked like an ordinary man, working as a carpenter, and coming from the worst possible place, Nazareth, and coming to John to be baptized.

So some people had the wrong notions. Hence John states emphatically that the Baptist "was not the light, but came to testify to the light." The Baptist in his humility also said as much, "I am not the Messiah.... I am 'the voice of one crying out in the desert, Make straight the way of the Lord.'" In a word "I'm a herald no more — a witness!" And that too is precisely our role in the world today: to be heralds, making straight the path to the Lord for others.

St. Paul in the second reading points out one way that we can do this: by being



a word  
for  
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

joyful always. "Rejoice always," he said. "Always" — in sickness or in health, in riches or in poverty. "Always!"

Tiberius Caesar ruled Rome in A.D. 30. He had power, pomp, and possessions. But the historian Pliny wrote that "He is the gloomiest of mankind." But Jesus sitting in the shadow of his cross, at the Last Supper "gave thanks"; then after it, he sang a hymn. Are we transmitters of Caesar's gloom or of Jesus' joy?

St. Francis de Sales used to say, "A sad saint is a sorry saint." Artists picture saints with halos around their heads, because saints radiate an aura of love, peace and joy. Saints are rare, but joyful Christians are rarer.

Pascal said that there are three kinds of people in the world. First, those who neither seek God nor find him. They are unreasonable and unhappy. Secondly, those who seek God and have not yet found him. They are reasonable and unhappy. Lastly, those who seek God and

have found him. These are reasonable and happy.

The Exedrin Headache Resource Center took a poll to find out what causes more holiday headaches. They listed these 10 joy robbers during the holiday season.

1. Fighting crowds and traffic
2. Not getting enough sleep
3. Not having enough time to get everything done
4. Spending too much money
5. Eating or drinking too much
6. Skipping meals because of busy schedules
7. Getting together with friends and family
8. Cooking and cleaning
9. Long plane or train or car trips
10. Being apart from friends and family during the holidays.

If your heart is aching this Advent season for any reason — the loss of love in a marriage, the memory of someone you love who is now with God, concern about a teenage child, concerns about your health — don't let despair defeat you. Joy is our obligation, our responsibility.

The way to get it; the way to conquer any tendency to melancholy is what St. Paul recommends, namely "Never cease praying." For prayer is the source of joy. St. Francis de Sales in listing the remedies for sadness puts prayer at the top of the list. For prayer puts one in contact with God and God is joy.

Oh, for the innocence of children! Here is a couple of letters of children to Santa Claus.

"Dear Santa: Last year you didn't leave me anything good. The year before last year, you didn't leave me anything good. This year is your last chance. Alfred."

"Dear Santa: In my house here are three boys. Richard is 2. Jeffrey is 4. Norman is 7. Richard is good sometimes. Jeffrey is good sometimes. Norman is good all the time. Signed Norman."

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

## Daily Readings

**Monday, December 16**

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17;

Matthew 21:23-27

**Tuesday, December 17**

Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Matthew 1:1-17

**Wednesday, December 18**

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Matthew 1:18-24

**Thursday, December 19**

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25; Luke 1:5-25

**Friday, December 20**

Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-28

**Saturday, December 21**

Song of Songs 2:8-14 or

Zephaniah 3:14-18; Luke 1:39-45

## Reconciliation available to mother after abortions

**Q.** Several years ago I wrote to a priest about this matter, but he didn't respond. I'm not sure why.

I hope I can somehow get through it this time. Years ago I had three abortions, which my doctor recommended very firmly since my ex-boyfriend was a heroin addict.

I was young and afraid, but I have never forgotten it nor can I get over wondering, "What if — ?"

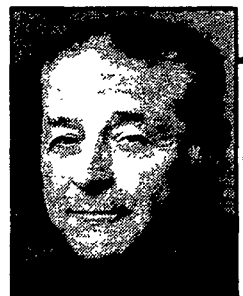
I could never express how I wish it never happened or how I could change things. I am now the mother of three beautiful children, and when I look at them I only wish there were six.

Am I forgiven or am I lost or am I still a Catholic? I hope so.

After all these years I'm not sure what I should do. I am sorry and afraid. (Maryland)

**A.** I wish you had some idea of the number of women who are in the same lonely and unhappy situation you are. It may at least help to know that you are not alone in your remorse over past abortions.

What you have done is a terrible violence against the gift of life, which you obviously realize, but God, the church and the sacraments are there waiting for you to come home.



question  
corner

BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN

There may be some sort of parallel here between abortion and divorce. Having heard so forcefully the church's position on the permanence of marriage, some Catholics came to believe that once divorced, even apart from remarriage, one was out of the church forever.

Similarly, many who have had abortions believe there is no way back to God or faith.

It's clear you will never be happy until you are once again united to your church's worship and sacraments, beginning with the sacrament of reconciliation.

There are many parishes and priests close to where you live. Pick one you don't know if you wish, perhaps one you

have heard will be gentle and welcoming, look up the times for confession and come back. You have waited long enough.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The Diocese of Rochester sponsors an outreach, "Project Rachel," for women and men suffering consequences of abortion. Call 1-888-9-RACHEL or 1-888-972-2435.

**Q.** My question is about the words "Thy kingdom come" in the Our Father. They seem to imply that the kingdom of God is in the future, at least after we die.

However, our priest recently spoke in a homily about the kingdom being here now, and quoted Jesus saying the "kingdom is among you." This is probably too trivial a question, but which one is right? I'm not even sure I know what the kingdom of God is. (South Dakota)

**A.** Your question is not trivial at all. Ideally, our whole spiritual lives should be founded on that reality.

The Gospels speak of that kingdom dozens of times as a truth that frames our relationship with God here and in eternity.

Essential to our understanding of that image is the realization that Christ's kingship, God's reign, is not a place or something else static, to be "complet-

ed," finally finished, sometime here or in the future.

God's reign, like God's love, is something active, dynamic, ongoing, continually at work in creation.

Thus this kingdom/reign is his gift to us now and manifests itself as we human beings react to each other socially, religiously, politically and in a myriad of other ways.

As the New Testament indicates often, this presence of God, his rule, is not something we merit, or even "build." He gives it to his people when they are communities of faith and fidelity to him.

Understood this way, the reign of God is always here and always coming, as long as a relationship between God and creation exists.

It's no wonder that Jesus, Matthew and other evangelists place such great importance on this reign in our life in Christ. I'm glad you want to delve into it more thoughtfully.

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A free brochure answering questions Catholics ask about Mary, the mother of Jesus, is available by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Father John Dietzen, pastor, Holy Trinity Church, 704 N. Main St., Bloomington, Ill. 61701. Also, questions should be sent to him there.

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