

COLUMNISTS

Submitting to God's laws shows good example

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 2:22-40. (R1) Malachi 3:1-4. (R2) Hebrews 2:14-18.

Next Sunday we celebrate the feasts of the Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Mary.

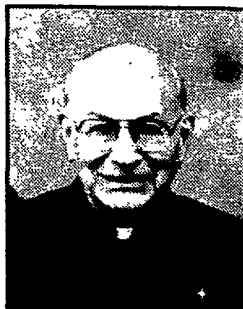
Katherine Lee Bates in her stirring poem "America" wrote: "Confirm thy soul in self-control / Thy liberty in law."

She said what this generation needs to remember; namely, the guardian of liberty is law. Laws are the dikes or levees that hold back the surge of human passion. How often one has been held back from doing a wrong, because there was a law, thank God.

The incidents of the presentation and the purification are meant, among other things, to teach us to obey the law. In those incidents, Joseph and Mary were obeying the Mosaic law.

Moses had commanded that the firstborn child be presented to the Lord and be redeemed for five shekels, paid to the priest on duty. This law was meant to remind Israel of all that God had done for their fathers in Egypt. When the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, God sent 10 plagues to force Pharaoh to free his people. In the 10th plague God slew the firstborn of the Egyptians, but spared the firstborn of the Hebrews.

So the firstborn of the Hebrews really belonged to God; its redemption reminded the Hebrews of this, just as the Fourth



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

of July reminds us of independence (Ex 13:2, 12; Nm 3:47-48).

Also, Moses commanded that a mother 40 days after the birth of a male child, and 80 days after the birth of a female, should be purified by going to the temple and offering a lamb and a dove; or, if poor, two doves (Lv 12:2-8). Mary and Joseph made the offering of the poor.

Now, mind you, neither Jesus nor Mary was obliged by these laws. For Jesus was the redeemer; he did not need to be redeemed. Mary was the virgin most pure; she did not need to be purified.

Yet both submitted to these laws to teach us to obey the laws of God and of his church.

How often so many judge themselves to be quite good. They feel that the laws are all right, but for others, not for them. Thus many absent themselves from Sunday Mass — yet to go to Sunday Mass is a very

serious law.

Many Catholics use artificial contraception — Father Peter Stravinskas, editor of *Our Sunday Visitor's* "Catholic Encyclopedia," estimates 87 percent of Catholics do — yet this is intrinsically evil and a grave violation of the moral law.

Many Catholics exempt themselves from daily prayer, fasting, monthly confession — yet the church tells us these are important.

Laws are meant not only to protect the weak from the violent, to guarantee liberty and the rights of others; but to bolster our weak resolve to do the things that we ought to do and that are best for us to do. How many children would go to school if there were not a law? Yet schooling is so important for them.

Here, then, is a rule we ought to follow for life: Keep the laws of God and of his church and they'll keep you. After having kept the law, the Holy Family encountered an old man, Simeon, and an old woman, Anna.

"This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed," Simeon told Mary. "And you yourself shall be pierced with a sword."

The presentation is the fourth joyful mystery of the rosary; the prophesy of Simeon is the first sorrow of Mary. Life is like that: It is a mixture of joy and sorrow.

Too much sun withers the rose; too much rain wilts it. So life consists of good days and bad days. We need both. Remember the good days won't last; nor will the bad. Prosperity doth best discover vice; adversity doth best discover virtue.

Anna was 84 years old and still served the Lord. What an example to us to be patient and persevering in our service of the Lord. Coward, wayward and weak, we change with the changing sky: one day eager and brave, the next not caring to try. Yet perseverance crowns the work.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 3
Hebrews 11:32-40; Mark 5:1-20
Tuesday, February 4
Hebrews 12:1-4; Mark 5:21-43
Wednesday, February 5
Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15; Mark 6:1-6
Thursday, February 6
Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24;
Mark 6:7-13
Friday, February 7
Hebrews 13:1-8; Mark 6:14-29
Saturday, February 8
Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21;
Mark 6:30-34

Priests can further address annulment concerns

Q. Nearly two years ago, I fled from my home with our 1-year-old daughter. My husband and I were married six years ago, after dating three years. I knew he tended to be jealous, but thought he would change after we married since he was good in every other way.

Several months after our daughter was born he was laid off with hundreds of others. He took it as a personal insult. Eventually he got another job, but he resented the time I gave to our infant daughter.

He began beating me. Once he nearly broke my arm. My sister, and eventually my parents and his parents, told me to leave.

A counselor (he agreed to go twice) was sure he had a chemical imbalance, but he would have no therapy.

For our child's safety and my sanity I filed for a divorce, which was final last August.

I asked for help. One priest simply said to let him know if I wanted to seek an annulment. I was sick with guilt until my mother sent me your columns, with a detailed response about abuse. It comforted me very much but I have some questions. An annulment means a marriage did



question corner

BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN

not exist. Isn't that thoughtless toward our child?

I attend Mass regularly and receive Communion. Is that allowed?

Can I ever be remarried in the Catholic Church? If a new marriage were not recognized, would that mean no future children would be baptized and raised Catholic?

How can I become more comfortable talking to a priest about this? (Florida)

A. I'm happy you were able to resolve this tragic dilemma with a good conscience. As I said more at length in the

columns to which you refer, fidelity to one's marriage vows does not require tolerating serious emotional or physical abuse.

Victims are understandably the first and most immediate concern. But it also is not an expression of love to one's spouse to persevere in a situation that is destroying him and everyone else.

When one's spouse is brutally abusive, part of keeping the marriage promises is to end the circumstances that make that abuse possible.

An annulment, in church or civil law, does not affect the status of children. A marriage which is later annulled is called a putative marriage.

This means that everyone, including very likely the couple themselves, thought it was a real marriage at the time. The children do not become illegitimate.

For a new marriage to take place in the Catholic Church, action by the tribunal of some diocese would be necessary regarding your first marriage. You would pursue this normally through your parish priest.

If you enter a new marriage outside the church, that will not automatically exclude

the baptism of future children. Church policies, spelled out in the baptism ritual and in canon law, require some solid reason to expect the child will be raised as a practicing Catholic.

If a couple not married in the church still go to Mass and otherwise still practice their faith as much as possible, and continue their efforts to return to the sacraments, that usually would provide good basis for hoping the children will be helped to grow up in the Catholic faith.

As for your concern about discussing the subject with a priest, serious differences in personalities and outlook inevitably affect one's ability to deal with such sensitive issues successfully with someone else.

Fortunately, several priests live not too far from your home. Ask around, go to one you feel will be helpful, and let him guide you through what needs to be done. I wish you luck.

Father Dietzen is the pastor of Holy Trinity Parish, 704 N. Main St., Bloomington, IL 61701. Questions may be addressed to him there.

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