

COLUMNISTS

Touch of Master's hand empowers us

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 1:29-39. (R1) Job 7:1-4, 6-7. (R2) 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23.

St. Mark in Sunday's Gospel gives us a rundown of 24 hours in our Lord's public ministry. How busy he was. He began the day by going to the synagogue to teach. There, he cured a man with an unclean spirit. After the synagogue service, he went to Peter's house for dinner. Peter's mother-in-law was ill with a fever. Jesus cured her. At sunset the whole town gathered outside Peter's house and Jesus cured all their sick and those afflicted with demons. The next day he arose early to pray. Then he toured the towns of Galilee.

Just one thought: When Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law, he simply went over to her and grasped her hand. The power of the touch of Jesus.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is divided into the Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments and Prayer. Each division is introduced by a fresco: three from the catacombs and the fourth, a painting from the monastery on Mt. Athos. The idea is to advise us to use visual aids in catechetics and to remind us of the antiquity of our religion — how ancient are our roots.

The fresco introducing the sacraments is taken from the catacombs of Ss. Marcellinus and Peter, Rome, from the beginning of the fourth century A.D. It depicts the scene of the woman with the hemorrhage touching the hem of the cloak of Jesus. When she did, power went out from Jesus and cured her.

The church uses that incident to define what a sacrament is. What a definition she gives; the church says that sacraments are "powers issuing from the body of Christ." Sacraments are encounters with Christ,



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the touch of his hand. From that touch issues power.

An electrical outlet has power. To tap that power, we must plug into the outlet. So with the sacraments: They are the powers of Christ; to receive those powers, the touch of his hand, we must plug into the sacraments by receiving them. There is a lovely poem titled "The Touch of the Master's Hand."

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer

Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid, good folk?" he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"

"A dollar — a dollar; then two — only two!

"Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Going for three" — but no —

From the room far back, a gray-haired man

Came forward and picked up the bow,

Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,

And tightening the loosened strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,

With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "NOW what am I bid for the old violin?"

And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars — and who'll make it two?"

"Two thousand — and who'll make it three?"

"Three thousand once — three thousand twice —

"and going — and gone," cried he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,

"We do not understand.

"What changed its worth?"

Quick came the reply, "The TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND."

And many a man with life out of tune,

And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap, to a thoughtless crowd,

Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage" — a glass of wine,
A game — and he travels on:

He is going once — and going twice

— He's going — and almost gone!

But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd

Never can quite understand

The worth of a soul, and the change

that's wrought
By the TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND.

— Myra Brooks Welch

The sacraments are the touch of the Master's hand. What a change is wrought in a baby baptized. St. Catherine of Siena saw a baby after baptism and said, "If I didn't know there was only one God, I would have worshiped that baby as God." What a change is wrought in the sinner by just one good confession! What love is poured out into hearts by holy Mass and one good holy Communion! Draw near, then, to the sacraments, for like the mother-in-law of Peter, we all need the touch of the Master's hand.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 10

Genesis 1:1-19; Mark 6:53-56

Tuesday, February 11

Genesis 1:20-2:4; Mark 7:1-13

Wednesday, February 12

Joel 2:12-18/Corinthians 5:20-6:2;

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday, February 13

Deuteronomy 30:15-20;

Luke 9:22-25

Friday, February 14

Isaiah 58:1-9; Matthew 9:14-15

Saturday, February 15

Isaiah 58:9-14; Luke 5:27-32

Row by row, making garden grow brings joy

Where I live in St. Louis, just north of downtown, the white (mostly Catholic) homeowners began moving out 50 years ago. Twenty-five years ago the Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance that when taxes went unpaid for five years, the property would revert to the city. The city now owns vast tracts of vacant lots, abandoned buildings and contaminated industrial sites.

In 1981, an old lady gave me her four-apartment building for use by the Catholic Worker. I manage it, providing long-term shelter for a few families. Next-door is a corner lot where the city had bulldozed two brick buildings into their foundations. City workers sprayed the lot regularly with a nasty herbicide to kill everything that's green and growing.

Eventually I bought the double lot for \$600, chiefly to end the spraying pro-



ordinary
time

BY MARY ANN MCGIVERN, SL

gram. I didn't know I had a taste for gardening. But then I began to harvest bricks and broken glass and haul leaf mulch from friends' homes to soften the clay soil.

The first years I cultivated the edges, planting tomatoes along the fence next to my brick-patio yard, roses along the 40-foot front walk and alley, and black-

berry and Nanking cherry bushes on the 120-foot sidewalk. I risk boring you with these details to make the point that I have been gradually creating a grandiose garden. For about 14 years, I've been spending an hour a day reclaiming and amending a few feet of soil, planting fruit trees, and watching things grow. I still harvest as many pounds of bricks as vegetables.

St. Louis winters are mild. While you in the Rochester diocese contemplate the work of worms digesting leaf mulch deep underground under the snow in your garden plots, I turn compost, weed, thin the iris, and harvest a few shoots of parsley and spinach under a dead tomato vine. Even now, in mid-winter, chicory sends its roots two feet deep into the soil. The garlic takes hold, forming its bulbs. The strawberries send out new

shoots. The fruit trees sprout water shoots straight up in the air; I'll have to prune them next month.

My garden is built right on top of a structure of economic maldistribution that encourages building decay and creates homelessness. I know that, and I work against the system as best I can. But the knowledge doesn't lessen the joy my garden gives me.

While we humans count the days to the new millennium, the fruit trees are silently counting their 40 nights of freezing temperatures before it's time to bloom again. It's a miracle that I aid and abet, and that, day after day, roots me in hope.

...
Sister McGivern is executive director of the St. Louis Conversion Project based in St. Louis, Mo.

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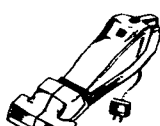
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