

COLUMNISTS

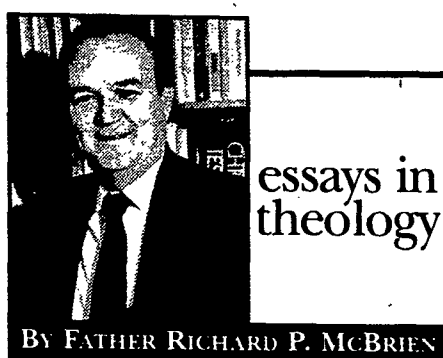
Cardinal Bernardin offered 'gift of peace'

I can think of no more appropriate book to read during the Easter season than Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's *The Gift of Peace* (Loyola Press, 1997). It is a book about faith in the resurrection, and the hope and peace we draw from it.

The late cardinal emerges from the pages of this slim volume as a healthy, uncomplicated human being with a spirituality that is traditional in the best sense of the word. For the last 20 years of his life, he arose from sleep an hour early each morning to devote himself to prayer and meditation. He would spend part of the time praying the Liturgy of the Hours (the breviary) and the rosary; another in spiritual reading; and the rest of the time just trying to stay "connected" (a favorite word of his) to the Lord, in spite of the persistent intrusion of daydreams, problem solving and other distractions.

This traditional spirituality shaped his whole approach to his priestly ministry. For Cardinal Bernardin, being a pastor meant being present to people in their joys and their sorrows. He remarked that what people remembered most about encounters he had with them was some small act of kindness or expression of concern. Nothing more dramatic than that.

One's spiritual journey through life, he believed, involves a "letting go" of whatever stands in the way of "an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus." Letting



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

go is never easy, he wrote. Indeed, it is a lifelong process, because "there is something in us humans that makes us want to hold onto ourselves and everything and everybody familiar to us."

There was also a heroic, or supererogatory, element in Joseph Bernardin's spiritual life. As a diocesan priest, he took no vow of poverty. And yet, more than 15 years before his death, he gave away all of his money and resolved never again to have a savings account or stocks. He pledged that he would keep only what was needed to maintain his checking account.

He began depositing the monetary gifts he received into a special account of the Archdiocese of Chicago to be used for personal charities and special projects of various kinds.

But the temptation to hold on persisted. In the last few years of his life, he re-

ceived so many gifts that he began once again saving some for himself, persuading himself that he might need the funds in retirement or to care for his aged mother (who, in fact, has survived him).

But he subsequently disentangled himself once again from everything so that he would no longer be distracted in his relationship with the Lord.

One might be tempted to make the point that, given his exalted ecclesiastical status, with an official residence on Chicago's "Gold Coast" and with all his personal needs taken care of, the "letting go" of his own monetary and material possessions was not really much of a sacrificial risk.

But this is to misunderstand his situation. Unlike the period before Vatican II, bishops are expected to retire at age 75. Cardinal Bernardin did have a legitimate concern about his retirement years when health related expenses are highest, especially for long-term care. He also had a legitimate concern about his mother.

But if these considerations aren't enough to satisfy the more cynical among us, let them provide a list of other bishops who have made a sacrificial choice similar to Cardinal Bernardin's, that is, who have no personal savings account, no stocks and bonds, no personal possessions of any significant monetary value, and only a modest balance in their checkbooks to pay personal bills.

Joseph Bernardin was a man of extraordinary spiritual depth and a priest of extraordinary pastoral dedication. And nothing revealed that more vividly or more convincingly than the manner in which he faced his own impending death.

He did not withdraw into himself, nor become immersed in self-pity and bitterness. Instead, he opened himself fully and generously to those in need, especially cancer patients and their families who, like himself, faced the immediate threat of death or the wrenching loss of a loved one.

But he became more than a pastor and spiritual guide for individuals. He truly became a pastor and spiritual guide for the whole Chicago community, then for the entire country, and finally, in death, for the global community itself.

How many persons in our time (other than Pope John XXIII) have, through their process of dying, forged the human community into such a solidarity of hope and peace? For all people of goodwill, Cardinal Bernardin became a sacrament of special luminosity, that is, a visible sign and instrument of the invisible presence and saving activity of God among us.

Through Joseph Bernardin, God has, yet again, offered each one of us "the gift of peace."

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Ask for mercy, be merciful, trust in God

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:19-31. (R1) Acts 4:32-25. (R2) 1 John 5:1-6.

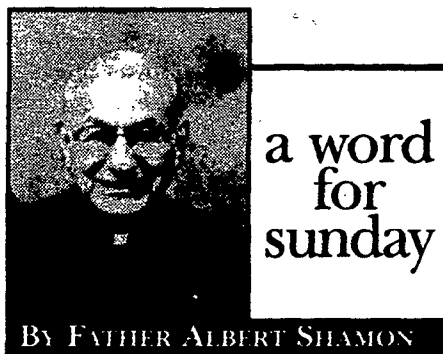
On a beautiful Sunday morning April 18, 1993, I was with more than 300,000 people who crowded the vast piazza of St. Peter's for the beatification of Sr. Mary Faustina Kowalski. The Holy Father celebrated Mass on the steps of St. Peter's. The Sistine Choir on the pope's right sang the Gregorian chants of the Mass; on his left were seated dignitaries.

Just before the Gloria of the Mass, the proclamation of beatification was read and a tapestry of Sister Faustina standing before the image of the risen Christ, with red and white rays emanating from his heart, was undraped from the roof of St. Peter's to the cheers of thousands.

Sister Faustina was born in 1905 and died in 1938 at the age of 33. She was the third of 10 children in a poor but deeply religious family. She attended school for only three years. At the age of 16 she left home and went to work as a housekeeper in Lodz in order to help support her parents.

A vision of the suffering Christ in 1925 moved her to enter the convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy. There, she worked as cook, gardener and porter. Externally, nothing betrayed her rich mystical life.

One day Jesus said to her, "I am sending you to all of humanity with my mer-



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

cy. I do not want to punish mankind but to heal it and draw it ever so close to my merciful heart."

Her mission was to become the apostle of Divine Mercy.

In 1931 Jesus gave her an image of himself as the Lord of Mercy. It was himself as risen, clothed in white. His right hand was raised in blessing; his left touched his heart, from which two large rays came forth: one red, one white. Beneath the image were the words: "Jesus, I trust in you."

Jesus commanded her to have the image painted and promised: "That the soul that will venerate this image will not perish ..."

Then Jesus asked Sister to work and pray that the church establish a feast of Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter. He made this request at least 14 times.

He wanted to reawaken in hearts the need to go to confession frequently. He promised that the "soul that will go to confession (within eight days before or after 'Mercy Sunday') and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment."

What a grace! Confession at this time will take away not only sins, but also the punishment due to them.

It is significant that the Gospel of that Sunday is the one on the institution of the sacrament of penance. For confession is the fount of God's mercy.

Lastly, Jesus told Sister Faustina that we must be merciful. The ABCs of Mercy are —

A: Ask for mercy, especially at Mass at the "Lord, have mercy."

B: Be merciful. Practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Blessed are the merciful. Don't be a NATO person: No Action, Talk Only.

C: Have confidence in God. If we knew how much God loves us, we would die for joy. To show us just how much he loves us, God did not make us on an assembly line. He made each one of us distinct so that no two people are alike; each is unique, totally different from everyone else. So he told us to pray, "Jesus, I trust you."

The twin plagues of modern man are fear and worry. This is so because we

tend to put all our trust in self, in our own resources and talents. To be afraid is to believe in evil more than you believe in God! Trust God: He is too wise to make a mistake, and too good to do evil.

As Longfellow wrote:

Trust no Future howe'er pleasant.
Let the dead Past bury its dead.
Act, act in the living Present,
Heart within, God o'erhead.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 7

Isaiah 7:10-14, Hebrews 10:4-10;
Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday, April 8

Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7-15

Wednesday, April 9

Acts 5:17-26; John 3:16-21

Thursday, April 10

Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36

Friday, April 11

Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15

Saturday, April 12

Acts 6:1-7; John 6:16-21

Look for the third annual Milestones supplement in the April 17 *Catholic Courier*.

Michael R. Yackiw
Funeral Home



1270 Norton Street
544-5000

**"IF YOU'VE MADE A WILL,
THERE'S ONE MORE
THING TO DO..."**

To learn more about prearranged funerals, please call us. Our counsel is always available free of charge and at no obligation.

David P. Crawford • Mark D. Wakeman
495 N. Winton Rd. • Rochester • (716) 482-0400

Crawford
FUNERAL HOME INC.

**HART
MONUMENT
COMPANY**

Since 1856

**Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering**

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)
(716) 865-6746

Call 716-328-4340 to subscribe to the Catholic Courier