

COLUMNISTS

Jesus is a model friend

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 15:9-17. (R1) Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48. (R2) 1 John 4:7-10.

A moving van loaded with furniture was parked in front of a home. A husband and wife were sweeping out the open garage when a woman from across the street approached with an apple pie.

"Welcome to the neighborhood," she said. "I baked this pie myself and I want you to have it."

The husband replied, "Really, we can't."

"Of course you can," the woman ran on. "When I moved here two years ago no one welcomed me, and I want you to feel at home."

She thrust the pie into the husband's hands.

"Uh, well, you see," the man stumbled with an embarrassed laugh, "we've been here four years and we're moving away."

The woman stared at him dumfounded, her mouth open. "Well," she said,



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

shrugging her shoulders, "enjoy it anyway!"

That could happen in a lot of neighborhoods, couldn't it? It can happen in a lot of churches. Perhaps, because we have focused on the Eucharist, many of us at church have forgotten to be neighborly. One thing we can learn from our separated brothers is sociability.

Dr. Eugene Kennedy, a psychology professor at Loyola University, says that Americans find it difficult to form friend-

ships. One of the reasons for this, he writes, is the emphasis society puts on "self." Friendships require self-denial. Do we have close friends?

We all need at least one close friend. People who have friends are sick less often, live longer, are happier than those who do not have friends. So a study at the University of Chicago showed.

We need friends when life is unkind to us. Mary Hughes defined a friend as "the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out." Erma Bombeck defined a friend as "somebody who doesn't go on a diet when you're fat." Do you have a friend who will lift you up when you fall? Many people do not. That's sad.

There's an old hymn: "What a friend we have in Jesus..." How do we know Jesus is our friend? According to John there are two ways.

He showed his love for us by his dying on the cross and by his giving us the church: his family and our family. What a

friend we have in Jesus.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 5

Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26-16:4

Tuesday, May 6

Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11

Wednesday, May 7

Acts 17:15-22, 18:1;

John 16:12-15

Thursday, May 8

Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:17-23;

Mark 16:15-20

Friday, May 9

Acts 18:9-18; John 16:2-23a

Saturday, May 10

Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23b-28

Feast day focuses us on work, and more

May 1 is the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. Christians have always had a kind of "love-hate" relationship with work. It's almost as if we connect two opposing strands of human experience with the reality of work.

On the one hand, we associate it with the labor of the body. There are some ways in which work implies sweat and toil. To secure necessities, a tiring, monotonous activity is required. We've even associated this aspect of work with punishment for sin (Gen 3:17, 19; 4:12).

But there is another sense in which the "work of our hands" points to a more creative activity through which we make "products" that are both valuable to others and part of our own growth, freedom and self-determination.

We have whole treatises about virtues we have associated with work at one time or another. As far back as the New Testament we have been disgusted with laziness and idleness.

When we read in 2 Thessalonians about Paul warning the community that "whoever does not wish to work, let that one not eat," we might conclude that



the moral life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

there is some bickering going on as early as the first century about who's taking too many coffee breaks at the office! We've even associated with Jesus a kind of injunction to develop our talents (Mt 25:14-20; Lk 19:11-26).

Indeed we have assigned a moral significance to work throughout our history, and we continue to grapple with issues relating to working. Recently we've learned about some research that indicates Americans are actually happier at work than at home. Apparently we like the controlled, structured, relatively non-emotional contacts of the workplace more than the trouble, confusion and emotionally-charged

arena of our personal relationships.

Today we struggle with the burdens of trying to form two-income families, with the availability of day care, with "workaholicism," or with making more money. We can make an idol, sometimes, of our own accomplishments and successes.

Today we can fear unemployment more than almost any other "disaster," since unemployment carries with it social stigma, a sense of personal failure, the loss of health care, a wrenching even of our friendships, which seem based more and more on the level of our income and our upward mobility.

In our society there is a tendency to associate our achievements and our salary level solely with our own personal success, without acknowledging the role of society that is hidden in the wage structure itself.

For example, when I look at my paycheck and I see what "I made" in relation to what "they take," I feel resentful. Still, "they" really are part of deciding how salary scales are determined in the first place. We make "good money" to the extent that society (including government,

customs and mores, board-level decisions, the market, etc.) decides that some jobs will pay big bucks and some will not.

It can seem absurd that the farmworkers who secure our food are paid almost nothing, while a few athletes make millions for endorsing sneakers. We miss the fact that the same *they* who are involved in the deduction side of the paycheck are also involved in the "I made" column.

At first glance when we notice the feast of Joseph the worker we might be puzzled about why the church would enact a religious feast day around work. But work touches on one of the most complex personal and social phenomena that we experience. Many of our hopes and dreams, some of our self-esteem, part of the legacy that we will leave for our children and for the world, relate to our work.

Let's just take a minute to think about one area where our own attitudes and fears about work are actually detracting from our ability to live the fullness of the Christian life.

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Sr. Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

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