

# COLUMNISTS

## Pray for unity, pray for others

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) John 17:11-19. (R1) Acts 1:15-17, 20-26. (R2) 1 John 4:11-16.

Reggie White, a defensive end for the Green Bay Packers, said before signing a \$17 million deal with the Packers that he would look to God to tell him where to play. Later, Green Bay Coach Mike Holmgren confessed that he had left a message on White's answering machine that said, "Reggie, this is God. Go to Green Bay."

Sunday's Gospel is about prayer — not just any prayer, but a prayer from the lips of Jesus. How selfless Jesus was! On the very night before his crucifixion, who is he thinking about? Not himself, but about his friends. He prayed for them.

First, he prayed that they would be united — "that they may be one, even as we are one." Unity is one of the great marks of the true Church of Christ. Unity is the sacramental grace of every Mass: "May all of us who share in the body and unity by the Holy Spirit."

Someone described the difference between an audience and a church. An audience, he said, is a group of people; a gathering; a church is a community. An audience is a heap of stones; a church is a temple. The difference between an audience and a church is unity. An audience is just people; a church is a people



a word  
for  
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

united by love. A priest preaches not to impress an audience, but to build up the church, the mystical body of Christ.

So many things can disrupt the unity of a church: an unwarranted liberty in the liturgy, a cantankerous person, a disagreement with the pastor over some trivial item — people can get upset over the silliest things in church. That is why, like Jesus, we must pray for unity. In unity there is strength. A single strand of thread can be broken easily. But multiply the threads into a mighty cord, then it defies breaking. So when all in the church work together, pray together, pull together, then the church will bless the world and the people in it.

Secondly, Jesus prayed that his Father would help his friends to remain strong. Jesus knew the cost of discipleship. He knew there would be times when his disciples' lives would be in danger. He knew

there would be times when they would be tempted to run. Notice that Jesus did not pray to take away their problems — "I do not ask you to take them out of the world." Instead, He did pray that they might be strong. He did not pray for escape, but for victory. "Guard them from the evil one."

There is great power in prayer. Tony Campolo was at a prayer service one morning. A man there prayed for his friend. "Dear Lord," he prayed, "you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in the silver trailer down the road a mile. He's leaving his wife and kids. Please do something to bring the family together."

The man repeated the prayer and as he did, he repeated the location — "the silver trailer down the road a mile." Campolo wanted to say, "Knock it off, fella. Do you think God is asking, 'What's that address again?'"

After the service, as Campolo drove home, he saw a hitchhiker and decided to give him a lift. "My name's Tony," Campolo said. "What's your name?"

"Charlie Stoltzfus," the hitchhiker said. Campolo was dumbfounded. Here was the man for whom prayer had been offered. Campolo got off at the next exit.

"Hey, where are you taking me?" asked the hitchhiker.

"Home," Campolo said. He drove

right up to the silver trailer down the road a mile. That afternoon that man and his wife were reconciled.

We sometimes forget how powerful a simple prayer can be. Do we pray for our friends? Jesus did. But even more wonderful, he prays for us too. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, as at Mass or the family rosary, there am I praying with you and for you."

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

### Daily Readings

**Monday, May 12**

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

**Tuesday, May 13**

Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11

**Wednesday, May 14**

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26;

John 15:9-17

**Thursday, May 15**

Acts 22:30, 23:6-11;

John 17:20-26

**Friday, May 16**

Acts 25:13-21; John 21:15-19

**Saturday, May 17**

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31;

John 21:20-25

## Pope's vision requires new ecumenism

Evangelization is one of the great themes in the magisterium of Pope John Paul II, who believes that the Gospel can be a "springtime of the 21st century."

The Holy Father made that argument most extensively in the 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, "The Mission of the Redeemer." The vision is historically compelling — the century in which Christianity was supposed to wither away being followed by a century of great missionary endeavor. The question before the house is, how will that vision be realized?

The suggestion here is that the pope's vision can only be realized in the Americas through evangelical Protestants and Catholics working together to proclaim the redeeming work of God in Christ. Or to put the matter negatively, the vision of *Redemptoris Missio* will only be realized in the Western Hemisphere in the 21st century if Catholics and evangelical Protestants are not at each other's throats as we each proclaim God's saving action in the Lord whose name we both bear.

Unhappily, this proposition is regarded as little less than heresy in many Latin American ecclesiastical quarters. There, it is settled dogma that the evangelical, pentecostalist and fundamentalist insurgency of recent years is a North American conspiracy, concocted and paid for



the  
catholic  
difference

BY GEORGE WEIGEL

by the CIA, the Rockefellers and/or the U.S. foreign aid bureaucracy, the Agency for International Development.

A few years ago I was told by a sober-minded "senior Vatican official" that every bishop in Latin America believed that the "Protestantization" of Latin America was an "American plot." I think my eminent friend was exaggerating just a bit; indeed, I can name several Latin American bishops who are immune to this particular fever. But it is indisputable that the "North American conspiracy" view of the rise of the evangelicals is widespread throughout Latin America.

It is also mistaken and shortsighted.

No one familiar with the legendary sluggishness of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy could imagine that a decades-long conspiracy of this magnitude could be planned, funded, execut-

ed — and, given the sieve-like quality of the State Department, kept out of *The New York Times*.

U.S. foreign aid monies have indeed been used to muscle Latin American governments on population control questions; I deplore this. But such hardball political tactics have had nothing to do with the rise of the Latin American evangelicals, according to every serious sociological study of the phenomenon.

Of even greater concern is the ecclesial shortsightedness involved in such conspiracy theories and fantasies. Assuming the continued implosion of mainline liberal Protestantism, the Catholic-Evangelical dialogue is Christianity. That is certainly going to be the case in Latin America, where mainline Protestantism is a non-factor.

Recent history tells us that, as evangelical Protestants develop their theology, they are inexorably drawn to the question of the church (as was Charles Colson in his 1992 book, *The Body*). And the question of the church, for Western Christians, can only be engaged by an intensified encounter with Rome.

Evangelicals willing to take the risk of such an encounter have found a Catholicism that their grandfathers (who spoke of Babylon) resident in the Vatican)

could not have imagined — a Catholicism that speaks readily of our being justified before God by faith through grace.

To repeat: A "springtime of the Gospel" in Latin America in the 21st century demands a new Catholic-Evangelical ecumenism. Forging that ecumenism will require some of the more exuberant of our Protestant brethren to rethink their methods of evangelism; it will require virtually all evangelicals to rethink their theological understanding of Catholicism.

For the majority of Catholic population, and especially for its episcopal leadership, the new ecumenism demands that the evangelical insurgency in Latin America not be dismissed, contemptuously or fearfully, as a matter of rapacious "sects."

The forthcoming Synod for America, which will bring together North American and Latin American bishops in preparation for the Great Jubilee of 2000, could make a crucial contribution to this new ecumenism if it faces honestly and without panic the new Christian pluralism in our hemisphere. The synod could also do a lot of damage, if it insists on writing off the evangelicals as "sects."

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

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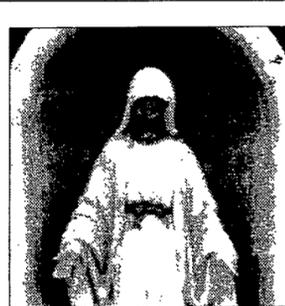
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