

## COLUMNISTS

## God is just a local call away

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Matthew 28:16-20. (R1) Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40. (R2) Romans 8:14-17.

A couple from India traveling in the United States on business left their 11-year-old girl with some American friends. One Sunday the Hindu girl decided on her own to go to church with the family. When they returned home, the girl was asked what she thought of the service.

"I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included, too," the little girl replied.

"What do you mean," her friends asked.

"You know, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the whole East Coast (Holy Ghost)."

Often, too, there are truths in our faith that are difficult to understand, like the doctrine of the Trinity.

One day a little girl asked her father, "Daddy, what is God like?"

He tried to answer, but finally, he gave the answer for which fathers are famous: "Go ask your mother."

She asked her mother, "Mommy, what is God like?"

She said, "Honey, ask your Sunday school teacher."

She asked her Sunday school teacher, "What is God like?"

The teacher said, "Why don't you ask your father or mother?"

The little girl said to herself, "If I had lived with God as long as my father and



a word  
for  
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

mother and Sunday school teacher, I think I would be able to tell a little girl what God is like."

St. Augustine was walking along the seashore one day thinking about the Trinity. He seemed to hear a voice saying, "Pick up one of the large seashells there by the shore."

So he picked it up. Then the voice said, "Now pour the ocean into the shell."

Augustine said, "Lord, I can't do that." And the voice answered, "Nor can your small, finite mind ever hold and understand the mystery of the eternal, infinite, triune God."

God defies understanding. In 150 B.C. Hipparchus said there were exactly 1,026 stars in the universe. Fifteen hundred years later Galileo, with the newly invented telescope, saw many times that number. Now we know there are about 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone, and that there are billions of such galaxies besides ours! Can you deal with that? Bil-

ions and billions of solar systems like our own?

J.B. Phillips said our God is too small. Do we try to create God according to our own image? The Trinity says he is beyond our understanding. Yet this unfathomable God visited this planet in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He didn't masquerade as a man. No, he emptied himself and became fully human. He cried real tears and sweat real sweat and bled real blood. He was a real man, and yet God was in him. Can you deal with that?

Yet this same God, who created the galaxies and in Christ suffered and died, is available to every one of us through Christ's gift to us, the Holy Ghost ("the whole East Coast") — to comfort, strengthen and befriend us.

One day Menachem Begin of Israel visited President Carter. In the Oval Office Begin questioned Carter about his phones.

"Well," Carter said, "the red phone is a hot line to Russia so I can keep track of what's happening there. The yellow phone is to China to keep track of what's going on there. And the gold phone is a direct line to God."

"How much does it cost to call God?" Begin asked.

"Ten thousand dollars," Carter replied. "But it's worth every penny."

Later Carter visited Begin in Israel, and he asked the same question. "What are your three phones for?"

"One's a hot line to Egypt, another's a hotline to Parliament, and the third is a hotline to God," Begin replied.

"What's the cost to call God from here?" Carter asked.

"Ten cents," Begin answered. "From here, it's a local call."

Even though God is the God of the galaxies, the God who walked the dusty roads of Galilee, the God who is a mysterious Trinity, he is here and he is available. If we need him, it is only a local call.

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, May 26

Sirach 17:19-27; Mark 10:17-27

Tuesday, May 27

Sirach 35:1-12; Mark 10:28-31

Wednesday, May 28

Sirach 36:1,5-6,10-17;

Mark 10:32-45

Thursday, May 29

Sirach 42:15-25; Mark 10:46-52

Friday, May 30

Sirach 44:1,9-13; Mark 11:11-26

Saturday, May 31

Zephaniah 3:14-18 or Romans

12:9-16; Luke 1:39-56

## Church must consider 'invincible ignorance'

**Q.** Our Catholic newspaper recently reported on the new Vatican guidelines for confessors, mostly about birth control, it seems.

What disturbs me is the statement that, generally, a confessor is not obliged "to investigate concerning sins committed in invincible ignorance of their evil or due to an inculpable error of judgment."

In such cases "it is preferable to let penitents remain in good faith rather than create a situation in which they would begin formally to sin."

How could any Catholic beyond the age of reason be invincibly ignorant of the church's teaching on artificial birth control?

They might not want to believe it. But that's not invincible ignorance.

(New York)

**A.** Yours is a good question, and I will attempt to respond as well as possible in this short space. First, however, something very much bothers me in the mail I'm receiving about this. Perhaps it's worth some prayerful reflection.

I have the strong impression that many writers are angry mostly because another person is doing something we



question  
corner

BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN

believe is wrong and getting away with it. There seem to be an almost anxious need and desire to prove someone else is committing serious sin.

St. Paul insists that genuine Christian love is patient, not pompous, and "does not rejoice over wrongdoing" (1 Cor 13). Wrongdoing must sometimes be identified and addressed and exposed, but only with humility and sadness over the sinfulness.

To be happy that we can declare someone in mortal sin, that we can transfer them into a state of sin when (because of some ignorance or moral disability) they are not, is a terrible sin against the love of God and neighbor.

Instructing the ignorant is still a spiritual work of mercy. And doing some-

thing objectively sinful is wrong.

It is a cosmic leap to a far different wrong, however, to deliberately attempt to change that objective wrong into a subjective, personal alienation from God.

To do this unnecessarily and without extremely serious reason, to do it for example just so others don't slip by without the punishment we think they deserve — that is evil, a prideful intrusion into the relationship between an individual soul and God.

Contrary to what you and others assume, ignorance of the law, which you reject in this case, is only one of many varieties of invincible ignorance. There may also be ignorance of the fact that I am bound by the law, whatever that law is.

For instance, if individuals exercise all the reflection, faith and prayer they can reasonably manage in the circumstances, and if they still cannot see they are bound to a particular obligation, they are in what is, somewhat indelicately, called invincible ignorance.

Their action may be objectively wrong, but they are not sinning because they cannot see that they are acting wrongly. (Those serious about under-

standing this may see almost any of the classical moral texts, for example, Nodin-Heinzel's *Summa Theologiae Moralis, De Principiis*, 1952.)

As a less sensitive example, some great non-Catholic theologians and philosophers have been, or are today, experts in Catholic doctrine. They know well the church's teaching about necessity of membership in the Catholic Church.

In spite of all their study and reflection, however, they have never come to see membership in the church as a personal moral imperative. They know the "law"; they just cannot in conscience perceive that the law applies to them.

According to the church's traditional teaching on moral responsibility, they are (again in the embarrassing disrespectful phrase) invincibly ignorant.

Finally, these thoughts, reflected in the guidelines, are not new or revolutionary. They are simply part of the church's traditional criteria for evaluating responsibility and culpability for our moral actions.

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Kids' Answers  
from page 10

A. Moses E. Solomon  
B. Aaron F. Cain  
C. Samuel G. Ruth  
D. Lot H. David

Ten Commandments

Look for the graduation supplement in the June 13th issue.