

## COLUMNISTS

## Christians need to face the heat

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mark 6:1-6. (R1) Ezekiel 2:2-5. (R2) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

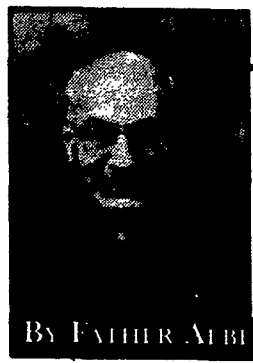
Among his own people, in his hometown, Jesus encountered rejection and conflict in Sunday's Gospel. He was rejected because his own thought of him as an unimpressive "hometown boy" who could not possibly be their deliverer. Jesus provoked controversy; so shall his followers provoke controversy.

Too often we tend to look upon conflict as some sort of failure on our part. Yet conflict can be a sign that the Gospel is being truthfully preached and lived. Crisis, conflict, disagreement and rejection typify the world's response to Jesus. As St. Augustine said regarding the beheading of John the Baptist, "Truth begets hatred."

In the second reading, St. Paul says that he himself endured "mistreatment, distress, persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ."

Somebody in the Middle Ages compared the church to Noah's ark. "If the storm were not so fierce on the outside, we couldn't stand the stench on the inside!"

That of course is nonsense. There is often fighting, conflict and disagreement in



a word  
for  
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the church. But the Gospel suggests that this can be because we are being faithful to the Gospel rather than unfaithful. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he warned them that they too were going to experience the same rejection and conflict that he did at Nazareth.

"Conflict" comes from the Latin *conflicere*, meaning "to strike together." Whenever two or more people go after goals that are mutually exclusive, whenever one person's needs collide with another's, conflict results. If there were no movement to fulfill ideas, goals or desires among human beings, there would be no conflict.

Conflict can have a positive role in life. In conflict, a group is energized. As one

pastor put it, "You can put out a fire easier than you can raise the dead." A church where there is a healthy amount of tension and conflict is alive. It is important to realize that the Gospel is a force for change, for good and for meaning, and that the Christian vision is of something better than the present arrangements. People fight only over what is important.

Peace at any price is often capitulation to the status quo or to evil. Or when conflict is suppressed, it acts like a pressure cooker. The heat continues to build and the inevitable explosion is more destructive. Whereas if conflict is constantly met and released, it is less likely to be destructive.

We must pray, not always to have peace and quiet, but to learn to fight for what's important and, in our disagreements with one another, to fight like Christians, that is with love, with truth and with the conviction that we are all sisters and brothers here, all of us trying to be faithful to the one who has called us to follow him.

The theologian Karl Barth said that people used to come to church asking, "Is it true?" Today most people in the pew come to church asking themselves, "Will it work?"

Dorothy Sayers, when criticized for her depiction of Christ in her book *Man Born to Be King*, countered, "To make of His story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire a single living soul is to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame."

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, July 7

Genesis 28:10-22; Matthew 9:18-26

Tuesday, July 8

Genesis 32:23-33; Matthew 9:32-38

Wednesday, July 9

Genesis 41:55-57; 42:5-7, 17-24;

Matthew 10:1-7

Thursday, July 10

Genesis 44:18-21, 23-29; 45:1-5;

Matthew 10:7-15

Friday, July 11

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30;

Matthew 10:16-23

Saturday, July 12

Genesis 49:29-33; 50:15-24;

Matthew 10:24-33

## Fear of faith can make us too busy

In this column I want to respond to Bishop Clark's request that we reflect on our need for silence and solitude. Traditional Christianity maintains that silence and solitude have an important role in the development of human wisdom and spirituality because they exist for the sake of some goods that are centrally important in life.

Christians stop talking and enter into stillness for the sake of prayer, reflection and paying attention to our souls and to God. Christians go apart and spend time alone for the purpose of greater union with God. Jesus himself "would withdraw to deserted places to pray" (Lk 5:16).

But life today makes it pretty hard to come by even the slightest measure of silence or solitude. Most of us long for cherished moments of quiet. All of us yearn for what silence and solitude are meant to foster: prayer, reflection, attending to our souls and God. In fact, lots of us would probably say that our bodies are in better shape than ever, but our spirits are virtually withering.

Of course, part of the problem that Bishop Clark hinted at is that we are actually uncomfortable when we are alone, or



the  
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life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

when silence prevails. I think we are unsure about what to do with silence and solitude, because we are unsure about the prayer, reflection and genuine communion that silence and solitude are supposed to foster. We actually prefer the state of distraction that seems to characterize so much of our life.

T.S. Eliot wrote once that we are "distracted from distraction by distraction." He thought that the pace of modern life, the way we let so many trivial demands take up our time and attention, the ways we settle for shallow relationships and banal entertainment, have actually dulled our capacity to use our minds discriminately

or to nurture our hearts for genuine union with God, others or even ourselves.

Terms like "junk mail," "cocktail chatter," "conspicuous consumption," we know too well. Many of us find that more often our days are spent as we bump and grind our way through a series of impersonal encounters, without rest, without satisfaction. Our level of tension is increased and multiplied by an almost endless stream of inane events, vacations that leave us unsatisfied, obligations we accept because we'd rather be busy than genuinely reflective.

Silence and solitude have never been ends in themselves for Christians. They have always been prized in Christian life because of what they are for. I think our reluctance to be still, to be quiet, to be alone, is related to our fear of faith. "Fear of faith" is a peculiar expression, but I think it has real meaning.

Faith implies relationship, of course. It implies relating to God from the heart of life, in the midst of its mystery, from a sense of deepening reverence for all its great complexity. Faith implies a commitment to build authentic community, to allow for genuine intimacy with others, to

allow others to say what they need to say, to listen with real attention.

But those things can't happen unless we have formed within ourselves a habit of silence and a habit of solitude. Silence and solitude ask us to give up some of the control we have over time and space. To fill up time and space with chatter, noise, distraction, lets us be comfortable because it lets us think we're "in control."

I think it would be easy to write back to Bishop Clark and tell him that we fail at silence and solitude because we haven't got enough self-discipline to sustain them.

But I think it's something deeper than that. I think we flee from silence and solitude because we're afraid to commit to another and to others, to mystery, to relationship. Essentially, we don't want to enter into silence or solitude because we know that when we do, we stand to lose control and move beyond ourselves. The paradox is, of course, — and we have it on good authority — that it's only in the losing that gain is possible.

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

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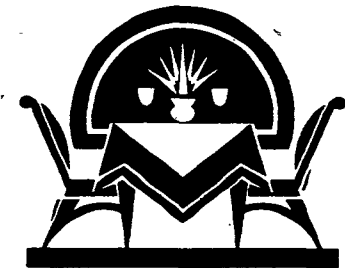
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