

## COLUMNISTS

## Law, prophets all point to love's primacy

All of Jesus' moral teachings were reducible to the one great commandment of love: love of God and love of neighbor (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28). On this commandment, Jesus said, the whole Law and the prophets depend (Matthew 22:40).

We fulfill the mandate to love God in and through our love of neighbor. As St. John put it, we cannot say that we love God, whom we do not see, if we do not love our neighbor, whom we do see (1 John 4:20).

This is not to say that love of God and love of neighbor are identical. Acts of worship and prayer pertain primarily to the love of God. On the other hand, our love of God expressed through prayer cannot be divorced from our love of neighbor. The Last Judgment scene in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) offers one of the classic illustrations this point.

Jesus gave himself as an example of the unselfish love we are to render to God through our love for one another. He humbled himself to wash the feet of his disciples and urged them to do the same (John 13:4-15). He insisted that he was in their midst as one who serves (Luke 22:27), ready to give his life on behalf of all humanity (Mark 10:45). He encapsulated his whole theology of love in the "new commandment" he left his disciples: "Love one



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Jesus insisted, however, that such love is not to be reserved to one's family and friends. His disciples are also to love their enemies (Luke 6:27,28) and to renounce revenge (6:29). They are to avoid judging and condemning others (6:37), and to be careful not to dwell on the speck in their neighbor's eye while missing the plank in their own (6:41,42). All of which was summed up in St. Paul's classic hymn to love: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). To be sure, these are not the sort of sentiments that any self-respecting Christian is likely to challenge. Who can be against love?

The question is: What do we mean by love? In English there is only one word for

it; in Greek there are four.

"Epithemia" is desire, with the connotation of lust. This is sexual love. Eros is the drive toward union with others which brings self-fulfillment. "Philia" is affectionate love of the sort that exists among brothers, sisters and friends. Finally, agape is total dedication and devotion to the welfare of others, regardless of the sacrifices required and the personal cost entailed.

Most healthy expressions of human love, including Christian love, include a proportionate blending of all four elements.

Christian love consists in an intimate participation in the very life of God, who is Love itself (1 John 4:8-16). In that sense it is a gift of God (as is every virtue), mediated to us by Jesus Christ and activated and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Christian love calls us to share in the paschal mystery by which Christ handed himself over to death and then was raised up and glorified by the Father (Philippians 2:5-11). Christ remains always the model of love in his own life of unselfish service to others (Mark 10:45).

Christian love is the same self-giving love, even to point of crucifixion if need be. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Psychologists remind us that our capacity to love depends not only on grace

but on our personal maturity. Grace, after all, presupposes and builds on nature. Love requires self knowledge, courage, generosity, a sense of responsibility, sensitivity, patience, understanding and an acceptance of oneself with all of our strengths and limitations.

Love of God and neighbor require us to overcome our own narcissism, or self-centered love. We have to achieve a certain measure of objectivity, not only about ourselves but about others as well, lest our judgments be colored too much by our own interests, needs, fears and "hangups."

Christian love, finally, requires commitment and even passion. Its opposite is not hate but apathy, which is a lack of concern, an indifference. (In Greek, apathy means "without pain.")

The church itself is called to be a community of love. "Every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family," the Second Vatican Council declared, "stems from the fact that the Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God's love for humankind" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 45).

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## Wisdom is far more than mere knowledge

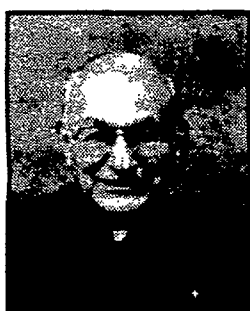
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 6:51-58. (R1) Proverbs 9:1-6. (R2) Ephesians 5:15-20.

"Wisdom has built her house" (R1). What is wisdom? Some people think it is native intelligence; a God-given talent. That's not bad.

Other people think it is the knowledge that comes from studies. They wrongly think that such book knowledge is everything, can solve all problems. Thus they try to solve sexual problems by having sex education in the classrooms. They pooh-pooh moral and religious training. Our universities are crawling with such unwise intellectuals — a coterie of self-assured intolerant thinkers, who crucify Christ in our colleges. Archbishop Fulton Sheen used to say that such intellectuals were so broad-minded that they were flat-headed.

True wisdom, however, is the ability to use knowledge aright. We say, "Wise up!" Or "Put him wise." Or "Get wise; don't act like a fool." Knowledge comes from books; but true wisdom comes from God. That is why the house wisdom built is set up on seven columns — the seven sacraments, especially the Eucharist. "Let him who lacks understanding ... come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed!"

The Gospel concludes the long discourse that John gives on the Eucharist. What is of superlative importance is the fact that this Gospel supports the



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Catholic teaching that Christ is really and truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Jesus said to the crowds: "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever ...."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can he give us his flesh to eat?" They took Jesus' words literally. Were they correct in doing so? Well, whenever Jesus was misunderstood, he explained away the misunderstanding. When Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus when he was talking about being born again, Jesus explained what he really meant. When the Samaritan woman took living water to mean drinking water, our Lord once again explained away the misunderstanding. When his disciples misunderstood his remark "Lazarus sleeps," Jesus came right out and said, "Lazarus is dead."

However, whenever people under-

stood Jesus correctly, but objected to his teaching, he would only reinforce what he had said (cp John 8:56; Mark 2:7). So in this instance, when the crowd took him literally when he spoke of their eating his flesh and drinking his blood, Jesus — far from backing down — reaffirmed more strongly what he had said.

This is even clearer in the Greek than in English. The ordinary word for "to eat" in Greek is "phagein." Thus we have the word "esophagus," which refers to the tube bringing food to the stomach.

Jesus used the word "phagein" twice when promising eternal life to the crowds from the eating of this bread. But when the crowds objected, then Jesus switched words: he substituted the much stronger word "trophein," which means "to crunch with one's teeth." Four times our Lord used "trophein." Our translation tries to catch this nuance by using the word "eat" for "phagein" and the word "feed" for "trophein." Thus, "if you do not eat (phageite) the flesh of the Son of Man ... He who feeds (trophein) on my flesh ...."

Then to leave absolutely no doubt that he meant to be taken literally Jesus said, "My flesh is real food and my blood real drink."

Eating is a necessary act. To get nourishment, it is not enough just to look at food, to admire it, or to philosophize about it. One must eat it.

Eating is a personal act: Nobody can do it for you.

Eating not only nourishes one, but it unites one to the food eaten.

Holy Communion, too, is a personal act: nobody can do it for you. Holy Communion unites us to Jesus. But there is this difference: We change the food we eat into ourselves; holy Communion changes us into Christ. Union with the risen Christ guarantees us eternal life. Wise men eat this bread.

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, August 18

Judges 2:11-19;  
Matthew 19:16-22

Tuesday, August 19

Judges 6:11-24;  
Matthew 19:23-30

Wednesday, August 20

Judges 9:6-15; Matthew 20:1-16

Thursday, August 21

Judges 11:29-39;  
Matthew 22:1-14

Friday, August 22

Ruth 1:1-3, 6-14, 16-22;  
Matthew 22:34-40

Saturday, August 23

Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11; 4:13-17;  
Matthew 23:1-12RESPIRATORY VIRUS  
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716-458-4110Kids' Answers — from page 12  
Joshua fought the battle of Jericho.