

COLUMNISTS

Think ahead, clear the way, act now

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48. (R1) Numbers 11:25-29. (R2) James 5:1-6.

Jesus said, "If your hand is your difficulty, cut it off! ... If your foot is your undoing, cut it off! ... If your eye is your downfall, tear it out! Better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to be thrown with both eyes into Gehenna..."

Strong words! Of course Jesus is employing hyperbole. He doesn't really mean for us to mutilate our bodies. He is simply giving us some very important advice.

The first thing he is saying is, think far ahead. Keep your eyes on your life's goal — the kingdom of God.

There was once a barren land where wood was scarce. But a certain citizen knew of a hidden forest where wood was plentiful, so he availed himself of it. When people asked for some of his timber, he would ask, "What will you do with it?"

Those who wanted firewood were politely turned away. But citizens who wished to build homes or cabinets were given the wood they needed.

The keeper of the forest wanted to encourage long-term thinking. He knew that many people continually focus on the immediate — building a fire to keep warm — and neglecting the far-off — building a home. We need to look down the road 10, 20, 30 years and see where we are headed. If we had a clearly defined destination,



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

then many of us would choose better roads to get there.

Another thing Jesus emphasized is the little things: a hand, a foot, an eye. A Hindustani proverb says, "Men trip not on mountains; they stumble on stones."

In Orlando, Fla., a suspected Colombian drug kingpin who had eluded authorities for two years was caught at Universal Studios — for shoplifting souvenirs. A drug kingpin arrested for shoplifting!

The space probe Mariner I, bound for Venus, headed off course and had to be destroyed at a cost of \$18.5 million. The rocket had responded erratically because an anonymous flight computer programmer had left out a comma from Mariner's computer program. Look to the little things. The little foxes eat the vines.

Are there little foxes gnawing at the vine of your life? For instance, watching television. How many hours do you give it a day? Yet how much time do you give to

reading spiritual books or to praying?

Just think of this: The average reader reads 300 words a minute. In 15 minutes, he reads 4,500 words; in a week, 31,000; in a month 26,000; in a year 1,512,000. The average book is about 75,000 words. In one year, if you read 15 minutes a day, you will read 20 books; in fact, at this rate, you can read the entire Bible four times a year. How are you doing?

Finally, Jesus says, act decisively. Cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye is about as decisive an act as we can take. Someone invented a new word: catmatic. It is the opposite of dogmatic. Dogmatic people have opinions about everything and are always expressing those opinions. Catmatic persons are those who pussyfoot around! They never make firm decisions. They never get into action.

A farmer advertised for a farmhand. Three young men responded. The farmer met with each. He interviewed the first youth and concluded with the question, "How long can you work with a stone in your shoe?"

"Half a day," answered the youth. He interviewed the second youth and asked the same question. The young man boasted, "All day long!"

The farmer met with the third youth, and asked, "How long can you work with a stone in your shoe?"

"Not a minute!" exclaimed the youth. "When I get a stone in my shoe, I take it

out right away."

The farmer hired that man on the spot. If there is some stone in your shoe as you walk the path of life — some stone that is impeding your spiritual growth — a relationship, an addiction, or a bad habit — do you walk with it or do you get rid of it? Jesus would say, "Cut it off and pluck it out and do it now!"

Jesus wants us to think long-term; to get rid of the little things that drag us down; and to act now.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, September 29

Deuteronomy 7:9-10, 13-14 or Revelation 12:7-12a; John 1:47-51

Tuesday, September 30

Zechariah 8:20-23; Luke 9:51-56

Wednesday, October 1

Nehemiah 2:1-8; Luke 9:57-62

Thursday, October 2

Exodus 20:20-23;

Matthew 18:1-5, 10

Friday, October 3

Baruch 1:15-22; Luke 10:13-16

Saturday, October 4

Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29;

Luke 10:17-24

Greater openness impacts teachings' acceptance

A current dispute between some theologians and bishops involves the issue of women's ordination and whether it still is even open to discussion. This dispute is a sign of the times.

The Catholic Theological Society of America recently endorsed the conclusion of a paper saying it is clear "that further study, discussion and prayer regarding this question by all the members of the church in accord with their particular gifts and vocations are necessary."

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had concluded that the church lacks authority to ordain women to the priesthood, holding this to be infallibly taught and to require definitive assent by church members.

Some bishops say that the CTSA is causing pastoral confusion and is harming people's faith by inquiring whether this really is infallibly taught. It has been said that the CTSA failed to provide an accurate historical account of how a teaching develops or to confirm and to search out the authentic sources of a teaching. It has been said that the association's use-



the human side

BY FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

fulness is even in question.

The CTSA argues that its scholarly work is intended to contribute positively to the maturing of reflection on the deposit of faith. The association holds that it is not opposing church authority, but rather is presenting difficulties and questions in order to deepen understanding of Catholic tradition.

As much as I would like to see this debate settled so that our energies aren't dissipated by infighting, I know that won't happen. With the arrival of the information highway, society has entered a new age in which people are conditioned as

never before to speak out on matters that concern them.

In the past, Vatican documents were scrutinized by many fewer people than today. Only those deeply interested in a topic took the time to go over Vatican texts line by line to see what they meant and how they arrived at their conclusions.

But immediately after a document is published today it becomes available online. Analysts quickly find themselves in a position to critique the text, compare it with other texts, assess it. Of course scholars are challenged in this environment to be much more precise about things.

I recall one sleepless philosophy professor coming to a morning meeting and saying he had been on-line with philosophers in Europe discussing an encyclical of the pope on the very day of its release.

Added to the instant availability of information is the fact that in our society no one fears speaking out. The posture toward information and ideas is hardly passive.

In fact, any talk of silencing a person or ending discussion of an issue is guar-

anteed to receive immediate global media coverage and to open up, not close down, worldwide discussion.

Think about it. No society ever before scrutinized people in high positions, or laws, or policies as ours has.

Society is at a crossroads involving the way information is discussed and digested.

As important as women's issues may be, along with the church's need to speak authoritatively, I believe a bigger issue faces the church and, indeed, all of society.

In a context in which neither church documents nor the works of church scholars are accepted as readily as they once were, we're challenged to cope better with openness.

In times that condition people to speak out, to challenge anything that pertains to them, a new need arises for reconcilers, for those willing to collaborate with others and to take the steps needed to help unify people.

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Father Hemrick is director of diocesan relations at the Catholic University of America.

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Kids' Answers

from page 12

1. Eve
2. Noah
3. Ham
4. Isaac
5. Jacob
6. Potiphar

Mystery word: Joseph



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