

COLUMNISTS

Has your family found Jesus?

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 2:41-52. (R1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14. (R2) Colossians 3:12-21.

It's embarrassing to a family to misplace a child. These things happen from time to time, though. It happened to Mary and Joseph at the Passover celebration in Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years old. They were part of a large company of pilgrims traveling together. When a full day's journey away from Jerusalem they realized that Jesus was not with them. They turned back to find him. They went searching for Jesus.

Sunday is Holy Family Sunday. We might ask: Is Christ missing from your family? Even if a family has only one parent, the question is just as relevant.

In one of Tennessee Williams' plays a mentally ill woman is in her garden. She is sitting at a card table working a jigsaw puzzle. She is tense and her hands are shaking. She tries to force pieces of the puzzle together that do not fit. Some of the pieces fall off the table. The pain and the frustration are evident in the woman's face. She cries to her daughter, "The pieces don't fit together! The pieces don't fit together!"

That might well describe the family that seeks to live without Christ. Without Christ the pieces won't fit together. How can they? He is the way, the truth and the life. Without him there is only emptiness where there should be meaning and pur-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

pose. Is Christ missing from your family or from your life?

We all sense the emptiness, the loneliness, the fear. Only one person can meet our deepest needs. Are we searching for him?

According to an old legend, when the Magi were following the star of Bethlehem, they came to the house of a certain woman. They said to her, "Come with us! We have seen his star in the east and we are going to worship him."

"Oh," she said, "I would love to go. I heard that he would be coming one day and I have been looking forward to it. But I can't come now. I must set my house in order; then I will follow you and find him."

But when her work was done, the wise men were out of sight, the star shone no more in the heavens, and she never saw Jesus. Don't put off the truly vital matters of life.

The last words written in Sir Walter Scott's diary were, "Tomorrow we shall ..." But there was no tomorrow for him. He died with good intentions to accomplish a certain goal — a goal that was not to be reached by him. We all have goals and plans and dreams that we reach for. Yet many fall short of their goals simply because of limited time or opportunity. That is why it is always important to get busy and do the right thing immediately. Never delay that which needs to be done today. Is Jesus missing in your family or your life? Then seek him today — not tomorrow, next month, next year.

And where shall we find Jesus? In his Father's house — at church. Of course church may not always be the most exciting place to be, especially for children. A mother once asked her young son what was the highest number he had ever counted to. He replied "537."

She asked, "Why did you stop there?" He answered, "Church was over."

I believe most children enjoy learning about God. Jesus' parents took him to the temple. That says something about parents' responsibility to train their children. In the temple the teachers were amazed at his intelligence and his answers. That also says something about parents' responsibilities for their children's religious instruction.

What a teacher Mary must have been! She so trained Jesus that he had all his pri-

orities straight. On the threshold of manhood he chose to be about his Father's business. Vocations start in the home. It's been said that vocations to the priesthood begin 20 years before the child is born. There is such a dearth of vocations today because families have not found Jesus.

Young people want to know Christ. They want to know the church he founded. They want to progress in wisdom, age and grace before God and men. They will, if parents find Christ.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, December 29**
1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35
- Tuesday, December 30**
1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40
- Wednesday, December 31**
1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18
- Thursday, January 1**
Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21
- Friday, January 2**
1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28qcr
- Saturday, January 3**
1 John 2:29-3:6; John 1:29-34

Meal time should be quality time

Like many single women in their mid-30s, a woman I'll call Millie lives alone in a condominium. Her daily eating routine is to have a cup of coffee and piece of toast for breakfast and to grab the noon special at work.

Depending on how tired she is after work, she throws something together for dinner, orders out or microwaves something frozen. Most nights she eats alone.

Asked whether she thinks her eating routine is normal, she replies: "Very normal. There are millions of people just like me. Let's face it, we live in a new age."

When further asked if she likes her situation, she concedes it could be better. "It would be nice to have someone at the dinner table and to eat good home-cooked meals.

"But," she adds, "you can't invite just anyone over. You need to be with the right person. And you can't do this every night if you're on a strict budget."

Millie's eating habits are not restricted to single women and men living alone. Most families experience the same rou-



the human side.

BY FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

tines. Quick and "fast" foods are the order of the day. How many people find themselves stationed in front of the television eating junk foods?

Although family members live together, many are like ships passing in the night when mealtime arrives.

In this scenario, people suffer a loss. My purpose is not to lay a guilt trip on them, but to be sensitive to their situations — and to make the case that we need to be aware of what we lose when this sacred ritual known as mealtime no longer seems very important to us.

A meal fulfills many roles. It not only sustains us physically but is a gift from God — a reminder that God cares for us in an ongoing way. This realization leads to a sense of awe in the presence of God, who is the producer of our food, and a sense of joy at the realization that we are participating in a sacred mystery.

The problem is that when demeaning rituals replace more sacred ones, God's presence either is minimized or ignored.

A meal has the potential to bring people together. The Scriptures are replete with examples of the meal's unifying role. The most sacred meal of all, the Eucharist, has united the people of whole nations and the hearts of individuals since Christ's time.

Some of us won't have the opportunity to dine with others every day. And some who do have the opportunity will ignore it often.

What I think no one should ignore is the power of mealtime rituals to foster our human dignity.

As the Eucharist is the center of the

church's life, so too should a meal be the center of dignified living.

Some argue that today's quick pace of life doesn't allow us to control our meal routines. This is true. Not only are we losing control over this, we are losing control over most of our time and all that sustains life.

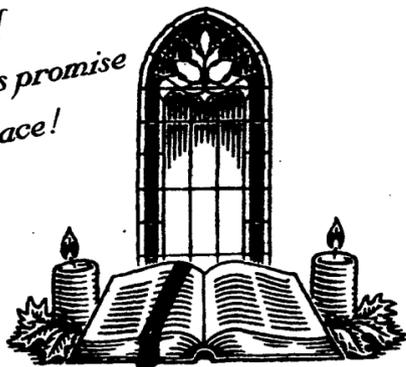
Lacking a sense of the sacred, people are more likely to substitute hasty self-serving rituals for sacred ones.

The loss of a sense of the sacred reverberates in many areas of life. Powerful new strains of anxiety accompany the loss of a sense that time is sacred. Desecration of the earth's resources accompanies the loss of a sense of the earth's sacredness.

And with a loss of the sense that God is present wherever two or more gather for a meal, we diminish the importance of a ritual that for millennia has fostered human dignity.

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

May the holiday season
bring to all
the fulfillment of its promise
of joy and peace!



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