

COLUMNISTS

Easter marks a triumph over death

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 20:1-9. (R1) Acts 10:34, 37-43. (R2) Colossians 3:1-4.

One of the greatest ballerinas of all time was the Russian ballet superstar Anna Pavlova. Her most memorable performance, however, took place after her death.

Anna was to play the role she made famous, the Dying Swan, at the Apollo Theatre in London. Tragically, she succumbed to pneumonia and died two days before the event.

Still, on the appointed night, a crowd of her fans packed the Apollo Theatre. The orchestra began playing, the curtain rose, a spotlight flashed through the dark, and the entire audience rose to its feet. They all stood gazing at a pool of light wandering around the stage, accompanied by the orchestral theme. As the light danced and the orchestra played, they remembered Anna Pavlova. In their hearts they could see her on stage, dressed in white with flashing dark eyes. And when the music stopped at last, they gave the vanished Anna a thunderous ovation that echoed on and on in the night.

An empty stage with only a spotlight, but in their hearts Anna was alive.

The Easter story is just the opposite: not an empty stage, but an empty tomb.



a word
for
sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Jesus was crucified. He died. He was laid in a borrowed tomb, but when the women and later his disciples came to visit his tomb on the third day, the stone had been rolled away. The borrowed tomb was empty. The grave clothes that had been wound around his blood-stained body were neatly folded and laid to the side. He was not there! He was alive! He met with his own, dined with them, reassured them — not as a mere memory dancing in a spotlight, but as a real person.

Death is often an ugly experience. It means separation, loss, heartache beyond description. Oh, we try to pretend it is not so. We disguise death in many ways. We use euphemistic language, for instance, he passed away, she's gone, mother's no longer with us. We dress the deceased in finest suit or prettiest dress. We make use

of the embalmer's art. Sometimes we retreat into memories of better days.

Death would be ugly if Easter were merely a spotlight on an empty stage. But Easter is about an empty tomb and that puts death in a totally different light. The empty tomb means that death has been conquered. "Said I to Death, 'Thou cruel one, thou takest life from me.' Said Death to me, 'Thou fool one, I give but life to thee.'"

Alfred Barret, a wonderful Jesuit poet wrote: "Death is only a change in range — nothing strange. / There is between our dreaming and our seeing one pulsing continuity of being. / Ah, when the life of glory we achieve, why grieve? / We only lose our having to believe."

The Indian mystic Tagore wrote: "Death is not extinguishing the light, it is only putting out the lamp, because the dawn has come."

Around 1992 there was a contest on public radio seeking a new name for the Soviet Union. One entry suggested that in light of the disintegration of the country, that the name should be changed from the USSR to the USSWas.

That's what Easter is all about. Pardon the grammar, but it is taking what we are and making that what we was. It is about giving us new life — today and forever.

Anna Pavlova danced in the hearts of the people who loved her and admired her. The resurrection of Jesus was something more. He is alive. More than an empty stage — his was an empty tomb.

And because it was, death is not just a "Good Night!" Rather, it is a "Good Morning" to those who have followed Christ, not just in their hearts, but in their lives. As the hymn put it: "On that great gettin' up morning we shall rise, we shall rise!" Alleluia! Praise the Lord!

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 13

Acts 2:14, 22-32; Matthew 28:8-15

Tuesday, April 14

Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18

Wednesday, April 15

Acts 3:1-10; Luke 24:13-35

Thursday, April 16

Acts 3:11-26; Luke 24:35-48

Friday, April 17

Acts 4:1-12; John 21:1-14

Saturday, April 18

Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15

Season inspires baseball 'yarnings'

Until the philistines in charge started imitating the NBA and filling the ballparks with rock 'n' roll between innings, baseball taught one of the lost arts of this televisual age: the craft of storytelling. When my sainted Grandfather Weigel first began taking me to old Memorial Stadium in Baltimore in 1958 or thereabouts, yarning between innings was as much a part of the game as ... well, as another Orioles' power outage at a critical moment in the contest. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 15, I duly passed this oral tradition on to my own children when they were old enough to enter the sanctuary; my two daughters are now adept baseball yarnings, and no doubt their younger brother will follow suit in due course.

Baseball stories are usually embellished in the telling, although we of the orthodox persuasion consider it bad form to stretch a tale beyond any ascertainable connection to the truth. But some baseball stories are too good to be true in their own right; no assistance is required.

For example:

Dr. Fritz Rothschild is a distinguished Jewish philosopher, a longtime member of the faculty of New York's Jewish Theology Seminary of America, the editor of *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity* (an im-



the
catholic
difference

By GEORGE WEIGEL

portant contribution to the Jewish-Christian dialogue), and a friend.

When he first came to America he was wholly ignorant of the national pastime. Like most immigrants he was curious to learn the mores of his new home, and remembers how startled he was when he started looking around the subways and piecing together the telegraphic English on the back, or sports, page of the New York tabloids.

"I thought, this must be the most educated population in the world," he said. "People were reading newspapers with big headlines, 'Another Homer' and 'Raschi Does It Again.' This was impressive — people reading about the classics and the greatest of Talmudists on the subway?"

In due course, Dr. Rothschild had explained to him the diminutive of "home run" and the vital statistics of the other Raschi — Vic, the Springfield Rifle — a fearsome headhunter on the New York Yankees' pitching staff in the late '40s.

Then consider this:

A baseball has 216 slightly raised red cotton stitches.

In the complete, 15-decade rosary, there are 159 Hail Mary's, 18 Our Father's, 18 Glory Be's, three Apostles' Creeds, three Hail, Holy Queen's, and 15 mysteries. Total: 216 prayers and meditations.

This is not an accident.

Alas, many baseball stories today are about How Things Used To Be before the philistines took over. As I contemplate another season of begging, borrowing or scalping tickets to Baltimore's Camden Yards (three million seats having been sold six weeks before Opening Day), my mind turns to the days when baseball wasn't an "entertainment experience"; when you simply decided to go to the park on a sweltering summer evening, bought a ticket (box seats for \$3), got a \$.25 popcorn, and settled down for the game.

(Experienced souls also bought a newspaper to sit on, thus avoiding the

splinters in the plank seats. The choice of newspaper was an infallible indicator of class in the Baltimore of the '50s. Shift workers at Sparrows Point and the Bethlehem Steel dry docks sat on the *News-Post*. We were incorrigibly middle class and sat on the *Evening Sun*, the bible of the Baltimore bourgeoisie since time immemorial.)

There were no mascots, no cavalry charges over the loudspeakers in the middle of an important at-bat, no Golden Oldies between innings. And you weren't in danger of getting your eye put out by a broker's cellular-phoné antenna, an aberration buried deep in the womb of the microchip future.

No, you went for baseball, and the storytelling that went with it, and in my case, learned instruction from my grandparent in the finer points of the pastime. It was hot and humid; the sodas were often flat and the popcorn usually stale; the bathrooms would have fit comfortably in the Tower of London during the reign of Elizabeth I; Walt Dropp struck out.

But it was baseball the way it was, and is, supposed to be. I miss it.

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

Air de Cour
Bonnie Choi, Director

"So Great a Sorrow"
Howells' Psalm Prelude
Pergolesi's Stabat Mater

Colleen Liggert, soprano; Barbara Starapoli, alto;
Susanna Cortesio, violin; Drew Irvin, violin;
Jennifer Kalka, viola; Bonnie Choi, harpsichord;
Brink Bush, organ

Good Friday, April 10, 1998, 7:30 pm
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