

COLUMNISTS

Jesus sends Apostles forth after Easter

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 21:1-19. (R1) Acts 5:27-32, 40-41. (R2) Revelation 5:11-14.

A man showed up at church with his ears painfully blistered. After Mass, the priest asked him what happened. The man replied, "I was lying on the couch yesterday watching the basketball tournament and my wife was ironing nearby. I was totally engrossed in the game when she left the room, leaving the iron near the phone. The phone rang and keeping my eyes glued to the television, I grabbed the hot iron and put it to my ear."

"Well, how did the other ear get burned?" the priest asked.

"Well, I no more than hung up and the guy called again."

Now there was a man who was focused. He was so caught up in watching the game, that he didn't know what he was doing.

Well, that was the way it was with the disciples after Easter. They had lost their focus. They were confused and wary. They had been through so much. They had seen Jesus crucified, nailed between two thieves. It was as if everything they had worked for was futile. Then women found the tomb empty. He was alive. They too had seen him. Yet they seemed at sea.

So, the disciples went back to Galilee and to their old trade. Peter said to his six friends, "I'm going out to fish." They



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

all said they would go out with him. Maybe that would clear their heads. They fished all night and caught nothing. Just as day was breaking and they were ready to call it quits, they saw a stranger on the beach.

"Have you had any luck?" he called out to them.

"Not a thing," they answered.

"Cast your net on the other side of the boat," the stranger replied, "and you'll find something." They did and this time they caught so many fish they couldn't haul in the net.

John turned to Peter and said, "It's the Lord." Always impulsive, Peter threw on some clothes and jumped into the water.

It was time for Jesus to refocus his disciples. They needed to come to grips with what he needed them to do. They had had all kinds of mind boggling experiences; now was the time to get on with the work to which he had called

them. They had gone back to their old job of being fishermen. Jesus confronts them. Their ministry is not over. It was just beginning.

He had promised to build his Church on Peter. Now he fulfills that promise. He asks Peter, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" Three times he asks to enable Peter to atone for the three times he had denied Jesus.

Three times Peter replies, "Lord, you know I love you."

I used to wonder how one was to love Jesus. It is simple: Do your job; take care of those entrusted to you by him. For Peter, it was to take care of the sheep and lambs, the hierarchy and the laity of the church. Jesus was the Good Shepherd. But he was going to return to heaven very soon. Yet he wasn't going to leave us orphans. So he appointed another shepherd to take his place, to be his "vicar" on earth — Peter and his successors. On this memorable occasion Jesus conferred the primacy on Peter and his successors.

Then Jesus ended this event with Peter by repeating the call he had given his disciples at the beginning of his ministry: "Follow me." This was his final instruction for them before leaving them. "Follow me." He was not sending them out to a hostile world alone. He goes ahead of them, like a commander leading his troops into battle. "I am with you. Fear not," he reminds them.

It is significant that St. John gives the number of fish caught: 153. The Greek zoologists of John's day knew of only 153 kinds of fish. The number symbolizes the catholicity of the church that Jesus was building on Peter. It was to include all nations. And the fact that John notes that "the net was not torn" implied that despite the number, the diversity of peoples in the church, her unity would never be fractured.

Do we love Jesus? Build up his church.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 27

Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29

Tuesday, April 28

Acts 7:51-8:1; John 6:30-35

Wednesday, April 29

Acts 8:1-8; John 6:35-40

Thursday, April 30

Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-51

Friday, May 1

Acts 9:1-20; John 6:52-59

Saturday, May 2

Acts 9:31-42; John 6:60-69

Why do you go to Mass?

In the 1960s, Father Romano Guardini wrote a number of inspiring works on the Mass that hold as true for the liturgy today as they did for the liturgy of his times. Those works, now collected in *The Essential Guardini: An Anthology of the Writings of Romano Guardini* (Liturgical Training Publications, Chicago, 1997), raise a soul-searching question: What exactly is it that prompts people to go to Mass?

This question isn't easy to answer because no two motivations are exactly alike. But let's examine a few responses that I'm sure we'd hear.

One response surely would be this: The Mass makes many people feel closer to God and thus makes them feel good about themselves.

Again, although some might not admit it, they enjoy the fact that the Mass puts them into contact with friends or helps them start their day right.

Many husbands and wives believe that the Mass is an important means of keeping their family together. As much as



the human side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

they might have to drag their children to it, they believe that the battle is worthwhile and gives religious "backbone" to their family.

Some people would say in response to our question that Mass attendance is a serious obligation; they feel they won't get to heaven without it.

Some people love the sense of the spiritual found in the Sunday liturgy's ritual, especially when it is celebrated with processions, the blessing with water, fine music, beautiful vestments and a whole-

some community spirit.

Others like a certain priest's homilies, perhaps on social-justice issues or making the Bible come alive.

For some, the Mass affords an opportunity to pour personal troubles out to God, to pray for a favor or to regain a sense of balance and focus in life.

If we fit into any of these categories, however, Father Guardini would challenge us to ask whether we are using the Mass solely for our own ego needs. If so, he would encourage us to seriously rethink those needs in order fully to experience the liturgy as it is intended.

Here is a thought-provoking observation that Father Guardini offers on the Mass: Seldom is the word "I" found in it.

This indicates that the Mass aims to help us realize we are part of God's bigger world, which stretches far beyond our little circle of friends, family, personal needs or even our need to be alone with God.

In the Mass, we are connected with the saints of all ages and with God's his-

tory of salvation. The liturgy of the Mass invites us to leave our own time zone, our own little world, and to enter into God's bigger picture.

Although we may reside in a particular parish at this given moment in time, we transcend it when we unite ourselves to the transcendent Jesus. A main reason for going to Mass, therefore, should be to enter God's world, not to maintain our world.

The purpose of the Mass is to pull us out of ourselves toward God. Of course, the result also will be that we love and serve others better than ever before.

Father Guardini is quick to say that all of this is not easy. Human beings have "a tendency to spiritual intimacy and exclusiveness."

One reason I enjoy reading Father Guardini's works is because he makes it so easy to see why exclusiveness and ego needs miss the real point of the Mass.

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

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