

Sinatra's death came in very good year

An astute cultural critic — someone like Garry Wills perhaps — can decipher for us the astonishing impact Frank Sinatra's death last month made upon so many of us. This week's column, however, is concerned with the pastoral, not the cultural.

The way the Catholic Church handled Frank Sinatra's death and burial tells us a great deal about how much the church itself has changed since he was just a young crooner in the 1940s and '50s. Back then, someone like Frank Sinatra could never have been given a church funeral and a Catholic burial.

Notwithstanding his extraordinary generosity to the worthiest of causes, his three divorces and four marriages would have rendered him morally ineligible for a public funeral Mass and Catholic burial. (Those were the days before annulments became so widespread, although it is reported that Sinatra's first marriage had been annulled, and his fourth later validated by the church.)

What happened in this case? We saw garbed priests on camera, offering warm testimony to the impact of Sinatra's singing and style. His old neighbors in Hoboken, N.J., referred to him in the sort of reverential way that the citizens of Wadowice, Poland, will speak of their beloved hometown hero when John Paul II passes



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

on to his eternal reward. And the funeral Mass itself was celebrated by no less an ecclesiastical figure than the cardinal-archbishop of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony.

Let there be no misunderstanding. This column is written in praise, not criticism, of the cardinal and those others who ministered, in the name of the church, to the Sinatra family in their time of bereavement. These good priests were only doing what their ordinations called them to be — caring and compassionate pastors.

They represent a church that now treats people more often with kindness rather than severity, and that no longer punishes families for the presumed sins of their departed loved ones. The deceased, after all, have already faced their divine Judge and been embraced with a love and understanding that infinitely exceed the para-

eters of ecclesiastical rules.

One can imagine a conversation that might have taken place in a rectory office, were we back in 1948 rather than 1998:

"No, I'm sorry but we simply can't do it. Yes, I know a lot of people are going to be upset, especially the children. But you have to understand, in the eyes of the church you weren't really his wife. You were only living together — in sin. Just like the two women with whom he 'attempted' marriage before you.

"Please, if we did it for you just this one time, it would be a public scandal. People would say if you have a lot of money or are important enough, the church will look the other way. We can't do that. This is a matter of God's law. Only he can change it.

"No, we can't go to the cemetery either. In fact, if you have a plot in a Catholic cemetery, you'll have to buy another somewhere else because he can't be buried in consecrated ground. Oh, I thought you knew that. Yes, that's the rule. We just can't do it. But I can say some private prayers for him, and I'll remember him at Mass.

"No, the Mass can't be announced in the bulletin. It has to be private — something just between the priest and God. We have to leave his eternal soul to God's mer-

cy.

"Look, why don't you go home now and take care of the arrangements with the funeral director. And remember, if ever you want to come down for confession, just give me a call. God is a forgiving God.

"What was that you mumbled about the church not being forgiving? I understand your feelings, but please try not to be bitter. I'll pray for you."

Among the millions who mourned Frank Sinatra's passing last month, there must have been a number of Catholics who have complained about how the Second Vatican Council displaced the church of their youth and that we'd be a lot better off if we could restore the Catholicism of the 1940s and '50s, when Frank Sinatra himself was still young and skinny.

But does anyone really want to go back — to all of that?

Thank you, Cardinal Mahony and all who ministered to the Sinatra family and to their relatives and many friends in their time of sorrow. You showed the face of Jesus as a loving, compassionate, and forgiving redeemer, and you helped to configure anew the church's face to his.

Just as Vatican II had hoped.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Eucharist nourishes us in love, service

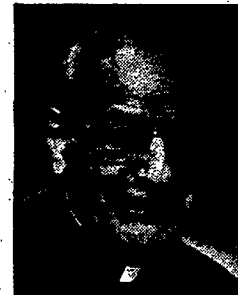
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 9:11-17. (R1) Genesis 14:18-20. (R2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Benedict XI wanted to beautify the papal residence. He had heard of the fame of Giotto, called the Apelles of Florence, and sent an emissary to get a sample of his work. When Giotto received the emissary, without saying a word the painter drew a circle with his brush on a sheet of paper. He gave the disappointed emissary his sample for the pope. That was all the evidence the pope needed, because the circle was exquisitely perfect.

Proof of skill and artistry lies not in quantity but in quality. Giotto had put into the circle all the beauty of his art.

One "circle" — a tiny host — is enough to capture for us all of God's power and love. Corpus Christi, the feast of the body and blood of Christ in a "circle," celebrates this wonder of power and love.

Some persons today are too preoccupied with what the body of Christ is, and not with what it means. Can we not well imagine the frustration of Christ in the Eucharist? Again and again, a thousand times over, priests proclaim to myriads of communicants: "The body of Christ!" And they answer, "Amen." That is what the Eucharist is — the bread that is Christ!



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

But the key question is not what body of Christ is, but what does it mean? People are hungry, spiritually hungry for love and a wanting to love. The lonely heart needs to know that the body of Christ means power — the power to cast out fear and to instill love, that those who labor and are burdened can find rest for themselves simply by coming to the body of Christ.

I know we all believe that the body of Christ is God present among us. But what we don't believe, so it seems, is that he can make a difference in our lives. Christ is present in the Eucharist not just to be adored. He is present there for the same reason he became bodily present on earth 2,000 years ago to help us, to nourish in us a life of love and service.

Jesus, through his real presence in the

Eucharist is constantly offering us the capacity to become really present to God (in worship), to others (in service), and to oneself (in self-control).

About the year 700, a Basilian monk in Lanciano, Italy, had continuous doubts about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He couldn't believe that the words of consecration uttered by him over the bread and wine would change them into the body and blood of Christ.

One day, as he was offering Mass, at the consecration the bread literally changed into Flesh and the wine into Blood, which later coagulated into five irregular globules. He did not consume them, but invited the people to come to the altar to see what the Lord had done. In 1713 the Flesh and Blood were enshrined in a silver monstrance preserved today in the Church of St. Francis in Lanciano.

Lanciano, a town south of Loreto, means "the lance." The centurion St. Longinus who pierced our Lord's side with a lance was supposed to have come from there. Longinus had poor eyesight. He regained total vision when he touched his eyes with the water and blood from the side of Christ. He converted, left the army, and was martyred in Cappadocia. We celebrate his feast on March 15 and his statue is one of the four surrounding the main

altar in St. Peter's Basilica. I was privileged to celebrate Mass twice in — Lanciano at the altar where the reliquary containing the body and blood of Christ is reserved.

The Cure of Ars called the tabernacle "the pantry." His body is our bread to nourish love. And his blood is our wine to fill us with joy.

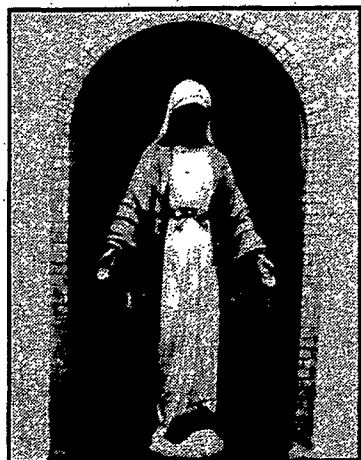
"Take and eat," Jesus commanded, that we might have love, joy and peace.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, June 15**
1 Kings 21:1-16; Matthew 5:38-42
- Tuesday, June 16**
1 Kings 21:17-29; Matthew 5:43-48
- Wednesday, June 17**
2 Kings 2:1, 6-14;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
- Thursday, June 18**
Sirach 48:1-14; Matthew 6:7-15
- Friday, June 19**
Ezekiel 34:11-16; Romans 5:5-11;
Luke 15:3-7
- Saturday, June 20**
2 Chronicles 24:17-25;
Luke 2:41-51

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