

## Who's encroaching on whom?

From the time of the Council of Trent in the mid-16th century and largely in reaction to the Protestant reformers' stress on the "priesthood of all believers," the Catholic Church restricted the notion of ministry to the ordained, that is, to bishops, priests, and deacons and to those preparing to be ordained.

Due largely to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, ministry has taken on a broader and richer meaning. The Catholic Church no longer limits ministry to the clergy. Indeed, the council acknowledged that there is "a variety of ministries" in the church (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 18; Decree on Ecumenism, n. 2).

Vatican II explicitly recognized the liturgical ministries of servers, lectors and choir (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 29), and that of catechists (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, n. 17).

In a column on the late, pioneering champion of the lay apostolate, Father Louis Putz, CSC, I repeated his wonderfully pithy and accurate comment about the change wrought by the council: "The church is a new church today. The big emphasis up to now was clerical, but now the church needs to be run by the laity."

Before Vatican II, the relationship of



### essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the laity to the hierarchy was reflected in the conventional definition of Catholic Action, namely, the participation of the laity in the work of the hierarchy. It was as if only the hierarchy had received a mission directly from Christ, while all others in the church, especially the laity, had to be deputized by the hierarchy to exercise any formal ministry in the church.

But the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church made clear that the church is not just the hierarchy. It is the whole People of God (chapter II, "The People of God"). Every member of the church shares, by baptism, in the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king. "Everything which has been said so far in chapter II concerning the People of God applies equally to the laity, religious, and clergy" (n. 30). Indeed, the lay apostolate

is "a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself" (n. 31).

Even though there are still some occasional references in the council documents to the "sacred power" of the ordained priest and bishop, the old medieval distinction between the power of orders and the power of jurisdiction was abandoned. Whatever "power" a minister may have is always for the sake of the minister's service to others, and never for the personal benefit or aggrandizement of the minister as an individual.

Nevertheless, there is some ambiguity or even ambivalence in the council's teaching. Although it taught that all the faithful participate in the priesthood of Christ by baptism and confirmation (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n. 3), the council also insisted that there is a difference not only "in degree" but also "in essence" between "the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood" (DCC, n. 10).

The faithful, the council said, exercise their priesthood by joining in the offering of the Eucharist, by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, and by practicing self-denial and active charity.

On the other hand, the ordained priest, "by the sacred power that he has, forms

and governs the priestly people" and acts "in the person of Christ" as he "brings about the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people" (DCC, n. 10).

The Vatican has been concerned in recent years by certain post-conciliar developments at the parish level which, in the Vatican's mind, have blurred the distinction between clergy and laity. It is now suggesting that the increased involvement of lay people in the ministerial life — for example, as eucharistic ministers, pastoral associates, directors of liturgy — is only temporary. As soon as the so-called vocations crisis is over and the church once again has an abundance of priests, it will send these lay ministers on their way.

But perhaps the real issue is not whether the laity have been encroaching on clerical territory during these past few decades, but whether the clergy have been encroaching on lay territory these past few centuries.

Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, all the baptized have the opportunity to fulfill their vocation to ministry, even if not all ministries are open to all of them. Not at the moment at least.

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

## We must pass through the narrow door

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Luke 13:22-30. (R1) Isaiah 66:18-21. (R2) Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13.

Someone asked Jesus, "Are they few in number who are to be saved?"

The speaker was referring to the gentiles. He took it for granted that all Israelites would be saved. But the gentiles? Would many or a few of them be saved?

Jesus shocked him with his answer. He said in effect, "Don't be so cocksure about yourselves. Many will say, 'We ate and drank in your company. You taught in our streets.' But he will answer, 'Away from me, you evildoers.'"

Salvation is more than just belonging. Being a Jew is no guarantee of salvation; nor is being a Catholic a guarantee. Salvation is more than belonging. It demands doing. Thus Jesus said, "Try to come in by the narrow door."

In the Greek, the word for "try" is *agonizates*, to agonize over, to strive, to struggle. Salvation is a striving, a struggle. The saint is the sinner who keeps trying.

There is a story that the devil once told St. Don Bosco, "Take it easy, don't work so hard."

Don Bosco answered, "I'll rest when you do."

We must always try to live the Christ-



### a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ian life, no matter the cost, nor the effort. A mountain climber died on Mt. Everest. When last seen he was going strong for the top, but an avalanche stopped his advance. On his tomb were inscribed the words: "He died climbing."

So we must live striving. If one rowing against a strong current stopped rowing, he would be swept backwards. To stop striving, to stop trying, is to miss the narrow door and salvation.

So our Lord's first response to the number saved was don't bank on who you are, rather work like the dickens, "try" to come in through the narrow door.

Regarding the number saved, Isaiah (R1) says they will be many. They shall come from the distant coastlands, from

all the nations. They will come, as Jesus said, "from the east and the west, from the north and the south."

The Book of Revelation implies that more will be saved than will be lost: two-thirds saved and one-third lost. That makes sense, for Christ's redemption is stronger than Satan's wiles. "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound."

Then our Lord told his questioner there'd be a reversal of roles after death: "Some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last."

Shakespeare said the same in "The Merchant of Venice": "O that wealth, honor and offices were not obtained by corruption, but by merit. Then low ones would be in high places, and how many be commanded that command."

St. Augustine said there would be three surprises in heaven: First, we'd see people there we thought would never make it. Second, we would not see people there who we thought would certainly be there. And last, the biggest surprise, we'd find ourselves there.

To be a Catholic is a great privilege. But it is not enough for salvation. We must live our faith. In the book of Job we read: "The oxen were ploughing and the asses were grazing." It is not enough to

come to Mass each Sunday to be fed, like the asses. We must also "plough," like the oxen, cut furrows in society by living the faith, sowing the seed of the Gospel by just being good, being Christian, a light to others by what we say and do, and especially by accepting the crosses and problems of everyday life, as Jesus did.

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

### Daily Readings

**Monday, August 24**  
Revelation 21:9-14; John 1:45-51

**Tuesday, August 25**  
2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 14-17;  
Matthew 23:23-26

**Wednesday, August 26**  
2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, 16-18;  
Matthew 23:27-32

**Thursday, August 27**  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Matthew 24:42-51

**Friday, August 28**  
1 Corinthians 1:17-25;  
Matthew 25:1-13

**Saturday, August 29**  
1 Corinthians 1:26-31;  
Mark 6:17-29

### KIDS' ANSWERS

from page 16:

- Samuel  
(The others are Gospels)
- Genesis  
(The others are numbered books)
- John  
(The others star with "P")
- Luke  
(The others are Old Testament prophets)
- Jonah  
(The others are women)

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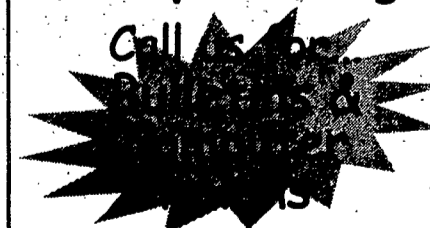
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