

# Rely on the ordinary, not 'miracles'

For the past several years thousands of Catholics have been making their way to Worcester, Mass., to view a 14-year-old child as she lies in a coma-like state in her bedroom, behind a special window for visitors. It cannot be determined whether she has grown intellectually or is aware of what is being said to her. Her pediatrician identifies the condition as akinetic mutism, a rare disorder. The child has been in that state since she nearly drowned in the family's swimming pool 11 years ago.

A yearly Mass in her parish church, celebrated on the anniversary of the incident, drew 800 people in 1996. Last year the number rose to 4,000, thanks in large part to an hour-long report on Mother Angelica's cable-television network. This past August 8,000 attended an open-air Mass in the College of the Holy Cross's football stadium.

Priests from various parts of the United States and from other countries have celebrated Mass at the girl's home. According to reports in the *Hartford Courant*, the previous bishop of Worcester approved the establishment of a chapel in the family garage and the placement of a tabernacle in the girl's bedroom. The current bishop, Daniel P. Reilly, has appointed a commission to investigate the case.



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

The girl is portrayed by her devotees as a "silent soul" who brings people closer to Jesus through her sufferings. She is said to have acquired special spiritual powers after her mother took her to Medjugorje, a village in Bosnia where the Blessed Virgin is believed to have appeared. However, instead of the girl's being miraculously cured there, as her mother had fervently prayed, she became ill and had to be rushed home.

Not long after her return to Worcester, her nurses reported smelling roses in her room, although none were there. Others said that statues were weeping oil and blood. Priests celebrating Mass in the garage chapel claimed to have seen blood dripping from the consecrated host. Physical cures were attributed to the girl's intercession.

The recent Mass in Holy Cross stadium was preceded by the recitation of the rosary and followed immediately by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a practice no longer encouraged in the church. It is the liturgical equivalent of bringing out a fresh plate of the main course immediately after the meal itself has ended, just for the sake of showing it again to everyone at table. (Those likely to be offended by that comparison should remember that the Eucharist is a meal as well as a sacrifice.)

After various Masses at the girl's home, visiting priests have anointed people with "holy oil" supposedly gathered in plastic cups from the weeping statues. Some of the worshipers would fall to the ground in scenes similar to those at Pentecostal and charismatic services.

Although there is no attempt here to disguise this column's skepticism regarding all such reports, the column casts no aspersions on the good will and sincerity of those who have traveled to the girl's home or to the annual Masses in hopes of finding a cure for themselves or their loved ones. One woman is described in a newspaper story as choking back tears as she told of her bringing her terminally ill brother to the service.

To be sure, healing was a major element of the Lord's own ministry. But the church has continued that ministry, not through preteritious attempts at miraculous cures, but through its network of hospitals and other health-care facilities all over the world and especially through its everyday ministries via the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

In other words, God continues the divine healing work on our behalf not through outlandish and bizarre happenings, but through ordinary people rendering ordinary service to others in the ordinary events and activities of life.

It would be easy to deplore the goings-on in Worcester if it were not for the many innocent and well-meaning people who are drawn there out of hunger for an authentic spiritual experience and out of a desperate need to be touched by the healing presence of God.

The problem, however, is that they are looking for God in some faraway place and extraordinary circumstance. God is closer at hand: in their homes, in their parishes, in their local communities.

This is what the principle of sacramentality is all about: the presence of the invisible God in the ordinary, visible things of the earth. That principle is a distinguishing mark of Catholicism itself.

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

# God is the source of all that's good

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 18:9-14. (R1) Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18. (R2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18.

A Hindu priest, a Jewish rabbi and a preacher were caught in the same area by a terrific thunderstorm. They sought shelter at a farmhouse. The farmer told them the storm would last for hours so they had better stay with him for the night.

"There's a problem," the farmer said. "I have room for only two of you, one will have to sleep in the barn."

"I'll be the one," the Hindu priest offered. "A little hardship is nothing to me." He went out to the barn, but returned a few minutes later.

"I'm sorry," said the Hindu, "but there is a cow in the barn. Cows are sacred in my religion. I cannot intrude into their place."

"Don't worry," the rabbi said. "I'll go to sleep in the barn."

A few minutes later he returned to say, "There's a pig in the barn. Pigs are unclean in my religion. I can't share quarters with a pig."

"Oh, all right," the preacher said. "I'll go sleep in the barn."

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. It was the cow and the pig.



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

That's an old joke, of course. Pharisees probably told it on tax collectors.

Jesus told a parable of two men, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector, going up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee thanked God he wasn't like the rest of men. Then he listed the sins of other people. The tax collector beat his breast and asked God to be merciful to him a sinner. God heard him and not the other.

Prayer is not an opportunity to praise oneself. Prayer is a means of getting close to God. The Pharisee did not go to the temple to enter into real communion with God. He went to parade his piety. He did not go to listen to God but to expound.

A man lost a valuable watch while working in an ice house. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the saw-

dust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but in vain. A small boy heard about the fruitless search and slipped into the ice house. Soon he emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it.

"I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

So often we talk to God, like the Pharisee, all about ourselves. Rarely do we listen to him.

Another reason why the tax collector's prayer was so much more effective than the Pharisee's was that he was honest with regard to his needs before God. The tax collector knew that he had fallen under the wrong power and influence. His loyalty to Rome had produced greed rather than good. He realized that he needed to put his life under a new power and a new influence. His ultimate loyalty could no longer be to Rome but to God. So he went to the temple to pray. He could muster only a few words and beat his breast, but God heard his prayer. God heard the Pharisee as well, but God could not act on the Pharisee's prayer for it was not an honest sharing of his own needs. The Pharisee focused not on his own shortcomings but

on those of the tax collector.

The Pharisee placed his hope in his own virtue; the tax collector put his hope in God.

The Pharisee was so busy singing his own praises that he did not even acknowledge the real source of all that was good in his life. The tax collector could not even lift his eyes to heaven. He emptied his cup. God filled it with living water.

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

## Daily Readings

- Monday, October 26  
Ephesians 4:32-5:8; Luke 13:10-17
- Tuesday, October 27  
Ephesians 5:21-33 or 5:25-32;  
Luke 13:18-21
- Wednesday, October 28  
Ephesians 2:19-22; Luke 6:12-16
- Thursday, October 29  
Ephesians 6:10-20; Luke 13:31-35
- Friday, October 30  
Philippians 1:1-11; Luke 14:1-6
- Saturday, October 31  
Philippians 1:18-26; Luke 14:1, 7-11

**Hobart A. Lerner, MD**

continues the practice of ophthalmology

at

720 East Avenue  
Rochester, NY 14607

(716) 461-2850

SPINNING IS NOW AT FLEX

**Come try us out!**



**FLEX**  
Gym & Aerobics Center  
Spinning, aerobics, cardio kick boxing, and 3 personal training sessions  
605 Culver Rd., Rochester  
654-7122

**3 MONTHS Only \$99**  
Offer ends Oct. 31st

**Nautilus OF PITTSFORD**  
35 Lincoln Ave.  
Pittsford  
248-6298

Membership privileges available at both locations

By R Staff

A l poor. accor occup lege i Brazi know

"T] dards the B in fail ly an They' as far comm

No dents lege w Sister St. Jo Collej

The Brigit Monr Rochu ioner

The ters o side o which Goias durin villag

He family montl ians s dors.

a grov she kr visiter comp spoke ple of devicu their

Am Norto kites; some derly

Her inter theraj schoo physio health ic was said of she sa to wea

T info call dio wor 717 finc pag http Wej abo Vou lies at tl spo For fror Vall Cos Call ext. ho