

COLUMNISTS

Church, too, must die to be resurrected

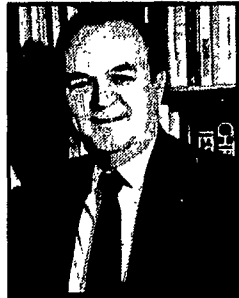
Easter is at the heart of Christian faith and worship. It is the saving event that gives the entire New Testament its theological shape and direction.

This is so because the Resurrection is the centerpiece of the paschal mystery, the Lord's passing over, for the sake of our salvation, from life through death into eternal glory at the right hand of the Father. "If Christ has not been raised," Paul wrote, "your faith is vain; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The death-to-resurrection dynamic remains at the core of the whole Christian life, and indeed of all human life as well. We can only truly live if we are prepared to die to self and to live for others, in fidelity to the truth. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies," Jesus said, "it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24).

The pope's annual Easter greeting this Sunday will echo the traditional profession of faith, "He is risen!" The air will be filled with "Alleluias" and the mood in Rome will be appropriately festive.

On Monday morning, however, the world will look just about the same as it did on Easter morning. Violence, poverty, homelessness, oppression, hatred, greed and injustice will continue unabated. The light of the risen Christ, so joy-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

fully displayed at the Easter Vigil, will not have penetrated the earthly nooks and crannies of sin and apathy.

This will not shock or disorient people of common sense. They know already that sinners do not automatically cower, Dracula-like, under the shadow of the cross, nor does the world become instantly cleansed by the sunlight of morality at the first intonation of the Easter Gloria.

It has been 2,000 years since the Word of God became flesh and dwelled among us, but the world was not thereafter immunized from evil. Given the extraordinary development of modern science and technology, we have witnessed instead a dramatic increase in our capacity to inflict even more horrifying evils upon one another and the created order itself.

And yet we continue to plod along, ready to do whatever we can to push back the forces of evil by becoming ourselves weak and imperfect instruments of the grace of the Risen Lord.

While we remain severely limited in our ability to effect any real change in the world at large, we can make a difference, though still a modest one, in the church. And that is not a matter of minor importance, because the renewal and reform of the church contribute indirectly to the renewal and reform of the world itself.

How? According to the Second Vatican Council, the church is the universal sacrament of salvation (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 48). It is the community of disciples in which God's saving activity on behalf of every human being is made visible.

Consequently, if the church fulfills its mandate to love one another "with an active love, in word and in deed, thus bearing witness to the truth," then "people all over the world will be awakened to a lively hope, the gift of the Holy Spirit, that they will one day be admitted to the haven of surpassing peace and happiness in their homeland radiant with the glory of the Lord" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 93).

Such lofty ideals can never be realized,

however, if the church itself is afraid of the very truth to which it is called to bear witness. How, one will ask, can the church possibly be "afraid" of the truth it proclaims?

By "truth" I do not mean simply the truths of the catechism or even of the Bible, for example, that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that we are destined for eternal life, or that God is triune. While these are great and eternal truths, they are also, in their own way, "textbook truths" that can be repeated in rote fashion without being really assimilated and lived in all of their challenging consequences.

There are, after all, not two separate categories of truth: the one religious and the other secular. There is only one truth. To bar access to the truth, to stifle discussion of it, to censor those who seek to explore and then to share it these are among the gravest violations of the one truth to which the church must always bear witness.

To be sure, the church may occasionally "die" a little under the force of uncomfortable truth, but there is no other way to its own resurrection.

That is what Easter is all about.

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

Resurrection from sin can be ours

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

It is interesting that the first persons Jesus appeared to on the First Easter were women. One of the women identified as seeing the resurrected Jesus was Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene was not only a woman, but she was from a town with a bad reputation — rabbis later attributed its fall to licentiousness. Then, too, Mary was probably the woman once possessed by seven demons (Luke 8:2). Why did God entrust the important news of his resurrection to a woman with a reputation for demon possession who came from a town known for its sinfulness?

One day Jesus visited the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) at Capernaum, not far from Magdala. There, a woman who had led a sinful life, brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood over his feet, washed them with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with perfume. Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven," since she loved much. Soon after this incident, Luke says a group of women who had been healed of evil spirits followed Jesus. Among the women Luke mentions Mary Magdalene. Luke says these women supported Jesus and his disciples out of their



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

own means. Think of it, these relatively unknown women paid the bills of Jesus and his disciples. So often women in the church do such important things and get no or little credit.

On the day Jesus was crucified the men deserted the master and fled; but not the women. At the foot of the cross were four women and John. Among the women was Mary Magdalene. No doubt she helped Mary, the Mother of Jesus, prepare his body for burial; then left the tomb with a broken heart and all her hopes crushed.

On Sunday Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. Still dark, she could see that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. Fear and grief ripped her soul. "They have stolen his body," she cries to Peter and John who confirm her finding. Confused, the men return to their homes.

Mary is left alone at the tomb. Weeping she looks once more inside. Two angels are there and ask, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Turning she sees Jesus, but does not recognize him. He too asks, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

"They've taken away my Lord," she answers. And thinking that he is the gardener she says, "Where have you laid him? I will take him away."

Jesus simply says, "Mary."

In the twinkling of an eye she knows who is speaking.

"Rabboni," she exclaims, which means, "Teacher."

The musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" is replayed quite often. Calling Jesus a "Superstar" angers me, for Jesus is no superstar: He is the Son of God! Then to suggest that he and Mary Magdalene were romantically involved blows my top. I suppose that is only natural in our sex-obsessed culture. I mention this here because the facts of the first Easter dispute this notion. When Mary recognizes Jesus in the garden she does not in this most intimate and emotion-laden moment call him by name. She uses a formal term: Rabboni — Teacher. She sees him only as her master, her Lord!

Isn't it noteworthy too that in this most

dramatic moment, Jesus appears to a woman and not to Peter? And to a woman who may have been a great sinner? Doesn't this tell us that the Easter message is not just about a resurrection from the dead, but of a greater resurrection from sin? That the same resurrection is available here and now to every other sinner in the world?

Resurrection from sin for all who seek Jesus in faith and hope? He seeks us, we need only seek him, as Mary did.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 5

Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matthew 28:8-15

Tuesday, April 6

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

Wednesday, April 7

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

Thursday, April 8

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

Friday, April 9

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

Saturday, April 10

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

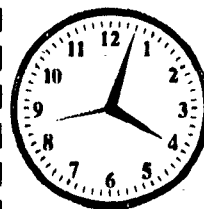
I your Mother, am coming to visit you as THE MOTHER AND LADY OF ALL NATIONS



Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send NOW Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of ALL nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disaster, and war. May The Lady Of All Nations, who once was Mary, be our advocate. Amen

For an appointment to see her please call Dorothy Bartosch — Host Guardian 716-242-9329

Isn't it time...



to start Saving Money on your printing without sacrificing quality?

Try Courier Graphics & Wayuga Press...

A special arrangement between Wayuga Press and Catholic Courier Graphics offers you one-stop shopping for quality, affordable design, typesetting & printing.

GIVE US A CALL FOR YOUR NEXT JOB! COURIER GRAPHICS • 716-328-4340 WAYUGA PRESS • 315-754-6229

HART MONUMENT COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue (OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746