

COLUMNISTS

Gospel of life presents a challenge

The name of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin will always be associated with the expression "consistent ethic of life," which the media translated as "the seamless garment." Whichever one prefers, the term refers to a holistic approach to moral issues. Thus, if one claims to be "pro-life," that commitment must be to all of life, at every stage of development or decline.

In the Bernardin view (later embraced and employed by the Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in statements on U.S. presidential campaigns), to be pro-life does not mean only to defend the unborn. Human life is a precious gift that needs to be nurtured and protected at every point.

As important as the abortion issue is, it cannot be the only issue by which to judge the moral character and fitness of politicians and other public figures. Catholics should not vote against politically liberal candidates solely on the basis of the abortion issue nor give a "pass" to politically conservative politicians who may be "right" on abortion but "wrong" (by the standard of Catholic social teaching) on a whole range of other life issues.

Many in the pro-life movement have not taken kindly to the consistent-ethic-of-life or "seamless garment" approach to the abortion issue. They are convinced that it



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

dilutes or diminishes the commitment to defend the life of the unborn, and that it lets liberal politicians off the hook by allowing their stand on other issues to compensate for their stand on abortion.

For such critics, the name of Cardinal Bernardin was (and still is) more likely to evoke sentiments of scorn rather than admiration. According to the cardinal's close friend and biographer, Eugene Kennedy, these critics, even during the cardinal's last illness, protested noisily outside his residence. In their minds, by situating the abortion issue within a larger framework of life issues, the late cardinal made it easier, knowingly or not, for Catholics to adopt a pro-choice position. And for these critics, pro-choice is pro-abortion.

Ironically, the church leader these critics most admire and respect, Pope John

Paul II, also takes a consistent-ethic-of-life approach, as he demonstrated during his visit to St. Louis in late January.

During his homily in the Trans World Dome stadium, the pope said that the "new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life — who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation." That gospel, he insisted (quoting from his own encyclical, "The Gospel of Life"), is a "single and indivisible Gospel."

Then he listed some of the most important elements of a genuinely pro-life position. It includes, to be sure, opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, all of which he characterized as a "terrible rejection of God's gift of life and love." This won immediate and warm applause from the congregation.

The gospel of life, the pope continued, also requires a commitment to "the sick and those in distress." Again, applause.

But then he pulled many of his listeners up short. Insisting that the "new evangelization" requires an unconditional commitment to life, "in every situation," he pointed to yet another component.

"A sign of hope," he declared, "is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done

great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform."

Then came the "hard saying" (for some of his most conservative admirers): "I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary." Confused and tepid applause.

The next day the governor of Missouri, a non-Catholic who supports the death penalty, acceded to the pope's appeal and commuted the sentence of a death-row inmate to life without parole. The fact that the condemned man was one of the least deserving of a commutation among all those awaiting execution made the gesture even more prophetic in character.

Jesus did not say that we should love the least obnoxious of our enemies, but to love our enemies, period. He did not say to do good to those who hate us least intensely, but to those who hate us, period.

John Paul II, like the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, not only believes in, but also proclaims, a consistent ethic of life. Like the late cardinal, the pope challenges us all with the "Gospel of life" — liberals, conservatives and centrists alike.

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

God's word, bread feed us at each Mass

Third Sunday of Easter: (R3) Luke 24:13-35. (R1) Acts 2:14, 22-28. (R2) 1 Peter 1:17-21.

"I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you. Which would you like to hear first?" the farmer asked.

"Why don't you tell me the bad news first?" the banker replied.

"Okay," said the farmer. "With the bad drought and inflation and all, I won't be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year, either on the principal or interest."

"Well, that is pretty bad," the banker said.

"It gets worse," said the farmer. "I also won't be able to pay anything on the loan for all that machinery I bought, not on the principal or interest."

"Wow, is that ever bad," the banker admitted.

"It's worse than that," the farmer continued. "You remember I also borrowed to buy seed and fertilizer and other supplies. Well, I can't pay anything on that either — neither principal nor interest."

"That's awful," said the banker, "and that's enough! What's the good news?"

"The good news," replied the farmer with a smile, "is that I intend to keep on doing business with you."

The two disciples on the road to Em-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

maus were as low as that farmer — if not lower. Puzzling things had been going on. Their master had been crucified like a common thief. They in turn had scattered like frightened sheep. But now there were reports that their master was not dead at all. Reliable sources told them that he had appeared to some of their trusted friends. Was it real? Was he really alive?

Do we believe the good news or the bad? Isn't that our dilemma? The good news is that Christ is alive. The bad news is that this is having so little impact on the world today. In this world, it is easy to be fearful and troubled of heart like the two disciples of Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

As the two disciples were making their journey and trying to make sense of their situation, of their world, Jesus comes to them. Jesus doesn't wait for them to find

him. The poet Francis Thompson called God "the hound of heaven." He pursues us to show us the way.

And how did Jesus reveal himself to the two disciples? By explaining the Scriptures and by the breaking of the bread.

So we shall find Christ by listening to the Word of God in the Sunday liturgy. The lesson Jesus drew from the Scriptures for the two disciples was that the cross was a necessary step to the crown — no cross, no crown. *Per aspera ad astra*: "Through bitter paths to the stars."

The second thing Jesus did to restore the faith of the disciples on the road to Emmaus was to break bread with them, to celebrate the Eucharist. It was at that moment their eyes were opened. Then Jesus disappeared as if to tell us that from now on his presence would be sacramental.

What happened on the road to Emmaus happens every day at every Mass. Every Sunday the church feeds us God's word and God's bread. That is why attendance at Sunday Mass is so imperative. To absent oneself from Sunday Mass frequently and without a valid reason will eventually lead to a loss of faith.

The Liturgy of the Word builds up one's faith. Just consider the second reading. It tells us three things. First, God will judge each one of us justly, based on our

actions. That certainly must give us pause. Secondly, we are in a strange land, we are a pilgrim people, that should color our outlook on life. Thirdly, we were purchased by the blood of Jesus, that should give us great self-esteem.

But to know our faith is not enough; we must live it. God's word tells us what we must do; God's bread imparts the power to do it. The one build faith; the other keeps us faithful. So it is the Mass that matters!

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 19

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

Tuesday, April 20

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

Wednesday, April 21

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

Thursday, April 22

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

Friday, April 23

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

Saturday, April 24

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



In our community, the Image Centre of the World, we greatly appreciate the value of memories. Pictures capture special moments, family events, and once-in-a-lifetime happenings. Our life, as with a picture, becomes a memory to family and friends. When you consider how you would like to be remembered and memorialized, think of us, we are the CRAWFORD FUNERAL HOME, where helping families share memories has been our focus since 1957.



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SERVING DINNER
Monday - Saturday