

COLUMNISTS

Sunday Mass is a needed 'habit'

I was at a presentation recently when a question arose about "why we should attend Sunday Mass." The simplicity of the question perplexed me a bit, particularly since I thought I should be able to offer a profound and articulate reply. That didn't happen.

An experience yesterday brought the question to mind again. I was out of town, knew nothing of the church community around me, but tried to "catch a Mass" before making a trip to the airport.

The liturgy was not quite what one would have wanted. The lector wasn't very good, and we couldn't hear her in the back. The organist needed additional music lessons, and the hymns were hard to sing. Babies everywhere were shouting and crying, the amount of coughing suggested an outbreak of tuberculosis, and the adorable children in the pew directly in front of me distracted and amused me throughout. The woman next to me had submerged herself in a strong and offensive perfume; people appeared to arrive and leave at any time during the celebration; the ushers used military tactics to get us to Communion. Finally, the homily was definitely not among my "10 personal best."

As I sat there, my mind began to wan-



the
moral
life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

der. I began to think about swimming, of all things. Back in 1994, when I was really out of shape, I joined a YMCA in Baltimore. Because the membership cost me quite a bit of money, and because I realized that I had begun to take on the shape and muscle tone of a walrus-like creature featured on a Marlin Perkins program, I began swimming with a vengeance.

From that moment on, I never missed a day of swimming. If I was too busy, I still swam. If I felt tired, I still swam. If I hated the monotony, I swam anyway. If the pool was too crowded and I had to share lanes, I endured it. If the water was too cold, I braved it. If the "Y" closed for some reason (like Christmas!), I was furious. If the lifeguard overslept, I was murderous. I swam every day, no matter what.

Swimming became an important marker for my days, and it actually paid off in other positive ways too. Gradually I began to lose some of the walrus-like characteristics. After a while I developed pretty good muscle tone. I trimmed down a little. I felt less stressful because of swimming. I also became a pretty good swimmer. I learned to do flip turns. After a few years I even became less compulsive about it, and could alternate swimming with walking every other day.

Yesterday, as I sat in this not altogether inviting celebration, I became aware that I haven't been swimming since January. For a whole host of reasons, I haven't been able to get to the health club. I haven't exercised at all. As a result, I've lost many of the good effects that had been part of my life when I swam. More importantly, I realized that it is going to take me a long time to regain the ease and skill as a swimmer that I had developed before. I know that it will take me a very long time to tone my now shapeless muscles.

Back to the question of regular eucharistic participation. I don't think there is one right or one profound answer to the question of why it's important to attend Mass every week. I don't think it's entirely a matter of the quality of the ser-

vice. I don't think it's only a matter of the others there recognizing and welcoming me. I don't think it can be reduced to a weekly "dose of sanctifying grace." All this is important, of course.

But a big part of it is simply the issue of doing something with regularity. Liturgy forms us in the faith of the church. Yesterday the presider pronounced familiar words and I listened to readings I could have recited by heart. The movements, words and actions of the entire celebration were familiar in every way.

In part, I think, that may be an important part of the answer. Rather than a single moment of dramatic faith awareness, liturgy works on us gradually, over time. It works by way of a cumulative effect, through repeated, regular exposure to the stories of Jesus heard over and over again. The habitual recitation of the eucharistic prayer exposes us to the nature of our salvation in almost imperceptible ways, through steady, regular, ordinary participation. It doesn't sound very profound or religious; I suppose, to draw an analogy between Eucharist and exercise. Still, I think there may be something to it.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

The Holy Spirit provides church's power

Pentecost Sunday (May 23): (R3) John 20:19-23. (R1) Acts 2:1-11. (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13.

On Feb. 2, 1985, the Daytona 500 Auto Race had just started when, on the third lap, the Donny Allison's \$250,000 car rolled to a stop. He had run out of gas.

How embarrassing. One of the top drivers in auto racing stalled because he had run out of gas. That often happens to many people: Spiritually, they try to drive without gas.

After Jesus ascended, his disciples, the holy women, and the brothers of the Lord devoted themselves to prayer. While they were all together in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them, like a violent, rushing wind and filled the whole house. They saw tongues of fire rest on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues.

On that day there were Jews in Jerusalem from every nation come to celebrate Pentecost. The noise drew a large crowd. And when the apostles spoke, they each heard them in his own language. "Are not these men all Galileans? How is it that each of us hears them in his native tongue?" Obviously, on the day of Pentecost the church had its fuel tank full. From her on that day we can learn what will energize the church today.



a word
for
sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

First, the source of the church's power then was the Holy Spirit. If we are going to have the joy, the energy, the enthusiasm of the early church, we too must pray for the Holy Spirit to fall upon us. Anytime we try to substitute any other kind of power for the Holy Spirit, we are in trouble.

Political power won't do. Celebrity power won't do. Support groups are not enough. Nothing can be substituted for the Holy Spirit as the basic source of the church's power. If ever we become what God means us to be, it will not be because of our programs. It will be because God's Spirit lifts us.

As birds, heavier than air, glide, ride the winds, are never blown off course, so we need to ride the winds of God's Spirit. He is the source of all our power.

Secondly, the Pentecost event teaches us that where God's Spirit is there is unity.

On that first Pentecost people of differing backgrounds, differing social classes, differing skin colors, differing national origins, all heard the Gospel in their own tongue. Rather than fragmenting into tiny self-serving groups, they were drawn into a cohesive whole. What a beautiful sight that unity must have been.

When Billy Graham held his crusade in Montgomery, Ala., in the '60s, he insisted on an integrated choir. A newspaper editorial said Graham had set the church back a hundred years. Graham answered, "If that's the case, I failed in my mission. I intended to set it back two thousand years." Where the Spirit of God is present, there is unity: no longer male or female, black or white, Jew or Gentile. There are only precious souls for whom Christ died. When the waters of God rise, the fences disappear. We are one in the Spirit.

Finally, where the Spirit is, there is outreach to others. People are concerned about sharing the Gospel with family, friends and neighbors. The church at Pentecost reached out from Jerusalem to Rome and to the ends of the earth.

People magazine did a story on Richard Lederer, a teacher and writer who collected such things as unintentionally funny headlines and signs, etc.

The photographer for the magazine asked Lederer to set up a humorous,

posed picture. Lederer chose a telephone pole in his town with the sign, "Electric Avenue." Right beneath the sign was a traffic sign announcing, "No Outlet."

That is a danger for the church: to experience God's electricity, his Spirit, and find no outlet — refuse to share that power with others. The source of the church's power is the Holy Spirit. Where he is, there is unity and a concern for reaching out to others.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, May 24
Sirach 17:24-29; Mark 10:17-27

Tuesday, May 25
Sirach 35:1-12; Mark 10:28-31

Wednesday, May 26
Sirach 36:1, 4-5, 10-17;
Mark 10:32-45

Thursday, May 27
Sirach 42:15-25; Mark 10:46-52

Friday, May 28
Sirach 44:1, 9-13; Mark 11:11-26

Saturday, May 29
Sirach 51:12-20; Mark 11:27-33



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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