

COLUMNISTS

A Jubilee Lent

According to ancient Jewish law (Leviticus 25), a Year of Jubilee was to be observed every 50 years. The land was to lie fallow, mortgage debts were to be canceled, and slaves were to be set free. The Year of Jubilee was meant to serve as a dramatic reminder that all life and all land belong to God.

The term "jubilee" has been used in the Catholic Church since the first Holy Year in 1300, when the pope granted indulgences for those who made pilgrimages to Rome and performed other acts of devotion.

The focus of holy years in recent times has been on the celebration of God's forgiveness and mercy and on our own obligation to manifest this forgiveness and mercy toward others.

Because the current holy year is also the first year of a new Christian millennium, Pope John Paul II has made a special point of underscoring the need for the church itself to acknowledge its past sins, to ask forgiveness for them, and to amend its ways for the future.

That thrust is evident in the pope's message for Lent 2000. Lent, he reminded us, is traditionally "a time of conversion and reconciliation." This year, however, "it takes on a particular character, occurring as it does during the Great



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BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Jubilee of the Year 2000." Looking back over the recently ended century, the pope noted, we are appalled and shamed by the cruel violence, the forced deportations, the systematic elimination of peoples, and the contempt for the fundamental rights of the person.

The Risen Christ, however, offers forgiveness and reconciliation to those who acknowledge their sins and seek his mercy. Not to individuals alone, but to the church as well.

"The church is called to bear witness to the communion, peace and charity which are the kingdom's distinguishing marks ... (and) knows that faith without works is dead" (James 2:17).

During this jubilee year we are "called in a particular way to manifest Christ's love to our brothers and sisters who lack

the necessities of life, who suffer hunger, violence or injustice. This is the way to make the ideals of liberation and fraternity found in sacred Scripture a reality, ideals which the holy year puts before us once more."

The ancient Jewish jubilee called for the freeing of slaves, the cancellation of debts and the giving of assistance to the poor. "Today," the pope pointed out, "new forms of slavery and more tragic forms of poverty afflict vast numbers of people, especially in the so-called Third World countries. This is a cry of suffering and despair, which must be heard and responded to by all those walking the path of the jubilee."

"How can we ask for the grace of the jubilee," he continued, "if we are insensitive to the needs of the poor, if we do not work to ensure that all have what is necessary to lead a decent life?"

This year's Lenten message, however, cannot be understood apart from the pope's celebrated apostolic letter in 1994, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* ("As the third millennium draws near"), in which he noted that this jubilee year would require even more repentance on the part of humanity and the church because we "leave behind not just a century but a millennium."

"It is fitting," he wrote, "that the church should make this passage with a clear awareness of what has happened to it during the last ten centuries." It must purify itself, "through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act." To acknowledge our errors and infidelities requires "honesty and courage."

These weaknesses and failures have included co-responsibility for the ruptures in church unity, first between East and West beginning in the 11th century and then within the West beginning with the Reformation in the 16th. They have also included resistance to the legitimate role of the laity and to the church's need to be open to dialogue with the world.

"In the Church," therefore, there is a need for "a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity, and [an] increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture."

There are other challenges, to be sure, but these are sufficient to fully engage the church this year—and well beyond.

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

Transfiguration: A glimpse of the future

Second Sunday of Lent (March 19): (R3) Mark 9:2-10. (R1) Genesis 22:1-2,9, 10-13, 15-18. (R2) Romans 8:31-34.

The Transfiguration story underscores the theme of sacrifice. Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about his coming death on Calvary, the sacrifice of the cross. Peter, James and John needed to see the divinity of Christ in order to survive the terrible scandal of the cross.

In the Transfiguration scene there were three elements. First, there were Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets — making it clear that Jesus was the center of Old Testament history, that he, too, must become the center of our lives. Never at a loss for words, Peter blurts out, "Let us erect three booths on this site, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." No sooner had Peter spoken those words than Moses and Elijah disappeared. Now they were alone with Jesus.

Second, there was the transfigured Jesus — the sun of his divinity for one brief moment shone through the cloud of his humanity, to buttress the faith of the Apostles. The scene was meant to remind us of our own baptism, which transfigures our very being, transform-



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ing us into children of God and making us heirs to his heavenly kingdom.

Third, there was the cloud overshadowing them. From out of the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him." How much God loves us. He prevented Abraham from sacrificing his own son, yet he loves us so much that he willed that his only-begotten Son give his life for us.

At that moment Peter heard what he did not want to hear, "Listen to him." Peter had rebuked Jesus earlier when Jesus had spoken of his suffering and death. But now God was saying, "Listen to him." Peter didn't want to listen — not to news of Christ's death. This was an awful truth he did not want to confront, but he knew he must. There are some truths

that necessarily mean change.

The Apostles wanted to stay on the mountaintop. Who does not want the moments of glory to last forever? God permits these moments to carry us over the Calvary periods of life. Too much sun withers the rose; too much rain wilts it. Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow, light and darkness, winter and summer. At the Transfiguration, there was talk of the cross at the moment of glory.

As Peter, James and John descended the mountain, they pondered the significance of what they had just experienced. No doubt they walked back down in silence, filled with awe. Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone of their recent experience, "before the Son of Man had risen from the dead." The time would come when they would tell everyone, but the time wasn't right just then. Jesus and the disciples still had work to do. Jesus needed the disciples' help. This mountaintop experience played a major role in the lives of these three disciples. However brief the experience was, they were given a glimpse of the future. Those who have seen the future are better prepared to live in the present.

What a difference Jesus' Transfiguration made in the lives of the three disci-

ples and what a difference that can make for us. God breaks into our lives sometimes. When it happens, our perspective on life is changed. Such occurrences prepare us for life in the valley. Such experiences tell us that whatever the situation, we are not alone.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, March 20

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16;
Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22;
Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24 or
Luke 2:41-51

Tuesday, March 21

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday, March 22

Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday, March 23

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

Friday, March 24

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28;
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday, March 25

Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10;
Luke 1:26-38



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