

COLUMNISTS

Homily speaks to role of theologians

The following is an excerpt from the homily I was privileged to give at the funeral of the distinguished moral theologian, Richard A. McCormick, SJ, last month in Toledo:

The first reading (Sirach 39:6-11) is especially apt for this occasion. Richard McCormick was indeed "filled with the spirit of understanding." As a theologian and priest, he poured "forth his words of wisdom and in prayer [gave] thanks to the Lord." Those who benefited from his knowledge, counsel, and wisdom praised him, and now that he has left this earth, "his renown will not cease."

The second reading (2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:13) reminds us of the task one undertakes in proclaiming the Gospel and in reflecting upon it for the sake of the whole church. Among the norms for such a task are the "sound words" of Paul and of the other Apostles and saints, rooted as they are in "the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

Proclaimers of the Gospel and students of its message are called to "guard this rich trust," but, as the late Pope John XXIII insisted, not as museum keepers but as gardeners cultivating living and growing things. Our assurance of fidelity to this "rich trust" is given by the Holy Spirit who "dwells within us" — indeed,



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

within every member of the church, not just within a select, entitled few.

What we have heard "through many witnesses," Paul writes to Timothy, we "entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well." Tradition, as one theologian pointed out, is not a matter of wearing your grandfather's hat, but of having a baby. It is the transmission of a living reality.

We are gardeners who work in the fresh air and bright sunshine, not museum guards with eyes fixed on surveillance cameras, ever ready to sound the alarm. Richard McCormick practiced his own calling as a theologian in the light of John XXIII's understanding of it.

The third reading (Mark 10:17-30) goes to the heart of the vocation of a moral theologian — to answer in some

meaningfully practical way the perennial question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?"

"You know the commandments," Jesus replied, listing six. "Teacher," the young man persisted, "I have kept all these since my childhood." Then Jesus looked at him "with love" and told him, "There is one thing more you must do. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor; you will then have treasure in heaven. After that, come and follow me."

Obedience to the law is never sufficient. There is "one thing more": the complete divestiture of oneself and of one's gifts and possessions for the sake of others. "At these words, the man's face fell," the Gospel tells us. "He went away sad, for he had many possessions."

"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God," Jesus pointed out to his disciples standing nearby. Indeed, he said, it is "easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye."

Richard McCormick saw that one of his principal tasks as a moral theologian was to encourage people to aspire to greater heights of discipleship, to practice a "faith that does justice," without, however, laying unnecessary burdens on them, much less imposing false guilt.

Jesus' disciples were "overwhelmed"

by the Lord's warning. "Then who can be saved?" they asked him. "For humans it is impossible, but not for God," he replied. "With God all things are possible." In the end, the burdens of discipleship are lightened by hope.

As we leave this church at the end of Mass and return eventually to our ordinary, everyday lives, we will sing the hymn, "How Great Thou Art." The last stanza is particularly pertinent to the hopes we have expressed in prayer today for Richard McCormick's eternal happiness and peace, and for ours as well: "When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim, 'My God, how great thou art!'"

The McCormick family selected that as the recessional hymn because they want us to leave this church singing of the greatness of God. They want us to sing joyfully of the love that bound them all together as a family, with their brother and uncle, Dick. It is a love for which we "give thanks" today in this Eucharist. It is a love, St. Paul insists, that "never ends."

...

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

The cross: Love in its purest form

Fourth Sunday of Lent (April 2): (R3) John 3:14-21. (R1) 2 Chronicles 36:14-17, 19-23. (R2) Ephesians 2:4-10,

Sue Kidd had a 3-year-old son who was afraid of the dark. She tried everything to help little Bob overcome his fear. She'd leave a light on in the hall, then in his room — nothing helped. He was still scared of the dark and would cry out to her in the middle of the night.

One night while she was pregnant with her second child, Sue was holding Bob to comfort him against the dark. All at once he touched his mother's round abdomen and asked, "Mama, is it dark inside there where my little brother is?" "Yes," she replied, "it is dark in there."

Then Bob asked, "He doesn't even have a night light, does he?"

"I don't think so," Sue explained, "because he's not really alone. He's inside of me." Suddenly she had an inspiration. "It's the same way with you," Sue said. "When it's dark and you think you're all by yourself, you really aren't. I carry you inside me too. Right here, in my heart."

Bob went back to bed that night and was soon asleep. That was the last time he woke up afraid during the night.

Children aren't the only ones who are afraid when night falls. Nicodemus, a



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

high-ranking member of the Pharisees, was full of fear. Nothing was making sense to him. He heard about Jesus and thought maybe he could help. Under the cover of darkness, he went to see Jesus.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the time when Moses and the children of Israel were in the desert. Some were bitten by snakes and died. Moses sought out God for a solution.

God instructed Moses to make a poisonous serpent and set it on a pole. Everyone who was bitten and looked at it would live. Moses did as God had instructed. When the people looked at the snake, they were healed.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all

who believe may have eternal life in him."

Jesus' advice to Nicodemus was to look to the cross. That is where our hope lies — on the hill of Calvary. Jesus knows how we feel. He's been there himself. He carried the cross. He was nailed to it. But through the cross came light. The bitter paths led to the stars.

The story of Nicodemus does not end with the lesson of the serpent in the wilderness. Jesus has a message for Nicodemus, and for us as well. To Nicodemus Jesus said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life." Jesus was trying to move Nicodemus from a life of law to a life of love. He was trying to impress on him the abundance of God's grace, that God's devotion to his children is beyond measure. It is love in its purest form.

One night, at a prayer crusade, a young girl, Joni Eareckson Tada, spoke. At 17 she had been paralyzed in a diving accident. She had prayed for healing. Yet she remained a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair. Sitting there in that wheelchair, Joni spoke from her heart. She told how she was filled with anger after praying and believing a miracle

would occur. A miracle did take place, though not the one she had sought. Instead of being healed physically, God met her in her pain and gave her life new meaning and new direction. From her wheelchair she has given hope and life to hundreds of others so plagued.

Look to the cross. There, we shall see love in its purest form; we shall see healing and life; we shall discover that God cares for and loves each one of us.

...

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 3

Isaiah 65:17-21; John 4:43-54

Tuesday, April 4

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16

Wednesday, April 5

Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30

Thursday, April 6

Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

Friday, April 7

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22;

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday, April 8

Jeremiah 11:18-20; John 7:40-53

**HART
MONUMENT
COMPANY**

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)
(716) 865-6746



Since 1895

**MARRION
MONUMENTS**

476 State St.
(Corner Jay)

546-4450

M/F 9-5, Sat. 10-2

**"MILESTONES" EDITION
Coming April 27, 2000.**

The *Catholic Courier's* annual Milestones/Vocations edition is a great way to promote vocations programs for ordained, vowed and lay Catholics and to honor those marking significant anniversaries of their vocations. Reader interest is captured by profiles of former teachers and pastors celebrating jubilees, and by an extensive listing of married couple celebrating wedding anniversaries.

This edition also will recognize those retiring from active ministry and address the need for young people to follow in the footsteps of those founding therein.

The advertising deadline is April 20.

To take advantage of these opportunities please contact us at

716-328-4340

(1-800-600-3628 outside the Rochester calling area)
or by fax at (716) 328-8640.