

## COLUMNISTS

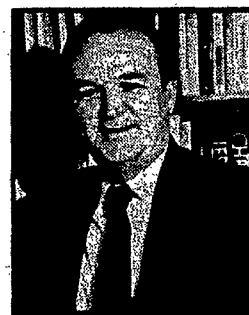
## Pope triumphs on Holy Land pilgrimage

Cardinal Adam Maida, archbishop of Detroit, had it right when he told the press that Pope John Paul II's visit to the Holy Land, and particularly to the Western Wall and Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, was "probably the strongest moment of his pontificate."

Indeed, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of what he did there. As Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, Dominican biblical scholar and longtime Jerusalem resident, pointed out: "By standing there (at the Western Wall), this symbolized the humility of the church which for Jews has been viewed as arrogant. By standing there he transformed the relationship of Christianity toward Judaism. It is a complete reversal of history."

And there is more than anecdotal evidence to support this view. A poll taken in Israel immediately following the visit showed a dramatic rise in favorable attitudes toward Christianity. The pope is viewed by many there not only as the spiritual head of the Catholic Church but of all Christians. His visits to Yad Vashem and the Western Wall were key to this change in outlook.

The pope's words at Yad Vashem were overshadowed only by his physical presence and his gesture of leaving his chair to shuffle across the hall, leaning on his



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

cane, to greet six Holocaust survivors.

In his remarks, the pope indicated that silence rather than words was the more apt response to the terrible events memorialized in that place. "I have come to Yad Vashem," he said, "to pay homage to the millions of Jewish people who, stripped of everything, especially of their human dignity, were murdered in the Holocaust. More than half a century has passed, but the memories remain."

"No, one," he continued, "can forget or ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale. We wish to remember. But we wish to remember for a purpose, namely, to ensure that never again will evil prevail as it did for the millions of innocent victims of Nazism."

"As Bishop of Rome and successor of the Apostle Peter, I assure the Jewish

people that the Catholic Church, motivated by the Gospel law of truth and love and by no political considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place."

He prayed for "a new relationship between Christians and Jews, ... a mutual respect required of those who adore the one Creator and Lord, and look to Abraham as our common father in faith."

No wonder that Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak referred to the pope's visit to Yad Vashem as an "historic journey of healing" and suggested that "time itself (had) come to a standstill. This very moment," he said, "holds within it two thousand years of history. And their weight is almost too much to bear."

The same combination of words and gesture prevailed at the Western Wall three days later. A Reuters photo on the front page of many of the world's leading newspapers showed the diminutive pope, bent with age and bowed in prayer, standing before the massive wall.

Another shot depicted him placing a customary note to God in a crevice. The note contained the same message of reconciliation he had uttered at the Mass of reconciliation in St. Peter's Basilica a

week earlier. It asked forgiveness for the sins perpetrated against the Jews and it committed the church to "genuine brotherhood with the people of the covenant."

By the time the pope left Tel Aviv for Rome, he had clearly succeeded in his longstanding hope of making a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land during this Jubilee Year 2000, and of voicing a plea for peace, reconciliation and forgiveness in a land torn for centuries by conflict.

How enduring the effects will be no one can say at this point. But clearly the Jews were touched and transformed by his words, his gestures and his very presence. The Palestinians were uplifted by his message of peace and justice, and his explicit recognition of their suffering as refugees under Israeli occupation.

Only in his outreach to Orthodox Christians and Muslims did he meet with somewhat less success. In their regard, one recalls the pointed words of Abba Eban, a past foreign minister of Israel, directed at the time against a Likud government: "They never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity (for peace)."

Pope John Paul II seized his — and then some.

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

## Remain faithful to God even in time of doubt

Second Sunday of Easter (April 30): (R3) John 20:19-31; (R1) Acts 4:32-35; (R2) 1 John 5:1-6.

Johnny Carson, asked what he would inscribe on his tombstone, responded with the words he used before commercial breaks on his television show, "I'll be right back."

Jesus told his disciples he would be put to death and rise again on the third day. The Apostles tried to understand but, for some reason, they just didn't.

On the first Easter they were trying to make sense out of what had happened. They were afraid. They met behind locked doors and talked in muffled tones. What had happened to Jesus could very well happen to them.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Jesus appeared in their midst. He showed them his hands and his feet, and greeted them with familiar words: "Peace be with you." They were upset. How did he know where they were hiding? How did he enter without using the door? Yet here was the master right in their midst. And alive! Slowly they began to calm down and then to rejoice.

That's the first thing that happens when people meet the risen Christ: he takes away fear. And notice what hap-



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

pened next: Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jesus had unlocked the doors of fear in their lives; now he would be sending them into the world to unlock those doors for others. So he gave them a foundation that would not crumble: the Holy Spirit.

As the Apostles were having this extraordinary experience, one of them, Thomas, wasn't with them. When the other disciples caught up with Thomas, they told him that they had seen the risen Jesus. They were filled with excitement and hope. But Thomas was a realist. He shook his head and said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails and put my finger in the mark, I will not believe."

It is all right to have doubts and questions. Christ accepts us just as we are —

doubts and all. Thomas was not excluded from the rest of the Apostles because of his disbelief. A week later, while the disciples were meeting, the risen Lord Jesus again appeared in their midst. This time Thomas was with the others and he saw Jesus with his own eyes. Jesus said to him, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." That was all it took. Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God."

In order for an event to affect a person, it must become an experience. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was an event, but it wasn't until the disciples experienced the risen Christ that their lives changed. They went from hiding to spreading the Gospel. They risked persecution, torture, even death to tell others of the Good News of Jesus.

Thomas knew of the event of Jesus' resurrection, but it wasn't until he experienced the risen Christ that his life changed. Some of us know of the event of Christ's resurrection, but we never have a life-changing experience with Jesus.

All of us doubt at one time or another. The story of Thomas teaches us that we can be faithful to God even in mo-

ments of honest doubt. Thomas, while in doubt, stayed with the disciples until Jesus appeared and erased his doubts.

There's nothing wrong with honest doubt, if it is a questing doubt that seeks answers and acts upon them, like Thomas saying, "My Lord and my God."

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, May 1

Acts 4:23-31; John 3:1-8

Tuesday, May 2

Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7-15

Wednesday, May 3

1 Corinthians 15:1-8;

John 14:6-14

Thursday, May 4

Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36

Friday, May 5

Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15

Saturday, May 6

Acts 6:1-7; John 6:16-21

Since 1895

**MARRION MONUMENTS**

476 State St.  
(Corner Jay)

546-4450  
M/F 9-5, Sat. 10-2

**HART MONUMENT COMPANY**

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers  
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue  
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746

**St. Michael's Homecoming Mass**

SUNDAY, APRIL 30TH AT 7 P.M.

Come together with old friends and schoolmates to worship in the rich tradition of your parents and grandparents. Father Vincent Panepinto will preside at an English Mass. The choir from St. Charles Borromeo will perform, accompanied by a 1909 pipe organ. Secured parking will be available in the lot behind the church hall. Mass will be followed by a social hour in the hall. Tours will begin at 5:30 p.m.

**ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH**  
869 Clinton Avenue, North • Rochester, N.Y. • 325-4040

e-mail us at [cathcour@frontiernet.net](mailto:cathcour@frontiernet.net)