

COLUMNISTS

Translate Scripture readings into daily life

This week I'll continue focusing on part of the liturgy to consider some moral implications that may flow from it. After we pray at each Eucharist, we listen to Scripture readings. On Sundays we generally hear a reading from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, one from the New Testament letters, and a Gospel passage.

There are all kinds of books about how Scripture can influence our moral lives. Some passages, for example, give us concrete commands or laws that determine our behavior. The Ten Commandments are like that. Sometimes passages that sound like they are giving us a command, actually come to be interpreted as offering us an ideal toward which we might aspire more than a rule for living. "Go sell what you have and give it to the poor," has come to be interpreted that way. Other passages seem to be somewhere between an ideal and a rule. I most often think of "Love your enemies and do good to those who hurt you" in those terms.

In addition to functioning as rules or ideals governing particular behaviors, some passages in Scripture give us a way of seeing the world more than a way of acting in it. These passages reveal something about God to us, or reveal something about human reality. Many of the stories Jesus told serve us in these ways: "Who touched the hem of my garment?" or "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed," or "And Jesus came walking to them across the water."



the
moral
life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

Basically, Scripture can function in many different ways in our lives. It can challenge us to act differently or behave differently; it can shape the way we view reality; it can help us to understand God better or understand ourselves and our situations in deeper or wiser ways. We can always learn more about Scripture. Hundreds of books and articles are written each year to help us understand the Bible. We can find new and challenging ways of interpreting the Bible through discussion, homilies, or readings we do on our own.

We know that there are ways we can misuse Scripture, too. Today we sometimes encounter groups or individuals we have come to label as "fundamentalist." By this I think we refer to those who belong to churches that accept Scripture as the only source of authority and who take Bible passages quite literally, denying that we need to interpret them and try to understand how the context surrounding the writing of a passage influenced its com-

position and meaning. These methods of Scripture interpretation also often overlook ways in which we, the readers of Scripture, bring our own scheme of meaning to the text. No one is capable of an absolutely "objective" reading of the Bible. We all bring the background of our social and economic class, our family biases, our individual experiences.

Still, there is something unique about the fact that we read the Bible in the context of our act of worship. In this setting, we come together as a people to hear readings from the book we have accepted as the canon of our faith. This is the book to which we have granted the highest authority, and which becomes the norm for what we believe — what we seek to become as individuals and as communities, what we strive to embody in our actions. Ultimately, we don't want simply to HEAR the word of Scripture, we want to live it.

Nicholas Lash, a theologian from Cambridge University, has encouraged us to think of Scripture as a "performative document." By this Lash means that we ought to be concerned more with performing the Scriptures than simply reading them for greater understanding. Our goal is to embody what we read and make it live through us. The Good News is finally meant not to remain on the page or even to delight our hearing. The Good News is meant to be made real as the community of Christians acts it out in our very lives. The Word indeed becomes flesh and

dwells among us, but only insofar as we let the word of the Gospels possess us and determine how we see the world, how we interpret our role in it, how we should behave toward one another because of it.

I used to spend lots of time and energy trying to figure out if the episodes recorded in the Bible actually happened just the way they are recorded. Were there really THREE wise men, not four? Were they really all MEN? Did Jesus really heal the woman who was stooped over just as it is recorded in the text? Did Jesus actually walk across water without sinking?

My studies told me that questions like those, and the answers are important. Years and years of reading Scripture in the context of worship, however, has taught me something else. Coming together week after week to be formed by reading these passages has taught me that more important than knowing the actual number of wise men is discerning which gifts wise people are bringing to our communities. More important than proving that Jesus healed the hunched-over woman is letting Christ heal my own stunted development. More important than deciding whether water supported Jesus' body is the realization that He will walk impossible paths to get to every one of us — if we let him!

Scripture studies are terrific, and we can learn much from them. Listening for God's word together from the book we've agreed to live by is much better even than that.

Meaning and use of indulgences clarified

Q. My question concerns indulgences. As a convert to the Catholic faith 10 years ago, I don't remember hearing any discussion about them.

I understand that during this jubilee year we have several indulgences available, but I'm still not sure what they mean. What is an indulgence? Even now we don't hear much about them.

— (Florida)

A. It's true that the church is extremely careful in speaking of indulgences today, partly because this aspect of our faith has been so badly misunderstood in the past.

Catholic tradition on the subject is founded on the fact that every sin is not only a disobedience of God's law, it also violates the harmony of creation established by God and is, at least to some degree, a rejection of his love.

Forgiveness then requires not only conversion, but a reintegration of that divine order, which itself normally involves some sort of pain and cleansing (purgation) before entering the eternal presence of God.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI called for a re-



question
corner

BY FATHER JOHN DIETZEN

form and better understanding of the whole indulgence structure. In light of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, he said, the church "undertook various ways of applying the fruits of our Lord's redemption to the individual faithful and of leading them to cooperate in the salvation of their brothers so the entire body of the church might be prepared" for the fullness of God's kingdom (Doctrine of Indulgences, No. 6).

Remission of temporal (as distinct from eternal) punishment for sins has been called "indulgence" for hundreds of years. Indulgences were formally attached

by the church to certain prayers and actions, and could be applied to oneself or to one who has died.

A few important points should answer most of your questions. First, the number of permanent indulgenced prayers and works has been drastically reduced. Why was this?

Pope Paul VI explained the reason. "The main concern," he wrote, "has been to attach greater importance to a Christian way of life and lead souls to cultivate a spirit of prayer and penance, and to practice the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) rather than merely repeat certain formulas and acts" (Enchiridion of Indulgences, 1968).

Second, partial indulgences, as distinct from plenary, are granted using only those words, with no determination of days or years as was common previously.

This avoids confusion, among other things. Contrary to what many Catholics believed, an indulgence of one year, for example, did not mean "one year off of purgatory."

It meant, rather, whatever alleviation of purgation or punishment might be achieved by one year of fasting or other penance. Thus it did not directly address the subject of time in purgatory.

Great pains are taken in recent years, by Pope John Paul II and other leaders, to keep the understanding of indulgences in harmony with the Gospel and with other Catholic teachings.

It is good, and very helpful spiritually, to remember that in all its devotional practices, including indulgences, the church desires that we, the faithful, "will be more effectively moved to live holier and more useful lives, thus healing the division between the faith which many profess and their daily lives" (Enchiridion, observations 4).

• • •
A free brochure answering questions Catholics ask about Mary, the mother of Jesus, is available by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Father John Dietzen, Box 325, Peoria, IL 61651.

Questions may be sent to Father Dietzen at the same address, or e-mail: jjdietzen@aol.com.

HART MONUMENT COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746

Looking for Quality Printing?

Call us for
**Campaign
Materials**

Through a special arrangement between Wayuga Press and the Catholic Courier Graphic's Department, you can now get quality, affordable typesetting and printing.

Give us a call for your next job!

COURIER GRAPHICS • 716-328-4340

WAYUGA PRESS • 315-754-6229



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.



Crawford
FUNERAL HOME INC.



Independently Owned and Operated Since 1957

DAVID P. CRAWFORD

495 N. Winton Rd. • Rochester, NY 14610 • Phone (716) 482-0400

Visit us at www.frontiernet.net/~crawford/