

COLUMNISTS

A tribute to Holy Cross priest, archbishop

The Congregation of Holy Cross is a religious institute of priests and brothers founded in 1837 by Father Basil Moreau in Le Mans, France. Its best known institution is the University of Notre Dame, established in 1842.

Although a relatively new and small religious community in comparison with, let us say, the Jesuits or the Dominicans, Holy Cross has produced a few truly outstanding members, not all of whose names are instantly recognizable.

Father Julius Nieuwland discovered synthetic rubber in 1906. Notre Dame's science building is named after him. Brother André Bessette is considered the founder of the famous Oratory of St. Joseph in Montreal. Upon his death in 1937, 1 million mourners paid their respects. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982.

In our time, the name of Father Theodore M. Hesburgh towers above all others, not only within the Congregation of Holy Cross and within the Catholic Church in the United States, but within the entire American citizenry.

The long-time president of the University of Notre Dame (1952-87) was singularly honored this past July by the conferral of the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest form of recognition Con-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

gress can bestow upon a civilian for distinguished achievements and contributions to the nation. (This award is not the same as the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is given to war heroes.)

Fewer than 250 people have received the Gold Medal since it was initially authorized by the Continental Congress in 1776. The first recipient was George Washington, in recognition of his role in the evacuation of the British from Boston.

In its early years the medal was bestowed exclusively on military leaders, but the scope was broadened in the mid-1800s and again in the 20th century to include achievement in the arts, athletics, aviation, diplomacy, entertainment, exploration, medicine, politics, religion, and science.

Thus, in 1929 Major Walter Reed and 21 associates were awarded gold medals for volunteering themselves for yellow fever experiments in Cuba. A year later, 67 gold medals were conferred on the officers and men of Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd's expedition to Antarctica. In 1956, the four surviving veterans of the Civil War were honored.

Father Hesburgh already holds the world record for most honorary degrees from colleges and universities: 144. In 1964, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Lyndon Johnson for his work as an educator and humanitarian. But these are only a few of the items on an ever-lengthening list of his honors and achievements.

At the gold medal award ceremony in the Capitol rotunda, President Clinton captured the essence of Father Hesburgh when, after pointing out his extraordinary contributions to his country and to world peace, he said: "The greatest honor you'll ever wear around your neck is the collar of a priest."

Father Hesburgh himself has often insisted that his all-sufficient epitaph would simply read: "priest." He said at the ceremony in Washington that, notwithstanding the enormity of this latest honor, the most significant day of his

life was the day of his ordination to the priesthood. And what an extraordinary priest he has been.

The other member of the Congregation of Holy Cross this week's column honors is Mark McGrath, who served as archbishop of Panama from 1969 until his retirement in 1994 and who played a leading role at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) as a young auxiliary bishop in drafting one of its two most important documents, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, known also by its Latin title, "Gaudium et spes" ("Joy and hope").

As archbishop of Panama he was a strong advocate of the poor and, like so many other church leaders of his time and place, he was quickly branded a Communist for his efforts.

He also encouraged the role of the laity in the church and was one of the key organizers and leaders of the Latin American Bishops' Conference. He should have been named a cardinal, but that is another story.

Mark McGrath died on Aug. 4 at age 76, after a six-year struggle with Parkinson's disease.

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

To serve children, the needy and lost is to serve Christ

25th Sunday of the Year (Sept. 24): (R3) Mark 9:30-37; (R1) Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; (R2) James 3:16-4:3.

Do you know what major corporations in our country prize most? It is service to their customers. They put it this way: "If anyone would prosper in today's economy, he or she must be driven to serve."

And yet the one who invented service was Jesus. His life was totally devoted to serving those he had been sent to seek and to save. As followers of Christ, service, too, should be our whole reason for being. Who are we to serve?

First of all, we ought to serve children. In the Gospel Jesus took a little child, stood him in the midst of his followers and said to them, "Whoever welcomes a child such as this for my sake, welcomes me."

How do we serve children? If possible, do we send them to a Catholic school? Do we provide such schools or help build strong religious instruction programs? Do both parents work, just to get luxuries, or does mother stay home for the children? Do we teach our children to pray at morning and at night? A psychologist said, "Give me a child until he is six and I'll have him for the rest of his



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

life." What example do we give our children? Remember, the apple will not fall far from the tree.

Secondly, we are also here to serve people who are in need. Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink..." (Matt. 25:35). We may not know many starving or thirsting people. They are around, but we are not likely to encounter them. Yet there are people all around who feel unloved. There are lonely people. Eleanor Rigby asked in the song, "Where do they all come from?"

Sociologist Robert Weiss estimates that a quarter of the American population feels extremely lonely at some time during any given month. It is a condition that affects people of all ages. Loneliness

soars during the teenage years and reaches its peak between ages 18 and 25.

Loneliness is pandemic in our society. The divorce culture has added to the numbers. If we could simply reach out to all the lonely people in the area around any parish and give them the love of Jesus Christ, we would have more conversions than we could count. Do we welcome strangers? Anyone who is in need?

Thirdly, we should be concerned about people Jesus called "those who are lost." Just as we are surrounded by strangers, we may not even be aware we are surrounded by lost people.

In 1992 a Los Angeles county parking control officer came upon an illegally parked car and dutifully wrote out a ticket. Ignoring the man seated at the driver's wheel, he reached inside the open window, placed the citation on the dashboard and drove away. The driver had been shot hours before but was sitting up, slumped slightly forward. He was dead. The officer, preoccupied with ticket writing, was unaware of anything out of the ordinary.

How often that happens to us. We see people whom Paul called "dead in their sins," people whose lives are empty, who do not know that God loves them, who

are wandering around with no meaning to their lives, lost in every sense of the word. We fail to see that they should be our concern. We are so often live-and-let-live individuals, we would rather let people go to hell — literally and figuratively — than get out of our comfort zone and share with them the love of Jesus.

What we do to the least — children, the needy, the lost — we do to Jesus.

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

Daily Readings

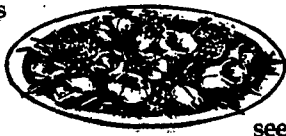
Monday, September 25
Proverbs 3:27-34; Luke 8:16-18
Tuesday, September 26
Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13; Luke 8:19-21
Wednesday, September 27
Proverbs 30:5-9; Luke 9:1-6
Thursday, September 28
Ecclesiastes 1:2-11; Luke 9:7-9
Friday, September 29
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or
Revelation 12:7-12; John 1:47-51
Saturday, September 30
Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8; Luke 9:43-45

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