

COLUMNISTS

Saints should reflect cross-section of church

Saints are holy people — individuals who, on balance, lived their lives in conformity with the Gospel. The words "on balance" are crucial here. It's not that saints never committed a sin, nor had personal faults and weaknesses.

The saints were as human as any of us, but they somehow managed to rise above ordinary human behavior and manifested heroic virtue, when it counted most.

In canonizing a saint, the church declares the person to be in heaven, that is, to have achieved salvation, a word derived from the Latin, *salus*, meaning health. To be saved means that one has been brought to the fullness of human health, to have been made whole.

Saints were made whole by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whose presence became manifest in them through acts of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col 3:12; Gal 5:22; Rom 6:22). The holy person, by definition, is a person of integrity, leading a whole life in which belief and practice converge, even against a threat of death.

Because saints are healthy human beings, they are hopeful, not despairing; loving, not mean-spirited; courageous, not weak; and have a passion for justice. In years past, these characteristics were readily recognized and called virtues, or "powers," by which a life of Christian dis-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

cipliship, a fully human life, is possible.

There were, traditionally, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13), and the cardinal, or moral, virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, rooted in the writings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle and developed by such early Christian theologians as Augustine, Gregory the Great, and later, Thomas Aquinas.

By contrast, the life of the Spirit is not visibly present in the unholy, the unhealthy. They tend to be self-righteous, judgmental, unforgiving, resentful, vindictive, grim, rigid and authoritarian, punitive, controlling, obsessive, gratified by the humiliation and misfortunes of those whom they disapprove, burdened with guilt, ill at ease in the presence of others, especially the opposite gender, and wracked by fear of their own sexu-

ality, of the human love and intimacy which it expresses. In its extreme, unhealthyness generates cruelty and violence.

On occasion, men and women with one or more of these unhealthy traits have been raised up by the church as models of Christian discipleship. The message conveyed in their beatification and canonization was misleading at best, and the "cloud of witnesses," to which Scripture (Heb 12:1) and the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 50) refer, became instead a kind of milky fog.

The elevation of controversial individuals has, in fact, generated confusion and even resentment. That happened several years ago with the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei, and more recently with the beatification of Pius IX.

But there has also been more general criticism and distress — directed more at long-term patterns than at specific instances. The great majority of officially recognized saints has been white, celibate, European males, mostly ordained or religiously professed, or white, celibate (or widowed), European females.

Many members of the universal church have been left to wonder whether the response to Christ's universal call to holiness is generally more difficult, if not practically impossible, for people of col-

or, for Asians and Africans, for the poor, and especially for married people.

If the great majority of recognized saints never expressed love for another human in sexual intimacy or, worse, if some of them had manifested disdain and contempt for such intimacy, what message does that send to the world and to the church regarding the sanctity of marriage and the sacramental, co-creative character of human sexuality?

Pope John Paul II indirectly called attention to this problem in his 1994 apostolic letter on the coming millennium. "Precisely because we are convinced of the abundant fruits of holiness in the married state," he wrote, "we need to find the most appropriate means for discerning them and proposing them to the whole church as a model and encouragement for other Christian spouses."

Throughout the history of the church there have been far more married people than monks and virgins who have been luminous examples of Christian discipleship. When the ratio of the one to the other is reflected in the canonization process, the church will have achieved the balance that so many of its members have longed for.

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

Love your neighbor in response to Christ's love

31st Sunday of the Year (Nov. 5): (R3) Mark 12:28-34; (R1) Deuteronomy 6:2-6; (R2) Hebrews 7:23-28.

On the television news show, "20/20," there was a segment called "Neighbors at War." It showed how next-door neighbors do battle with each other — fighting, fussing, suing, even shooting at each other because of a barking dog, or a noisy power tool, or a bouncing basketball. Neighbors at War! Such things can really happen. But there is a solution.

Jesus was asked, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And this is the second: Love your neighbor as yourself."

When William Penn was given land in the New World by King Charles II, he was also granted power to make war on the Indians. But Penn refused to build forts or have soldiers in his province. He treated the Indians kindly, as equals. Disputes between the two races were settled by a meeting of six white men and six Indians. When he died, the Indians mourned him as a friend! Other colonies were constantly under attack by Indians. Pennsylvania was free from such attacks as long as they refused to arm themselves. Many years later the Quakers were outvoted and the colony began building



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

forts and training soldiers against possible aggression. Then they were attacked!

Penn understood that the key to all human relations is, "love your neighbor as you love yourself." At times this is hard, especially if you've ever had a difficult neighbor. Jesus' dream for the entire world is that people shall care about other people — red, yellow, brown, black, white people — people of every race, of every religion, of every nation, of every political persuasion.

However, the truth of the matter is, we can't truly love our neighbor until we love God. Why in the world should I love my neighbor? Loving my neighbor takes work. It is inconvenient. It interferes with my schedule. It interferes with my hedonistic lifestyle. Why should I love my neighbor? Because I love God, and God

has commanded me to love my neighbor. "No one can truly love God," says St. John, "who does not love his or her neighbor." This is how we show our love for God: we pass his love on to others. There is nothing else we can do in return for God's love. All God asks is that we take the love he has given us and pass it on to others.

A police officer in Northern Ireland was asked why he stayed on the job. No day was easy for him or for the other police officers. Before he gets into his car each day, he must check it thoroughly for any explosives. The law requires that he must carry a gun at all times, even in church. His life is continually in danger. When he was asked why he didn't emigrate to another country, he replied, "I would leave tomorrow if it wasn't for the fact that this is where God has called me to be ..." He was doing his job because he loved God first, then his neighbor.

One morning in Chicago, harried commuters jammed and shoved their way into a subway train. When it seemed as if it had been filled, a panic-stricken young man appeared. He cried out, "There's room for all 600 of us if we'll just love one another a little!" The human sea parted, and he slipped on to the train. The passengers relaxed a little; the

incident had set a new tone of gentleness for the day.

It is so easy to give in to our baser emotions: to hate, to seek revenge, to ignore the plight of the poor, to wrap ourselves in smug self-satisfaction. But the man hanging on the cross says, "I have loved you with a love that can only be repaid one way, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

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

Daily Readings

Monday, November 6
Philippians 2:1-4; Luke 14:12-14
Tuesday, November 7
Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 14:15-24
Wednesday, November 8
Philippians 2:12-18; Luke 14:25-33
Thursday, November 9
Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12;
1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17;
John 2:13-22
Friday, November 10
Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 16:1-8
Saturday, November 11
Philippians 4:10-19; Luke 16:9-15

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL

Announcements

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