

COLUMNISTS

Twelve steps on the path of discipleship

One of the finest and most successful self-help groups founded in the 20th century is Alcoholics Anonymous. Although not connected with any religious organization, AA is explicitly committed to various spiritual principles that are centered on the reality of God as a "Power" greater than ourselves. Those principles are contained in AA's famous 12-step program.

Following a recent lecture in Rhode Island, in which I had proposed 12 teachings of Jesus that should provide the inspiration and moral standard for the church's pastoral practice and communal spirituality, a member of the audience came up to me, eager to point out their general similarity to the 12 steps of AA.

Although I recall having incorporated these 12 points once before in a column, the gentleman's comment has prompted me to repeat them here for the sake of readers who may have missed them the first time around.

1. The call to love one another. Jesus said that our love for one another is the sign by which others will know that we are his disciples (John 13:34-35).

2. The call to love even our enemies. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you ... If you love those who love you," Jesus said; "what



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BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:27,32).

3. The call to forgive one another. Jesus said that we cannot ask forgiveness for our own sins unless we are also ready to forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12).

4. The call always to seek reconciliation with one another. Jesus said that we should not presume to offer sacrifice to God unless and until we have been reconciled with our brother or sister (Matthew 5:23-24).

5. The call to renounce revenge. "If anyone strikes you on the cheek," Jesus said, "offer the other also" (Luke 6:29).

6. The call to avoid judging and condemning others. "Do not judge," Jesus said, "and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. ... First take the log out of your

own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Luke 6:37,42).

7. The call to avoid self-righteousness, presumption, and resentment toward others. Jesus repudiated the proud Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14) and the resentful elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son (15:25-30). He condemned those who try to shut the doors of the kingdom of God so that others could not enter it (23:13) and said the publicans and the prostitutes would enter the kingdom before their detractors would (21:31-32).

8. The call to befriend those whom society looks down upon. Jesus made himself the friend of outcasts (Matthew 11:19) and did not avoid their company (Mark 2:16).

9. The call to serve one another, humbly and unselfishly. Jesus gave us an example when he washed the feet of his disciples (Matthew 13:4-15; see also Luke 22:27). "But when you give a banquet," he said, "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14).

10. The call to serve the poor. Jesus singled out the poor in the Beatitudes, insisting that the reign of God will be theirs

(Luke 6:20), as did Mary in her Magnificat: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (1:52-53). Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19-31) is particularly compelling. Indeed, Pope John Paul II has frequently cited it in summoning the church to the service of the poor and the powerless.

11. The corresponding call to beware of riches and the attachment to possessions. Jesus said it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:25). He said that those who would be his disciples should be ready to sell all that they have and give to the poor (Mark 10:21).

12. The call always to be just in our dealings with others. Jesus attacked the Scribes and the Pharisees for straining at gnats and swallowing camels and for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, including justice first (Matthew 23:23).

Such are the steps to be taken along the path of true discipleship, both for the individual Christian and for the church itself.

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

John the Baptist calls for a truly Christian revolution

3rd Sunday of Advent (Dec. 17): (R3) Luke 3:10-18; (R1) Zephaniah 3:14-18; (R2) Philippians 4:4-7.

Here we are on the Third Sunday of Advent, only seven shopping days left. "It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas." Perhaps the last person we are in the mood to hear from is John the Baptist. He is by no means polite; lives a crude, far from pretified life; and rudely invades our polite, banal lives; an astonishing misfit when the calendar says "December 17." Hallmark never puts him on a greeting card, and we never see him in a Christmas pageant.

With his lightning bolt preaching and massive following, he was obviously important, the one whom God chose to herald the coming of Jesus, the main event.

John's function, like that of prophets before him, was to expose, unmask, tell the truth. Truth-tellers are not often welcome; they can irritate you until you want to just get rid of them. Like a surgeon, John cut deeply into hearts with his call to repentance. He reminded people that Jesus was coming, not so they could feel different, but so they could be different.

Repentance means to change one's life. The repentant life is as simple as sharing a coat or your dinner, or refusing to swindle anybody in business. Mother Teresa did not leap over tall buildings, or turn



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

nickels into dimes, or part the Ganges River. Small of stature and of no unusual physical or mental capability, she simply did what any of us is capable of doing — simple acts, like caring for the sick, the downtrodden, the needy, the abandoned. She did good in minute particulars.

Impressive as John was, he was not the one. There was a certain fervor of messianic expectation in Palestine. There were movements at the time, and there were demagogues who came and went. John announced that one was coming who would baptize with fire and the Spirit. Thomas Merton said it like this: "As a magnifying glass concentrates the rays of the sun into a little burning knot of heat that can set fire to a dry leaf or a piece of paper, so the mystery of Christ in the Gospel concentrates the rays of God's light and fire to a

point that sets fire in the spirit of man" (*Seeds of Contemplation*, p.150).

John did not urge anyone to mimic his bizarre mode of existence. Rather, he urged people to live differently where they already find themselves. He exhorted people to live a good life in the society in which they lived, to be aware of the future, with hearts and minds fixed on the one who was to come.

John's call to repentance was not just for the individual. He called the people at large to account for their waywardness. He was offended by wealth and corruption, especially in the well-heeled Jerusalem priesthood. Herod's marital escapade was just one more outrage, symptomatic of a more widespread disease in Judea.

Herod had dispensed with his wife so he could marry Herodias, his half-brother's wife. John publicly denounced this, was promptly imprisoned and then beheaded. St. Thomas More suffered a similar fate for his refusal to condone Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn. How often faithfulness to God does not issue in success, but rather in suffering! In "A Man for All Seasons," Robert Bolt has Thomas More ask, "Dare we for shame enter the Kingdom with ease, when our Lord himself entered with so much pain?"

John's call to us is to a radical kind of commitment. It is a call to a renunciation of materialistic values. It is a call to fasting, to prevent one's bodily appetites from passing into greed. It is a call to sacrificial giving that prevents the laying up of treasures here on earth. It is an entry into the life of Jesus who, though rich, for our sake became poor. It is a Christian revolution!

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

Daily Readings

Monday, December 18
Jeremiah 23:5-8;
Matthew 1:18-24

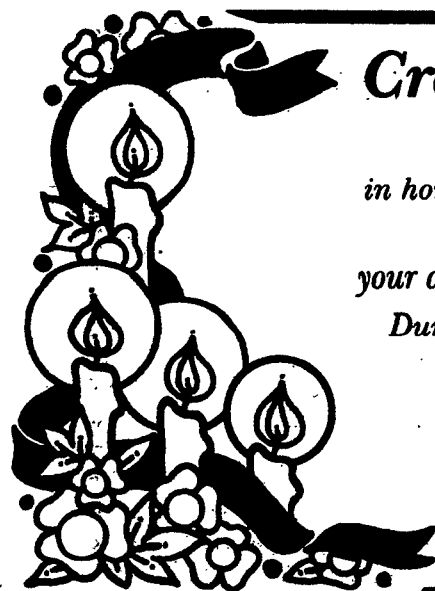
Tuesday, December 19
Judges 13:2-7, 24-25; Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday, December 20
Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-38

Thursday, December 21
Song of Songs 2:8-14 or
Zephaniah 3:14-18; Luke 1:39-45

Friday, December 22
1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56

Saturday, December 23
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24;
Luke 1:57-66



Create a New Ritual

This holiday season light four candles in honor and celebration of your loved one.

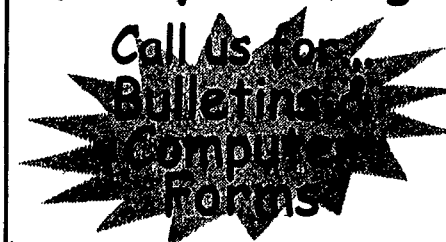
The four candles represent your grief, your courage, your memories and your love.

During this season of new hope, may you find peace and joy in remembering.

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