

COLUMNISTS

Readers can 'advertise' value of Catholic press

In October, an article in *Editor & Publisher* magazine reported data emerging from the Readership Institute's "Impact" study of newspaper readership. It said this project "may very well be the best hope — or last chance — newspapers will ever have of reversing a readership decline they have been unable to staunch for 50 years."

The article reported that in 1970 "77.6% of adults over 18 years of age read a daily newspaper during the week. By last year, that figure was down to 56.9%." It further notes that the decline in readership is most pronounced among Americans between the ages of 21 and 25. "Where about 60% of young adults were daily readers in 1967, the percentage has declined ... to barely 20% in 1997," it said.

These statistics aren't surprising to those involved in Catholic publishing. We've watched readership grow smaller and less committed over recent decades. But whereas television, radio and the Internet can (at least partly) fill the information void created when people stop reading secular publications, most Catholics who stop reading the church's printed media effectively stop learning about their faith. And that's reason for all of us to be concerned.

A lack of time is cited by most people who stop reading the Catholic press or de-



BY KAREN M. FRANZ

between the lines

cline to try it. But while multiple work and family pressures leave a small percentage of Americans with absolutely no time for themselves, a lack of time often is just a convenient excuse. We all long for more free time, yet still manage to squeeze in leisure activities that take as much or more time than it does to read the average Catholic publication.

When people say they don't have time to read a Catholic publication, they really mean doing so isn't important to them. That they don't value knowing what's going on in the church. That they don't see church affairs as relevant to their lives. That they consider Catholic reading a chore on which they're not willing to waste their precious leisure time.

Certainly, Catholic publishers need to redouble their efforts to make reading

easier and more enjoyable. But when it comes to making non-reading Catholics see the value of Catholic literature, our hands are virtually tied.

Every February, the Catholic Press Association promotes Catholic Press Month as a time to consider the importance of Catholic literature in ongoing faith development. Members' publications produce posters, feature articles on their operations, subscription drives and other events to make people in the pews aware of the contribution the Catholic press makes to church life. As CPA president, in fact, I originally wrote this column for press-month use in member publications.

But, for the most part, our promotional efforts constitute preaching to the choir. Most campaigns succeed only in reaching people like you — people who already know the value of reading Catholic publications. How can we reach those who think a couple of sound bites per month on the evening news contains all they need to know about the church? Our tiny budgets generally don't allow for billboards, TV or radio ads. And posters in the back of church only reach those who attend Mass and are interested enough to read them. So what's the solution?

You. You know that our church needs informed, faithful members. You know

that learning more about the church increases your commitment to it. You know, as the Pontifical Council for Social Communications asserted in *Aetatis Novae* (1992) that "Communications in and by the church is essentially communication of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is the proclamation of the Gospel as a prophetic, liberating word to the men and women of our times; it is testimony, in the face of radical secularization, to divine truth and to the transcendent destiny of the human person; it is the witness given in solidarity with all believers against conflict and division, to justice and communion among peoples, nations and cultures."

You are the best advertisement the Catholic press could possibly devise. You can help us reach non-readers by telling them about articles you read in Catholic publications. You can use our work as the basis for discussions at church and in your neighborhood. You can help others see how Catholic literature improves your life. You can help them understand the importance of making time to continue learning about their faith.

That's enough preaching; it's time for the choir to sing.

Franz is general manager/editor of the Catholic Courier.

Daily work may provide setting for God's call

5th Sunday of the Year (Feb. 4): (R3) Luke 5:1-11; (R1) Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Sunday's Gospel is simple, but beautiful. Our Lord is being mobbed by crowds on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He speaks at the seashore because the doors of the synagogues were closed to him.

The crowds pressed in on him to hear the word of God. For the first time, Jesus' preaching is called "the word of God."

To prevent his being pushed into the sea, Jesus gets into Simon's boat. Luke spotlights Simon. Jesus teaches from his boat. And when the crowds were gone, Jesus told Simon to launch out into the deep. Simon was probably thinking, "Lord, you're just a carpenter. Stick to your trade. No fisherman would fish in the daytime, especially at noon, when fish go to the bottom of the sea to avoid the heat of the sun." Still, Simon had such respect for Jesus that he said, "If you say so, I will lower the nets."

They caught so many fish that they had to summon their mates in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats until they nearly sank.

At the sight of this, Simon Peter (this is the first time he is called "Peter") fell at the knees of Jesus saying, "Leave me,



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

Lord, I am a sinful man. Peter did not want the Lord to depart from him. He meant that he was not worthy to be near Jesus. Note, too, that it is Peter who is the first one to call Jesus "Lord" and no longer "Master."

The result of this incident was not just the miracle of the catch of fish, but the greater miracle of four fishermen leaving everything to become fishers of men.

First, the catch of fish was Jesus' way of saying "thank you" to Peter for the use of his boat. Remember, whatever we do in his name comes back a hundredfold. It was also Jesus' way of rewarding Peter's faith. Peter believed, even when he had every reason not to believe. He acted on the word of Jesus. Too often we won't do anything, try anything, unless our com-

mon sense ratifies it. The just man lives by faith, not by common sense. Faith means taking the word of Jesus just because he said so. He said, "This is my body." Faith responds by saying, "He said it. I believe it. That ends it!"

Second, Peter had not only faith; he had the spirit of try, try again. Perseverance crowns the work. The constancy of the dropping water weareth a hole in the rock. So often we do not achieve, because we do not persist in our efforts. We say that Rome was not built in a day. Neither is holiness. Sanctity is a series of beginnings. A saint is a sinner who keeps trying.

A third lesson from the Gospel incident is this: wouldn't it be tragic to live our lives and in eternity end up with nothing? That is what happens to those who live only for themselves and not for Jesus. The apostles fished all night and caught nothing, for they were fishing without Jesus. We can labor all our lives and end up with nothing if we do not learn to live our lives with and for Jesus. That is why it is so important to pray the morning offering at the beginning of each day. It is not what we do that counts but why we do what we do.

A final point. God often calls people at their work. Angels spoke to shepherds at

Bethlehem while they were watching their flocks. The Magi were called while studying the stars. Jesus called Matthew while he was collecting taxes. And Simon, Andrew, James and John were summoned to follow Jesus while engaged in their occupation of fishing. All each of us needs to do is to do well the task that God has given each of us.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, February 5

Genesis 1:1-19; Mark 6:53-56

Tuesday, February 6

Genesis 1:20-2:4A; Mark 7:1-13

Wednesday, February 7

Genesis 2:4B-9, 15-17;

Mark 7:14-23

Thursday, February 8

Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 7:24-30

Friday, February 9

Genesis 3:1-8; Mark 7:31-37

Saturday, February 10

Genesis 3:9-24; Mark 8:1-10

Tapestry of Faith

"Faith... must be woven into the fabric of our lives not only through prayer and good works, but also through continued reflection stimulated by frequent reading of Catholic publications."

— Archbishop John P. Foley



MEMBER CATHOLIC NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES AND BOOKS CATHOLIC

Weaving the Faith of Our Lives



Kids' Answers from page 7:

OT: Leviticus, Samuel, Daniel, Amos; NT: Acts, Romans, Revelation

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