

COLUMNISTS

Pope calls for creative charity, closeness to poor

John Paul II's apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium"), which will set the agenda for the consistory of cardinals next month, ends on an Easter note.

The pope calls upon the church to "go forward in hope" into the new millennium that opens before us "like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture" (n. 58). Then, changing the metaphor from the nautical to the terrestrial, he urges us to "quicken" our steps "as we travel the high-ways of the world."

There need be no great distances between us as we move along many different paths, because we are united in the same communion — a communion "which is daily nourished at the table of the eucharistic bread and the word of life."

"Every Sunday," the apostolic letter continues, "the risen Christ asks us to meet him, as it were, once more in the Upper Room where, on the evening of the first day of the week" (John 20:19), he appeared to his disciples in order to "breathe" on them his life-giving Spirit and launch them on the great adventure of proclaiming the Gospel."

The pope assures us that "the risen Jesus accompanies us on our way and enables us to recognize him, as the disciples of Emmaus did, 'in the breaking of the



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

bread' (Luke 24:35). May he find us watchful, ready to recognize his face and run to our brothers and sisters with the good news: 'We have seen the Lord!' (John 20:25)."

But how are we to "recognize his face"? The pope's answer is implied in the spiritually meaty paragraphs that precede his closing references to the risen Lord.

"If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ," he insists, "we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' (Matthew 25:35-37)" (n. 49).

"This Gospel text," he says, "is not a simple invitation to charity." It "sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ."

"By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the bride of Christ."

Surely, the face of the risen Christ does not appear only in the poor, but "as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them."

In a time when politicians trumpet their commitment to a "compassionate conservatism," John Paul II gives specific content to that slogan: "Our world is entering the new millennium burdened by the contradictions of an economic, cultural, and technological progress which offers immense possibilities to a fortunate few, while leaving millions of others not only on the margins of progress but in living conditions far below the minimum demanded by human dignity."

"How can it be that even today," he asks, "there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads?" (n. 50).

We must not only seek the face of Christ, however, but also hear his voice. Christians, the pope writes, "must learn

to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. ... Now is the time for a new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters."

"We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home." For "the charity of works ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words."

There are, of course, other needs to which the balm of compassion and the sharp edge of justice must be applied: the ecological crisis; threats to peace; contempt for human rights, especially of children; a lack of respect for life at every point on its continuum.

To meet these needs in fidelity to the risen Lord, "we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the Incarnation" (n. 52).

And of the Resurrection as well.

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

Our beliefs determine our actions

Easter Sunday (April 15): (R3) John 20:1-9; (R1) Acts 10:34, 37-43; (R2) Colossians 3:1-4.

A woman at the door of the church complained to the priest, "Why is it every time I come to church you're always singing that same hymn, 'Jesus Christ Is Risen Today?'" Obviously, the only time she came to church was on Easter Sunday.

What we believe is so important. Belief determines our actions.

During the time of Homer, Greek sailors believed that the sea was filled with deadly monsters and that seagoing ships would be lost. So their travels were limited to their own coastline.

For centuries, European sailors believed the world was flat. They believed that if they sailed too far, they'd fall off the earth. Christopher Columbus changed all that.

Because one's belief determines one's actions, Easter Sunday is so important. It tells us there is a life beyond this world.

So many of the followers of Christ were totally demoralized after Good Friday. Their Master was dead. They felt that there was nothing left but to go back to their nets and forget the Galilean.

But then there was Easter Sunday.



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Mary Magdalene found the stone rolled away from the tomb and the tomb empty. She ran to tell Peter. Peter and John raced to the tomb and found it empty as Mary Magdalene had said. Then the Lord began appearing: first, to his mother Mary; then to Mary Magdalene, to the holy women, to Peter, to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and in the evening to the other apostles. Dismay became joy.

Never again would they think of death as the end-all of life, but as the beginning of a new and better life.

People at one time attributed illnesses to all kinds of strange influences. Then Louis Pasteur did research on bacteria and a stone was rolled away. Treating illnesses was never the same again.

When the stone was rolled away from Jesus' tomb, death was conquered and the teachings and life of Jesus were validated.

Spurgeon, one of England's greatest 19th century evangelists, met a lad carrying an old, bent bird cage. Inside was a tiny field sparrow. Spurgeon asked the lad what he was going to do with the bird.

"Well," the boy said, "I think I'll play with it for a while." Then with a wicked grin, he said, "When I'm tired of playing with it, I'll kill it."

Spurgeon asked, "How much would you sell me that bird for?"

"For two pounds," said the lad slyly. That was an astronomical price, but Spurgeon paid the price, and let the bird go.

The next Sunday, Easter Sunday morning, an empty bird cage sat on the pulpit where Spurgeon preached. "Let me tell you about this cage," Spurgeon said as he began the sermon. Then he told the story of the lad and the high price he paid to free the bird.

Spurgeon said, "I tell you this story because that's just what Jesus did for us. The devil had caged the human race to play with them and then destroy them. Jesus offered to buy them back."

"Oh," said the devil, "People will only

hate you and spit on you, then nail you to a cross. If you want to buy them back, it will cost you your life and death."

Spurgeon concluded, "That is just what Jesus did for us on cross. He paid the ultimate price that we might be free from death and live eternally with him."

That is the message of Easter. Jesus, by his death, overcame Death and made it the door to everlasting life.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, April 16
Acts 2:14, 22-32; Matthew 28:8-15
Tuesday, April 17
Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18
Wednesday, April 18
Acts 3:1-10; Luke 24:13-35
Thursday, April 19
Acts 3:11-26; Luke 24:35-48
Friday, April 20
Acts 4:1-12; John 21:1-14
Saturday, April 21
Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15





The Journey to the Cross
Lent and Holy Week
THURSDAY, APRIL 12
Mass of the Lord's Supper - 7:30 p.m.
Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark, Presider
FRIDAY, APRIL 13
Good Friday Service - 3:00 p.m.
Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark, Presider
Tenebrae Service
Sacred Heart Cathedral
Choir - 7:30 p.m.
SATURDAY, APRIL 14
Easter Vigil - 8:00 p.m.
Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark, Presider
EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 15
11:30 a.m.
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