

COLUMNISTS

Msgr. Egan, urban ministry leader, remembered

Monsignor John "Jack" Egan, died on May 19 in the rectory of Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago. He was 84.

Much has already been written about Msgr. Egan in various local and national obituary notices and columns. I cannot add very much to the list of accomplishments that marked his long and fruitful life in the priesthood.

Ordained a priest of the archdiocese of Chicago in 1943, three years later he became the first director of the Cana Conference of Chicago, a marriage preparation program that set the standard for similar programs around the country.

He was also the first director of the archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, holding that post from 1958 until 1969. In 1965 he marched with Martin Luther King Jr., in Selma, Ala., and a photo of him walking arm-in-arm with Dr. King became a national call for other clergymen to join in the civil rights movement.

In 1967 Egan founded the Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry, which sought to promote social and racial justice. He also became associated with the celebrated community organizer, Saul Alinsky, in fighting to keep poor people from being evicted from their homes.

When Cardinal John Cody became archbishop of Chicago in 1965, replacing



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

the scholarly, self-effacing Cardinal Albert Meyer, who had been one of the progressive leaders at the Second Vatican Council, Msgr. Egan found himself suddenly in a less congenial ecclesiastical environment. It was a situation shared by many of his fellow Chicago priests.

It became increasingly clear that the new cardinal and Jack Egan did not see eye to eye on whether the church should become involved in community organizing for social justice and human rights. Jack was removed as director of the Office of Urban Affairs and replaced by another Msgr. Egan, Edward by name. Cardinal Cody naively assumed that no one would even notice what he had done. Edward Egan has since been appointed archbishop of New York and was in the recent batch of cardinals created by the pope.

Eugene Kennedy, emeritus professor at Loyola University of Chicago and the author of *The Unhealed Wound: The Church and Human Sexuality* (St. Martin's Press), reports in his own column that he had phoned Jack Egan last year when his counterpart, Edward Egan, had been named to New York, telling Jack that it was another mix-up, that he, not Edward, was the new archbishop and should hurry east to claim his rights. "I can still hear Jack Egan's laugh," Kennedy writes.

A year after the switch at the Office of Urban Affairs, Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC, president of the University of Notre Dame, invited Jack to come there to serve as his special assistant and also eventually as the founding director of the Institute for Pastoral and Social Ministry.

Msgr. Egan remained at Notre Dame until 1983, returning to Chicago, like the Holy Family, only after it became clear that the one who had sought his life, so to speak, was now dead and had been replaced by someone of an entirely different outlook and manner, Joseph Bernardin. A year later Jack would return to Notre Dame to receive an honorary degree as "a shrewd and heart-smart man who knew where the funds were and how they could be eased into the service of the kingdom."

Cardinal Bernardin appointed Msgr.

Egan as the director of the archdiocesan Office of Human Relations and Ecumenism, a position he held until 1987 when he became special assistant to the president of his alma mater, DePaul University in Chicago, with residence at the archdiocesan cathedral of the Holy Name. Msgr. Egan remained at DePaul until his death last month.

At his side through almost all of these years was his close associate and friend, Peggy Roach, who received a standing ovation at his funeral in the cathedral. Peggy continued to take his dictation, and type and mail his letters right to the end.

Jack received advance copies of my column each week. From time to time, he would write to thank me for them or to comment on a particular essay. He would always bemoan the fact that the column isn't carried in more Catholic papers.

Two days after Msgr. Egan's death, I received his last letter to me, full of the usual words of support and encouragement. His signature was noticeably shaky, but his spirit was as vibrant as ever.

I shall treasure that letter, of course, but the memory of the man, the priest, and the friend far more — and forever.

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

Focus of John the Baptist's birth is on preparation

Birth of John the Baptist (June 24): (R3) Luke 1:57-66, 80; (R1) Isaiah 49:1-6; (R2) Acts 13:22-26.

On next Sunday the church celebrates the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. Generally, the church celebrates the day of death of her saints. However, there are three exceptions: the birth of Jesus (Dec. 25), the birth of Mary (Sept. 8), and the birth of John the Baptist (June 24). We celebrate these three birthdays because all three were born sinless. Jesus and Mary were sinless at their conception. John the Baptist was not. He was purified in his mother's womb at the time when Mary visited his mother, Elizabeth.

At the time of the Visitation, Elizabeth said to Mary, "The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44). The presence of Jesus in Mary's womb sanctified John the Baptist. So when John was born, he was born without original sin.

John's father was Zechariah, a priest of the Jewish Law. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were both of the house of Aaron. "Both were just in the eyes of God, blamelessly following all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord" (Luke 1:6). The day Zechariah had to offer incense to the Lord in the temple, the angel



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

Gabriel appeared to him and announced that his prayer was heard: Elizabeth, his wife, would bear a son. "Thou shalt call him John," Zechariah doubted the angel. Because he did, he was struck dumb until the child was born. In the sixth month of her conception, Mary visited Elizabeth and the child in her womb leapt for joy.

After the child was born, he was circumcised on the eighth day. Family and friends wanted to name the boy after his father. But Elizabeth urged that he be called John. So Zechariah was consulted. He beckoned for a tablet and, on it, wrote: "John is his name." Immediately Zechariah recovered his speech and broke into that great canticle of love and thanksgiving, the "Benedictus," which the church says every day in the Divine Office.

His canticle has two parts. The first part speaks of God's salvation about to come through the child of Mary. The second part centers on the mission of John who was to prepare the way for the Lord through the forgiveness of sins.

St. Augustine writes that after the birth of John the Baptist (June 24), the days begin to get shorter; whereas after the birth of our Lord (Dec. 25), the days begin to get longer, fulfilling John's words: "I must decrease, He must increase."

The last verse of Sunday's Gospel has John growing up and taking his place in the desert even before Jesus' birth is described. He is stationed there for his next appearance 30 years later (Luke 3:1-3).

A child born into a family is two great things. First, a child is the greatest privilege life can offer a husband and wife. A child is a blessing sent fully from above. No matter how he comes, he brings so much love. And God will reward parents for joining his world to theirs.

Secondly, a child is one of life's greatest responsibilities, for a child is a bundle of possibilities and it is up to the parents to see that these possibilities are realized.

A final truth we can learn from the story of John the Baptist is that preparation is important. All life should be a prepara-

tion to lead us to Christ. John pointed Jesus out as the way, the truth and the life. Without him, there is no going, no knowing, no living.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, June 25

Genesis 12:1-9; Psalms 33:12-13, 18-20, 22; Matthew 7:1-5

Tuesday, June 26

Genesis 13:2, 5-18; Psalms 15:2-5; Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Wednesday, June 27

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalms 105:1-4, 6-9; Matthew 7:15-20

Thursday, June 28

Genesis 16:1-12, 15-16 or 16:6B-12, 15-16; Psalms 106:1-5; Matthew 7:21-29

Friday, June 29

Acts 12:1-11; Psalms 34:29; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16:13-19

Saturday, June 30

Genesis 18:1-15; (Ps) Luke 1:46-50, 53-55; Matthew 8:5-17

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