

COLUMNISTS

Sainthood has continuing history of gender bias

Although veneration of saints is a distinctively Catholic practice, it is not peculiar to Catholicism alone. The saints are also commemorated on the liturgical calendars of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches and in other churches of Eastern Christianity; in the Church of England, in the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., and in other churches within the Anglican Communion; and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and in Canada and in other churches of the Lutheran World Federation.

In my new book, *Lives of the Saints* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), where the biographies of more than 650 saints and other holy persons are arranged according to the days of the year, the liturgical point of reference is the General Roman Calendar, worldwide standard of the Roman Catholic Church. Consideration is also given to the saints celebrated on the Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran calendars, as well as those commemorated by major religious orders, including Benedictines, Carmelites, Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits.

This ecumenical approach to the saints is in line with the thinking of John Paul II. In his 1994 apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Aveniente* ("As the Third Millennium Draws Near"), the pope urged



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

that "local churches should do everything possible to ensure ... the memory of those who have suffered martyrdom."

This action, he continued, "cannot fail to have an ecumenical character and expression. Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* (communion of saints) speaks louder than the things which divide us" (n. 37).

On May 7, 2000, the pope held an ecumenical jubilee prayer service. In preparation, the Vatican collected more than 12,000 names of 20th-century martyrs, both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. More than two dozen leaders from 19 Christian churches joined the pope in reading testimonies from a representative group of 16 Catholic, Orthodox, An-

glican and Protestant victims of Nazism, Communism, dictatorships, civil wars and religious persecution.

"The precious heritage which these courageous witnesses have passed down to us," the pope said, "is a patrimony shared by all the churches and ecclesial communities."

While the ecumenical scope of our veneration of saints and martyrs has widened, more work needs to be done with regard to gender. There still aren't enough women saints, either canonized or prominent on the liturgical calendars and in the prayers of the Eucharist itself.

Fordham theologian Elizabeth Johnson, a Sister of St. Joseph, argues in her excellent book, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (Continuum, 1998), that "women's history of holiness has been largely erased from the ... memory of the church" and "even when they are remembered, exemplary women's lives are interpreted as models of virtue that support the male-dominated status quo and cast women into submission."

But the problem is not limited to the relatively small number of women saints. Women also do not have as significant a place as men in the church's liturgical and devotional life, only 41 (12 Marian-

related) being commemorated.

More than twice as many "obligatory memorials" are for male saints as for females (52-23), five females being Marian, with five times as many "optional memorials" for male saints as for females (66-13), three females being Marian.

One liturgical writer noted, "If one excludes the various celebrations in honor of Marian titles, apparitions or dogmas, the names and stories of ... women are heard with relative infrequency in Catholic liturgical assemblies." And most of the female saints are virgins, martyrs or religious, not married women.

Female saints are included only in the First Eucharistic Prayer, and even there reciting their names is optional.

To be sure, the problem is not peculiar to the Catholic Church. The record of the Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans is no better, where the number of commemorated women is between 12 and 15 percent of the sanctoral cycle.

The church has increasingly recognized that sanctity is ecumenical in character and in scope. It must begin now to recognize and to teach through its worship that sanctity is gender-blind as well.

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

A life of faith benefits from the lessons of sports

20th Sunday of the Year (Aug. 19): (R3) Luke 12:49-53; (R1) Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; (R2) Hebrews 12:1-4.

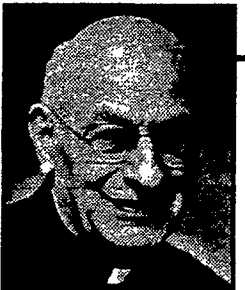
Even if sports is not your thing, we can appreciate principles found in sports.

The first principle is that victories are first won not on the playing field but in the training room. Everyone who competes in games goes into strict training.

If you jump into a taxi cab in New York City and ask the driver, "How do I get to Yankee Stadium?" don't be too surprised if he replies, "Practice! Practice! Practice!" The key to life is discipline. It is true in the classroom, in the workplace and in our relationship with Christ. The Christian life involves good mental, emotional and physical habits. The life of faith is a life of discipline.

A second lesson we can learn from the locker room is the importance of a clear-cut sense of direction and purpose. It is important to run a straight and intentional course. If you hit a home run but but run the bases in reverse, your effort will count for nothing. You can be the fleetest athlete in the world, but if you don't stay on course, it's not likely you'll find your way into the record books.

As St. Paul wrote, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

has called me." After his conversion, St. Paul focused everything he was and everything he hoped to be on serving Christ.

Does our life have a focus, a great purpose? To be driven by a great purpose means to get rid of anything in life that would keep us from attaining our final goal: eternal life with God. The life of faith is like being in a race. In a race one gets sore and tired; there will be times when one gets confused and feels like giving up. But one will never win by giving up. So, too, in living our faith, we must keep going, trusting in God, keeping in touch with him especially through prayer.

Another lesson to be learned from the locker room is to run the race with

the anticipation that we'll win. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says, "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance" (4:7-8).

Paul had a profound sense of the one who had called him, the God to whom he had committed his life. He knew that God's grace would carry him across the finish line as a winner. We too must have that kind of anticipation in our lives.

Most athletes, even before participating, see themselves performing effortlessly, flawlessly, winning. The decathlon participant will see himself clearing the hurdles. The end will hear the crowd cheering as he catches the winning pass. The swimmer will feel herself touching the wall just before her competitor. They all will experience the thrill of winning in their hearts long before it actually happens in the arena.

Paul knew about such things. He felt heavenbound. Do we? Such a feeling will make all the difference in how we live.

If you are going to compete in the race of life, run to win. It means seeking

to be all that God created you to be. It means getting rid of any sin in your life that may serve as a hindrance. It means running your race to cross God's finish line. Keep these rules in mind and you'll finish a winner.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, August 20
Judges 2:11-19; Psalms 106:34-37, 39-40, 43-44; Matthew 19:16-22

Tuesday, August 21
Judges 6:11-24A; Psalms 85:9, 11-14; Matthew 19:23-30

Wednesday, August 22
Judges 9:6-15; Psalms 120:2-7; Matthew 20:1-16A

Thursday, August 23
Judges 11:29-39A; Psalms 40:5, 7-10; Matthew 22:1-14

Friday, August 24
Revelation 21:9B-14; Psalms 145:10-13AB, 17-18; John 1:45-51

Saturday, August 25
Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11, 4:13-17; Psalms 128:1-5; Matthew 23:1-12

Kids' Chronicle
Answers from page 17
1. c. 2. c. 3. f.
4. d. 5. b. 6. g. 7. a.

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