

COLUMNISTS

Beatified married couple falls short of model

Catholics have been asking with greater frequency why there are not more saints drawn from the ranks of ordinary married people.

Why have so many of the canonized and the beatified never entered a normal, committed, loving relationship with another human being, or raised ordinary children who later married and did the same, or held an ordinary job?

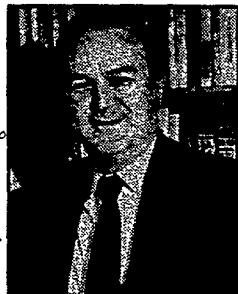
Of the 451 individuals canonized by Pope John Paul II as of this past June, 156 were members of the clergy, 20 were nonordained religious men, and 29 were religious women. That is almost half of the entire number.

While it is true that 164 laymen and 82 laywomen have been canonized in this pontificate, most were part of large groups of martyrs: 92 of the 103 Martyrs of Korea, 59 of the 117 Martyrs of Vietnam, 83 of the 120 Martyrs of China.

As many Catholics know, saints have significance as individuals, not as anonymous members of large groups. Individuals, not crowds, serve as models of Christian discipleship.

And yet 234 of the 246 lay people canonized by Pope John Paul II were a part of large groups of heroic Catholics martyred for their faith in Asia.

It was a matter of some interest, there-



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

fore, when the Vatican announced earlier this fall that the pope intended, as part of a two-day, Vatican-sponsored "Celebration of the Family," to beatify a married couple. They would be the first husband and wife to be beatified together in more than five centuries.

A crowd of some 100,000 had been expected at the beatification rites in St. Peter's Square. Only 30,000 to 40,000 showed up. Not a bad number in itself—comparable to that of a well-attended major league baseball game—but a lot less than normal for such an event.

Perhaps after married couples in Italy took a closer look at the two candidates for beatification, whatever sense of pride and enthusiasm they had dissolved into one of disbelief and irritation.

Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi were

married for nearly 50 years and, upon Luigi's death in 1951, his widow neither entered a convent nor founded a new religious order, as some previously married saints had done. Maria remained a laywoman until her death in 1965.

What may have initially aroused Italian's suspicions were the Vatican's claims that the Quattrocchi marriage had been a model for their own, in spite of the fact that none of the Quattrocchis' four children had married—highly unusual in a culture that places a high premium on marriage, children and grandchildren.

Two became priests, one a nun, and the fourth a consecrated laywoman, that is, a vowed celibate.

But that was not all. In interviews, the two priest-sons acknowledged that, after some 20 years of marriage, their parents moved into separate beds and spent their last 26 years living as brother and sister rather than as husband and wife.

It was all the more remarkable—astonishing, in fact—that the pope would declare in his homily that the Quattrocchis' lives were a model of "Christian spirituality, lived heroically through marriage and family."

"Amidst the joys and the concerns of a normal family," John Paul II continued, "(they) knew how to realize an existence

extraordinarily rich in spirituality."

According to the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (n. 50), saints function primarily as examples of holiness rather than as miracle-workers and intercessors. It is difficult to understand how this newly beatified couple fits such a profile—unless the church intends to teach that, in the ideal order, married couples will express their love for one another sexually for the sole purpose of conceiving children.

Once that is accomplished, they will live the rest of their married lives as brother and sister and may even encourage their children to live celibate lives, whether as priests, nuns, or consecrated virgins.

One assumes that this was not the pope's intention. In that case, someone in the Vatican might have taken greater care in drafting the pope's remarks for the beatification and should also have considered disengaging the ceremony from the "Celebration of the Family."

In the meantime, they might continue searching for a somewhat more compelling model of a happily married, saintly couple.

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

Christ comes in mercy, then in judgment

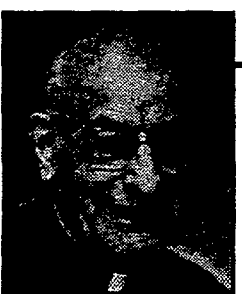
3rd Sunday of Advent (Dec. 16): (R3) Matthew 11:2-11; (R1) Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; (R2) James 5:7-10.

The question of John in Sunday's Gospel is a puzzling one. John was in prison. There he heard about the works of Jesus. So he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are you he who is to come or do we look for another?" "He who is to come" was the early Christians' way of speaking about the Messiah.

That was a strange question, especially after John had earlier pointed Jesus out as the Lamb of God. John had preached about the Messiah in terms of judgment. He spoke of the Messiah as bringing "the wrath to come," as an axman cutting down unfruitful trees, casting them into fire, or as a farmer separating chaff from wheat and throwing the chaff into unquenchable fire.

Yet John was hearing that Jesus was coming, not as one who judges but rather as one who heals. John was puzzled. "Are you the one who is to come?"

Jesus answered John's question by telling his disciples to go back to John and report what they have heard and seen. They heard Jesus proclaiming the Good News to the poor in spirit; they



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

saw him working the cures which Isaiah foretold in the first reading would characterize the messianic age. Jesus knew John would understand. Jesus heaped upon John the greatest praise: "I solemnly assure you, history has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptizer."

John did not understand that the coming of the Messiah would take place in two stages. He would come first in mercy, then in judgment at the end of time as judge to whom each person will have to give an account of his works.

But until that time, Christ comes to us in mercy. John wanted judgment right away. He wanted the wicked punished immediately and the good rewarded in-

stantly. But Jesus said, in effect, be patient! God will the salvation of the sinner, not his death.

Patience is not passivity; it is the highest activity. A drowning man exercises great self-restraint when he ceases thrashing about and lets himself be towed in to safety. So the patient person always exercises great control in the midst of trial and suffering.

In a world that seeks instant solutions, it is hard to come to grips with the fact that changing the hearts of people is the work of a lifetime. We like to get things done and over with. But that is not the way life is. All growth is slow. One thing that I know of that grows quickly is the toadstool and that is poisonous.

Christ's coming as judge is not something that is going to happen right away. It is something we must get ready for, the whole purpose of this period of waiting. As John's words stirred men's hearts and pointed the way to Jesus, so should our words and works. As Jesus' works healed and saved others, so should our works.

Neither John nor Jesus saw the effects of their lives, but still they sowed good words and good works, in season and out. So should we in this period of wait-

ing, certain that at harvest time we will gather in the happiness that Jesus will bring when he comes a second and last time in judgment!

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

Daily Readings

Monday, December 17

Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalms 72:3-4, 7-8, 17; Matthew 1:1-17

Tuesday, December 18

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Psalms 72:1, 12-13, 18-19; Matthew 1:18-24

Wednesday, December 19

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25A; Psalms 71:3-6, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25

Thursday, December 20

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalms 24:1-6; Luke 1:26-38

Friday, December 21

Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18A; Psalms 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Luke 1:39-45

Saturday, December 22

1 Samuel 1:24-28; (Psalms) 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-7, 8ABCD; Luke 1:46-56

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