

## COLUMNISTS

## Church's first council decreed tolerance

February 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, is celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church and by the Orthodox churches, the churches of the Anglican Communion, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

It marks the event at which the infant Jesus was brought to the Temple, and Mary was purified following childbirth in order to fulfill the requirements of the Mosaic law (Luke 22:2-40; Exodus 13:2, 12; Leviticus 12:6-8).

Simeon and the prophetess Anna greeted them: Simeon, with the prayer that came to be known as the *Nunc Dimittis* ("Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation ..."), and Anna, with a prayer of thanksgiving to God on behalf of all those "who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem."

But February 2 also happens to be the feast day of Cornelius the Centurion, an officer of the imperial Roman army who was among the first Gentiles to be converted to Christ (Acts 10:45).

Cornelius is described by the Scriptures as a devout man who feared God, gave alms generously and prayed constantly (10:1-2). He and the apostle Peter had simultaneous visions (10:1-16) that



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

eventually brought them together at Cornelius's home in Caesarea (10:25-33).

While Peter was speaking there, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word" (10:44). Peter was so "astounded" that the gift of the Spirit should be poured out on the Gentiles as well as the Jews that he readily acceded to Cornelius's wish to be baptized.

Peter asked the crowd, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" (10:47). Not hearing any objections, he baptized Cornelius and his whole household.

Peter's act of pastoral wisdom and courage, however, precipitated the first major crisis in the church. When some of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem learned of what had happened, they

sharply criticized his behavior.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Peter was confronted by his accusers. "You entered the house of uncircumcised people and ate with them," they charged. Peter attempted at once to explain what he had done and why he had done it (11:2-4).

He told them of a vision that he had while at prayer in Joppa. Something resembling a large sheet was lowered from the sky by its four corners. The sheet contained a variety of animals.

A voice from heaven ordered him to slaughter the animals and eat them. But Peter protested that he could not eat anything "profane or unclean" (11:8).

Then the heavenly voice said, "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane" (11:9). This happened three times before everything was drawn up again into the sky.

Immediately thereafter, three men came to the place where Peter was staying and asked him to come with them to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea.

When Peter arrived at Cornelius's home, the centurion fell to his knees, paying him homage. Peter said, "Get up. I myself am also a human being" (10:26).

As Peter entered the house, he informed those gathered there that, as a Jew, it was unlawful for him to associate

with, or visit, a Gentile, much less eat with them. But God, he said, had shown him that he should not call any person profane or unclean. Therefore, he would gladly remain with them.

"God shows no partiality," Peter declared. "Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (10:34-35).

This theology became the basis for the subsequent pastoral and missionary activities of the apostles. Some of the more traditionalist Jewish Christians, known as the "circumcision party" and the "Judaizers," stirred up opposition to them—so much so that James, the head of the Jerusalem community, summoned a council to address the issue.

The council vindicated Peter and the other apostles, ruling that one did not have to become a Jew (by circumcision and by observing Jewish dietary laws) before becoming a Christian, and that God indeed "shows no partiality" (15:1-35).

In the eyes of many people, Christians included, Cornelius may seem to be a minor footnote in the history of the church, and one of its least significant saints.

So much for appearances.

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

## Attitudes pave the way to happiness

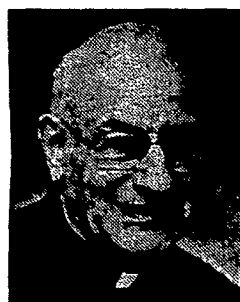
4th Sunday of the Year (February 3): (R3) Matthew 5:1-12; (R1) Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13; (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

In the year A.D.41, the Roman Emperor Claudius named Herod Agrippa King of Judea.

The Christians in Judea knew that Herod was hostile to Christianity. So the Apostles decided to scatter to the four corners of the earth. Before separating, they wanted a written account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Naturally, they asked the bookkeeper Matthew to write it. Each of the Twelve contributed to his account. The result was the Gospel according to St. Matthew. In this church year, we are in Cycle A. The predominant Sunday Gospels will be from St. Matthew. Before Lent, they will be from Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew, chapters 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Eight Beatitudes. The word "beatitude" means "happy." When we start a journey, the first thing we have in mind is our goal, even though that is the last thing achieved. In the Christian life, Jesus begins with the end, the goal. The goal of the Christian life is happiness.

The Eight Beatitudes tell us how we can become happy. The key to one's hap-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

piness is one's attitude — one's inner life. The beatitudes are the attitudes that should characterize our inner life.

We should be poor in spirit, putting our trust and our hope in God, not in self nor in things.

We should be so full of love that we mourn over the injustices in the world and over man's inhumanity to man.

We should be meek, returning good for evil, accepting injuries and wrongs for the redemption of sinners.

We should be merciful, trying to do something about others' miseries for God's sake.

We should be clean of heart, non-judgmental; giving everybody the benefit of doubt.

We should be peacemakers, by giving

to everyone what is his due: to God, obedience and to neighbor, love and service.

Lastly, we should be ready to pay the price of trying to do God's will. For the servant isn't greater than the master. They gave him a cross and they will give one to his followers. No pain, no palm. No thorns, no throne. No gall, no glory. No cross, no crown.

The mark of the Christian is suffering. The goal of being Christian is happiness: *per crucem, ad lucem; per aspera, ad astra* — through the cross to the light; through bitter paths to the stars.

As someone wrote: "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearances, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. ... The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. Life is 10 percent of what happens to us and 90 percent is how we react to it."

What's my attitude toward people, toward life? We are in charge of our attitudes. The beatitudes are a list of what our attitudes should be! In fact our attitude will determine our beatitude.

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

## Daily Readings

Monday, February 4

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30, 16:5-13A; Psalms 3:2-7; Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday, February 5

2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14B, 24-25A, 30-19:3; Psalms 86:1-6; Mark 5:21-43

Wednesday, February 6

2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17; Psalms 24:9-17; Mark 6:1-6

Thursday, February 7

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; (Ps) 1 Chronicles 29:10-12; Mark 6:7-13

Friday, February 8

Sirach 47:2-11; Psalms 18:31, 47, 50-51; Mark 6:14-29

Saturday, February 9

1 Kings 3:4-13; Psalms 119:9-14; Mark 6:30-34

## And Now I See...



All I know is I was blind  
and now I see.

John 9:25

A Practical Workshop on the  
Spirituality of Transformation

by Fr. Patrick Eastman

Saturday February 16, 2002: 10:00 am - 3:00 pm  
(Please bring a brown bag lunch)

Sunday February 17, 2002: 2:00 - 4:00 pm

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"For whosoever shall call upon the name  
of the Lord shall be saved" RM 10:13

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