

shepherds of Christ

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd is one who lays down His life for His sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep. This is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. And I lay down My life for My sheep." (Jn 10: 11-15¹)

Indeed, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for His sheep. During the recent events of Holy Week, we have called this truth to memory in a most special way. And on Easter, we have called to memory also in a most special fashion that the death of Jesus the Good Shepherd was for the purpose of life. In rising from the dead, Jesus achieved the life of resurrection, not only for Himself, but for us also.

The theme of death-resurrection is at the heart of Salvation history. In the Old Testament we see how the Jewish people, under the leadership of Moses, experienced death-resurrection as they were formed into the people of the covenant—Yahweh's people. In the great Exodus event they escaped Egyptian slavery, went on to Mt. Sinai where the covenant was ratified, and then progressed to the Promised Land. As members of the Mosaic covenant, as Yahweh's people, the Jews experienced a religious transition. They passed over to a higher level of religious existence, to a more intimate union with God.

This religious transition contained death-resurrection. For the Jews to become people of the covenant, to remain so, and to grow in the life of the covenant, it was necessary that they undergo a mystical or spiritual death. In short, the Jewish people had to be willing to pay a price; they had to be willing to bear with that which was difficult in covenant life. They had to be willing to die to that which was not according to God's will. This mystical death, however, had a very positive purpose. It was directed at life

in the covenant and at growth in that life. This spiritual death, in other words, was aimed at resurrection.

Christ perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament theme of death and resurrection. In doing so He, too, was experiencing a religious transition. He was passing over—gradually, at first, and then definitively in His death—to a new kind of existence, to the life of His resurrection which He achieved not only for Himself, but for the entire human family. To achieve this new life of resurrection, Jesus was willing to pay the price. Jesus was willing to suffer, even unto a horrible death. That it had to be this way Jesus Himself pointed out to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory?" Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, He explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about Himself." (Lk 24: 25-27).

St. Thomas Aquinas on the Sufferings of Christ

These thoughts of Thomas Aquinas easily follow from our previous considerations:

"Why did the Son of God have to suffer for us? There was a great need, and it can be considered in a twofold way: in the first place, as a remedy for sin, and secondly, as an example of how to act.

"It is a remedy, for in the face of all the evils of which we incur on account of our sins, we have found relief through the passion of Christ. Yet it is no less an example, for the passion of Christ completely suffices to fashion our lives. Whoever wishes to live perfectly should do nothing but disdain what Christ disdained on the cross and desire what he desired, for the cross exemplifies every virtue.

"If you seek the example of love: *Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends.* Such a man was Christ on the cross. And if he gave his life for us, then it should not be difficult to bear whatever hardships arise for his sake.

See *St. Thomas Aquinas*, page 2



Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

A number of our entries in this issue of the Newsletter deal explicitly with Christ's paschal mystery, with His death and resurrection. Since we have just celebrated the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter, we thought it a particularly apt time to present various ideas concerning the paschal mystery.

The reality of suffering has perennially been a problem for many. Some apparently are tempted to give up their religion when intense suffering enters their lives. They find it difficult to understand how the goodness of God would permit such suffering. There are others who become bitter because of suffering. Even though they once may have been the most attractive personalities, they become changed through their bitterness into persons who are burdens to themselves and others.

As is said elsewhere in this Newsletter, the real tragedy concerning suffering is not that there is so much of it. Rather the real tragedy is that so much of it seems to be wasted. When suffering is encountered according to God's will, it helps make a person more beautiful, more capable of love for God and neighbor, more apt for fulfilling one's unique role in life.

As priests we have numerous opportunities to help others suffer properly. The more we ourselves are united to the Christ Who suffered such a brutal death, the more we can help others see God's plan for suffering—that it is meant to lead to greater life:

"We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and Yahweh burdened him with the sins of all of us. Harshly dealt with, he bore it humbly, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers never opening its mouth." (Is 53: 6-7).

Ed Carter, S.J.

St. Thomas Aquinas continued from page 1

"If you seek patience, you will find no better example than the cross...Christ endured much on the cross, and did so patiently, because *when he suffered he did not threaten; he was led like a sheep to the slaughter and he did not open his mouth.* Therefore Christ's patience on the cross was great. *In patience let us run for the prize set before us, looking upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who, for the joy set before him, bore his cross and despised the shame.*

"If you seek an example of humility, look upon the crucified one, for God wished to be judged by Pontius Pilate and to die.

"If you seek an example of obedience, follow him who became obedient to the Father even unto death.

For just as by the disobedience of one man, namely, Adam, many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one man, many were made righteous.

"...follow him who is *the King and the Lord of lords, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Upon the cross he was stripped, mocked, spat upon, struck, crowned with thorns, and given only vinegar and gall to drink.

"Do not be attached, therefore, to clothing and riches, because *they divided my garments among themselves.* Nor to honors, for he experienced harsh words and scourgings. Nor to greatness of rank, for *weaving a crown of thorns they placed it on my head.*"²

On the Resurrected Christ

Here are words of Melito of Sardis, bishop, which, speaking of the Resurrected Christ, complement the previous words of Aquinas on the Suffering Christ:

"The Lord, though he was God, became man. He suffered for the sake of those who suffer, he was bound for those in bonds, condemned for the guilty, buried for those who lie in the grave; but he rose from the dead, and cried aloud: *Who will contend with me? Let him confront me.* I have freed the condemned, brought the dead back to life, raised men from their graves. Who has anything to say against me? I, he said, am the Christ; I have destroyed death, triumphed over the enemy, trampled hell underfoot, bound the strong one, and taken men up to the heights of heaven: I am the Christ.

"Come, then, all you nations of men, receive forgiveness for the sins that defile you. I am your forgiveness, I am the Passover that brings salvation. I am the lamb who was immolated for you. I am your ransom, your life, your resurrection, your light. I am your salvation and your king. I will bring you to the heights of heaven. With my own right hand I will raise you up, and I will show you the eternal Father."³

St. Ambrose on the Paschal Mystery

These thoughts of St. Ambrose help us to continue our reflection on the Paschal Mystery:

"We have died with Christ. We carry about in our bodies the sign of his death, so that the living Christ may also be revealed in us. The life we live is not now our ordinary life but the life of Christ: a life of sinlessness, of chastity, of simplicity and every other virtue. We have risen with Christ. Let us live in Christ, let us ascend in Christ, so that the serpent may not have the power here below to wound us in the heel."⁴

Our Participation in the Paschal Mystery

When we are baptized we are incorporated into Christ's paschal mystery of death and resurrection. St. Paul speaks of this marvelous assimilation to Jesus: "You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in his death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life." (Rom 6: 3-4).

And, again: "...wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body." (2 Cor 4: 10-11).

Christ has structured the Christian life by the way He lived, died, and rose from the dead. It is obvious then, as Paul tells us above, that the pattern of death-resurrection must be at the heart of the Church's life. Individually and collectively, we continually die with Christ so that we may continually rise with Him. Thus we pass over in a process of continual religious transition to a greater participation in Jesus' resurrection. It is true that our participation in Christ's resurrection will reach its completion only in eternity. Nevertheless, we begin the life of resurrection here upon this earth, in the here and now of human life, in the midst of joy and pain, in the experience of success and failure, in the sweat of our brow, in the enjoyment of God's gifts. As Christians, we should have a sense of dynamic growth concerning our here-and-now life of resurrection.

We cannot maintain the life of resurrection or grow in it without a willingness to suffer. This does not mean that we need to feel overwhelmed and heavily burdened by the suffering in our lives. The greater portion of suffering for most Christians seems to be an accumulation of ordinary hardships, difficulties, and pains. At times, however, deep suffering, even suffering of agonizing proportions, can enter one's life. Whether the sufferings one encounters are of either the more ordinary variety or the more rare and extreme type, Christians must nevertheless convince themselves that to relate properly to the cross is to grow in resurrection, and for an individual to grow in resurrection means one will also have an increased capacity to help give resurrection to others.

Reflections on Suffering

All of the above provides an occasion to offer various reflections on suffering:

- ◆ The great tragedy concerning human suffering

is not that there is so much of it. The real tragedy is that apparently so much of it is wasted. So much of it apparently is not coped with according to God's will.

◆ Suffering can beautifully expand or bitterly constrict the personality. It is our choice which prevails.

- ◆ A willingness to suffer for a cause must accompany any true commitment.
- ◆ A persistent suffering is the necessity of bearing with our limitations.
- ◆ The fear of suffering is, for some people, one of the greatest crosses.
- ◆ True love, in any of its forms, must be experienced against the background of the cross. Jesus has very vividly shown us this. Strange, then, that at times we can strive to develop another pattern of loving.

◆ The suffering that is presently the most necessary for us is the one we can most consistently refuse.

◆ Happiness cannot be achieved without a proper encounter with suffering. This is a basic premise of the Christian message. It would seem, then, that we would eagerly embrace the cross. Yet how often is this the case?

◆ Being misunderstood by others precisely because we are striving to do God's will is a not uncommon suffering.

◆ To have to unavoidably hurt others can cause the sensitive person a suffering greater than the one he or she is inflicting.

◆ There is a part of us that does not want to surrender to God. This struggle between the true self and the false self produces a unique type of suffering which is persistently present, often in milder degrees, but occasionally with an intensity that pierces very suddenly and very sharply.

◆ It is not necessarily those who suffer the most who are the holiest. We grow in holiness through suffering—whatever its degree—to the extent we encounter it in loving conformity to God's will.

◆ The boredom that can grow out of daily routine, the frequent occasions which try one's patience, ordinary episodes of failure, minor annoyances of various kinds, anxieties—these and other forms of the daily cross do not, taken separately, require a Christian response of heroic proportions. But in their cumulative effect over a long period of time, such occasions offer us the opportunity of becoming love-inspired Christians to an eminent degree.

◆ There is nothing in the Christian teaching of the cross that says we cannot pray for relief from our sufferings.

◆ To want to flee suffering is an un-Christian attitude. So also is the attempt to make suffering an end in itself. The Christ-event did not end on Calvary.

◆ "Then to all he said: 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me.'" (Lk 9: 23).

Reflections on Joy and Happiness

When we cope with suffering according to God's will, we grow in the Christ-life of grace. We grow in love. We grow in peace and joy. Suffering, which is properly encountered, consequently leads to a greater share in the joy of the resurrected Christ. There follow some reflections on joy:

◆ The Christian vocation includes the call to be joyful. If we live properly in Christ Jesus, we will increasingly share His resurrection joy despite the painful dimension of being human: "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete." (Jn 15:11).

◆ The Christian who is not fundamentally joyful presents a contradiction. He or she claims to be a follower of the Jesus who has promised abundant

Mary,
Queen of Peace,
Pray for us.

life, abundant joy. To remove the contradiction, such a Christian must look to himself or herself. Such a person does not lack a basic joy because there is anything wanting in Jesus' message. The person lacks joy because there is something wanting in the self. In some way or another, for some reason or another, the person has failed to assimilate properly the Gospel message. The Gospel is the good news. Jesus invites us to listen to His Gospel, to respond to it, to live it ever more fully and dynamically. Jesus tells us that if we do, we will experience a peace and joy that the world does not know. We know that Jesus does not lie, that Jesus does not deceive, that Jesus does not cruelly excite the expectations of His followers and then fail to fulfill them. Again, if a Christian is lacking in joy, he or she has to look at the self and ask why. But one should not ask this question in isolation. One should ask it in the company of Jesus. Jesus will help the person find the answer. Jesus will help the person remedy the situation.

◆ Western, industrialized culture has tended to create the illusion that joy can be bought and that, the more money one has, the greater the prospects of enjoying life. This tragic illusion has time and again prevented people from living in a manner which alone can give true joy.

◆ Real and lasting joy comes only when we are consistently willing to expend the effort required to grow in union with Jesus. Since this effort is a graced effort—one accompanied by God's grace—we should pray daily for the grace to use the means God has put before us to grow in union with Jesus. And the greatest of these means is the Eucharist.

◆ One of the greatest sources of joy is learning to share in the joy of others.

◆ There are many daily occasions for experiencing joy, but we often pass them by unaware of their joy-producing possibilities because we have foolishly narrowed our expectations regarding what is a source of joy and what is not.

◆ St. Paul says to us: "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness...There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4: 4-7).

On Union with Jesus

One of the above reflections on joy states that growth in joy depends on growth in our union with Jesus. One of our readers, Msgr. Bob Guste, in his book, *The Gift of the Church*, speaks to us convincingly concerning deep, personal relationship with Jesus: "Ideal Catholics held up to us by the Church are the *saints*. As you read

their lives, what do you notice? One after the other, they were men and women who had a deep, personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Their hearts were on fire with love for Him. Take a man like Ignatius of Loyola...Alphonsus Ligouri, with his brilliant mind, composed that prayer I learned as a child in Catholic school: 'I love You Jesus, my love. I love You more than myself. I repent with my whole heart for ever having offended You. Grant that I may love You always and then do with me what is Your will.'" A woman like Margaret Mary, to whom Our Lord appeared with His Heart ablaze with love, spent her life proclaiming the mystery of Jesus' personal love for each of us. Therese, called "the little flower of Jesus," died at the young age of 24. Under obedience, she wrote her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*. Every page burns with love for Our Lord. One after the other, these men and women had a deep personal love for Jesus and, as a result, an ever growing love for all their sisters and brothers.

"Sometimes, for us Catholics, when we read these lives or hear them we think, "Well, that was okay for them but it's not for me! The Church honors them in order to say, 'Hey! It is for *you!*' We're all called to genuine holiness, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us. We're all called to grow every day in knowing, loving and serving Our Lord Jesus Christ. That's our goal, and everything we do in the Church is meant to foster that goal."⁵

The Catechism on Prayer Before the Tabernacle

The new Catechism tells us: "The tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament."⁶

Bishop Fulton Sheen, one of the most admired and influential speakers of this century, gives witness to the efficacy of praying before the Blessed Sacrament: "When I stand up to talk, people listen to me. They will follow what I have to say. St. Paul says: 'What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given, how can you boast as though it were not?' (1 Cor 4:7). The secret of my power is that I have never in fifty-five years missed spending an hour in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. That's where the power comes from. That's where sermons are born. That's where every good thought is conceived."⁷

The Priestly Character

The theologian Fr. Jean Galot, S.J., offers us some very meaningful words regarding the priestly character:

"Instead of seeking to demystify the priestly character, we should seek to

See *The Priestly Character*, page 5

The Priestly Character continued from page 4

discover the mystical significance it embodies, at least to the extent to which the term ‘mystical’ refers to the presence of mystery understood as God’s plan of salvation taking hold of a man’s life.

“Already at baptism and confirmation, this divine plan gains access to the depth of the human self and impresses upon it the project of the whole Christian life that is to unfold...The project God sketches out for the existence of a person does not remain confined solely to the person’s will. It imprints itself onto the personal self, first through the baptismal character, then through that of confirmation, so that it may be realized from within.

“For the sake of precision, note that the priestly character is not added to the other two. It deepens the mark already there by imprinting upon the self the project of a priestly life that is to come to fruition with the help of graces conferred during the exercise of the ministry. It impresses upon the being of the baptized person an orientation which commits the whole self to the mission of the priest. Thus, this mission is not carried out from without, as when someone is sent by another to express a wish or convey an order. God engraves that mission in the very person. He makes it inseparable from personal being.

“Thus, we can well understand how the value of the priestly character is both ontological and dynamic. It is ontological because the priestly character affects personal being not more superficially than baptism—namely, only for the sake of a function to be exercised—but more thoroughly by bringing itself to bear upon the person’s deepest feelings. It seeks to surrender to God, not only deeds, but the very source from which springs the doing of deeds, the human being itself with all its capacities and possibilities.

“Thus, in the character of order as in that of baptism and confirmation a new creation is entailed. Through the mark it imprints, ordination fashions a new being...

“The new being constituted by the character is not meant solely to raise the person to a level ontologically higher. Since it is intended for the sake of a mission that needs to be carried out, it is dynamic by its very nature. True, from this dynamic point of view, terms such as sign, seal, and mark fall short of the meaning intended. Of themselves, they do not do justice to what the character is destined to be, to its essential orientation toward action. In a doctrinal presentation, they must be supplemented by emphasizing the dynamism immanent in the mark imprinted on the soul.

“When we insist that the priesthood pertains to the order of being, this statement

should not be taken to mean, not even by implication, that the priesthood pertains any less to the order of doing. The contrary is true. The priesthood engages us more radically at the level of our doing precisely because it affects what we are. In all this we recognize a distinctive sign that God is at work: He wants to gain possession of the whole person, and not only of the upper and visible layer, which is the person’s activity. If the priest is to be capable of doing God’s work, he must belong to God with his whole self. It is not in vain that he is called not merely God’s messenger, but the man of God. Grasped by God in his whole being, he can radiate and communicate God by everything he is.”⁸

On the Joy of Being a Priest

Fr. Philip Hamilton, a former college professor and Air Force Chaplain, and now a pastor, speaks to us about the joy of being a priest:

“When I was a young priest as an assistant pastor in a rather large parish with a parish high school, I wore many hats.

“Everyone knows what an assistant pastor did...He had Sunday afternoon rosary and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament while the pastor listened to the Green Bay Packer football games. He was always late to his basketball practice on Tuesday nights because he had to give the Sorrowful Mother Novena. He taught a full load as teacher of Latin and religion in the parish high school...

“Sleep was not a major part of my life. Many a night I returned home at two in the morning from an athletic trip to be up for the six o’clock Mass the next morning.

What kept me going? The priesthood. Simply to be a priest was enough for us in those days. It was a cloud nine experience every day. I loved those boys and girls in Assumption High School...I hated getting up in the morning but it was worth it to offer Mass for those holy, appreciative, hardworking hospital sisters...

“If only our young men could understand the joys of being a priest, they would have to nail the front doors of the seminaries shut from the inside.”⁹

Act of Consecration

Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, I consecrate my priestly life to Your Heart, pierced on Calvary for love of us. From Your pierced Heart the Church was born, the Church You have called me, as a priest, to serve in a most special way. You reveal Your Heart as symbol of Your love in all its aspects, including Your most special love for me whom You have chosen as Your priest-companion. Help me always to pour out my life in love of God and neighbor. Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You!

Dear Blessed Virgin Mary, I consecrate myself to your maternal and Immaculate Heart, this Heart which is symbol of your life of love. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. You love me with the most special love as this unique priest-son. In a return of love I give myself entirely to your motherly love and protection. You followed Jesus perfectly. You are His first and perfect disciple. Teach me to imitate you in the putting on of Christ. Be my motherly intercessor so that, through your Immaculate Heart, I may be guided to an ever closer union with the pierced Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, who leads me to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit in Our Lives

As the closing words of the act of consecration remind us, Jesus leads us to the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary at our side. The Holy Spirit desires to fashion us into an ever greater likeness to Christ according to Jesus' pattern of death-resurrection. Mary our Mother cooperates with the Spirit, Whose spouse she is, in this process. Obviously, we should pray to the Holy Spirit each day. There are many ways we can do this. We can do this by simply turning over attention to the Spirit at various times during the day as we ask for His guidance. This method can also be complemented by saying certain established prayers. Here is one of these: "Come Holy Spirit, almighty Sanctifier. God of love, Who filled

the Virgin Mary with grace, Who wonderfully changed the hearts of the apostles, Who endowed all your martyrs with marvelous courage, come and sanctify us. Enlighten our minds, strengthen our wills, purify our consciences, rectify our judgment, set our hearts on fire, and preserve us from the misfortunes of resisting Your inspirations. Amen." 6

Letters

We thank all those who have taken the time to write us. We very much appreciate your letters. Space limitations permit us to publish only a few of these:

A blessed New Year—and a quick note of thanks for the excellent bulletin, *Shepherds of Christ*.

Eamon Carroll, O. Carm.
Chicago, Illinois

I just wanted to drop you a note to tell you how much I enjoyed reading *Shepherds of Christ*. I found it good spiritual reading—and refreshing. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Eugene P. Hruska, V.G.
Great Falls, Montana

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Company.
2. St. Thomas Aquinas, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., Vol III, pp. 1335-1336.
3. Melito of Sardis, bishop, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, op. cit., Vol II, pp. 554-555.
4. St. Ambrose, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, op. cit., Vol II, p. 204.
5. Msgr. Bob Guste, *The Gift of the Church*, Queenship Publications, pp. 22-23.
6. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 348.
7. *Through the Year with Fulton Sheen*, compiled by Henry Dietrick, Servant Books.
8. Jean Galot, S.J., *Theology of the Priesthood*, Ignatius Press, pp. 201-202.
9. Rev. Philip Hamilton, *Padre's Point*, Alt Publishing, pp. 44-46.

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