

shepherds of Christ



A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS
AND OTHERS INTERESTED IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Suffering: A Source of Life

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd 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 as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; he runs away 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 10:11-15)¹

Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying, while we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God; whereas he was being wounded for our rebellions, crushed because of our guilt; the punishment reconciling us fell on him, and we have been healed by his bruises. We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and Yahweh brought the acts of rebellion of all of us to bear on him. Ill-treated and afflicted, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb before its shearers he never opened his mouth. (Is 53:4-7)

♦ He hung upon a cross on a hill called Calvary. Death was near. How much Jesus had already suffered! He had been derisively crowned with thorns. In a terribly weakened condition, He carried the heavy cross to the hill of Golgotha. There He was stripped of His garments and mercilessly nailed to the cross. After all this brutal and agonizing suffering, Jesus finally died.

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WE ARE EXPANDING OUR READERSHIP!

We are expanding our circulation by explicitly inviting to our readership those who are not priests, but who are interested in the spiritual life.

The Newsletter will still be written for priests in a special way. Yet we feel much of the material will also be of interest to those who are not priests.

To reflect the fact that we are now expanding our readership to include all interested parties, we think it is appropriate to offer a new act of consecration which is not worded for priests only, but one suitable for all.

Truly the Good Shepherd had laid down His life for His sheep. That magnificent Heart, overflowing with love for His Father and all of us, had beat its last.

On the third day, Jesus rose: 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple: are you going to raise it up again in three days?' But he was speaking of the Temple that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what he had said. (Jn 2:19-22)

Yes, the Good Shepherd died and rose for our salvation. Behold, the paschal mystery of Jesus!

When we are baptized we are incorporated into Christ's paschal mystery of death and resurrection. St. Paul speaks of this marvelous union with Jesus: *You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. (Rm 6:3-4)*

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 in Christ so that we may continually rise in Him. Thus we pass over in a process of ongoing religious transition to a greater participation in Christ's resurrection. It is true that our participation in Christ's res-

urrection will reach its completion only in eternal life. Nevertheless, we begin the life of resurrection here upon 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 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 into one's life. Whether the sufferings one encounters are of the more ordinary variety or of the more rare and extreme type, Christians must convince themselves that to relate properly to the cross is to grow in resurrection, and growth in resurrection means we will also have an increased capacity to help give resurrection to others.

♦ Pope John Paul II speaks of the role suffering plays in the Christian life: "Every man has his own share in the redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the redemption. Thus each man in his suffering can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ..."

"Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the paschal mystery of the cross and resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: Indeed, he dies nailed to the cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open, to the working of the salvific powers of God offered to humanity in Christ. In him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptiness of self."²

♦ Dom Hubert Van Zeller observes: "Men and women who might be turning their afflictions over to God, who have only to unite themselves in spirit with Christ's passion, are found so often to stop short, and even to make of their trial further matter for selfishness. Even if we do not rebel positively against God's providential will, we can become so preoccupied with our troubles as to leave God out of account.

"Instead of making us compassionate for others we can squander compassion on ourselves.

Suffering is meant to enlarge our hearts, not shrink them. With suffering goes the grace of patience, peace, fortitude, penitence and love. All this can be missed if we make the mistake of turning in upon ourselves as the result of our trials.

"To the Jews the cross was a stumbling block, and to the gentiles foolishness. What is it to us? Often it can be an emblem merely, the significance of the symbol forgotten. The cross is something in which we are, by reason of our Christian inheritance, inextricably involved. Do we yield to it or harden ourselves against it? The cross is not just two planks fitted together on a certain day in the history of the world, and of all the relics which we venerate the most sacred, but a fact of our human experience which may or may not be sacred according to what we do about it."³

♦ Contrary to what many think, Fr. Edward Leen reminds us that suffering is compatible with happiness: "If men are prone to err in conceiving the nature of happiness, they will necessarily err in judging of its opposite. They commonly think that a man cannot possibly be happy if he is a prey to constant sickness; if he is condemned to experience habitual poverty and to be buried in obscurity; if he fails to take an important part on the world stage; if he is unsuccessful in his enterprises; if he is deprived of the opportunities of intellectual or aesthetic development; and finally, if he fails to gain the applause and the esteem of his fellows. Now though all these things mean grievous sufferings for men, neither singly nor in combination have they the power to rob him of essential happiness.

"Apart from the consideration of the life of the Redeemer, certain undeniable facts of history justify this contention. The saints, in all ages, have been persons whose lot it was, generally speaking, to undergo greater trials and sufferings than others are called upon to endure. Yet they were habitually happy, buoyant and joyous human beings..."

"The saints were not violently wresting words from their literal meaning when they proclaimed themselves happy. For the happiness they enjoyed was that which is proper to, and satisfying for man..."



"God planned an unbroken life of happiness for man. The Fall modified, but did not prevent the realization of this plan. Suffering, but not unhappiness, becomes the condition of the earthly portion of men's existence. God does not make unhappiness here to be the price to pay for happiness hereafter. To be happy, in the minds of all men, is to fare well, that is, to live excellently... The Saviour Himself suffered intensely, but He lived the highest life possible for men. He was, therefore, happy. He assured men that He could share His own blissful experience with them. It may appear paradoxical to associate happiness with the mental image of One Who is called the Man of Sorrows. But an analysis of the nature of happiness will show that it was fully realized in the earthly life of the Saviour..."⁴

♦ Caryl Houselander writes with great sensitivity regarding the second station of the Way of the Cross: "They put His own garments on Him again, and Jesus comes out from the judgment hall of Pilate to receive His cross.

"He comes to it gladly! This is a strange thing, for the cross is a symbol of shame, and it is to be His deathbed. Already He sees the very shape of His death in the wide-spread arms. From this moment He will be inseparable from it, until He dies on it. He will labour and struggle under the weight of it... Yet Christ welcomes the cross. He embraces it. He takes it into His arms. He lays His beautiful hands on it tenderly, those strong hands of a carpenter that are so familiar with the touch of wood."⁵

♦ Henri Nouwen tells this story: "I would like to tell you the story of a mid-

dle-aged man whose career was suddenly interrupted by the discovery of leukemia, a fatal blood cancer. All his life plans crumbled and all his ways had to change. But slowly he was able to ask himself no longer: 'Why did this happen to me?' but instead: 'What is the promise hidden in this event?' When his rebellion became a new quest, he felt that he could give strength and hope to other cancer patients and, that by facing his condition directly, he could make his pain a source of healing for others. To this day, this man not only does more for patients than many ministers are able to, but he also refound his life on a level that he had never known before." 6

◆ St. Paul tells us: *But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us; always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh.* (2 Co 4:7-11)

Our Father

We have these words from Roman Guardini: "It is only through Christ that we come to the Father. When speaking of God the Father, we ought to add that we mean Him whom Christ means when He says 'My Father.' Thus we would signify that we were not thinking of a vague concept of deity whose power one may suspect behind the government of the world, but that holy countenance which revealed itself for the first time in the words of Christ. When we 'go to the Father,' we must go together with Christ, along His path and in His spirit. There can be no other way to the Father..."

"So that we may be able to follow Christ we must never cease to dwell on His life and teaching; otherwise our prayer to God will inevitably assume the character of a vague cosmic worship. Only through Christ can we reach the real Father in heaven.

"Christ has laid down for us how we should pray to the Father..."

"Rightfully understood, and spoken in the spirit in which Christ taught them, the words of the Lord's Prayer have profound and eternal significance. Their key lies in the body of teaching which is known as the Sermon on the Mount. They are illumined by the parables in which Christ explains the relationship between God and man; for example, by the parable of the Prodigal Son; thus, if rightfully understood in this wider context, they become a living path leading us to the Father.

"Because the Lord's Prayer is so full of meaning and truth, and yet so simple, it frequently suffers the fate of being said thoughtlessly, without true reverence and inner intent. It happens so much that we ought to remind ourselves of our responsibility as

Christians to preserve and treasure Christ's holy heritage. We should say the Lord's Prayer in a collected mood, thoughtfully, and putting our heart into its words. Only then will it open the doors to the kingdom of the Father which the Son's love has prepared for us." 7

The Holy Spirit in Our Lives

Romano Guardini also speaks to us concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives: "As a historical figure Christ is easily blurred by similarity with other historical figures, and also by the fact that man has an instinctive aversion to anything which goes beyond the purely human. The Holy Spirit must grant us the gift of discrimination. The figure of Christ as well as His message is surrounded by misunderstandings, distortions and hostility. The Holy Spirit must give the assurance to our hearts and minds so that we may find Him. Christ is the Truth..."

"The Holy Spirit teaches us to understand Christ, and in Christ, God and ourselves. It is the kind of understanding which comes from the heart... It is true comprehension; more than that, it is illumination.

"The Holy Spirit gives the answers to those questions which the mind cannot answer because the mind invariably couples the word 'why' with the word 'I'. 'Why must I endure this suffering? Why am I denied what others have? Why must I be the way I am, live the way I do?' These are some of the most essential and decisive questions in the life of the individual, and to those questions men and books remain silent. The true answer comes only when our heart is free from revolt and bitterness, when our will has come to terms with life as it is for us, recognizing in it the working of the will of God. The intellect may acquiesce readily enough, but this is not sufficient. Instruction must go deeper. Acceptance must come from our inmost heart. Only then will we find the answer to the *why*, and with it, peace, for truth brings peace. This is the work of the Holy Spirit." 8

Mary and the Priest

The *Directory of the Ministry and Life of Priests* tells us: "There is an 'essential rapport ... between the Mother of Jesus and the priesthood of the ministry of the Son,' stemming from the existing one between the divine maternity of Mary and the priesthood of Christ.

"In light of such a rapport, Marian spirituality is rooted in every priest. Priestly spirituality could not be considered complete if it were to fail to include the message of Christ's words on the Cross, in which He conferred His Mother to the beloved disciple, and, through him, to all priests called to continue his work of redemption.



"Like John at the foot of the Cross, every priest has been entrusted, in a special way, with Mary as Mother (cf Jn 19:26-27).

"Priests, who are among the favored disciples of Jesus, crucified and risen, should welcome Mary as their Mother in their own life, bestowing her with constant attention and prayer. The Blessed Virgin then becomes the Mother who leads them to Christ, who makes them sincerely love the Church, who intercedes for them and guides them toward the Kingdom of heaven..."

"But they are not devout sons if they do not know how to imitate the virtues of Mary. The priest will look to Mary to be a humble, obedient and chaste minister and to give testimony of charity in the total surrender to God and the Church." 9

The Church-Reflection of the Trinity, Body of Christ, and Spouse of Christ

Henri de Lubac states: "The Church is a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity, not only preparing us for the life of unity but bringing about even now our participation in it. She comes from and is full of the Trinity. She is for us -- in a favourite phrase of Bossuet -- 'Jesus Christ ... communicated'. She is 'the Incarnation continued.' She is, as Dietrick Bonhoeffer used to say, 'the presence of Christ on earth' --- she speaks with 'the authority of Christ living and present in her.'... St. Paul applies to her this same word 'mystery' which he had first used of Christ. She is after all, the spouse of Christ and his body."¹⁰

Let us, then, reflect upon the Church as a reflection of the Trinity, the Church as Body of Christ, the Church as Spouse of Christ.

The Christian community is a reflection of the ultimate and absolute community -- namely, the Trinity. In a special way, we are privileged to give witness to Trinitarian life, a life of divine intimacy, a life of divine knowing and loving.

Grace, or the Christ-life, is a created participation in Trinitarian life. This Christ-life, consequently, calls us to a special existence of knowing and loving. Christian faith and love, which are created participations in the Trinity's knowing and loving, allow us to know and love God in a special manner. Faith and love also give us a new capacity to relate to both our fellow Christians and to all others..

Because the life of the Trinity is person-centered, so must the life of the Church be person-centered. For many years, it seems, we were not sufficiently person-conscious. However, the theology that has emanated from Vatican II is helping to rectify this situation. In the pre-Vatican II Church, structures in the Church were at times treated by some as if they were ends in themselves rather than as means of serving the persons in the Church. Slowly but surely, structures in the Church are being renewed so that they might better serve their true purpose, which is to aid in the ongoing spiritual development of her members -- leading them closer to the Father, through and with Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

The Church, in turn, develops when those who make up that community develop as authentic Christians. Just as each divine Person contributes perfectly to the community life of the Trinity according to the Self-Gift of the fullness of His personhood, so each Christian contributes to the community life of the Church in proportion to the degree of his or her gift of self, according to the

degree of his or her personal holiness.

Authentic interpersonal relationships help to develop community. The Trinitarian community is a community of profound relationships. Because the Church reflects Trinitarian community, her members are intended to have relationships, not only with the Persons of the Trinity, but likewise with others. Authentic interpersonal relationships not only unite in a deeper knowledge and love the persons directly involved, they also make a person more capable of loving others more deeply, and, therefore, more capable of deepening the bonds of total community. If a person is growing in the capacity to love his or her friends, for example, that person is concurrently growing in the capacity to also love all others -- both those who are members of the Church and those who are not.

The fact that the Church is here on earth a reflection of the Trinitarian Community easily leads us to reflect upon the Church as the Body of Christ, since this name given to the Church also emphasizes the communitarian aspect of the Church. St. Paul tells us: *For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts -- all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body -- so it is with Christ. We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free men, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink. And indeed the body consists not of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body', it does not belong to the body any the less for that. Or if the ear were to say, 'I am not an eye, and so I do not belong to the body', that would not stop its belonging to the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how would there be any hearing? If the whole body were hearing, how would there be any smelling?*

Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole. And those whom God has appointed in the Church are, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers; after them, miraculous powers, then gifts of healing, helpful acts, guidance, various kinds of tongues. Are all of them apostles? Or all prophets? Or all teachers? Or all miracle-workers? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all of them speak in tongues and all interpret them? (1 Cor 12:12-17; 27-30).

The concept of the Church as Body of Christ certainly emphasizes the sense of corporateness that should permeate the consciousness of the Church's members. We depend upon each other. We each have a very important contribution to make to the life of the Church. We must think in terms of both what is good for the entire Church and, through this Church, what is good for the total human community. Even when we disagree among ourselves, we do so not because we

want to glory in having the upper hand, but because we believe that to disagree here and now is necessary so that the truth might better emerge for the good of the community. St. Paul speaks to us about this sense of corporateness: *So if in Christ there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any warmth or sympathy -- I appeal to you, make*

my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests but those of others. Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus. (Phil 2:1-5)

Finally, we reflect upon the Church as Spouse of Christ. Fr. Joseph Murphy, S.J., tells us: "John Paul II always quotes the rich doctrinal and patristic traditions of the Church which refer to Christ as the Spouse of the Church and the Spouse of souls, given to both in the Eucharistic mystery. For him the key to understanding the sacramentality of marriage, not to mention the nature of humanity, is the spousal love of Christ for the Church demonstrated in Ephesians 5. Christ is the Head of the Church as Savior of His Body. The Church is exactly that Body which receives from Him all that through which it becomes and is His Body. As Head and Savior of the Church He is also Bridegroom of His Bride..."¹¹

Here is a prayer for intimacy with the Lamb, the Bridegroom of the Soul: "O Lamb of God, Who take away the sins of the world, come and act on my soul most intimately. I surrender myself, as I ask for the grace to let go, to just be as I exist in You and You act most intimately on my soul. You are the Initiator. I am the soul waiting Your favors as You act in me. I love You. I adore You. I worship You. Come and possess my soul with Your divine Grace, as I experience You most intimately."

*Mary, Queen of Peace,
Pray for us.*

The Eucharist

◆ *At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 17)*¹²

◆ *The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. They should be instructed by God's word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 48)*¹³

◆ *Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ the Lord desired to set before us in a very special way this remarkable union whereby we are united one with another and with our divine Head, a union that no word of praise can ever sufficiently express. For in this sacrifice the sacred ministers act not only as the representative of our Saviour, but as the representative of the whole Mystical Body and of each one of the faithful. Again, in this act of sacrifice, the faithful of Christ, united by the common bond of devotion and prayer, offer to the eternal Father through the hands of the priest, whose prayer alone has made it present on the altar, the Immaculate Lamb, the most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the Church's universal need. Moreover, just as the divine Redeemer, while dying on the Cross, offered Himself to the eternal Father as Head of the whole human race, so now, 'in this clean oblation' He not only offers Himself as Head of the Church to His heavenly Father but in Himself His mystical members as well. He embraces them all, yes, even the weaker and more ailing members, with the deepest love of His Heart. (Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis AAS*. XXXV, 232-233)*¹⁴

◆ The Sacrifice of Calvary is sacramentally made present in the Mass. When we pray the Morning Offering Prayer, united to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we act as Intercessors, pleading to God that great graces be released all day through our prayerful actions as we act in love according to the Father's will. Whether we are eating, taking care of a sick parent, enjoying time spent with a friend, working at our job, we can help bring down great graces for the world.

When we pray the Morning Offering Prayer we offer our lives to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, with the prayerful assistance of Mary, our Mother. Let us pray together united in our

hearts in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There follows a Morning Offering Prayer.

"My dear Father, I offer You this day all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings in union with Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in the Holy Spirit.

"I unite with our Mother, Mary, all the angels and saints, and all the souls in purgatory to pray to the Father for myself, for each member of my family, for my friends, for all the people throughout the world, for all the souls in purgatory, and for all other intentions of the Sacred Heart.

"I love You, Jesus, and I give You my heart. I love you, Mary, and I give you my heart. Amen."

◆ St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, offers us these consoling words: "If we really loved God, we should make it our joy and happiness to come and spend a few moments before the tabernacle to adore him, and ask him for the grace of forgiveness --- Oh! how sweet and consoling are moments spent with the God of goodness. Are you in sorrow? Come and cast yourself at his feet and you will feel quite consoled. Are you despised by the world. Come here and you will find a good friend whose faithfulness will never fail you. Are you tempted? It is here that you will find strong and terrible weapons to vanquish your enemies --- Are you oppressed by poverty? Come and find a God infinitely rich... You who are reconciled with him, beg for the precious gift of perseverance. Oh! Tell him that if you are to offend him again, you would rather die. Would you begin to taste the joy of the saints? Come here and you will know the happy beginnings of it."¹⁵

Priesthood

In one of his Holy Thursday letters to priests, Pope John Paul II says: "Attempts to make the priest more like the laity are damaging to the Church. This does not mean in any way that the priest can remain remote from the human concerns of the laity: he must be very near to them, as John Mary Vianney was, but as a priest, always in a perspective which is that of their salvation and of the progress of the Kingdom of God. He is the witness and dispenser of a life other than earthly life. It is essential to the Church that the identity of the priest be safeguarded, with its vertical dimension. The life and personality of the Curé of Ars are a particularly enlightening and vigorous illustration of this..."

"Saint John Mary Vianney did not content himself with the ritual carrying out of the activities of his ministry. It was his heart and his life which he sought to conform to Christ.

"Prayer was the soul of his life: silent and contemplative prayer, generally in his church at the foot of the tabernacle. Through Christ, his soul opened to the three divine Persons, to whom he would entrust 'his poor soul' in his last will and testament. 'He kept a constant union with God in the middle of an extremely busy life.' And he did not neglect the office or the rosary. He turned spontaneously to the Virgin."¹⁶

Prayer

Dom Hubert Van Zeller observes: "If when we speak of prayer and faith *transcending* the drawbacks to human existence we mean a blind, uncaring ascent into a dream world where the realities of life are left behind for others to cope with, we have got it wrong... 'Transcendence' here denotes...the detachment which is brought about by the spirit, but which has not lost touch with the things of sense.

"Without suppressing the emotions, faith enables the soul to rise above the emotions. And if this sounds cold and superior, it must be remembered that those who are essentially souls of faith, the saints, are just those who feel things deeply. It is because they feel things deeply that they are able to help others, and again it

*Immaculate
Heart of Mary,
Pray for us.*

is because they feel things deeply that their prayer is all the more pleasing to God.

"So to transcend the contingencies of life is not the same as to hold aloof, to show indifference, to avoid involvement. Anything which breeds insensitivity is bound to be on the wrong lines. Compassion, as we know from the example of Christ and his mother, is inherent in the service of God. Followers of Christ must necessarily be involved. It is their vocation to live as members of one another. But by their faith and prayer they will use material contacts as a lever to the world of the spirit. Involvement instead of pulling them down from contemplation of God, will raise their natural operation, because performed in charity, to the supernatural level." ¹⁷

*Heart of Jesus,
We place our trust in You.*

Becoming

No one has to remind us that we live in a rapidly changing world. The temporal order is very much undergoing a process. It is engaged in a phenomenal manifestation of change. Some of this is for the better, but there is a dimension which is not good, because some of modern society's becoming is only apparent progress or becoming. To put it in another way, since a certain segment of modern man's activity is marked by immorality, it is actually retrogression rather than progress.

True becoming is inherent in the human person. The human person is a creature who is both always the same and always different. The human person, then, possesses both unchangeable and changeable dimensions. Regarding the changeable dimension, Vatican II says: "History itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis." ¹⁸

Because we are creatures who are both unchangeable and changeable, our authentic becoming respects both dimensions. We are not meant to become by denying the aspect of stability. We are not to become by always making fresh starts, but by building properly upon what we are and what we have been.

To feel psychologically at ease with ourselves, we need to develop a proper balance between the unchangeable and the changeable.

Our becoming, our growth, is rooted in God's will

for us. He has made us for continual growth, for continual development. This process of growth depends upon our relationship with God. The Father, out of His great love for us, is always inviting us to a deeper union with Him, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

In the depths of our heart we know we want this deeper union with God, and yet at times we are frightened at the prospect. We can be tempted to avoid coming closer to God for fear of what His love may ask of us. This is a critical point in the relationship. Many apparently draw back at this juncture, deciding that the closeness of deep love is too demanding. In our relationship with God -- unlike what can happen in a relationship with a human person who possesses a wounded nature because of sin -- we can be assured that becoming closer to Him will not end in any kind of disappointment. God will never be unreasonable in His demands. Growing, or becoming, through a closer love-union with Him will result in a greater happiness. Our quest for happiness will be more and more satisfied -- not without some pain, because our growth does involve suffering. But whether the suffering be now slight, now moderately severe, or even at times seemingly almost unbearable, we know in the depths of our heart we have to want deeper union with God if we truly want to continue to grow, to continue to become. Growth in happiness means developing the union of love with God. And if this means that suffering is one element of that process, then a voice deep within us, rising from the depths of the authentic self, whispers to us that we should be willing to bear with the pain involved -- for the sake of a deeper life, a greater becoming, a greater love.

Although our process of growing or becoming is rooted in our relationship with God, this relationship does not stand alone. According to God's will, our union with Him involves also other relationships. God calls us to the gift of self in relationships with others. He also wants us to be properly related to material creation.

We grow or become, then, through a going out in love to God, to others, to material creation. Much of this becoming is according to a more or less established and predictable pattern. But sometimes God surprises us. Sometimes He asks us to become in a way we ourselves would not have considered. God does not always act according to the more ordinary and predictable ways. He is an infinitely wise God, and His holy wisdom is perfectly capable of leading us along paths previously unknown to us. Whatever the case may be, His ways -- if we follow them -- always lead us to greater growth, to greater becoming, to greater happiness.

The Christian and the World

Henri Nouwen, one of the most well-known spiritual writers of our times, spent an extended period of time as a guest in a Trappist monastery. His following words remind us how a certain amount of prayerful solitude brings us closer to the world, how it helps develop in us a Christian concern for the world: "My stay at the monastery, however, has not only brought me closer to Christ, it has brought me closer to the world as well. In fact, distance from the world has made me feel more compassionate toward it. In my work in New Haven I am often so busy with immediate needs asking for an immediate response that my world narrows down to my daily worries, and I lose my perspective on the larger problems. Here in the monastery I could look more easily beyond the boundaries of the place, the state, the country, and the continent, become more intimately aware of the pain and suffering of the whole world and respond to them by prayers, correspondence, gifts, or writing. I also felt that in this retreat my friends and family came closer to me. I experienced especially that a growing intimacy with God creates an always widening space for others in prayer. I had a real sense of the power of prayer for others and experienced what it means to place your suffering friends in God's presence right in the center of your heart." ¹⁹ Most people cannot arrange for an extended time of retreat in a monastery. Everyone can, however, structure times of prayerful solitude into one's schedule which allow, among other things, for a deepened awareness and concern for the world with its many problems and challenges. In turn, this deepened concern for the world should lead to increased prayer for all the world's needs and other appropriate activity in accord with one's vocation and opportunities. There is still so much to be done to make this world more what God destines it to be. As the Christopher Movement's motto reminds us: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

Program for Diocesan Priests

The Institute for Priestly Formation at Creighton University is offering a program entitled, "The Identity of the Diocesan Priesthood Deepened through the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola." The program offers the full Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola in the 30-day retreat format in a context which serves and strengthens the identity of the diocesan priest. The program, which features preparation and follow up days in addition to the retreat, will be held from June 27-August 2, 2000. For further information contact:

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www.creighton.edu/SummerSessions/html/ipf.html

Various Thoughts

◆ Here are words of Therese of Lisieux, saint and doctor of the Church: "O Jesus! why can't I tell all little souls how unspeakable is Your condescension? I feel that if You found a soul weaker and littler than mine --- You would be pleased to grant it still greater favors, provided it abandoned itself with total confidence to your Infinite Mercy."²⁰

◆ Jesus calls us to surrender. He wants us to let go, to relate to persons, places, and things only according to His will. He wants us to renounce those things which prevent a closer union with Him. If we do this, we will experience the joy of being free, the joy of being deeply united to Him, the joy of being deeply possessed by Him.

Jesus sustains us. Others move in and out of our lives, some betray us, some become indifferent to us. Jesus is our Rock, the One we can always depend on, the One Who always loves us with an unfathomable love: *Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever.* (Heb 13:8)

◆ Sometimes we are tempted to think our efforts are rather useless. We must resist the temptations. The battle is hard, and the path at times seems to be all uphill. We have to pray for the light to realize that our efforts put forth for God are not in vain. When we are united to Jesus, our efforts are having a great effect in the work of the Kingdom. Let us keep our candles burning. Let us keep our focus on Jesus, and not worry about results. Our lives spent in Jesus' service please Him greatly, and they produce great good, although so much of this good can be hidden from our eyes.

A Prayer for Priests

Many of the laity pray for us priests, and consistently so. Is it not also fitting that we priests pray for all our brothers in the priesthood, and consistently so? There follows a prayer that can aid us in this endeavor.

"Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, we pray that in the great love and mercy of Your Sacred Heart that You attend to all the needs of Your priest-shepherds throughout the world. We ask that You draw back to Your Heart all those priests who have seriously strayed from Your path, that You rekindle the desire for holiness in the hearts of those priests who have become lukewarm, and that You continue to give Your fervent priests the desire for the highest holiness. United with Your Heart and Mary's Heart, we ask that You take this petition to Your heavenly Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen".

The above prayer is taken from the prayer manual of Shepherds of Christ Associates, a facet of Shepherds of Christ Ministries. The associates are members of prayer groups which meet regularly to pray for all the needs of the entire human family, but most especially for priests. If you would like a copy, or copies, of this prayer manual, and further, if you would like information on how to begin a Shepherds of Christ prayer chapter, contact us at:

Shepherds of Christ
P.O. Box 193
Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193 U.S.A.
Phone (toll free): 1-888-211-3041, Phone: 1-513-932-4451
Fax: 1-513-932-6791

Act of Consecration (new)

"Jesus, You show us Your Heart as symbol of Your life of love in all its aspects, including Your most special love for each of us as unique individuals. Out of Your great love for us, You died a brutal death, nailed to the wood of the cross. Out of Your great love for us, You rose gloriously from the dead.

"From Your pierced Heart the Church with her life-giving Sacraments was born. In the Eucharist, Crown and Center of the Church's life, You continue to give Yourself to us with the deepest, most tender, most on-fire, most complete love.

"Jesus, since in Your great love You give Yourself so completely to us, it is only fitting that we make a gift to You in return. It is entirely fitting that we give ourselves completely to You. Yes, we consecrate ourselves to Your most loving Heart. Each of us says to You, O Lord, our Savior and our Friend: 'Jesus, take me wholly, take me completely to Your magnificent Heart. Out of love I give myself to You. Live in and through me. In love You give Yourself completely to me. In love and in a spirit of reparation, I want to give myself, with the help of Your grace, entirely to You. Take me, Jesus, to an ever closer union with the Father, in the Holy Spirit, with Mary my Mother at my side. Pierced, Glorified, Eucharistic 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, including your most special love for me as this unique individual. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. 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, Glorified, Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the flock."

Letters

◆ Dear and Rev. Edward,

Loving and cordial greetings to you from Most Rev. G. Johannes, Bishop of Kurnool.

I am glad to learn that you are publishing a magazine by name *Shepherds of Christ*. Recently, I was given some magazines to be distributed to our priests by Most Rev. Bishop S. A. Aruliah of Cuddapah and the magazines are very good and worth reading.



website: <http://www.sofc.org>
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shepherds of Christ

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Letters...

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As the magazines are useful to our priests, I would like to get them for our priests too. Presently there are 70 priests in our diocese and distribution of these magazines to our priests will surely help their spiritual life. As your magazine covers so many theological, pastoral themes, it helps our priests in their pastoral life.

Hence, I request you to send at least 70 *Shepherds of Christ* magazines to us so that we may distribute to our priests. I also request you to send some audio-video tapes which can help our priests pastorally.

With Blessings,
GORANTLA Johannes D. D.
Bishop of Kurnool, India

◆ Dear Father Edward J. Carter, S. J.

Greetings and good wishes for Christmas and happy New Year 2000!

I am a diocesan priest. I am working in Mbanga Diocese. I, by good chance, came across your *Shepherds of Christ, A Spirituality Newsletter for Priests*.

After having read it, I decided to ask for a free copy of the newsletter both in cassette form and in book form. I believe that this book and the cassette will continue helping me to fervently renew my spirituality. I hope that this will be useful too to my fellow priests who are engaged in the pastoral activities.

Thanking you in advance, and May God bless your work too,

Yours sincerely,
Father Andrew J. Ndimbo, CARITAS Director
MBINGA DIOCESE
TANZANIA

NOTES:

1. Scripture quotations are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday.
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3. Dom Hubert Van Zeller, *More Ideas for Prayer*, Templegate, p. 112.
4. Edward Leen, C. S. Sp., *Why the Cross?*, Sheed & Ward, pp. 246-247, 255, 285.

5. Caryll Houselander, *The Way of the Cross*, Sheed & Ward, p. 21.
6. Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, Ave Maria Press, p. 57.
7. Romano Guardini, *Prayer in Practice*, Pantheon Books, p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.
9. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, No. 68, as in *Inside the Vatican*, Special Supplement, November, 1994, p. 25.
10. Henri de Lubac, S. J., *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, translated by James R. Dunne, Alba House, p. 24.
11. *The Thought of Pope John Paul II: A Collection of Essays and Studies*, John M. McDermott, S. J., Editor, Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, p. 135.
12. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," America Press edition, No. 17.
13. *Ibid.*, No. 48.
14. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis*, AAS, XXXV, pp. 232-233.
15. Saint John Vianney, "Sermons for Holy Thursday", in *Eucharistic Meditations*, editor Sr. Mary Benvenuta, O. P., translated by Abbé H. Convert, as in *Adoration*, compiled by Daniel Guernsey, Ignatius Press, p. 96.
16. Pope John Paul II, *Holy Thursday, Letters to My Brother Priests*, edited by James P. Socias, Scepter Publications and Midwestern Theological Forum, p. 148.
17. Dom Hubert Van Zeller, *More Ideas About Prayer*, Templegate, pp. 50-51.
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19. Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*, Doubleday, p. 212.
20. *Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, p. 200.