

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Christ and the World

“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).

In laying down his life for His sheep, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has established a new world order. Indeed, Christ is King of the universe, and all creation possesses its true meaning only in Him. St. Paul tells us:

“He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers— all things were created through him and for him.

Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity. Now the Church is his body, he is its head.

As he is the Beginning, he was first to be born from the dead, so that he should be first in every way; because God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross.” (Col 1:15-20)

Because the world belongs to Christ, we must love the world, the world as created and

redeemed by God. We, who proclaim to be followers of Christ, must tirelessly labor so that the Christic image of the world may more and more manifest itself.

Vatican II reminds us that we have an awesome responsibility regarding the world. The Council tells us that Christ in His paschal mystery has entered into the world's history, has taken this history to Himself, and has summarized it: “For God's Word, through whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh and dwelt on the earth of men. Thus He entered the world's history as a perfect man, taking that history into Himself and summarizing it. He Himself revealed to us that ‘**God is love**’ (1 Jn 4:8).

“At the same time He taught us that the new command of love is the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation.

“To those, therefore, who believe in divine love, He gives assurance that the way of love lies open to all men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one. He cautions them at the same time that this love is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life.

“Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, He taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice. Appointed Lord by His resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of His Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come, but, by that very fact, He animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings by which the human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to the goal.

“Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. He calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family. He summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs. Yet He frees all of

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“There is a season
for everything,
a time for every
occupation
under heaven.”

—Eccl 3:1

Reflections

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them so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God.

“The Lord left behind a pledge of this hope and strength for life’s journey in that sacrament of faith where natural elements refined by man are changed into His glorified Body and Blood, providing a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.”²

As we labor with Christ in helping to bring the work of creation and redemption to completion, we should not become discouraged by the fact that mankind and the temporal order seem to be less Christian than they were previously. We should not be disheartened in our efforts for Christ because of the possibility that official Christianity might become less influential in today’s world.

Although we see these and other signs that seem to portend increasingly difficult times for Christianity, let us not become discouraged. We must realize that there is an external and obvious manifestation of Christianity in the world, and there is a hidden or anonymous dimension. Men and women who are not publicly professed Christians can be coming closer to Christ without actually realizing it. In fact, the entire temporal order can progress in its Christianization process in a very quiet and hidden way, so quiet and so hidden that even we Christians can hardly recognize what is actually happening.

There is only one world order, and it has been

established in Christ. Every person is offered salvation, but this is *Christic* grace, *Christic* salvation. The entire temporal order comes under this Christic influence. If there is to be the authentic progress of this temporal order, it must be a progress in Christ. The Christic influence, then, reaches out and touches every human person, every authentic, human value. Regardless of how many persons realize what is happening in Christ to themselves and to the entire world order, it is definitely happening. Consequently, our Christ-oriented efforts for the human family are really effective, even though they are so hidden and mysterious at times.

We each contribute to the shaping of a better world according to a variety of circumstances. The young, for example, contribute their enthusiasm. The elderly contribute their mellowed wisdom. The conservatives contribute their concern for timeless values. The progressives contribute their penchant for change and adaptation to contemporary exigencies. Some work within the confines of a clean and quiet office. Others work amid circumstances charged with potential explosiveness. Some perform while receiving the attention of the public eye. Others perform in hidden ordinariness. Some must fight the boredom that routine work tends to generate. Others must maintain high-level awareness amid the dangers of high-risk occupations. Whatever the task and its cir-

cumstances might be, however, the imperative is the same for all of us, namely, to be where God wants us to be striving to do His will in all things out of love for God and neighbor. Only in this way can we contribute to the growth of the world order in Christ.

Scriptural Reflections

◆ *A Time for Everything*

“There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven.” (Eccl 3:1)

Nature has its own particular cycle. There is the time of spring’s greenness, a time bursting forth with new life, a new life nourished by April’s rain and May’s warmth. There is the time of summer’s sun mixed with the gentle breeze which lies tender against the brow. There is the time of fall’s briskness accompanied by the fascinating blend of October leaves in magnificent reds, yellows, and browns. There is the time of winter’s cold with the pure white snow softly and gently covering all.

We, too, have our cycle, a cycle comprised of a myriad of human experiences. There is a time to laugh and a time to cry, a time to work and a time to play, a time to speak and a time to remain silent, a time to rejoice and a time to mourn. There is a time to be together and a time to be separated, a time to console and a time to be consoled, a time to help and a time to be helped, a time to enjoy the glow of success and a time to endure the pain of failure.

As we grow in the Christian life, we achieve a broadened view of human existence. We achieve a deepened realization that the Christian must increasingly mature in the capacity to cope properly with the diversified experiences of life within the human condition. We achieve a deepened realization that one aspect of our prayer-life should be a petition for the light and strength to give ourselves to the right experience, at the proper time, and in an appropriate manner. There is a time for everything.

◆ *The Burden of Jesus Refreshes*

“Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Mt 11:28-30)

Discarding the burden of Jesus can seem to be a freedom-accomplishing event. A person can think that, freed from the restrictions of the Gospel message, one now has the liberty to live a kind of human existence that yields various types of joy and happiness. Wine, women, and song, or money and positions of power, or whatever—one can pursue these unhampered once the restrictions of Jesus' way of life are done away with.

To discard the burden of Jesus may indeed lead to a certain kind of freedom. However, such a distorted kind of liberty really leads to a kind of unfreedom. The proper use of freedom leads one to a God-intended human fulfillment, to the maturation of human nature's capacity for real happiness. Contrarily, the more a person abuses one's freedom, the more one strays from the Gospel way of living, the more one becomes burdened with layers of selfishness. These layers of selfishness prevent a person from living the really real which alone can yield true happiness. The person's abuse of freedom leads to the enslavement known as selfishness. To the extent a person abuses freedom, then to that extent does one become unfree. To the extent that one throws off the burden of Jesus, to that extent does one assume the burden of one's own selfishness. This burden is not light, but heavy; this yoke is not easy, but difficult.

The burden of Jesus, on the other hand, makes us truly free. The burden of Jesus constricts our selfishness, but expands our true selves. If we give ourselves to Jesus, he cuts through the surface veneer of our un-Godlike existence, and increasingly shows us what we truly are, children of God. He reveals to us our Christic selves, persons divinized with God's grace, persons meant to achieve happiness through love of God and neighbor according to the pattern of Jesus. Walking the narrow way of Jesus, then, expands us. Surrendering our freedom to the teaching of Jesus increases our freedom; it increases our freedom to be and become what we are destined to be. This is true liberty, this is real human liberty, this is God-intended liberty. The burden of Jesus is not heavy, but light. The yoke of Jesus is not difficult, but easy. The burden of Jesus refreshes.

◆ *Now Is the Time*

“As his fellow workers, we beg you once again not to neglect the grace of God that you have received. For he says: *At the favourable time, I have listened to you; on the day of salvation I came to your help. Well, now is the favourable time; this is the day of salvation.*” (2 Cor 6: 1-2)

We can easily develop the habit of belittling

the present. Often the realization that the present alone is completely ours—not the past or the future—fails to penetrate our thinking. We can nostalgically think of the good days of times past (forgetting all too quickly that such days had their problems, frustrations, and anxieties), and unrealistically dream of an utopian future (thinking that such time will be characterized by our finally coming into our own). All the while we miss numerous opportunities to be loving, kind, generous, and patient.

Looking ahead to future times, we dream of grandiose opportunities to prove ourselves outstandingly Christian, while our neglect of present opportunities is making us terribly mediocre. Or reflecting upon the past,

we squander time mourning missed opportunities, while simultaneously we waste the precious chances of the here and now.

All this is not to say that there should be no thought of the past or future. There are various ways in which reflection upon the past can be beneficial. An instance of this is allowing the remembrance of past mistakes to help prevent us from repeating the same. An appropriate look at the future is also helpful in more ways than

*Immaculate
Heart
of Mary,
Pray for us.*

one. If there is not sufficient consideration of the future, present planning and preparation will be incomplete. If there is no reflection upon future possibilities, present performance can be dulled because our motivation lacks the element of being buoyed by the thought of what is not yet attained, but which some day could be. Present decisions should also be influenced by a mature consideration of their future consequences. Proper reflection concerning the past and future, then, is far from being useless. As a matter of fact, such reflection is one characteristic of the mature personality. To be properly present persons, we must also be properly past and future persons.

It is correct to say, then, that we are past, present, and future. We are, however, mostly present. The past span of our lives is forever gone. And the extended future may never be, for who can promise oneself that there certainly will be another tomorrow? Today is the acceptable time. Today is the time of salvation. Today is the time when I can prayerfully meet Jesus, deepen my love for my Savior, renew my determination to belong entirely to Him. Today is the time when I have numerous opportunities to love my neighbor in quiet but meaningful ways, especially those who are poor, or lonely, or unattractive, or so forgotten. Today is the time when I can use suffering properly, rather than waste this opportunity for growth. Today is the time when I can be patient, especially with those who have a tendency to irritate me. Today is the time when I can be faithful to duty, despite the problems and anxieties which make loyal performance at least a little more difficult. Today is the time when I can rejoice in the Lord, thanking Him for His many and splendidly varied gifts—for the Eucharist, for the wonderful people in my life, for my ability to see and hear and walk, for the springtime freshness, the warm June sun, the fascinating colors of autumn leaves, and the soft whiteness of winter snow.

Now is the time. Now is the time to live and to love. Now is the time to be and to become Christian. Now is not yesterday; now is not tomorrow; now is today, and today is the day of salvation.

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◆ *A Cure for Loneliness*

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep.... I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”
(Jn. 10:11,14-15)

Loneliness, a trial which humans of any age have to endure, has increasingly become a problem in contemporary, industrialized society. We immediately see a paradox here: the more populated our areas become, the more loneliness seems to increase.

There are densely crowded neighborhoods and apartment buildings, crowded streets, factories, and office buildings. Surrounded by such countless numbers wherever one turns, today's urban person asks how can one feel so lonely with so many people around. It is not, however, sheer numbers of people which help to alleviate loneliness. It is rather relating to others in an authentic, meaningful way that helps soothe the pains of loneliness. And for various reasons, this proper person-relating process is rendered all the more difficult in industrialized society.

Today's person not only finds it more difficult to relate to his or her fellow human beings, He or she also experiences a greater difficulty in relating meaningfully to work. The production line method and other forms of work-impersonalism tend to put a distance between today's worker and his or her occupation, and, consequently, there more easily arises a sensation of work alienation or loneliness.

The material world surrounding us has also become an occasion for loneliness. The more we master the material world, the more estranged we seem to be regarding it. The various scientific and technological advancements which make possible our increasing mastery over the material world at the same time tend to create a certain separation between us and the physical universe. The technological know-how which acts as a kind of mediator between us and the material world simultaneously often seems to create a subtle barrier separating humans from the universe they are striving to master. We are not claiming this necessarily has to be, but merely stating what actually is occurring.

Today's Christian, as does the Christian of any

age, has a radical solution to the problem of loneliness. We are not claiming that loneliness can be completely eradicated as one lives within the human condition. We are claiming, however, that the Christian has a solution which allows one to cope properly with loneliness, and thus prevent it from becoming a major and debilitating problem. The solution is Jesus Himself.

The Good Shepherd died an agonizing and brutal death for each one of us. He did so out of the greatest love for each of us. St. Gregory of Nyssa has left us these inspiring words: “Where do you pasture your sheep, O Good Shepherd, you who carry on your shoulders the whole flock? For it is but one sheep, this entire human race whom you lift onto your shoulders. Show me the place where there are green pastures, let me know restful waters, lead me out to nourishing grass and call me by name so that I can hear your voice, for I am your sheep. And through that voice calling me, give me eternal life.

“Tell me, you whom my soul loves. This is how I address you, because your true name is above all other names; it is unutterable, incomprehensible to all rational creatures. And so the name I use for you is simply the statement of my soul's love for you, and this is an apt name for making your goodness known. Very dark though I am, how could I not love you who so loved me that you laid down your life for the sheep you tend? No greater love can be conceived than this, that you should purchase my salvation at the cost of your life.”³

The same magnificent Self-gift which Jesus gave forth from the cross is sacramentally

made present in each Eucharistic Sacrifice. Each day Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist—body, blood, soul and divinity. He comes to us in the most complete gift of love. He longs for our return of love! Through each Eucharist He wants to nourish and further develop a deep love relationship between Himself and each of us. He has a special desire to do this regarding His priests.

We have to ask ourselves if we properly appreciate Jesus' gift of Himself which He makes to us in each Eucharist. Do we try to grow in appreciation of the fact that the Son of God, made Incarnate for love of us, comes to us in the Eucharist with the most ardent love? Do we take sufficient time to converse with Him after Communion? Are we more interested in conversing with our earthly friends than we are with this Friend Jesus? Outside of Mass, do we tend to think more about being with this or that friend than being with this Friend Jesus as He is present in the tabernacle?

Jesus is the answer to loneliness and all other problems and difficulties. We are not saying that He will completely remove them. But the more we deepen our love relationship with Him, the more He helps us to cope with loneliness or whatever. The more we surrender to his Heart, the more love, peace, joy, and security we experience, despite the suffering, and harshness of human existence.

Jesus is our Shepherd. There is nothing we shall want, nothing we really need in order to achieve our God-given destiny, as long as we are open to His guidance. Yes, there is the difficult dimension of human existence which we must all bear. Yet we only intensify for ourselves the harsher experience of life here below when we refuse in various ways to walk in the Shepherd's presence. Jesus wants to help alleviate the pains of loneliness, just as he desires to help us cope with all forms of trials and tribulations. But He will not force His love and guidance upon us. He is a Shepherd who leads only those who want to follow. If we say yes to His invitation, He will lead us ever closer to the Father, in the Holy Spirit, with Mary, our Mother, at our side.

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

Thoughts on the Eucharist

◆ In his recent book, *Gift and Mystery*, Pope John Paul II speaks of the Eucharist and the priest: “In the Eucharist, the Son, who is of one being with the Father...offers himself in sacrifice to the Father for humanity and for all creation. In the Eucharist Christ gives back to the Father everything that has come from him. Thus there is brought about a profound *mystery of justice on the part of the creature toward the Creator*. Man needs to honor his Creator by offering to him, in an act of thanksgiving and praise, all that he has received. *Man must never lose sight of the debt*, which he alone, among all other earthly realities, is capable of acknowledging and paying back as the one creature made in God’s own image and likeness. At the same time, given his creaturely limitations and sinful condition, man would be incapable of making this act of justice toward the Creator, had not Christ himself, the Son who is of one being with the Father and also true man, first given us the Eucharist.

“The priesthood, in its deepest reality, is the priesthood of Christ. It is Christ who offers himself, his Body and Blood, in sacrifice to God the Father, and by this sacrifice makes righteous in the Father’s eyes all mankind and, indirectly, all creation. The priest, in his daily celebration of the Eucharist, goes to the very heart of this mystery. For this reason the celebration of the Eucharist must be the most important moment of the priest’s day, the center of his life.”⁴

◆ Our personal relationship with Christ is characterized by the realization of the great, personal love of His Heart for each of us and of our need to love Him in return. The chief source for growth in the personal relationship with Jesus is the Eucharist. The Catechism tells us: “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and work of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole good of the Church, namely Christ himself, Our Pasch.”⁵

◆ Ignio Giordani offers us insightful thoughts concerning Catherine of Siena, saint and doctor of the Church. These thoughts center on the Eucharist: “All the strivings of theologians and diplomats and preachers and missionaries are to no avail if they do not lead to love. By loving, one gives the life of God to the loved one. As St. John of the Cross will say: ‘Where you do not find love, implant love and you will find love!’

“And Christ said to Catherine: ‘He who knows

himself to be loved cannot do otherwise than love; in loving he will put on the spirit of Christ crucified, and in the tempestuous sea of many troubles he will find himself at peace.”⁶

Elsewhere, Giordani observes: “Man is like a candle to be lighted—to be lighted in God. The combustible material is love. As the heavenly Father will say to Catherine: ‘Your material is love because I have created you for love; hence without love you cannot live! Without love one must die; a lamp without oil goes out.

“‘This light is lighted day by day above all at the flame of the Eucharist, sacrament of love.’ ‘The soul,’ Jesus will say on another occasion to Catherine, ‘receiving this Sacrament lives in me and I in it.’”⁷

◆ The Catechism emphasizes how all participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As priests we have the privilege and the responsibility to instruct the people regarding this truth: “*All gather together*, Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ Himself, the principal agent of the Eucharist. He is high priest of the New Covenant; it is He Himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration.

“It is in representing Him that the bishop or priest acting *in the person of Christ the head (in persona Christi capitis)* presides over the assembly, speaks after the readings, receives the offerings, and says the Eucharistic Prayer. *All* have their own active parts to play in the celebration, each in his own way: readers, those who bring up the offerings, those who give communion, and the whole people whose ‘Amen’ manifests their participation.”⁸

◆ St. Peter Julian Eymard observes: “It is true also that the world does all in its power to prevent us from loving Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament with a real and practical love, to prevent us from visiting Him, and to cripple the effects of this love.

“The world engrosses the attention of souls; it finds and enslaves them with external occupations in order to deter them from dwelling too long on the love of Jesus.

“It even fights directly against this practical love and represents it as optional, as practicable at most only in a convent.

“And the devil wages incessant warfare on our love for Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

“He knows that Jesus is there, living and substantially present; that by Himself he is drawing souls and taking direct possession of them.

The devil tries to efface the thought of the Eucharist in us, and the good impression made by it; for in his mind, that should decide the issue of the struggle.

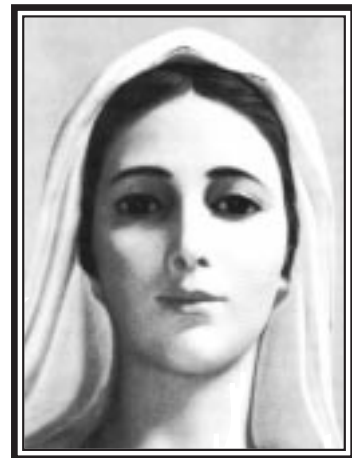
“And yet God is all love.

“This gentle Savior pleads with us from the Host: ‘Love Me as I have loved you; abide in My love! I came to cast the fire of love on the earth, and My most ardent desire is that it should set your hearts on fire.’”⁹

◆ Rita Ring writes: “Jesus gives and gives and gives and we treat him ‘nonchalantly’. He gives us love, but we must give ourselves to Him to have union with Him. He wants us to be one with Him.

“We must relish the great gifts He gives to us—the greatest gift being the gift of Himself. We should anticipate the great gift of receiving Him in the Holy Eucharist with such eagerness in our hearts.

“When we awake at night, we must think of Him and how we will receive Him the next day. We long to go to Communion to receive Him. We love



Thoughts on the Eucharist, continued from page 5
Jesus in the Eucharist so much. A King comes to us. He enters our body and unites with our soul. He is the King of the kingdom of heaven—He is our Lover, He is the Almighty God, a Divine Person, and He comes to us. He wants us to come to Him with such longing. He wants us to think of Him all day. He wants us to long for Him.”¹⁰

St. John Vianney and Priestly Prayer

The Curé of Ars, St. John Vianney, has some very direct words for us priests concerning prayer: “What keeps us priests back from the attainment of holiness is lack of consideration. It displeases us to withdraw our minds from outside things. We have need of intimate reflection, continuous prayer and intimate union with God.”¹¹

The Hidden Life of Jesus

Much of our lives has a “hidden” dimension, just as did that of Jesus during those many years at Nazareth. Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., gives us these comforting and inspiring words concerning this aspect of our Savior’s life: “It is quite true to say that it is by the cross and passion of Jesus that we are redeemed. The faith teaches that it is by the death of the Saviour on the cross that to men has been restored the dignity of the divine adoption and that from Satan has been wrested his usurped principality of the world. But it would be a mistake to consider the passion in isolation from the rest of the life of Christ and out of all relation to it. It would give us a false view of that life were we to regard the passion as alone entering into the Divine economy of redemption and as having nothing but an accidental connection with the thirty years that preceded the public life of the Savior. That Divine life constituted a totality and an indivisible unity, each part of which has a vital and intimate union with every other part. It is through, and by means of, and in virtue of that life taken as a whole that our salvation has been achieved, and each several mystery of Our Lord’s life had its part to play in the work of the redemption. Each had its redemptive effect on humanity, though all were meant to lead up to, to prepare, and to converge on the great tragedy of Good Friday. Every path in Our Lord’s life led towards

the hill of Calvary; Calvary in turn, projected its shadows over every mystery and *simply set forth in letters of vivid flame and blood what each expressed in more sober terms*. In other words, Jesus was redeeming us when He laboriously planed wood in St. Joseph’s workshop as well as when He faced the awful ordeal of the passion. The hidden life played its part in the salvation of mankind no less than the public life with its denouement on Calvary. Without the passion, the hidden life would not have been accepted by God—in accordance with His eternal decree that by the death of His Son should men be redeemed. But without the hidden life redeemed mankind would not have been taught how to exercise in the ordinary circumstances of average life the virtues displayed in such an eminent degree in the passion. Men had not only to be restored to life, they had to be taught to live.

“By the death of Christ we were restored to that supernatural condition which we had forfeited by Adam’s sin, but it is through the *example of and by virtue of the life of Christ that we are enabled to walk worthy of our Divine vocation*... Were we to dwell under the impression that access to God would be for us only through the accomplishment of works on a heroic scale, the endurance of sufferings that would bear some resemblance to those of the passion, the courage of almost all would fail. But heaven is not thrown open exclusively to men of heroic caliber. Jesus, in His goodness, has traced for us a human existence which is easy for all to imitate and at the same time one which is eminently pleasing to God. It must needs be a manner of existence pleasing to God, seeing that God made man chose it for Himself, and in all things, as He tells us, He fulfilled His Heavenly Father’s pleasure.”¹²



Pope John Paul II on the Priesthood

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his ordination, Pope John Paul II has these most inspiring words for all priests: “If we take a close look at what contemporary men and women expect from priests, we will see that, in the end, they have but one great expectation: *they are thirsting for Christ*. Everything else—their economic, social, and political needs—can be met by any number of other people. From the priest they ask for Christ! And from him they have the right to receive Christ, above all through the proclamation of the word. As the Council teaches, priests ‘have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all.’ (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 4). But this proclamation seeks to have man encounter Jesus, especially in the mystery of the Eucharist, the living heart of the Church and of priestly life. The priest has a mysterious, awesome power over the Eucharistic Body of Christ. By reason of this power he becomes the steward of the greatest treasure of the Redemption, for he gives people the Redeemer in person. Celebrating the Eucharist is the most sublime and most sacred function of every priest. As for me, from the very first years of my priesthood, the celebration of the Eucharist has not only been my most sacred duty, but above all my soul’s deepest need.”¹³

Laurentin and Mary

Fr. René Laurentin, one of the world’s foremost Mariologists, offers us the meaningful words concerning Mary: “She was present physically

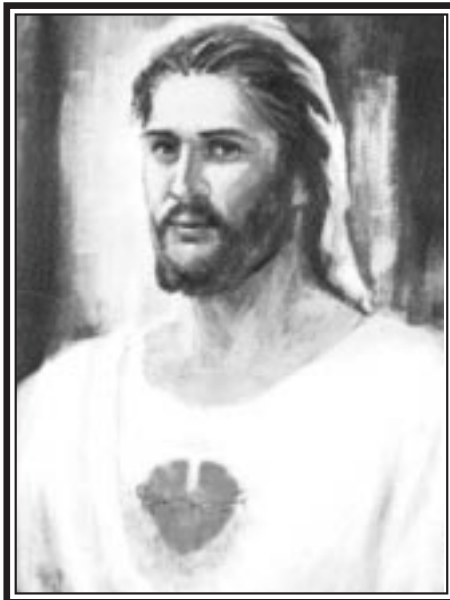
throughout the life of Christ—both by her mother’s love and by her commitment to him. It was a communion of faith, of hope and of charity. Mary’s presence to her son is a model for us, since, through this mother, God becomes our brother and has given her to us as mother in order to identify us with himself...We are humble children of this mother who has so profoundly adopted us in him...Mary has the mission of aiding the work of our divinization in Jesus Christ. She cooperates with him in the work of God.”¹⁴

The Heart of Christ

Rudolph of Saxony, whose book *The Life of Jesus Christ* played a key role in the conversion of St. Ignatius Loyola, gives us these inspiring words regarding the Heart of Christ: “The Heart of Christ was wounded for us with the wound of love, that through the opening of His side we may in return enter His Heart by means of love, and there be able to unite all our love with His divine love into one love, as the glowing iron is one with the fire. Therefore, for the sake of this wound which Christ received for him on the Cross, when the dart of unconquering love pierced His Heart, man should bring all his will into conformity with the will of God. But to fashion himself into conformity with Christ’s sufferings, he should consider what surpassingly noble love our Lord has shown us in the opening of His side, since through it He has given us the wide open entrance into His Heart. Therefore, let man make haste to enter into the Heart of Jesus: let him gather up all his love and unite it with the divine love.”¹⁵

The Holy Spirit and the Priest

The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests reminds us of how closely the Holy Spirit is united to priests to lead us along the path of total self-giving: ‘In Priestly Ordination, the priest has received the seal of the Holy Spirit which has marked him by the sacramental character in order to always be the minister of Christ and the Church. Assured of the promise that the Consoler will abide **‘with him forever’** (Jn 14:16-17), the priest knows that he will never lose the presence and the effective power of the Holy Spirit in order to exercise his ministry and live with clarity his pastoral office as a total gift of self for the salvation of his own brothers.”¹⁶



St. Therese on Surrender to God

The Saint of the Little Way, St. Therese of Lisieux, gives us her words on abandonment to God’s will: “Neither do I any longer desire suffering or death, and still I love them both; it is love alone that attracts me, however. I desired them for a long time; I possessed suffering and believed I had touched the shores of heaven, that the little flower would be gathered in the spring time of her life. Now, abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass! I can no longer ask for anything with fervor except the accomplishment of God’s will in my soul without any creature being able to set obstacles in the way.”¹⁷

God the Father

The Catechism tells us: “Faith in God the Father Almighty can be put to the test by the experience of evil and suffering. God can sometimes seem to be absent and incapable of stopping evil. But in the most mysterious way God the Father has revealed his almighty power in the voluntary humiliation and Resurrection of his Son, by which he conquered evil. Christ crucified is thus ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.’ It is in Christ’s Resurrection and exaltation that the Father has shown forth ‘the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.’”¹⁸

The Theology of Consecration

A. Boussard gives an extremely fine and concise sketch of the theology of consecration: “By the Incarnation, in and of itself, the Humanity of Jesus is consecrated, so that in becoming Man, Jesus is ipso facto constituted Savior. Prophet, King, Priest, and Victim of the One Sacrifice that was to save the world. He is the ‘Anointed’, par excellence, the ‘Christ’ totally belonging to God, His Humanity being that of the Word and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When, by a free act of His human will, He accepts what He is, doing what He was sent to do, He can say that He consecrates ‘Himself’. In Christ, therefore, what might be called His ‘subjective’ consecration is a perfect response to the ‘objective’ consecration produced in His Humanity through the Incarnation.

“And what Christ does brings with it a ‘consecration’ for His disciples, a very special belonging to God, since He imparts to them His own life precisely by making them participate in His own consecration.

“Through Baptism Christians also are consecrated and ‘anointed’ by the power of

the Spirit. They share, in their measure, in the essential consecration of Christ, in His character of King, Priest, and Prophet (cf. 1 Pt 2:9; 2 Pt 1:3-4; Rv 5:9; etc.) With Christ and through Christ, they are ‘ordered’ to the glory of God and the salvation of the world. They do not belong to themselves. They belong to the Lord, who imparts His own life to them...

“The vocation of those who have been baptized is to ‘live’ this consecration

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website: <http://www.shepherds-of-christ.org>
E-Mail: info@shepherds-of-christ.org

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by a voluntary adherence—and one that is as perfect as possible—to what it has made of them. Living as ‘children of God’, they fulfill subjectively their objective consecration; like Jesus, they consecrate themselves. This is the deeper meaning of vows and baptismal promises, together with the actual way of life corresponding to them. The baptismal consecration is the fundamental one, constitutive of the Christian. All consecrations which come after it presuppose it and are rooted in it....”¹⁹

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 life 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 and 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.

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We will soon have available in book form the first 12 issues of this newsletter under the title, *Shepherds of Christ Newsletters: Selected Writings in Spirituality for All People—as Published in the Shepherds of Christ Newsletters for Priests*.

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NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
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3. St. Gregory of Nyssa, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co. Vol I, p. 555.
4. Pope John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, Doubleday, pp. 74-75.
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8. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1348.
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13. Pope John Paul II, op. cit., pp. 85-86.
14. René Laurentin, *A Year of Grace with Mary*, Veritas Publications, pp. 113-114.
15. Rudolph of Saxony, “The Life of Jesus Christ,” as in *Heart of the Redeemer*, by Timothy O’Donnell, Trinity Communications, p. 101.
16. “Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests,” as in special supplement, *Inside the Vatican*, p. 18.
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18. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 178.
19. A. Boussard in *Dictionary of Mary*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., pp. 54-55.