

# shepherds of Christ<sup>+</sup>

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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### Chief Shepherd of the Flock

## To Live in Christ Jesus

**“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 10:11-15<sup>1</sup>)**

Yes, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us. Through His life, His brutal and agonizing suffering and death on the cross, and His glorious resurrection, He has achieved new life for us. We truly live a new life in 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 Paul speaks to us: “...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).

Christ has come to give us a share in Trinitarian life. In Baptism the Persons of the Trinity have given Themselves to us in an extraordinary fashion. The intimacy of this Trinitarian communication imprints upon us the image of the Trinity. Because Christ as man mediates this Trinitarian gift, this image also possesses a Christ-like dimension. This Christ-like, Trinitarian image within us is our life of sanctifying grace. This life of grace, this Christ-life, allows us to communicate with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the divine Persons who dwell within us. This Christ-life allows us to pour ourselves out in love of God and neighbor.

The life that Christ has given us is not a type of superstructure which is erected atop our human nature. Although nature and grace are distinct, they are not side by side as separate entities. Rather, grace permeates nature. The Christian is one graced person. He or she has been raised up into a deeper form of life in Christ Jesus. Nothing that is authentically human has

been excluded from this new existence. Whatever is really human in the life of the Christian is meant to be an expression of the Christ-life. The simple but deep joys of family life, the joy of being accepted by another in deep friendship, the wonderment at nature’s beauty, the agony of crucial decision-making, the success or frustration that is experienced in one’s work, the joy of being well received by others and the heartache of being misunderstood—all these human experiences are intended to be caught up in Christ and made more deeply human because of Him.

Christ, has come, then, not to destroy anything which is authentically human, but to perfect it by leading it to a graced fulfillment.

There follows various ideas concerning our life in Our Savior, our life in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

◆ A well known spiritual writer of our day, Fr. William Johnston, S.J. observes: “Friendship with Jesus has played a central part in the lives of thousands of Christian mystics who have experienced Jesus walking beside them as he walked beside the disciples going to Emmaus, or who have experienced him living in them as he lived in Paul... They have spoken to the Lord about their hopes and fears, about their plans and projects, about their successes and failures, about their joys and sorrows. They have realized that he is the friend of friends, the faithful one who will not let them down. They have realized that this is the friendship in which all other friendships are rooted.

“Intimacy with Jesus has also been central to the lives of thousands, even millions, of simple Christians who have knelt before him asking for daily bread and for help in their difficulties.

“But now I hear you again. You ask about racial problems and nuclear war. You complain that this Jesus-and-I spirituality is a cop-out, a flight from the urgent problems of our explosive world.

“Well, it could be a cop-out...But properly understood this prayer has a profoundly social dimension—we know that Jesus is concerned with the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the underprivileged, the despised. Not only is he concerned with them; he identifies with them. If we want to be his friend, we must also be their friend. If we want to be his friend we must open our hearts to be his friend, his presence in the vast world of suffering and oppression. Friendship with Jesus is friendship with the world.”<sup>2</sup>

◆ Building upon Johnston’s thought, we should

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always remind ourselves that our ministry towards others—whether it be as a social activist or as a scholar in the world of academe—is effective in direct proportion to our relationship, our union, with Jesus. If our relationship with Jesus is a mediocre one, then the fruits of our ministry are relatively mediocre. If our union with Jesus is deep and vital, then our ministry bears much fruit. Indeed, our service to others is meaningful and effective proportionate to our love-relationship with Jesus. Let us not foolishly try to tell ourselves otherwise. Let us not think that the real success in our ministry is necessarily in proportion to the amount of praise, acceptance, and acclamation we receive. Let us not think that our ministry is necessarily lacking when we receive little or no thanks for our service to others, when they ridicule us, when we are misunderstood by those for whom we are taking special efforts to serve in the Lord. Rather, in all cases the true measure of the success of our ministry depends upon our love-union with Jesus. In the Gospel of John we read:

“I am the true vine,  
and my Father is the vinedresser.  
Every branch in me that bears no fruit  
he cuts away,  
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes  
to make it bear even more.  
You are pruned already,  
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.  
Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.  
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,  
but must remain part of the vine,  
neither can you unless you remain in me.  
I am the vine,  
you are the branches.  
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,  
bears fruit in plenty;  
for cut off from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:1-5).

◆ Father Edward Leen, C.S. Sp., gives us these inspiring words: “The...knowledge we have acquired of the Heart of Jesus stimulates us to penetrate further into its depths, and is accompanied by the ardent desire to eliminate the unlikeness that exists between the movement of His Heart and those of our own. The study of Him excites in us the desire to become like Him as man. And then when our life and acts bear a resemblance to those of Jesus, God comes and pours His Divinity into our souls in abundance, lavishes on them the gifts of His grace, and gradually breaking down the barriers that exist between creature and Creator, initiates souls into the happiness that accompanies union with the Divinity. Great happiness results from this union, even in the imperfect mode of it that belongs to the condition of our state of exile on earth. This is the whole theory of sanctity. The initiative in the giving of grace comes from God. He gives to all who do not present an obstacle to His giving. ...Accordingly, as Our Heavenly Father sees the souls of His adopted children assuming the features of the soul of His Only-

Begotten Son, He dispenses His treasures more freely. He gives in proportion to the degree of resemblance what He discerns us to bear to Jesus in the conduct of our life. This is the meaning of those mysterious words that were heard from Heaven on the occasion of the Transfiguration, ‘This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him’ (Mt.17:5). It is also the explanation of St. Paul’s teaching, the whole burden of which was that the Christian should learn of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

◆ And, elsewhere, Fr. Leen educates us as to what it means to live in Christ Jesus: “To *believe in* Jesus Christ is not the same thing as *believing Him*. Belief in Him is something more than accepting His statements as true, on His word; it is even more than yielding assent to certain mysterious propositions relative to His origin, His life, and His dual nature. *Belief in* a person is not equivalent to believing a person or believing things about that person. It means a complete going over, and a whole-hearted surrender of ourselves, to the man in whom we place our belief. It is to substitute His principles and views for our own. Hence, to believe in Jesus Christ is to subscribe to His entire theory of life and to accept it as our own. It means to make His values ours. Life for such a believer has that inner meaning, that significance, that purpose which it has for the divine Master. If He, with His insight into things, declares that the ideal human life is such and such, His true followers most warmly embrace that ideal, as being the only one. In a word, to believe in Jesus Christ, is to accept His guiding principles of life, to renounce all theories of the ‘good life’ that are in opposition to His and to submit not only our whole conduct but our judgments as well, to His ruling. It is to make His mind ours in those matters that pertain to the working out of our life on earth. ‘For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,’ writes the Apostle in his letter to the Phillipeans (Phil 2:5). It is to be noted that we do not rise to this transforming belief by merely holding that the Savior’s theory of life is, indeed, praiseworthy, admirable, sublime and incomparable if, at the same time, we regard it as one that admits of more humble alternatives. We do not *Believe in* the Saviour wholly, unless we have the practical conviction that His theory of life and life’s conduct is the only one admissible.”<sup>4</sup>

◆ Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical, *On Human Work*, observes: “The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ (cf 2 Pt 3:13; Rev 21:1) in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil—and never without it.

“On the one hand, this confirms the indispensability of the cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand, the cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.”<sup>5</sup>

◆ Again, Pope John Paul II speaks to us concerning our sharing the cross and resurrection of Jesus: “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 emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self."<sup>6</sup>

◆ A leading representative of the French School of Spirituality, St. John Eudes, speaks to us concerning our union with Jesus. "I ask you to consider that our Lord Jesus Christ is your true head and that you are a member of His body.

"He belongs to you as the head belongs to the body. All that is His is yours: breath, heart, body, soul and all His faculties. All these you must use as if they belonged to you, so that in serving Him you may give Him praise, love and glory. You belong to Him as a member belongs to the Head. This is why He earnestly desires you to serve and glorify the Father by using all your faculties as if they were His."<sup>7</sup>

◆ St. Peter Canisius, doctor of the Church, was gifted with a special mystical experience as he received the apostolic blessing prior to his departure for Germany. He has rightly become known as the second apostle of that country. Here is his description of part of that mystical experience. His words bring out his deep love for, and union with, his beloved Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ: "Finally, my Savior, I seemed to be gazing at the Heart of your Sacred Body with my own eyes. It was as if you opened to me and told me to drink from it as from a spring, inviting me to draw the waters of salvation from these springs of yours. I was filled with longing that the waters of faith, hope and charity should flow from your Heart into me. I thirsted for poverty, chastity and obedience; I begged you to wash me all over and dress me in fine clothing. Then I dared to touch your beloved heart and bury my thirst in it; and you promised me a role woven in three parts to cover my naked soul and help me greatly in my undertaking. Those three parts were peace, love and perseverance. Secure in the protection of this garment, I was confident that I would lack nothing, and everything would turn out for your glory."<sup>8</sup>

## Scriptural Reflections

◆ **Openness to God.** "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the house of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come

about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, *for nothing is impossible to God.*' I am the handmaid of the Lord, said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me'. And the angel left her." (Lk 1:26-38).

God wants the best for us. His love is eager—eager to draw us ever closer to Himself. His love for us is a transforming love. As we surrender to it more and more, this love accomplishes our ongoing conversion. It thrusts us forward to become more deeply Christian. God's love for us contains the absolute capacity to make us happy, to make us fulfilled persons, to make us what in the depths of our beings we really know we should be and want to be.

We can put obstacles in the way of God's transforming designs. We can say no to this love. We can refuse to be open to God's tender, loving touch. We can engage in a process of self-enclosedness. We can determine to map out our own path to happiness, forgetting that plans for happiness which exclude God are ultimately plans for experiencing frustration and emptiness.

At other times it is not so much selfishness which leads us to say no to God, it is rather fear. We hear God's voice calling us higher. We hear His voice asking something which seems very difficult. We hear His voice asking something we had not at all expected. Yes, we hear all this—and we draw back. We draw back because we are afraid. We refuse God because our fear focuses our attention on what we are rather than on what God is. We look too much at our own weakness, rather than at God's power which can transform our inadequacy into a mighty strength.

In all this Mary offers an example. Selfishness was totally foreign to her. She did not belong to herself. She belonged to God. She was not closed in upon herself. She was completely open to God. When God spoke, she listened. When God pointed the way, she followed. She realized that life is not a process a person masters by carefully mapping out one's own self-conceived plans of conquest, but a mystery to be gradually experienced by being open to God's personal and loving guidance.

Selfishness, then, did not close Mary off from God's call. Neither did fear. God asked her to assume a tremendous responsibility. He asked her to be the Mother of Jesus. Mary did not engage in a process of false humility and say that such a great role was above her. She did not say that she did not have the proper qualifications for this awesome mission. Briefly, she did not waste time looking at herself, making pleas that she was not worthy, telling the angel he had better go look for someone else. No, Mary did not look at herself. Her gaze was absorbed in God. She fully realized that whatever God asked of her, His grace would accomplish. She fully realized that although she herself had to cooperate, this work was much more God's than hers.

Mary's words, then, truly sum up what is the authentic Christian response at any point of life, in any kind of situation: "I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary, "let what you have said be done to me".

◆ **People are Looking at Us.** "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:14-16).

Jesus taught by word and action. He talked to huge crowds, to small groups, to various individuals. He talked about love and friendship, about joy and suffering, about life and death. He had a message to spread, His Father's message, and He did not miss His opportunities. It was not enough for Him merely to talk about His Father's message. He was also constantly teaching by the total event of His life, death and resurrection. Not only His words, but also His actions spoke out loud and clear. He not only talked about the love we should have for one another. He incarnated this teaching in the laying down of His own life for the salvation of all. His words spoke eloquently of brotherly love. So also did His bloody and bruised body nailed to a cross. His words sounded so convincing. The way He went about living could also pierce the hardest heart.

Jesus invites us to assist Him in the continuation of His teaching mission. The



method of procedure remains the same; we, too, like Jesus before us, are to teach by both word and action. The opportunities for teaching by word are more numerous than we might expect. For it is not only bishops and priests and teachers of religious studies who teach by word. Parents, as they rear their children, have numerous opportunities to teach Jesus' message. Friends talk about all sorts of things. If one is sincerely Christian, his or her friend will eventually know.

The opportunities to teach about Jesus by the way we act are even more numerous than are the occasions for variously speaking about the message of Jesus. People are looking at us. We cannot long hide the life- vision which thrusts us forward, which motivates so much of what we do. If we live according to the pleasure principle, this becomes evident. If we live according to the money principle, this also becomes manifest. If we are close followers and friends of Jesus, this too becomes clear to people. They will know by the way we work and play, by our attitude towards life and death, by our refusing to become bitter despite even great suffering, by the way we treat others, especially those who are poor, or ridiculed, or discriminated against, or passed over as unimportant and of little worth. If we are deeply Christian, Christ's way of thinking and doing will necessarily affect our own way of thinking and doing. We are called to project Jesus and His message through our own humanities. Either we do, or we don't. Either we seize the numerous and daily opportunities for helping to preach Jesus by the way we live, or we do not. Either we respond to Jesus' invitation to be a light for the world, or we do not. This invitation goes out to all, but to priests in a special way. Jesus, through Holy Orders, has given Himself to the priest in a most special way. If the priest, realizing Jesus' precious love for him as this unique priest-companion, surrenders to Christ, this gives Him special joy. For the priest, because of his special union with Jesus, can be a light to the world in a most extraordinary way.

## The Priest and the Eucharist

◆ *The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* tells us: "It is necessary to recall the irreplaceable value that the daily celebration of the Holy Mass has for the priest...He must live it as the central moment of his day and of his daily ministry, fruit of a sincere desire and an occasion for a deep and effective encounter with Christ, and he must take the greatest care to celebrate it with intimate participation of the mind and heart.

"In a society ever more sensitive to communication through signs and images, the priest must pay adequate attention to all that which can enhance the decorum and sacredness of the Eucharistic celebration. It is important that, in such ceremonies, proper attention is given to the appropriateness and cleanli-

ness of the place, the structure of the altar and tabernacle, the dignity of the sacred vessels, the vestments, the hymns, the music, the necessary silence, etc. These are all elements which can better contribute to a better participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In fact, a lack of attention to the symbolic aspects of the liturgy and, even more, carelessness and coldness, superficiality and disorder...weaken the process of strengthening the faith. Those who improperly celebrate the Mass reveal a weakness in their faith and fail to educate the others in the faith. Celebrating the Eucharist well, however, constitutes a highly important catechesis on the Sacrifice...

"The centrality of the Eucharist should be apparent not only in the worthy celebration of the Sacrifice, but also in the proper adoration of the Sacrament so that the priest might be the model for the faithful also in devote attention and diligent meditation...whenever possible done in the presence of our Lord in the tabernacle. It is hoped that the priests entrusted with the guidance of communities dedicate long periods of time for communal adoration and reserve the greatest attention and honour for the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, also outside of the Holy Mass, over any other rite or gesture. 'Faith and love for the Eucharist will not allow Christ to remain alone in his presence in the tabernacle.'<sup>9</sup>"

◆ From a person's spiritual journal we read: "When a priest is filled with the love of Jesus, he will unite more deeply with Christ in the great sacrifice being offered to the Father. In the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the faithful will see Jesus through the priest offering sacrifice to the Father. We will lift our eyes and we will feel, at this great sacrifice, the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We unite in offering sacrifice to the Father. We all unite as one and give ourselves in such oneness with Jesus, in such love to the Father, in the Holy Spirit. We die to all those things that are not of Him and join in this great miracle taking place. The Father looks down and He sees the sacrifice of His beautiful Son through the consecrated hands of His holy priests. Heaven unites to earth. Earth cries out in such jubilation at the great gift given from the Almighty God and we unite as creatures giving ourselves as a sacrifice to our beloved Creator. Do we experience the presence of God as His power flows through the hands of a man, the priest who takes ordinary bread and wine and changes them into the Body and Blood of Our Lord? Do we hear Jesus cry out, as He did at the last supper, with the intensity in His voice reflecting all knowledge of the upcoming events of His passion and death?"<sup>10</sup>

## Reflections on Prayer

◆ Father Edward Farrell tells us: "It is necessary each day to spend time alone with the Lord if one desires to know him more intimately. The rhythm of our prayer is given to us by the Gospel itself. Ultimately, the reason why a Christian prays is because Christ commands it. He commands it with his life; and if we are Disciples of Jesus, then we must pray as he did."<sup>11</sup>

◆ No realistic person expects to avoid a considerable share of distress during the course of human events. Times of distress are obviously an inevitable aspect of life within the human condition. They are as certain as the summer's sun, the winter's snow, or the spring rain. The question, then, is not whether a human life will encounter distress. The question is rather how often, to what degree, what form will the distress assume, and what will be the person's reaction.

We all consistently experience the lesser distresses of everydayness. The varied array of petty annoyances, the agonizingly slow pace at which our efforts to accomplish good must often proceed, being misunderstood, being passed by unnoticed, bearing with boredom, experiencing the times of ordinary depres-



sion, bearing with the common variety of physical aches and illnesses—these are some of the more consistent and ordinary distresses afflicting everyone without exception.

At rarer moments in the course of life, distress can assume much greater proportion. We feel overwhelmed, crushed, perhaps tempted to despair. So great is our distress that each moment seems like an hour, each hour like a day, each day like an eternity. Whatever the varied cause of deep distress, they commonly produce the feeling that, although the trouble has made but recent entry into one's existence, it seems as if the distress has already been so long-lived.

Whether our distress is moderate or severe, God invites us to pray—not only then, but certainly then. Our prayer can be varied. We can pray for patience to bear with the more moderate trouble of every day. We can pray for much needed courage to bear with the kind of agonizing suffering which can make one weep. We can pray for light to remind us of the purpose of suffering, and strength to live accordingly. We can pray to ask for God's removal of the suffering if such is His good pleasure, and for loving conformity to His will in the matter if He permits the distress to endure. Prayer, then, is a varied remedy for times of distress. The power of distress variously to affect us is great. But the power of prayer, which variously allows us to cope properly with distress, is even greater.

◆ Our prayer is mediated by Christ—this is simply an application of the fundamental truth that Jesus is the mediator between the Father and us in all things. Our prayer, then should be rooted in Christ. It is important to realize that, varied as the manner of our prayer may be, we always approach the Father through and with Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.

“We can implement the Christo-centrism of prayer by prayerfully considering the mysteries or events of Christ's life, allowing their consideration to penetrate us, allowing these events to shape our lives more according to Christ's image. Also, our Christ-consciousness during a period of prayer may take the form of allowing a particular teaching of Jesus to take deeper hold of us. While obviously not comprising an exhaustive list, these are a few examples of how our prayer can be Christo-centric. Yes, in prayer the Father wishes to speak to us through His Incarnate Son. Under the Spirit's guidance we open ourselves to the Father's Christ-centered, love-centered message, and respond with a love of our own: “At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is.” (Heb 1:1-2)

◆ A well-known spiritual writer of our times, Don

Hubert van Zeller tells us: “The question arises as to how the simple prayer of faith relates to attendance at Mass. Does not the mind, when following the movement of the Mass, have to let go of the simplicity and take up a more diversified prayer? Admittedly the mind ranges over a number of subjects presented to it by what is going on at the altar, but its focus is still on God alone. The thought of God, and union with him, holds the essential part of the soul while attention is given by the interior and exterior senses to the action of sacrifice.

“In praying with Christ at the Mass we are not complicating our prayer but in fact simplifying it. If Christ's prayer is unified, and if we share that prayer, our prayer too is unified. His is direct, immediate, simple, as offers himself to the Father in sacrifice. So can ours be. The senses perceive in diversity, but the soul receives and responds in unity.

“This is not an academic but practical matter. In the history of Catholic spirituality the idea has been put forward that interior prayer is something so still and secret as to be incompatible with the act of assisting at Mass. The Mass would disturb the soul's tranquility. The Mass is one kind of prayer (so the argument runs) and the silent search after God in the heart is another. The implication is that the soul has to come down from the mountain to witness the sacrifice in the plain. Since the sacrifice is Christ's, and since but for Christ's sacrifice we Christians could not pray at all, such a theory is surely inadmissible.”<sup>12</sup>



## Words from Henri Nouwen

Although death has recently taken him from us in one way, Henri Nouwen will always remain with us through his written words. There follow a few excerpts from these writings.

◆ “I vividly remember how I had, at one time, become totally dependent on the affection and friendship of one person. This dependency threw me into a pit of great anguish and brought me to the verge of a very self-destructive depression. But from the moment I was helped to experience my interpersonal addiction as an expression of a need for total surrender to a living God who would fulfill the deepest desires of my heart, I started to live my dependency in a radically new way. Instead of living it in shame and embarrassment, I was able to live it as an urgent invitation to claim God's unconditional love for myself, a love I can depend on without any fear.”<sup>13</sup>

◆ “The joy that Jesus offers his disciples is his own joy, which flows from his intimate communion with the One who sent him. It is a joy that does not separate happy days from sad days, successful moments from moments of failure, experiences of honor from experiences of dishonor, passion from resurrection. This joy is a divine gift that does not leave us during times of illness, poverty, oppression, or persecution. It is present even when the world laughs or tortures, robs or maims, fights or kills. It is truly ecstatic, always moving us away from the house of fear into the house of love, and always proclaiming that death no longer has the final say, though its noise remains loud and its devastation visible.”<sup>14</sup>

◆ “But it is exactly in this willingness to know the other fully that we can really reach out to him or her and become healers. Therefore, healing means, first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention. It is sad that often this listening is interpreted as technique. We say, ‘Give him a chance to talk it out. It will do him good.’ And we speak about the ‘cathartic’ effect of listening, suggesting that ‘getting it out of your system’, or ‘getting it out in the open’ will in itself have a purging effect. But listening is an act that must be developed, not a technique that can be applied as a monkey wrench to nut and bolts. It needs the full and real presence to each other. It is indeed one of the highest forms of hospitality.”<sup>15</sup>

◆ “Who thinks that he is immortal?—Every time we search anxiously for another human being who can break the chains of our loneliness, and every time we

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build new defenses to protect our life as an inalienable property, we find ourselves caught in that tenacious illusion of immortality. Although we keep telling each other and ourselves that we will not live forever and that we are going to die soon, our daily actions, thoughts and concerns keep revealing to us how hard it is to fully accept the reality of our own statements.

“Small, seemingly innocent events keep telling us how easily we externalize ourselves and our world. It takes only a hostile word to make us feel sad and lonely. It takes only a rejecting gesture to plunge us into self-complaint. It takes only a substantial failure in our work to lead us into a self-destructive depression. Although we have learned from parents, teachers, friends and many books, sacred as well as profane, that we are worth more than what the world makes us, we keep giving an eternal value to the things we own, the people we know, the plans we have, and the successes we ‘collect’. Indeed, it takes only a small disruption to lay our illusion of immortality bare and to reveal how much we have become victimized by our surrounding world suggesting we are ‘in control’. Aren’t the many feelings of sadness, heaviness of heart and even dark despair, often intimately connected with the exaggerated seriousness with which we have clothed the people we know, the ideas to which we are exposed and the events we are part of? The lack of distance, which excludes the humor in life, can create a suffocating depression which prevents us from lifting our heads above the horizon of our own limited existence.”<sup>16</sup>

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

## A Sense of Perspective

Life, in its basic orientation and purpose, is really quite simple. However, this fundamental simplicity of life is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. There are, as a consequence, many pieces which compose the varied and complete picture of human existence. It is not always easy to keep each piece in its proper place. To try to keep all aspects of life in balance requires consistent effort. To maintain a proper sense of perspective offers a challenge which makes persistent demands upon our powers of Christian maturity.

All sorts of human experiences, some pleasant, some exciting, some painful, can make inroads on our sense of perspective. These experiences, if not correctly handled, can detract from a balanced vision of life. What are some of these experiences?

Episodes of failure have a peculiar power to distort our sense of perspective. The failure, especially if it is of

more extreme proportions, seems to spread its cloak over our entire consciousness, trying to make us forget those many times we have experienced success. Failure can be a source of growth. But not automatically. It takes a rather painful effort to make the experience of failure a positive factor in our quest for Christian maturity.

At the other end of the spectrum we find states of happiness and success. These, for different reasons, can also make us lose a sense of proportion if they are not properly assimilated. During times of success and happiness, particularly at moments of ecstatic happiness, we have to hold our hearts with a gentle but firm grasp lest they lead us down undesirable paths. Happiness can be an impetus and inspiration for noble and successful living. But if not properly controlled, moments of success and happiness can be a heady wine. In our desire to continue to bask in the glow of happiness, we can block out other aspects of our lives—the call of duty or whatever—which rightfully demand their proper share of time and attention.

Experiencing failure—which we mentioned above—is one kind of suffering. But there are other kinds also. As we look at suffering with a faith-vision, we see that it is meant to be expansive. It is intended, through its process of purification, to deepen our capacity for real living. If properly assimilated, suffering has a special capacity to make us capable of deeper love toward God and neighbor. If, however, we try to immaturely flee the suffering, if we rebel under its purifying thrusts, then suffering has an opposite effect. It tends to make us bitter.

Rather than expanding us, it narrows us. It turns us selfishly in on ourselves. It makes us engage in a process of continual self-pity. It narrows our vision, making us morbidly gaze at our pain in a way which distorts the experience of suffering. We fail to see the place of suffering in the broader scheme of things. We fail to see that suffering is an inevitable dimension of life. Because we have lost perspective, we fail to see that unless one is willing to accept suffering properly, he or she is really refusing to continue in the quest for maturity. To refuse suffering is to refuse personal growth.

Anxiety concerning a particular task or goal to be achieved is another kind of experience which can narrow the broad vision which is our balanced view of life. Because of the importance the matter has for us, we begin to think as if the very success or failure of life itself depends on whether or not we properly perform the task or achieve the goal in question. We tend to lose perspective. We tend to narrow down our gaze almost exclusively to this one matter at hand, forgetting that, while it is important, it still makes up but one point in the long journey which is the totality of our human existence.

The above examples chosen from the many possibilities of life’s experiences, are sufficient to make us realize that to maintain a consistent and dynamic sense of perspective is no easy task. Yet the pursuit of such a balanced view of life is well worth the effort. People who maintain a proper perspective of life manifest a certain calm. They can experience failure, success, suffering, joy, happiness, and apprehension. But their experience of all this is channeled through the prism which is a balanced view of life. As a result they seem to be basically at peace with themselves, and consistently so. They are persons who drink deeply of the peace of Christ, this Christ who always maintained that perfect perspective of human existence.

## Shepherds in Christ

St. Augustine has these words for pastors: “Certainly, if there are good sheep there are also good shepherds; good sheep give rise to good shepherds. But all good shepherds are one in the one good shepherd; they form a unity. If only they feed the sheep, Christ is feeding the sheep. The friends of the bridegroom do not speak with their own voice, but they take great joy in listening to the bridegroom’s voice. Christ himself is the shepherd when they act as shepherds. ‘I feed them’, he says, because his voice is in their voice, his love in their love...”

“All shepherds should therefore be one in the one good shepherd. All should



...speak with the one voice of the one shepherd, so that the sheep may hear and follow their shepherd; not this or that shepherd, but one shepherd. All should speak with one voice in Christ, not with different voices...The sheep should hear the voice, a voice purified from all schism, freed from all heresy..."<sup>17</sup>

These words of Augustine emphasize the profound union which exists between Christ and His shepherds. Building upon Augustine's thought we should always strive to grow in the conviction that the closer the shepherd is united with his Savior and Master, the more fruitful is his ministry. Vatican II tells us: "Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry. True, the grace of God can complete the work of salvation even through unworthy ministers. Yet ordinarily God desires to manifest His works through those who have been made particularly docile to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because of their intimate union with Christ and their holiness of life, these men can say with the apostle: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20)<sup>18</sup>

## Mary and the Priest

Father Arthur Culkins, a contemporary Marian scholar, offers us these words on Mary and the priest:

"If every Christian ought to see himself in the Apostle John, entrusted to Mary as her son or daughter, how much more ought priests to recognize themselves as sons of Mary, as the subject of a 'double' entrustment to her. I say 'double' because they are successors of John by a twofold title: as disciples and as priests. This is beautifully drawn out by our Holy Father in his "Holy Thursday Letter to Priests" of 1988: 'If John at the foot of the Cross somehow represents every man and woman for whom the motherhood of the Mother of God is spiritually extended, how much more does this concern each of us, who are sacramentally called to the priestly ministry of the Eucharist in the Church!...'"

"Although Jesus had already entrusted every priest to his Mother from the height of the Cross and the Pope has done it even hundreds of times, it is still necessary for the priest to do so himself if he would truly experience the power and the protection of the Mother of God in his life as her Divine Son intends it. Priests who have done so know the difference it makes."<sup>19</sup>

## The Trinity in Our Lives

Pope John-Paul II speaks to us concerning the action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit towards us: "The truth, revealed in Christ, about the 'Father of mercies,' enables us to 'see' him as particularly close to man, especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity. And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God. They are certainly being moved to do this by Christ himself, who through his Spirit works within human hearts. For the mystery of God the 'Father of mercies' revealed by Christ becomes, in the context of today's threats to man, as it were, a unique appeal addressed to the church."<sup>20</sup>

## Spirituality Program for Priests

The Institute for Priestly Formation, founded to assist in the spiritual formation of diocesan priests in the Roman Catholic church, invites diocesan priests to a time of spiritual renewal. Inspired by the biblical-evangelical spirituality of Ignatius Loyola, this program seeks to give diocesan priests a time and place in which they can allow the Holy Spirit to touch their hearts with a deeper experience of his love.

Going beyond programs of continuing education, this program offers a time of spiritual formation intended to help foster the spirituality of diocesan priests, a spirituality that can inspire, motivate and thus sustain the busy daily lives of contemporary diocesan priests.

The 26 day program is conducted in an atmosphere of rest and leisure.

Following some initial days of rest, orientation and foundations for prayer participants will engage in:

- An eight day silent directed retreat
- Ongoing spiritual direction
- Seminars
  - Prayer and finding God in everyday busyness
  - Sexuality, celibacy and priestly life
  - Discernment and everyday decisions
  - The spirituality of diocesan priesthood
  - Personal prayer and liturgical prayer

A staff member is also available for consultation, particularly for those seeking help in the personal integration of psychology and spirituality.

*Presenters/Directors:*

Rev. George Aschenbrenner, S.J., S.T.L.

Rev. Richard Gabuzda, S.T.D.

Rev. John Horn, S.J., D.Min.

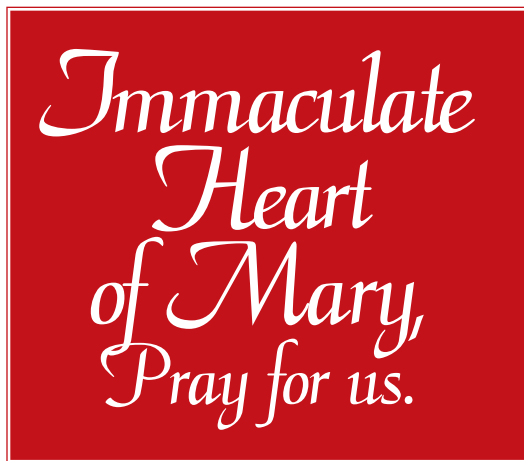
Kathleen Kanavy, M.A.

Margarett Schlientz, Ph.D.

The program will be conducted at **The Oratory Center for Spirituality, Rock Hill, South Carolina**. Located just south of Charlotte, N.C., with its cultural and athletic opportunities for leisure, the center is situated on six acres in a residential area of Rock Hill. The grounds, the neighborhood and two nearby parks offer opportunities for meditation, prayer and relaxation. Pool facilities of the local Y.M.C.A., located next door to the Center, are available.

Rooms are single occupancy with private bath. Room and board is included in the total fee.

The total cost for room, board, program fees and materials is \$1,763.00 due to a grant received! Limited financial assistance is available.





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## 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 a 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.

### NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. William Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today*, Doubleday Harper and Row, p. 88.
3. Edward Leen, C.S. Sp., *In The Likeness of Christ*, Sheed & Ward, pp. 198-199.
4. Edward Leen, C.S. Sp., *Why the Cross?* Sheed & Ward, pp. 46-47.
5. Pope John-Paul II, *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, United States Catholic Conference, No. 27.
6. Pope John-Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering (Sálvific Doloris)*, United States Conference, No. 23.
7. St. John Eudes, Lib. 1,5: *opera omnia* 6, 107. 113-115 as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., Vol. IV, p. 1331.
8. *Supplement to the Divine Office for the Society of Jesus*, published by the English Province of the Society of Jesus, pp. 21-22.
9. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* as in *Inside the Vatican*, November 1994, Special Supplement. For quotation within the excerpt, see C.I.C. can. 929; *Missale Romanum*, Institutio generalis, nn. 81; 298; *S. Congregation for the Divine Cult*, Instruction Liturgicae instaurationes (5 September 1970, 8c; AAS 62 (1970), 701.)
10. Rita Ring, *Mass Book*, Shepherds of Christ Publications, p. 103.
11. Edward Farrell, *The Father is Very Fond of Me*, Dimension Books, p. 96.
12. Dom Hubert van Zeller, *More Ideas for Prayer*, Templegate, pp. 35-36.
13. Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, Crossroads, pp. 80-81.
14. Henri Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, Doubleday, pp. 98-99.
15. Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, Doubleday, p. 67.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
17. St. Augustine, Sermon 46, 29-30: CCL 41, 555-557 as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., pp. 305-306.
18. *The Documents of Vatican II*. "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests", America Press, Ch 3, No. 12.
19. Arthur Culkins, *Soul Magazine* Jan-Feb, 1995, p. 30.
20. Pope John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy* (Dives in Misericordia), United States Catholic Conference, No. 2.