

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

CONTENTS

The Life of Prayer ... 1

The Christian and the World 3

Thoughts on the Eucharist 4

Thoughts on the Priesthood 4

Scriptural Reflections 4

Mary and the Holy Spirit 5

To Be Free 6

Limitations 6

Please Help Us, God 6

St. John of the Cross 7

Act of Consecration .. 7

Letters 7

Chief Shepherd of the Flock

The Life of Prayer

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)

Yes, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us. He has laid down His life for us so that we may have life, and have it more abundantly. The life which Jesus gives us, the life of grace, to a very great extent depends on the life of prayer for its sustenance and growth. There follow several prayers and various thoughts on prayer.

◆ Here is a prayer for union with Jesus. "Come to me, Lord, and possess my soul. Come into my heart and permeate my soul. Help me to sit in silence with You and let You work in my heart.

"I am Yours to possess. I am Yours to use. I want to be selfless and only exist in You. Help me to die to myself and live only for You. Use me as You will. Let me never draw my attention back to myself. I only want to operate as You do, dwelling within me.

"I am Yours, Lord. I want to have my life in You. I want to do the will of the Father. Give me the strength to let You operate my very being. Help me to act as You desire. Strengthen me against the distractions of the devil to take me from your work.

"When I worry, I have taken my focus off of You and placed it on myself. Help me not to give in to the promptings of others to change what in my heart You are making very clear to me. I worship You, I adore You and I love You. Come and dwell in me now."

◆ Pope John Paul II tells us that our present age has a special need for prayer. "Our difficult age has a

special need of prayer. In the course of history...many men and women have borne witness to the importance of prayer by consecrating themselves to the praise of God and to the life of prayer, especially in monasteries and convents. So, too, recent years have been seeing a growth in the number of people who, in ever more widespread movements and groups, are giving first place to prayer and seeking in prayer a renewal of their spiritual life. This is a significant and comforting sign, for from the experience there is coming a real contribution to the renewal of prayer among the faithful, who have been helped to gain a clearer idea of the Holy Spirit as he who inspires in hearts a profound yearning for holiness.

"In many individuals and many communities, there is a growing awareness that, even with all the rapid progress of technological and scientific civilization, and despite the real conquests and goals attained, *man is threatened, humanity is threatened.* In the face of this danger, and indeed

already experiencing the frightful reality of man's spiritual decadence, individuals and whole communities, guided as it were by an inner sense of faith, are seeking the strength to raise man up again, to save him from himself, from his own errors and mistakes that often make harmful his very conquests. And thus they are discovering prayer, in which the 'Spirit who helps us in our weakness' manifests himself. In this way the times in which we are living are bringing the Holy Spirit closer to the many who are returning to prayer. And I trust that all will find in the teaching of this Encyclical nourishment for their interior life, and that they will succeed in strengthening, under the action of the Spirit, their commitment to prayer in harmony with the Church and her Magisterium." ²

◆ The life of prayer requires an attitude of listening. Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B. speaks to us about the role of listening in the spiritual life: "The key word of the spiritual discipline I follow is 'listening'. This means a special kind of listening, a listening with one's heart. To listen in that way is central to the monastic tradition in which I stand. The very first word of the Rule of St. Benedict is 'listen!'—

NEWSLETTERS NOW AVAILABLE IN BOOK FORM

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

For a free copy of the book call toll free 1-888-211-3041, fax (513-932-6791) or mail order to Shepherds of Christ Center, Box 193, Morrow, Ohio 45152, U.S.A.

'Ausculat!'—and all the rest of Benedictine discipline grows out of this one initial gesture of wholehearted listening, as a sunflower grows from its seed.

"Benedictine spirituality in turn is rooted in the broader and more ancient tradition of the Bible. But here, too, the concept of listening is central. In the biblical vision all things are brought into existence by God's creative Word; all of history is a dialogue with God, who speaks to the human heart. The Bible has been admired for proclaiming with great clarity that God is One and Transcendent. Yet, the still more admirable insight of the religious genius reflected in biblical literature is the insight that God speaks. The transcendent God communicates Self through nature and through history. The human heart is called to listen and to respond.

"Responsive listening is the form the Bible gives to our basic religious quest as human beings. This is the quest for a full human life, for happiness. It is the quest for meaning, for our happiness hinges not on good luck; it hinges on peace of heart. Even in the midst of what we call bad luck, in the midst of pain and suffering, we can find peace of heart, if we find meaning in it all. Biblical tradition points the way by proclaiming that God speaks to us in and through even the most troublesome predicaments. By listening deeply to the message of any given moment I shall be able to tap the very Source of Meaning and to realize the unfolding meaning of my life.

"To listen in this way means to listen with one's heart, with one's whole being. The heart stands for that center of our being at which we are truly 'together'. Together with ourselves, not split up into intellect, will, emotions, into mind and body. Together with all other creatures, for the heart is that realm where I am intimately united with all. Together with God, the source of life, the life of my life, welling up in the heart. In order to listen with my heart, I must return again and again to my heart through a process of centering, through taking things to heart. Listening with my heart, I will find meaning."³

◆ Here is a prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Permit me not to be separated from Thee
From the wicked foe defend me
at the hour of my death call me
and bid me come to Thee
That with Thy saints I may praise Thee
For ever and ever. Amen.⁴

◆ The Curé of Ars, St. John Vianney, has some 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."⁵

◆ Closely connected with the words of St. John Vianney is the story related by Fr. Henri Nouwen, one of the best-known spiritual writers of our times: "Not long ago I met a parish priest. After describing his hectic schedule—religious services, classroom teaching, luncheon and dinner engagements, and organizational meetings—he said apologetically, 'yes, but there are so many problems.' When I asked, 'whose problems?', he was silent for a few minutes and then more or less reluctantly said, 'I guess my own.' Indeed, his incredible activities seemed in large part motivated by fear of what he would discover when he came to a standstill. He actually said, 'I guess I am busy in order to avoid a painful self-concentration.'"⁶

◆ The rosary has traditionally been a popular and powerful form of prayer. Pope Paul VI tells us: "As a Gospel prayer, centered in the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is therefore a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation—the Jesus that each Hail Mary recalls is the same Jesus Whom the succession of the mysteries proposes to us... By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded."⁷

◆ One of the most eminent theologians of our times, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, says: "Those who consider Christian contemplation outdated and turn to the values of the world to give them fresh force are victims of an illusion. Only 'in Christ' do things attain their ultimate meaning and end..."⁸

◆ Thomas Merton reminds us that love must be at the very heart of our prayer: "The instinctive characteristic of religious meditation is that it is a search for truth which springs from love and which seeks to pursue the truth not only by knowledge but also by love. It is, therefore, an intellectual activity which is inseparable from an intense consecration of spirit and application of the will. The presence of love in our meditation intensifies our thought by giving it a deeply affective quality. Our meditation becomes charged with a loving appreciation of the value hidden in the supreme truth which the intelligence is seeking. The affective drive of the will...raises the souls above the level of speculation and makes our quest for truth a prayer full of reverential love and adoration striving to pierce the dark cloud which stands between us and the throne of God. We beat against this cloud with supplications, we lament our poverty, our helplessness, we adore the mercy of God and His supreme perfections, we dedicate ourselves entirely to His worship."⁹

◆ The best way to pray is that method which at any particular time seems best able to put us in contact with God. For one person this may be meditative reading—for example, a prayerful reflection on a selected Scripture passage. As many passages may be prayed over as seems fruitful for a particular prayer period. For another, the best method here and now may well be a simple discussion with God concerning the happenings of one's life. Another person may choose reflection on the words of a favorite prayer. Prayer over a scene of Christ's life is another popular method. All the above are some of the common methods used in making meditative prayer. To have a deepened sense of God being present to us and we to God, and to realize that this occurs in the atmosphere of love—this is the important thing. The prayer method we use at any particular time should best serve this purpose.

No matter what prayer method I use, my prayers should always be Trinitarian and Christocentric. I should always strive to realize that the Father speaks to me through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and that I respond to the Father through and with Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

*Immaculate
Heart
of Mary,
Pray for us.*

As prayer develops, it usually becomes more simplified. Beginners in the life of prayer often experience numerous ideas and images regarding God and the things of God together with various acts of the will. As prayer develops there usually occurs a simplification process which is threefold. First, acts of the intellect become fewer, even to the extent that one idea clearly predominates. The acts of the will also become fewer, and that of love more and more emerges and, in summary fashion, contains all other movements of the will. Finally, prayer's simplification process reaches out and touches everything in the person's life. The person sees life harmoniously unified in Christ, and this simplified vision gives a sense of concentrated purpose and strength to one's existence which was previously not present.

Prayer and its growth process are not void of all difficulties. The path of prayer, as with the spiritual life in general, is not always a smooth one. Sometimes we encounter lesser sufferings along the way; sometimes the pain is more severe. The sufferings, if properly coped with, are meant to lead to greater union with God. It is once again a question of living Christ's paschal mystery of death and resurrection.

One of the common difficulties encountered in prayer is that of coping with distractions. It is only in higher mystical prayer, during which God takes special hold of the faculties, that distractions are completely absent. In the more ordinary stages of prayer, we will always have to cope with them. The challenge, then, is to strive to bypass distractions when they do occur. Essential concentration on God and the things of God is still possible although distractions come and go.

Dryness in prayer is another common suffering. Often God bestows sweet consolations upon one beginning the life of prayer in order to help the person become initiated into the rewarding but arduous life of prayer. Often, as prayer progresses, the periods of emotionally-felt consolation may become less frequent. A dryness of the emotions is noticeably present. The person, grounded in the practice of prayer, is now strong enough to continue in it even though times of emotionally-felt consolation may be less frequent. One is learning to seek God, rather than just God's gifts of consolation. In seeking God, the person will also receive consolations as God chooses to give them.

Of all the difficulties encountered during prayer, surely the most painful is to experience God as seeming to be distant. This is such a penetrating type of suffering because it strikes at the very heart of prayer—the fact that prayer is a special meeting with God in which I strive to be aware of God with heightened consciousness.

There are two basic reasons for God seeming to be distant. God can actually be more distant because the person is at fault. There is something of considerable significance which the person is doing and should not be doing, or something which he or she should be doing and is not. The solution to the difficulty is obvious. Corrective action should be taken. If, however,

upon examination the person honestly cannot discover any such significant commission or omission, he or she can be reasonably assured that this is a trial associated with prayer's growth process. Passing through this trial successfully, the person will discover that the relative darkness has turned into a greater light, and a closer love union with God in Christ is now experienced.

♦ The Eucharist is our greatest prayer. Let us pray for the grace to offer the Holy Sacrifice deeply united to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, this Jesus with Whom and through Whom we make adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and satisfaction to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

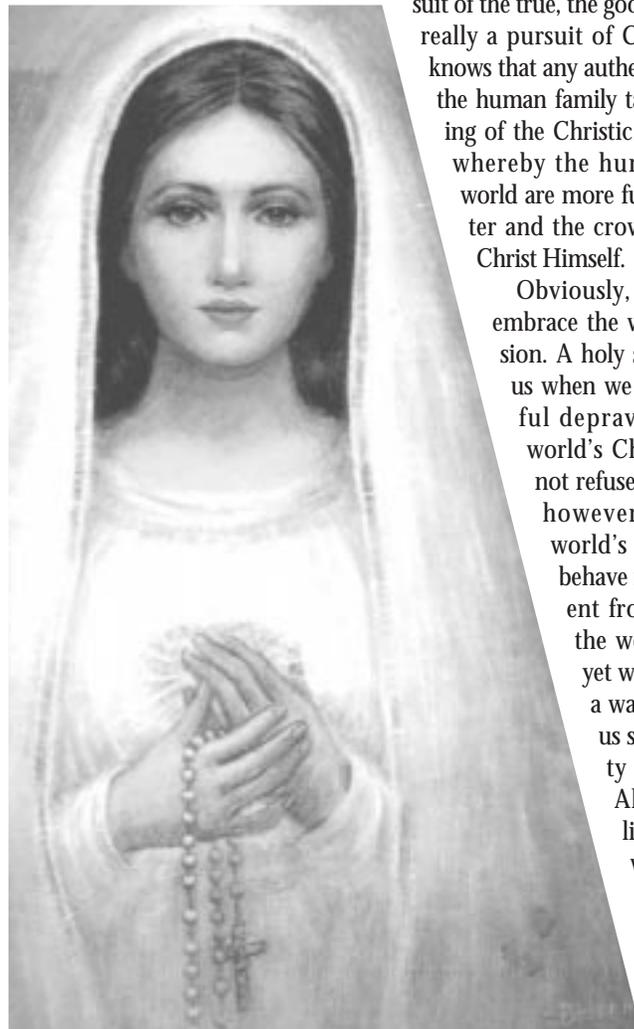
The Christian and the World

Growth in the life of prayer not only deepens our relationship with God in Christ, it also deepens our relationship with all members of the human family. Prayer deepens our determination to do our part in helping to make the world a more fit dwelling place for ourselves and all our brothers and sisters.

God calls us to share His love for His creation. Growth in Christ develops our awareness of this truth. The Christian should have a deeper love for the world than the non-believer. All that is good and true and beautiful, all the good we humans reach out for in hope, all the possibilities for our true earthly progress, all the worthwhile and enthusiastic dreams of the human heart for a better world—yes, the Christian should yearn more deeply for all this than does the non-believer. Why? Because the Christian knows the world belongs to Christ. The Christian knows that the human family's pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful is really a pursuit of Christ. The Christian knows that any authentic step forward that the human family takes marks a deepening of the Christic evolutionary process whereby the human family and the world are more fully united to the center and the crown of the universe—

Christ Himself.

Obviously, we do not love and embrace the world's sinful dimension. A holy sadness should touch us when we reflect upon the sinful depravity that defiles the world's Christic image. We do not refuse secular involvement, however, because of the world's sinfulness. We must behave in a way that is different from the way much of the world thinks and acts, yet we must be different in a way that does not make us shirk our responsibility toward the secular. All of us, whether we live within monastery walls or within the explosiveness of the inner city, have this responsibility—each in his or her own way.



Thoughts on the Eucharist

◆ Fr. David Turaldo has left us these words on the Eucharist:

“In his self-giving, the Lord Jesus consumed the form of his historical and earthly presence. Then he placed himself under the form of bread and wine, so that everyone might eat and drink of him and live.

“Having drawn all things to himself in his experience of death, he has become the source of a creation whose goodness and beauty are based on a harmonious balance stemming from the reconciliation by him and accomplished in him.

“The person who nourishes himself on the life-giving and substantial food that is the body and blood of Christ, acquires a consciousness of being rooted in Christ Jesus. The consciousness becomes the life-giving center of all one’s human resources—which, clothed with new light, constitute the identity of the person ‘conformed to the image of the Son’.

“The person becomes a radiant power in the cosmos of that life-giving substance progressively taking up its dwelling in him.

“Humbly giving his energies to this Eucharistic presence, he collaborates with God’s great and marvelous work for the unity of all.”¹⁰

◆ Pope John Paul II reminds us that the Eucharist builds the Church: “It is an essential truth, not only of doctrine but also of life, that the Eucharist builds the Church, building it as the authentic community of the People of God, as the assembly of the faithful, bearing the same mark of unity that was shared by the Apostles and the first disciples of the Lord. The Eucharist builds ever anew this community and unity, ever building and regenerating it on the basis of the Sacrifice of Christ since it commemorates his death on the Cross, the price by which he redeemed us. Accordingly, in the Eucharist we touch in a way the very mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord, as is attested by the very words used at its institution, the words with which those called to this ministry in the Church unceasingly celebrate the Eucharist.”¹¹

Thoughts on the Priesthood

◆ Whether he is the head of a parish or whatever, the priest must have as his only desire to love God with his whole being and to love his neighbor as himself. It is not power or recognition that the priest seeks, but rather to be one with Christ and to act in His name. As Christ acted before him, the priest must act for the love and glory of the Father, not for power, money, recognition, a title. The priest acts in the name of Jesus. As did Jesus before him, the priest

must concentrate on serving, not on being served. As did Jesus before him, the priest must act always in love.

◆ Fr. Robert Schwartz observes: “Because the Eucharist is the foundation, dynamic force and goal of priestly ministry, priests both are nourished there on the servant Christ and offer this same sustenance to others as their greatest service to them. Moreover, inasmuch as all ecclesial service involves participating in the life and mission of Jesus himself, the servant-leadership which is most characteristic of presbyteral ministry is Eucharistic both in origin and in expression. The response of the assembly to the priests’ Eucharistic ministry can be a profound invitation to union with Christ, as the people evoke and affirm the priestly identity of their ministers.”¹²

◆ Fr. Jean Galot, S.J. gives us these insightful words on the priesthood: “Christ requires of the Twelve a more complete consecration, more like his own. He calls upon them to forsake everything to follow him and thereby associates them more closely to his own Incarnation...”

“Consecration, too, establishes a special bond between priests and the redeeming mystery of Christ. Because Jesus brings his own consecration to fruition through sacrifice, those on whom he bestows his pastoral power are called upon to realize in themselves the definition of the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. Priests cannot limit their sacrificial offering to the ritual performance of the Eucharist. They are called upon to commit themselves completely by making that total gift of their own selves which the Eucharist implies for their own personal lives. Their commitment to sacrifice is not just the one required of every Christian by virtue of the universal priesthood but the one demanded of them by a consecration that is specifically the priest’s own.

“As to the mission of the priest, it is entirely an expression of redemptive Incarnation in its pastoral aspect. The Incarnation is revealed in this mission because the powers bestowed on the priests to be exercised in the name of Christ are divine powers: the power to hand down revealed truth authoritatively, the power to offer... Christ’s own sacrifice in the Eucharist, the power to forgive sins and to mediate Christ’s holiness, the power to lead the community and to promote the development of a kingdom which is God’s own. Thus, the priest emerges as the man of God, the man in whom God acts with a special power.

“The priestly ministry brings redemption to fruition also because of the indissoluble bond which Christ establishes between service and sacrifice. The Son of Man has come to serve and to give his life as a ransom for mankind. Prolonging this service of the Son of Man and making it available to men in every age and place means prolonging at the same time the sacrifice that imparts freedom. All the aspects of the priestly ministry bear the distinctive mark of sacrifice. The priest cannot impart the truth and the life of Christ, nor live his pastoral love, without a profound commitment to the way of the cross.”¹³

Scriptural Reflections

Happiness Now. *“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil 4:4-7).

Certain people look upon religion as a type of enslavement. Religion, claim these people, puts shackles on one’s desire for full living, pleasure, and happiness. Religion, they continue, makes one fearful, forces one into a rigid pattern of do’s and don’ts which restricts and evens suffocates a person’s thrust toward full personality development. Whatever the causes may be for arriving at this view, such an attitude grossly misrepresents the nature of true religion.

Jesus has come to make us happy, not to make us participate in a religion which destroys the joy-dimension of human life. Jesus has come to increase our

capacity for true self-fulfillment, not to restrict us with a religion which, while encouraging morbid self-enclosurement, destroys possibilities for healthy self-expansiveness. Jesus has come to show us the way to real pleasure, not to present us with a religion which looks askance at such. And the happiness and fulfillment Jesus has come to give us are meant for this life, not only for eternal life. Christianity is a religion which gives a here-and-now happiness which develops into a future and eternal happiness which satisfies our deepest desires to be fully alive.

Jesus has not told us that the process of achieving happiness is without pain and suffering. Jesus was the happiest man Who ever walked the earth. He was also one who suffered greatly. Observing the life of Jesus Himself, then, we come face to face with this undeniable Christian truth: suffering, even deep suffering, is not incompatible with deep happiness. On the contrary, whether we experience suffering or whatever, such an encounter is a means to further happiness provided we are living in Christ Jesus.

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

◆ **God's Tender Concern.** In Isaiah we read:

*Does a woman forget her baby at the breast,
or fail to cherish the son of her womb?
Yet even if these forget,
I will never forget you. (Is 49:15)*

One of the greatest and most rewarding of human experiences is to feel loved and wanted by another. Partners in marriage, parents and children, friend and friend—all these experience the tenderness of personal concern, a loving concern which penetrates deep down and makes the loved one feel warmly alive. The one who is loved thus feels a sense of elation that his or her uniqueness is indeed attractive to another. The person feels inspired to develop

this uniqueness, to be and to become according to God's marvelous design.

God's love for each of us obviously far surpasses any human person's capacity to show us concern. The love of all mothers for their children, the love shown each other by husbands and wives the world over, friendship's love which has united persons of all ages and all cultures down through the ages—all this vast and accumulated beauty and dynamism of human love does not equal God's love for each of us.

Since this is true, why don't we feel more fully alive, more in awe at life's beauty, more eager to fulfill the various possibilities God offers us to be and to become more thoroughly Christian? If God loves us so deeply and so tenderly, why should we worry or be anxious? If God loves us so much, why do we allow sadness to ruin our days? If the all-powerful God loves us so intimately, what trial, or temptation, or difficulty is too great to overcome? If God's wonderful love urges us on to further growth, why do we at times respond so feebly? In brief, why do we sometimes variously close in on ourselves and fail to open ourselves to the warm, sensitive, tender and concerned touch of God's love?

Mary and the Holy Spirit

The late Archbishop Luis M. Martinez of Mexico strikingly speaks of the ongoing cooperation of Mary with the Holy Spirit regarding the reproduction of Jesus within us: "Christian life is the reproduction of Jesus in souls..."

"Now, how will this mystical reproduction be brought about in souls? In the same way in which Jesus was brought into the world, for God gives a wonderful mark of unity to all His works. Divine acts have a wealth of variety because they are the work of omnipotence; nevertheless, a most perfect unity always shines forth from them because they are the fruit of wisdom; and this divine contrast of unity and variety stamps the works of God with sublime and unutterable beauty.

"In His miraculous birth, Jesus was the fruit of heaven and earth... The Holy Spirit conveyed the divine fruitfulness of the Father to Mary, and the virginal soil brought forth in an ineffable manner our most loving Savior, the divine Seed, as the prophets called Him..."

"That is the way He is reproduced in souls. He is always the fruit of heaven and earth.

"Two artisans must concur in the work that is at once God's masterpiece and humanity's supreme product: the Holy Spirit and the most holy Virgin Mary. Two sanctifiers are necessary to souls, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, for they are the only ones who can reproduce Christ.

"Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary sanctify us in different ways. The first is the Sanctifier by essence; because He is God, who is infinite sanctity; because He is the personal Love that completes, so to speak, the sanctity of God, consummating His life and His unity, and it belongs to Him to communicate to souls the mystery of that sanctity. The Virgin Mary, for her part, is the co-operator, the indispensable instrument in and by God's design. From Mary's maternal relation to the human body of Christ is derived her relation to His Mystical Body which is being formed through all the centuries until the end of time, when it will be lifted up to the heavens, beautiful, splendid, complete, and glorious.

"These two, then, the Holy Spirit and Mary, are the indispensable artificers of Jesus, the indispensable sanctifiers of souls. Any saint in heaven can co-operate in the sanctification of a soul, but his co-operation is not necessary, not profound, not constant: while the co-operation of these two artisans of Jesus of whom we have just been speaking is so necessary that without it souls are not sanctified (and this by the



actual design of Providence), and so intimate that it reaches to the very depths of our soul. For the Holy Spirit pours charity into our heart, makes a habitation of our soul, and directs our spiritual life by means of His gifts. The Virgin Mary has the efficacious influence of Mediatrix in the most profound and delicate operations of grace in our souls. And, finally, the action of the Holy Spirit and the co-operation of the most holy Virgin Mary are constant; without them, not one single character of Jesus would be traced on our souls, no virtue grow, no gift be developed, no grace increased, no bond of union with God be strengthened in the rich flowering of the spiritual life.

“Such is the place that the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary have in the order of sanctification. Therefore, Christian piety should put these two artisans of Christ in their true place, making devotion to them something necessary, profound, and constant.”¹⁴

To Be Free

If we are to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit as we should, we must possess a distinct spiritual freedom. By this we mean that we must be free enough relative to persons, places, occupations—to everything—so that we might hear the voice of the Spirit and respond as we should. To put it another way, we must always be striving to relate to all things according to God’s will. To do so is already to follow the Spirit’s lead; to do so is also to make ourselves more free, more sensitive to the Spirit’s guidance.

Some possess enough of this freedom (with its proportionate sensitivity) to hear what the Spirit is saying; but here and now they are not free enough to do what the Holy Spirit is asking. It may be a question of ridding oneself of a particular practice, or of initiating a certain course of action. The person, however, is not free enough to respond to the Spirit’s lead.

In the way we are using the phrase “spiritual freedom,” we do not mean to imply the person is not responsible when this freedom is not operative. We simply mean that because of inordinate attachments, the person does not use free will properly regarding the Holy Spirit’s requests.

Sometimes the shackles of our non-freedom possess such strength that it is only with extraordinary effort that we break loose from them. Once free, we are overwhelmed with a new sense of spiritual vitality. We resolve to preserve our new-found freedom at all costs.

Those who have been deprived of political or other types of freedom cherish these freedoms once gained or regained. The freedom of which we are speaking, the freedom to do whatever God may ask, is one which calls for the deepest rejoicing. For in possessing this freedom, we are fulfilling the purpose of our existence. Is this not reason to rejoice from the depths of our being?

Limitations

We are finite creatures. By this very fact we have limitations of various sorts. We must, however, distinguish between false limitations—those which need not be—and those which legitimately emanate from our finitude.

False limitations are those which, for various reasons, we wrongfully inflict upon ourselves. Let us consider some of these.

There is that limitation with which we are burdened when we waste time comparing ourselves with others. We say that if we possessed the talents of this or that person, well certainly then we could achieve great things. All the while, we partially waste the gifts we do possess. We miss numerous opportunities for serving God and others because we foolishly squander time and attention bemoaning the fact that we lack this or that talent.

We also needlessly limit our possibilities for achievement when we fail to generate the proper motivation which would allow for the reasonable development and implementation of our gifts. Properly motivating ourselves is something we must consistently strive for. The kind of motivation that thrusts us forward at one stage of our lives and in one set of circumstances may well not be the particular motivating factor we need at other points of life’s journey.

There are numerous limitations which need not be. There are also limitations which are inevitable. There are, for instance, situations which limit the use of the talents we actually do possess, and there is little or nothing we can do to change the circumstances. At other times when we do have the opportunity to exercise our talents we realize, sometimes with painful awareness, that there is only so much time and energy. We realize we must leave much undone precisely because of such restraints. There are also those situations in which, despite our own good will, we are limited in what we can accomplish because of the disinterest and even hostility of those we are trying to serve.

Let us pray for the gift to be able to distinguish between those limitations which need not exist and those which are inevitable. Let us pray for the strength to eliminate those limitations which need not be. Finally, let us ask for the courage to endure patiently those restrictions which are beyond our power to remove.

Please Help Us, God

Sister Mary Rose McGeady, president of Covenant House, tells us: “If you were to sit quietly in the back of our chapel at Covenant House you might notice a couple of things.

“First you’d notice that our chapel is one of the few peaceful places at Covenant House. As the largest crisis shelter for homeless kids on the continent, Covenant House is a pretty crazy place. We serve 1,200 children a night—kids from all walks of life and from every part of the country. On most nights there is noise, lots of noise that comes from lots of pain, lots of joy, lots of despair and lots of hope.

“But if you were to sit in the chapel, you’d escape most of that.

“What you would see, however, is a kid every once in a while, who would enter respectfully, walk to the front of the chapel and drop a slip of paper in a special box—our prayer box.

“On these scraps of paper, my kids scribble their notes to God...

“This morning when I reached into the box, the first scrap of paper I touched held this heart-wrenching plea: “Please Help Me, God!

“I felt glued to the floor... As president of Covenant House, I have met thousands of homeless kids. Somehow, everything I believe about these kids, everything I have come to love and respect about them was summed up in that four-word plea:

“Please Help Me, God”.

“Every day I meet hundreds of kids who’ve endured every imaginable horror (and some you can’t even imagine) in their homes and on the streets. Their lives are one story after another of abuse, degradation and abandonment.

“And so, after all that, they wonder if anyone really knows they are hurting, or cares.

“Please Help Me, God”.

“They come to us exhausted, hungry, cold, desperate—without any of the basics of life every child has a right to expect. It’s not hard to understand why they would cry out this plea...

“Please Help Me, God”.

“And so, they reach out as best they can. Some of the most moving experiences of my life have been listening to these special pleas, as part of our prayer circles. Unless you have been there yourself, it’s almost impossible to comprehend how moving those moments are, to hear kids read the scripture and pray from their hearts to the God who remains their friend when they have been able to rely on few others. In these moments, which I will always treasure, I can almost hear their broken hearts being repaired and soothed as they pray:

“Please Help Me, God”.¹⁵

It is not only the destitute children who come to Covenant House who have broken hearts. We all possess wounded hearts to one degree or another. Let us not deny this. Let us not deny our need to be healed by the divine physician, Jesus, Our Lord and Savior. And so, each day as we come to prayer, let us go to the Heart of Jesus. Resting there, and feeling loved and secure, let us ask Our Lord to heal us more and more so that we may go forth each day more able to accomplish the great mission He has given to each of us.

Please help us, Lord Jesus.

St. John of the Cross

Fr. Wilfred McGreal, O. Carm., gives us this thought concerning the teaching of St. John of the Cross:

“John did not ask that those he was guiding should turn their back on life. What he was saying was that God is everything: nature and people in themselves, are as nothing. The way to come to love people and value our planet is to see them as God sees them in a loving, sustaining gaze. John does not want people to lose their identity, because after all it is the unique person that God loves and is calling into the relationship. What John is against is putting anything before God. He wants everyone to be free so that they can soar on eagles’ wings, as even a silken thread can hold an eagle down. *Nada* is the true freedom that is meant to take us away from all that is negative in our lives and, above all, free us from alienation.”¹⁶



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.

Letters

◆ Dear Fr. Carter,

I would like to thank you for the first issue of 1998 of *Shepherds of Christ* which you have sent me.

I have found your newsletter thought-provoking and spiritually enriching. I have handed four of the five copies you sent me to the two Rectors of our Minor and Philosophy seminaries, to the priest in contact with our young priests and with vocations, and to our cloister at Carmel. I am sure that they will appreciate it as much as I do.

I shall be grateful if you could send me 75 copies. You can be sure they will be read avidly and greatly appreciated. Also, I shall be extremely grateful if you send me 3 copies of the first 12 letters that have appeared in book form.

Congratulations on this excellent apostolate. Keep up the good work you are doing. May Mary, our blessed Mother, bless this spiritual apostolate of yours. I have appreciated very much the quotations you put from Fr. Angelo Amato, S.D.B. and from Cardinal Newman regarding our blessed Mother.

Thanking you once again,

In caritate Christi

Armando Trinidad

Archbishop of Lahore, Pakistan

◆ Dear Father,

I have been asked by His Excellency Bishop Frances Gerard Brooks, D.D., to thank you for your recent letter.

At a recent diocesan conference our bishop informed the priests of the diocese of your recent letter and provided for their perusal the samples of your newsletter. The response was very positive, with many priests indicating a desire to receive your newsletter on a regular basis.

His Excellency has asked me to confirm with you the possibility of ordering 60 copies of your newsletter. This will allow for a copy to be given to every priest, deacon and seminarian of the diocese. It will also facilitate “sample” copies to be distributed further afield.

Rev. Niall Sheehan

Cathedral Presbytery

Newry, Northern Ireland



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

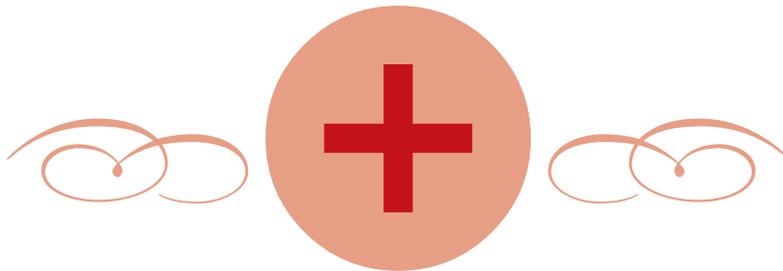
1998, ISSUE TWO

shepherds of Christ

Shepherds of Christ Ministries
P.O. Box 193
Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193
U.S.A.

**Non-Profit
Organization**
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Cincinnati, OH
Permit 4251

Shepherds of Christ, a spirituality newsletter for priests, is published bi-monthly by Shepherds of Christ Ministries, P.O. Box 193, Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193. While distribution is free of charge to all priests in the U.S., and growing internationally, donations are still very much appreciated. Inquiries and comments are welcome, as are address changes and addresses of the newly ordained. Permission to reproduce intact is granted for non-commercial use. Editor Father Edward Carter S.J. is Professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. John Weickert is President. Good Shepherd illustration is by Brother Jerome Pryor, S.J. Layout and design are by Cathy Ring. Also dedicated to the spiritual advancement of priests is a worldwide network of lay/religious prayer chapters, Shepherds of Christ Associates, headquartered at 2919 Shawhan Road, Morrow, Ohio 45152, telephone toll free 1-888-211-3041, fax 513-932-6791.



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

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*. Encyclical Letter, as in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., editor, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, No. 65.
3. David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., *A Listening Heart*, Crossroad, pp. 9-10.
4. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Loyola University Press, p. xvii.
5. Pope John XXIII, *The Curé of Ars and the Priesthood*, Encyclical Letter, Paulist Press, p. 16.
6. Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, Doubleday, p. 90.
7. Pope Paul VI, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Encyclical Letter, United States Catholic Conference, Nos. 46-47.
8. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, Sheed and Ward, p. 53.
9. Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, Thomas P. McDonnell, editor, Doubleday, p. 325.
10. David Turaldo, *Revelation of Love*, Pauline Books and Media, p. 133.
11. Pope John Paul II, *Daily Meditations*, Editions Paulines, p. 198.
12. Robert M. Schwartz, *Servant Teachers of the People of God*, Paulist Press, p. 145.
13. Jean Galot, S.J., *Theology of the Priesthood*, Ignatius Press, pp. 124-125.
14. Archbishop Luis M. Martinez, *The Sanctifier*, translated by Sr. M. Aquinas, O.S.U., Pauline Books and Media, pp. 5-7.
15. Sr. Mary Rose McGeady, *Please Help Me, God*, Covenant House, pp. 5-7.
16. Wilfred McGreal, O. Carm., *John of the Cross*, Triumph, p. 59.