



REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

His Body, the Church

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; he runs away because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep." (Jn 10:11-15)¹

Yes, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us. He gave His life so that we might have life in Him. This life we gloriously possess in Christ, we live within the Church. The Church herself came forth from the pierced side of Jesus. Vatican II tells us: "For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church."²

There follow various thoughts concerning the Church.

◆ St. Paul speaks to us concerning the Church as the Body of Christ: *For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts—all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body—so it is with Christ. We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free men, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink.* (1 Cor 12:12-13)

Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole (1 Cor 12:27).

◆ The Church considered as Body of Christ certainly emphasizes the sense of corporateness that should permeate the consciousness of the Church's members. We must think in terms of both what is good for the entire Church and, through this Church, what is good for the total human community. Even when we disagree among ourselves, we do so not because we want to glory in having the upper hand,

but because we believe that to disagree here and now is necessary so that the truth might emerge for the good of the community. St. Paul speaks to us about this sense of corporateness: *So if in Christ there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any warmth or sympathy—I appeal to you, make my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind.*

Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests but those of others. (Phil 2:1-4)

In our sense of corporateness, that is, as we are motivated by a common purpose and a common good, we should learn to rejoice in the gifts and achievements of others. These are not isolated gifts and achievements. Rather, they redound to the good

of the whole body. We all probably know of numerous instances of jealousy and a false sense of competition that have harmed the work of the Church. If the work of Christ is being accomplished, and if I am striving to do my part, does it really matter whether I or someone else is responsible for this or that particular accomplishment? Does it matter whether this or

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that group, or organization receives credit?

St. Paul again has words for us: *For what is Apollos and what is Paul? The servants through whom you come to believe, and each has only what the Lord has given him. I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave growth.* (1 Co 3:5-6)

◆ The Church continues the work of the Incarnation. With Christ as the Head of His Body, the Church, she continues the life and the work of Jesus according to the pattern and characteristics of Christ Himself. Because Christ's existence was centered in death-resurrection, so also is the Church's existence centered in death-resurrection.

◆ Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J., tells us: "The Church therefore is...a sign. It must signify in a historically tangible form the redeeming grace of Christ. It signifies that grace as relevantly given to men of every age, race, kind, and condition."³

God in His love was in a pre-eminent manner signified by Jesus in His incarnation.

Pope John Paul II says: "Making the Father present as love and mercy is, in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of his mission as the Messiah..."⁴

Because the Church continues the mission of Jesus, she also must above all signify, or give witness to, love. The Church must give witness to God's merciful love for us and our response of love, a response which includes love of God, neighbor and self.

◆ Vatican II points out to us: "...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in her sacrifice, and to eat the lord's supper."⁵

◆ The community which is Church is a terrestrial reflection of the ultimate and absolute community—The Blessed Trinity. The Trinitarian community is a community of profound relationships. Because the Church reflects Trinitarian community, we, her members, are intended to have relationships not only with the persons of the Trinity, but likewise with one another. Authentic interpersonal relationships not only unite in a deeper knowledge and love the persons directly involved. They also make a person more capable of loving all others more deeply and, therefore, more capable of helping to deepen the bonds of community.

◆ Speaking to us concerning the maternal role of the Church regarding us, Henri de Lubac says: "Whether it is a question of the entire history of the human race or each of our individual lives, it can never be said that Christ is completed in any of us. In consequence, the maternal action of the Church towards us never ceases...Her mission of giving birth always remains. We do not cease to draw life from her..."

"One consequence resulting from this is of great significance. We know Saint Paul teaches that since the fullness of time has come to pass we are no longer children, enslaved by the elements of the world or imprisoned under custody of the law. For us the time of pedagogues is past. According to the logic of our faith, we must become adults in Christ. On the other hand, Jesus said, *In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 18:3). At first glance, these two instructions might appear contradictory. But they are not at all. Nor will we merely say that it is possible to reconcile them, that the Christian can become an adult and still preserve a childlike spirit. Such language would be completely inadequate. In reality, we must speak, not of reconciliation, but of correlation. The more the Christian

becomes an adult in Christ, as Saint Paul understands this, the more also does the spirit of childhood blossom within him, as Jesus understands it. Or, if you prefer, it is in deepening this childlike spirit that the Christian advances to adulthood, penetrating ever deeper, if we can put it this way, into the womb of his mother."⁶

◆ Fr. Gerald Vann, O.P., speaks movingly about our life in the Church:

"If you live in the Church and try to use the power of the Church to increase the life of the Church, then the power of the Church will make you yourself whole; and in your wholeness you will help to make your family and make your world. But you will be building for a more than earthly beatitude because you will be building the city which is eternal. Here you build in shadow, you build for a future which is invisible, and so you can only build in hope. And often your plans will be wrecked and your dreams come crashing about your ears, and you will need the strength of the Rock which is Christ to give you patience and fortitude..."

"...And when death has come to you...the Church will bless you for the life you have added to it, and there will be men to heed you better than they did when you were here..."

"But you, for your part, will be no longer in the shadow but in the glory of the Light inaccessible; you will be in the City that is yours because you helped to build it; you will see Him at last as He is, and be wholly with Him; and you will have no more any mourning or weeping or any other sorrow, for all these former things will have been transmuted

into happiness and peace, and you will walk with Him—together with all those you have helped to bring to Him, even until the end of the world—you will walk with Him in happiness for ever, in the cool of the eternal evening."⁷

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

Assimilation to Jesus

The spiritual life is centered in assimilation to Jesus. Here are words which offer insight into our life in Christ: "No mere human courage carried even to the highest degree could rise to the strength of soul needed to carry into practice the principles of life on which the Man-God acted. Mere conviction that His way and His conduct are most excellent and most worthy of imitation, is not sufficient for us. It is more disheartening than inspiring to have to approve and yet to be unable to imitate. And admiration that does not lead to imitation is a sterile thing. The Christian by his very vocation is called to express Christ in his own life. To do this demands a divine *energy*. That energy is, in a mysterious manner, latent in the mysteries of the Savior's life on earth. These mysteries are quasi-sacramental in their character. Each is a manifestation of the divine. It is that and something more. For those, who by faith, lay hold of Christ in a willingness to be united with Him in act, the mystery possesses a divinizing power. It can make contact with the ordinary experiences of the Christian's life and impart to them a superhuman dignity and worth.

"The mysteries of the life of Jesus are not dead, static...They are living and dynamic. They have been lived for the members of Christ. All the states that the Savior traversed, all the human experiences that he willed to go through, have for their purpose the sanctification of all that enters into a man's deliberate life. These mysteries of His love accumulated vast reservoirs of merit in order to communicate this human-divine quality to the Christian's doings and sufferings..."

"That this divinizing process take place, there is required a willed contact between the individual and Christ. This contact is effected by the activity of the virtue of faith. It is perfected by sympathy and love. The Christian who wills to have the life of Christ develop in himself, must consent to 'steep' mind, imagination and heart in the earthly career of Jesus. He must aim at a *sympathy* with the Savior in all that he went through. He must strive to identify himself with the divine Master, to think with Him, to feel with Him, to judge with Him, to see with His eyes and to speak with His tongue. He must will to be as the Savior was in all these incidents..."

"The Son of man is ever at the service of His brethren for their good. The transformation of their souls is His chief concern, though He is not indifferent

to their bodily welfare. It is certain, then, that if a soul lays hold of Him in faith and trusts to receive an inflow of divine life through that contact, its expectations will be fulfilled. Christ Himself states that He came to give life. By life He meant the supernatural life of divine grace.

“Christ’s mysteries belong to all Christ’s members. To secure the advantages that follow from their privileged condition the members of Christ must deliberately aspire to harmonize thoughts, affections and aspirations with those of the Lord. They must try to be, in fact, one spirit with Him. It is this ‘Oneness’ in spiritual ideal that releases the streams of life accumulated through Christ’s merits and permits them to circulate through the soul...

“The events of the thirty-three years are not to be laid hold of by the Christian in the sense that he has to undergo exactly similar things. It is the spirit of these experiences that is important. And it is by putting that spirit into his own encounters with circumstances that the Christian posits the condition that enables the virtue and the merits of Christ to transmute his actions into something of divine worth. An excellent imitation of the Lord may be realized without demanding anything extraordinary in the way of poverty, sufferings, trials or persecutions.”⁸

The Eucharist

◆ *At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us* (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 17)⁹

◆ *The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. They should be instructed by God’s word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 48)¹⁰

◆ *Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ the Lord desired to set before us in a very special way this remarkable union whereby we are united one with another and with our divine Head, a union that no word of praise can ever sufficiently express. For in this*

sacrifice the sacred ministers act not only as the representative of our Saviour, but as the representative of the whole Mystical Body and of each one of the faithful. Again, in this act of sacrifice, the faithful of Christ, united by the common bond of devotion and prayer, offer to the eternal Father through the hands of the priest, whose prayer alone has made it present on the altar, the Immaculate Lamb, the most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the Church’s universal need. Moreover, just as the divine Redeemer, while dying on the Cross, offered Himself to the eternal Father as Head of the whole human race, so now, ‘in this clean oblation’ He not only offers Himself as Head of the Church to His heavenly Father but in Himself His mystical members as well. He embraces them all, yes, even the weaker and more ailing members, with the deepest love of His Heart. (Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis AAS*, XXXV, 232-233)¹¹

◆ Fr. Slavko Barbaric, O.F.M., observes: “The spirit of the Eucharist implies willingness to offer ourselves to others. It means to oppose completely the spir-



it of pride and selfishness which accomplishes not peace but war, destruction, violence and killing...Everything we give through Eucharistic love is transformed into something beautiful and new and creates a new relationship.”¹²

◆ Pope John Paul II states: “This worship, given therefore to the Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, above all accompanies and permeates the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. But it must fill our churches also outside the timetable of Masses. Indeed, since the Eucharistic Mystery was instituted out of love, and makes Christ sacramentally present, it is worthy of thanksgiving and worship. And this worship must be prominent in all our encounters with the Blessed Sacrament, both when we visit our churches and when the sacred species are taken to the sick and administered to them.

“Adoration of Christ in this sacrament of love must also find expression *in various forms of Eucharistic devotion*: personal prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, Hours of Adoration, periods of exposition—short, prolonged and annual (Forty Hours) - Eucharistic benediction, Eucharistic processions, Eucharistic congresses. A particular mention should be made at this point of the Solemnity of the Body

and Blood of Christ as an act of public worship rendered to Christ present in the Eucharist, a feast instituted by my predecessor Urban IV in memory of the institution of this great Mystery.

“All this therefore corresponds to the general principles and particular norms already long in existence, but newly formulated during or after the Second Vatican Council.

“...The Church and the world have a great need of Eucharistic worship. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and in contemplation that is full of faith and ready to make reparation for the great faults and crimes of the world. May our adoration never cease.”¹³

The Holy Spirit and Mary

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 this virginal soul 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 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 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 depth 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 grown, 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



Priesthood

♦ Fr. Richard Nahman, O.S.A., speaks incisively concerning the priest’s union with Jesus: “The priest, too, may accept Christ, have a deep affection for him, appreciate him as the completely loving Savior, Redeemer, Lord, etc., but if he has not developed the deep knowledge of Christ through attentive awareness, he may no longer be able to accept him as the unique, single other in union with whom he will attain his full identity as a person. And thus a conflict...a search

for identity...

"A priest constantly faces the fact that only with an absolute appreciation of the truth that he finds himself only by completely surrendering himself to Christ, that 'he must increase by my decrease', can he attain... meaning to his life."¹⁵

◆ The life of Fr. Eugene Hamilton was a most unique one. Among other things he was ordained a priest just three hours before he died of cancer. He had received special dispensation from Rome to be ordained despite the fact he had not finished the studies required for ordination. The dispensation notice included Pope John Paul's blessing.

Fr. Hamilton very much wanted to be a priest—and his wish was granted. He was not granted a priestly life made up of many years of ministry. But from the remarks of those who knew him well, one could say that, if he had lived a long priestly life, he most probably would have lived his years of ministry in a most fruitful way. All this gives those of us who are priests a chance to reflect on what is our sense of gratitude for the great gift of priesthood and on how well we use this gift in our daily existence.

There follow some remarks of Fr. Hamilton's brother, Tom, concerning the final moments of his priest-brother's life. These remarks are found in Fr. Benedict Groeschel's book, *A Priest Forever, The Life of Father Eugene Hamilton*: "At 5:00 p.m., my father arrived home... held Gene's hand and didn't say anything. He didn't have to! Gene knew he was there. At one point, Gene said to my mother, 'I'm going away now.' My mother kept telling him that we would all be okay and he could go to Jesus. My mother kept repeating, 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!' Gene also mouthed the name of Jesus over and over again. While no sound came from his mouth, I saw his tongue move against his teeth and he mouthed 'Jesus' with my mother. During the last hour, I saw one or two tears roll down his face. They didn't seem to be tears of pain or suffering. His anxiety and fear ended when my father came. He knew he was ordained a priest forever! The tears rolled down his cheeks as he was getting closer to death. During the last half hour before his death, Gene's breathing slowed. His breath became shorter and shorter. At 7:04 p.m. Father Gene Hamilton was peaceful. It was a relief to see that his suffering was finally over."¹⁶

◆ Fr. Nicholas Cachia speaks to us about the priest as shepherd: "The priest is always conscious that the flock does not belong to him but to Christ who shed his blood for it. The priest was entrusted with something very dear to Christ and, thus, needs to care for the flock with great love and dedication. The under-shepherds who are intimately associated to Christ, the Good Shepherd, need to render an account of their ministry to him who is the Chief Shepherd of the flock. The measure of judgment will be one's conformity or not to the example set by Jesus himself..."

"...Constantly open to the presence of the Holy Spirit within them, they are to grow in their communion with Jesus, as their Good Shepherd, and learn from him the 'art of arts' in leading, sustaining, instructing and protecting his sheep..."¹⁷

Prayer

Now it happened that Jesus was in one of the towns when suddenly a man appeared, covered with a skin-disease. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him saying, 'Sir, if you are willing you can cleanse me.' He stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' At once the skin-disease left him. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your cleansing just as Moses prescribed, as evidence to them.'

But the news of him kept spreading, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their illnesses cured, but he would go off to some deserted place and pray. (Lk 5: 12-15)

All of us no doubt have told ourselves on more than one occasion that we were too busy to pray. We are speaking about set, formal periods of prayer. We are not speaking about prayer in action, or that prayerful attitude which should permeate our daily activity. Such prayer in action allows us to bring a deeper Christian awareness to what we are doing and why we are doing it.

We cannot tell ourselves that we are busier than Jesus was, that we have more important work to accomplish than He did. Yet, as the above Scripture passage reminds us, Jesus set aside special time for prayer. Many, many holy Christian men and women from all states of life have likewise always found the time to pray. Moreover, they were more effective in their work precisely because they did pray.

Prayer serves various purposes. One of its functions is to mold us to become more effective workers in the Father's vineyard. Prayer helps us to control worry and anxiety. Worry and anxiety obviously can make us less efficient in our work. We cannot expect prayer to remove all anxiety from life. But prayer has a significant contribution to offer in making us Christians who are basically permeated with the peace of Christ. If we are persons of prayer, we grow in the awareness of what it means to be loved by Jesus, and, consequently, are in a position to control worry and anxiety. Prayer also aids us in our work by giving the motivation to do the right thing at the right time. Sometimes we can fail to do the work of the Lord precisely because we are not properly motivated. Prayer can also aid in making our work of a higher Christian quality—prayer can help permeate our work with a deeper faith, hope and love.

These are some of the ways prayer assists us to go about our work more effectively. When we pause to analyze the situation, then, we have to admit that we really are not too busy to pray.

*Immaculate
Heart
of Mary,
Pray for us.*

Words from Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen has been one of the most prolific and well-known spiritual writers of our time. There follow excerpts from some of his writings.

◆ Nouwen tells about a meeting with Mother Teresa: "Once, quite a few years ago, I had the opportunity of meeting Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I was struggling with many things at the time and decided to use the occasion to ask Mother Teresa's advice. As soon as we sat down I started explaining all my problems and difficulties—trying to convince her of how complicated it all was! When, after ten minutes of elaborate explanation, I finally became silent, Mother Teresa looked at me quietly and said: 'Well, when you spend one hour a day adoring your Lord and never do anything which you know is wrong...you will be fine!'

“When she said this, I realized, suddenly, that she had punctured my big balloon of complex self complaints and pointed me far beyond myself to the place of real healing. In fact, I was so stunned by her answer that I didn’t feel any desire or need to continue the conversation.

“The many people waiting outside the room to see her could probably use her time better than I. I thanked her and left. Her few words became ingrained on my heart and mind and remain to this day. I had not expected those words, but in their directness and simplicity, they cut through to the center of my being. I knew that she had *spoken* the truth and that I had the rest of my life to *live* it.

“Reflecting on the brief but decisive encounter, I realize that I had raised a question from below and that she had given an answer from above. At first, her answer didn’t seem to fit my question, but then I began to see that her answer came from

God’s place and not from the place of my complaints. Most of the time we respond to questions from below with answers from below. The result is more questions and more answers and, often, more confusion.

“Mother Teresa’s answer was like a flash of lightning in my darkness. I suddenly knew the truth about myself.”¹⁸

◆ “To know God in the world requires knowing him by heart. To know God by heart is the purpose of a contemplative discipline. It is a very hard discipline, especially for those of us who are ‘heady’ people. But if we are serious about the task of ministry, we must be willing to engage in the tough and often agonizing struggle to break through all our mental defenses and know our God by heart.

“Let us not underestimate the intensity of this struggle. Surrounded by books, papers and professors, and inundated by lectures, talks, presentations, chats, and chitchat, we are constantly in danger of letting God’s Word become caught in the network of our clever distinctions, elaborate arguments, and sheer verbosity. As ministers of the Word of God we urgently need a discipline of contemplative prayer...

◆ “Contemplative prayer requires that we listen, that we let God speak to us when he wants and in the way he wants. This is difficult for us precisely because it means allowing God to say what we might not want to hear. But if we listen long and deeply, God will reveal himself to us as a soft breeze or a still, small voice; he will offer himself to us in gentle compassion.”¹⁹

◆ “Christians are called to bear witness to the truth that God has gathered all people into one fam-

ily. Yet wherever we look we see the devastating fear people have of one another. Fear between races, religions, nations, continents. Fear between rich and poor, North and South, East and West. Wherever this fear rules division breeds leading to hatred, violence, destruction and war...

“We need new eyes to see and new ears to hear the truth of our unity, a unity which cannot be perceived by our broken, sinful, anxious hearts. Only a heart filled with perfect love can perceive the unity of humanity. This requires divine perception. God sees his people as one, as belonging to the same family and living in the same house. God wants to share this divine perception with us. By sending the only beloved son to live and die for us all, God wants to open our eyes so that we can see that we belong together in the embrace of God’s perfect love.

“Living in the intimacy of God’s house, we gradually come to know the mysterious truth that the God who loves us with a perfect love includes all people in that love without diminishing in any way the unique quality of God’s love for each individual person.”²⁰



Various Thoughts

◆ We read from a spiritual journal: “We cannot have deep intimacy with Jesus if we only give him part of ourselves. We think we are holding on to things we need when in reality we are blocking that which we most desire deep within our hearts—profound union with Jesus. There is only one way to achieve this union. We must give Jesus what He wants. In this lies our true peace, and only in this.”

◆ Isolation allows a person to stay locked in his or her imperfections. Relating to others according to God’s will helps us to grow to be more like Christ. We can find it very difficult at times to interact with others because the interaction is calling us to die to old behavior patterns which interfere with our relating to others as we should. It is through prayer and love, through God’s grace acting within us, that, in dying more and more to our imperfections, we will grow in greater oneness.

God intends us to walk hand in hand, interacting, and depending on one another. When we are hurt and bleeding because of interaction with others, many times we wish to close our arms and close the door to others. At these times let us look at Jesus on the cross, His arms outstretched. He continued to love even those who crucified Him. He did not close His arms. He hung, arms outstretched to the end.

We must keep our eyes on the goal. We must keep our arms outstretched in loving surrender to Jesus. Many times we are weary and are tempted not to so act. In loving interaction with others, our brothers and sisters help us hold our arms outstretched.

When we begin to think, “I don’t need you, it is Jesus and I, I can do it alone,” we are closing our arms. We obviously need God to accomplish our God-given destiny, but it is not only God that we must love. In the normal progression of love, there must be healthy interaction with others. This is the way of Jesus. In love we help each other live according to the Father’s plan. We help each other keep our arms outstretched. We grow more and more in Christ’s ways as we learn to love. The more we die to our imperfect ways of loving, the more we merge toward oneness with each other in Christ Jesus, Our Lord and Master.

Trust in the Lord

St. Claude La Colombière, one of the great apostles of devotion to the Heart of Christ, speaks eloquently concerning confidence or trust in God. Trust in God is one of the great fruits of devotion to the Heart of Christ. Claude says: “My God, I am so convinced that you keep watch over those who hope in you, and that we can want for nothing when we look for all from you, that I am resolved in the future to live free from every care, and to turn all my anxieties over to you...”

“Man may deprive me of possessions and honor, sickness may strip me of

strength and the means of serving you...but I shall never lose my hope. I shall keep it till the last moment of my life; and at that moment all the demons in Hell shall strive to tear it from me in vain...

"Others may look for happiness from their wealth or their talents; others may rest on the innocence of their life or the severity of their penance, or the amount of their alms, or the fervor of their prayer. As for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself. This confidence has never deceived anyone. No one, no one has hoped in the Lord and has been confounded.

"I know, alas! I know only too well that I am weak and unstable. I know what temptation can do against the strongest virtue. I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the pillars of the firmament; but that cannot frighten me. So long as I continue to hope, I shall be sheltered from all misfortune; and I am sure of hoping always, since I hope for this unwavering hopefulness.

"Finally, I am sure I cannot hope too much in you, and that I cannot receive less than I hoped for from you. So I hope that you will hold me safe on the steepest slopes, that you will sustain me against the most furious assaults, and that you will make my weakness triumph over my most fearful enemies. I hope that you will love me always, and that I too shall love you without ceasing. To carry my hope once for all as far as it can go, I hope from you to possess you, O my Creator, in time and in eternity. Amen."²¹

The Christian and the Social Order

Pope John Paul II states: "The historical experience of the West, for its part, shows that even if the Marxist analysis and its foundation of alienation are false, nevertheless alienation—and the loss of the authentic meaning of life—is a reality in Western societies too. This happens in consumerism, when people are ensnared in a web of false and superficial gratifications rather than being helped to experience their personhood in an authentic and concrete way. Alienation is found also in work, when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labor, grows or diminishes as a person...

"The concept of alienation needs to be led back to the Christian vision of reality, by recognizing in alienation a reversal of means and ends. When man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefiting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him. Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that one truly finds oneself. This gift is made possible by the human person's essential 'capacity for transcendence'. One cannot give

oneself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, one can give oneself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of our being and who alone can fully accept our gift. A person is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God. A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people."²²

A Prayer for Priests

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

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

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

Shepherds of Christ

P.O. Box 193

Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193

U.S.A.

Phone (toll free): 1-888-211-3041

Phone: 1-513-932-4451

Fax: 1-513-932-6791

Act of Consecration

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 a 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.



website: <http://www.sofc.org>
E-Mail: info@sofc.org

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Shepherds of Christ Ministries
P.O. Box 193
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Letters

◆ Dear Fr. Carter,

We priests get so many things in the mail for the parish and all its ministries and ministers. I was dumfounded that there was something for the pastor, and what a good thing it is, "Shepherds of Christ"! It is like getting a mini-retreat in the mail. How good of you to do this for us! Bless you.

Sincerely in Christ and the
Blessed Mother,

Fr. Guilbert Manaric
Skidmore, Texas

◆ Dear Fr. Carter,

Thank you. I have just got your Shepherds of Christ Newsletter for 1998, Issue Five. I was eagerly waiting for it so that I could distribute it among our clergy and seminarians. Every issue is a precious little mine of spiritual insights which helps us priests, always on the go, to stop and cherish the Spirit.

Sincerely in Christ, the Good Shepherd
Fr. Joseph M. Galdes, S.J.
Victoria, Gozo - Malta

NOTES

1. Scripture quotations are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday.
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7. Gerald Vann, O.P., *The Heart of Man*, Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 151-152.
8. Edward Jean, C.S. Sp., *The True Vine and Its Branches*, Kennedy, pp. 24-28.
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13. Letter of Pope John Paul II, *The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*, Pauline Books and Media, No. 3.
14. Archbishop Luis M. Martinez, *The Sanctifier*, translated by Sr. M. Aquinas, O.S.U., Pauline Books and Media, pp. 5-7.
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18. Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now*, Crossroads, pp. 88-89.
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20. Henri Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, Doubleday, pp. 45-46.
21. St. Claude La Colombière, "An Act of Confidence in God", Apostleship of Prayer, Chicago Regional Office.
22. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *On the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, St. Paul Books and media, No. 41.