CHURCH STUFF
(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)
Week of 2 November, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

November approaches.

In Catholic tradition, November is the month when we remember our BELOVED DEAD in an especially intense way…remembering that because of our belief in the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, we are connected to all those who have gone before us.

So I considered that the opening thought for this newsletter should be devoted to a sense of REMEMBRANCE.

The following poem – from the writings of the Irish poet John Boyle O'Reilly – sets the stage for such thoughts:

FOREVER

Those we love truly never die,
Though year by year, the sad memorial wreath,
A ring and flowers, types of life and death,
Are laid upon their graves.

For death the pure life saves,
For life all pure is love; and love can reach
From heaven to earth, and nobler lessons teach
Than those by mortals read.

Well blest is he who has a dear one dead;
A friend he has whose face will never change;
A dear communion that will not grow strange;
The anchor of a love is death.

The blessed sweetness of a loving breath
Will reach our cheek all fresh through weary years.
For her who died long since, ah! Waste not tears;
She's thine until the end.

Thanks God for one dear friend,
With face still radiant with the light of truth,
Whose love comes laden with the scent of youth,
Through twenty years of death.

May our BELOVED DEAD rest in the peace of God.

And may we keep them very close to our hearts as we wait to join them.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

DAILY 0630 MASS

During November, every daily 0630 Mass in the Chaplain's Office will be offered for your beloved dead whose names are recorded in the Book of Remembrance. If you'd like to add names to the Book, please stop by the Chaplain's Office in Washington Hall.

THANKSGIVING MASS

The annual THANKSGIVING MASS will be held on Tuesday, 25 November, at 1900 at the Chapel. and as always, it will be followed by an abundance of pies…More information to follow.

DID YOU KNOW?

HOW HINDUS LOOK AT JESUS:

The Gospels are silent about the life of Jesus between his boyhood visit to the Jerusalem Temple with his parents (Luke 2:41-52) and the beginning of his public life.

But in India, there is a strong tradition that the teenaged Jesus slipped away from his parents, journeyed across Southeast Asia, learning yoga and yogic meditation, and returned home to become a guru to the Jews.

This legend reveals just how easily Hinduism absorbs any figure whom others worship as divine. To Hindus, India is the Holy Land, its sacred mountains and rivers enlivened by more than 300,000 local deities. It is only natural, then, that Jesus would come to India to learn the secrets of unlocking his own inherent divinity.

As Gandhi was, many Hindus are drawn to the figure of Jesus by his compassion and non-violence – virtues taught in their own sacred scriptures. But also like Gandhi, Hindus find the notion of a single god unnecessarily restrictive. In their perspective, all human beings are children of God with the innate ability to become divine themselves.

The Hindus who read the Christian Gospels are drawn to the passage in John in which Jesus proclaims that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This confirms the basic Hindu belief that through rigorous spiritual practice, everyone is capable of realizing his or her own universal "god-consciousness".

The great modern Hindu saint Ramakrishna recorded that he meditated on a picture of the Madonna with child and was transported into a state of "samadhi", a consciousness in which the divine is all that really exists.

For that kind of spiritual experience, appeal to any god will do, in Hindu belief. "Christ-consciousness, God-consciousness, Krishna-consciousness, Buddha-consciousness – it's all the same thing," says Deepak Chopra, an Indian popularizer of Hindu philosophy for New Age Westerners. "Rather than 'Love thy neighbor', this consciousness says: 'My neighbor and I are the same being'."

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, what's the Church's teaching on what happens to our bodies after death? I've always understood that the body is re-united with the soul in heaven, but this still poses some questions. Which "version" of the body is re-united? The one where you were in your physical prime? What if the body was horribly disfigured or completely obliterated in death? Is this why the Church prohibits cremation?

A: Good questions…and they're ones which have captured people's imaginations over the centuries, right from the beginning.

First of all, the whole topic of "cremation" is not totally related to your questions. I'll answer that separately at the end.

I can best answer the other questions by quoting from "The Catechism of the Catholic Church", which I'll do shortly.

Belief in the "resurrection of the body" has been part of our tradition from earliest times. We recite those words every Sunday when we recite the "Creed": "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come…"

In addressing the particulars, the "Catechism" does it in the form of Q&A. Here's what it says in #997 to 1001:

WHAT IS "RISING"?

In death, the separation of the soul from the body,
the human body decays, and the soul goes to meet God,
while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body.
God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant
incorruptible life to our bodies by re-uniting them
with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.

WHO WILL RISE?

All the dead will rise, "those who have done good,
to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil,
to the resurrection of judgment".
(See John 5:29)

HOW?

Christ is raised with his own body: "See my hands
and my feet, that it is I myself" (Luke 24:39)…
But he did not return to an earthly life. So, in him,
"all of them will rise again with their own bodies
which they now bear"; but Christ "will change our
lowly body to be like his glorious body," into a
"spiritual body" (see Philippians 3:21 and I Corinthians 15:44).

This "HOW" exceeds our imagination and understanding;
it is accessible only to faith. Yet our participation in the Eucharist
already gives us a foretaste of Christ's transfiguration of our bodies:

Just as bread that comes from the earth, after God's
blessing has been invoked upon it, is no longer
ordinary bread, but Eucharist, formed of two things,

the one earthly and the other heavenly: so too our bodies,
which partake of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible,
but possess the hope of resurrection.
(From the book "Adversus Haereses",
by St. Irenaeus, an early Christian writer,
around AD 175)

WHEN?

Definitively "at the last day", "at the end of the world". Indeed, the resurrection of the dead is closely associated with Christ's Second Coming:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven,
with a cry of command, with the archangel's call,
and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead
in Christ will rise first (see I Thessalonians 4:16)

So, in thinking of "resurrection of the dead", the Church basically believes that the "body" which will be resurrected is not just a continuation of the physical body as it existed before death…but a NEW creation…a "spiritual body"…just as in the case of Christ after his own Resurrection.

And whatever disfigurements the original physical body had at the time of death will not be part of the "spiritual" version of the resurrected body.

It's a brand new reality.

Now…on the topic of "cremation", the Church discouraged this practice for years because it had become a symbolic custom of atheists in Europe who wanted to show that they denied any "resurrection of the body" or afterlife. And now that that particular symbolism is not connected to cremation, for the most part, the Church does permit cremation. As the "Catechism" says:

The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not
demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body (see #2301).

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

HOSPITALITY:

Okay, okay, it's not "theology" in the technical sense…

But the obligation of HOSPITALITY lies at the base of Catholicism.

And there's a long history to the concept.

Here are some thoughts for your spiritual enrichment (I hope).

A spiritual writer (Henri Nouwen) has written:

Hospitality is the creation of a space
where the stranger can enter
and become a friend instead of an enemy.

The word HOSPITALITY derives from an Latin word "hospis", which means both "guest" and "host".

And this came from the Greek concept surrounding their word "xenos" – meaning "one who receives welcome" and "one who welcomes".

Civilized people of the ancient world appreciated HOSPITALITY and felt it a sacred duty to provide for the needs of the stranger.

HOSPITALITY is the essential component of the Judeo-Christian tradition as well. The Bible consistently develops the theme of a close relationship between God and the "wanderer" or "stranger". Note the directive of Deuteronomy (10:17-19):

> For the Lord your God is the…great God,
> who accepts no bribes,
> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow
> and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him.
> So you too must befriend the alien,
> for you were once aliens yourselves
> in the land of Egypt.

And in the history of the Old Testament, God is identified as both GUEST and GRACIOUS HOST who made friends with the Israelite people when they were strangers.

The New Testament shows Jesus as both GUEST and HOST as well.

He was always solicitous for the needs of the poor, the marginalized, the sinner, Gentiles and Samaritans.

Jesus was a WAYFARER who depended on the HOSPITALITY of others, but he was also the supreme HOST, who washed the feet of his guests and broke bread for them…and to act HOSPITABLY is the criterion that Jesus laid down for all who wished to be considered righteous before God. Note this passage from Matthew's Gospel (25:40):

> …whatever you did for one of these least
> brothers of mine, you did for me.

For Jesus, "neighbor" is the same as "humanity" to the extent that the "stranger" becomes the "neighbor".

In the Early Church, the deacons were specifically mandated by the Christian community to organize the group's HOSPITALITY (see Acts 6), and as the Church grew, the monasteries and convents made HOSPITALITY one of their primary duties.

Nowadays, the Catholic Church reminds its members again and again that HOSPITALITY is the duty of each and every Catholic, and it is seen in two main contexts:

a) Mutual HOSPITALITY shared among Christians.
   HOSPITALITY is an extension of the Holy Eucharist. Christ comes to us as FOOD, and he invites humanity to the celebration of his transformation. And all who have partaken are challenged to serve others as they have been served. Worship is not authentic if love and service do not flow from it.
b) Christian HOSPITALITY extends to all peoples.
   Christian HOSPITALITY manifests the HOSPITALITY of the Kingdom of God. As both Catholic and catholic, the Church extends itself to every people and culture in order to incorporate everyone into the Lordship of Christ.

And we can begin HOSPITALITY in our own lives by

- being willing to listen to the needs of the world;

- acknowledging a preference for the poor and the stranger;
- maintaining an openness in our lives, so that people may know us
  for our humility, our kindness,
  our readiness to be with others
  and to be attentive to them.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"None of you is a believer
unless you desire for your brothers and sisters
that which you desire for yourself."

Islamic maxim (source unknown)

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that later and illuminate our time…

and YOU ARE THERE!

Hey, stay sane.
And let's pray for one another.
Be very careful out there.

Woodie