

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 9 November, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Life can get pretty serious around West Point.

Of course, the danger is that we forget to laugh.

And that's too bad because healthy laughter can be very therapeutic.

Lord of laughter,
shake me awake
and teach me to laugh at myself,
at my black-draped solemnity,
at my petty preoccupation with success-and-failure,
at my hurts and adversities,
at my many fears and terrors.

Let my laughter lure me deep
underneath the terrors without names,
underneath the questions without answers,
underneath the pain that has no relief...

Until I find within myself
the love I haven't used,
the strength I haven't spent,
the courage I haven't tapped,
the dream I haven't risked,
the beauty I haven't expressed.

Let me become the person You want me to be,
as fully as I can,
as unflinchingly as I can,
as accurately as I am able.

Let me find You in myself
so that I can find myself in You.

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

...that a prostitute once saved a pope who was a former slave and a convicted embezzler?

Strange times breed strange stories.

Her name was Marcia, and according to Hippolytus (a Church writer who lived and worked in the early 200s AD), she was the concubine of the Roman Emperor Commodus, the oddball son of the well-known Marcus Aurelius. The actor Joaquin Phoenix played the part of Commodus in the movie "Gladiator".

The pope was St. Callistus I, who was pope from 217 to 222 AD.

Callistus was supposedly an imperial household slave in Rome, who engaged in banking and was accused and convicted of embezzling money.

He was sent to the mines in Sardinia around 186 AD by the Roman authorities.

Marcia was one of Commodus' concubines, and she was also a Christian or at least had Christian sympathies.

She used her influence with the Emperor to get some Christians released from their servitude in the Sardinian mines.

Callistus was one of the lucky ones and was released around 189 AD.

He was eventually elected pope in 217 AD and spent his five years in office expanding the idea of "forgiveness" (the Early Church was VERY strict and believed for a while that ANY serious sins committed after Baptism couldn't be forgiven – Callistus was the one who brought about an effective "re-thinking" of that position).

He also recognized the Church marriages of free people with slaves, and he ruled that people who had given up their faith during times of persecution – and then repented and asked forgiveness – should be readmitted to the Church.

Callistus was martyred in 222 AD and was buried in a cemetery named after him (if you visit Rome, you can still tour the Catacomb of San Callisto).

His feast-day in the Church is 14 October.

As for Marcia, she was executed in 193 AD for playing a part in the assassination of her lover and patron, the Emperor Commodus.

Strange times breed strange stories.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, how come Protestants feel that Catholics don't know the Bible?

A: Well, that can be answered in a couple of ways.

Lots of Protestants believe that the Catholic Faith is not biblically-based.

And lots of Catholics feel a little intimidated by Protestants who have memorized lots of biblical passages and seem to know the whole book by heart.

The scenario has a history to it, and that goes back 400-or-so years to the time when Catholics and Protestants split apart.

At the time of the Reformation (1500s), there was tremendously bad feeling between the two: Catholics of the time developed a distrust about "that Protestant book", and Protestants at the time distrusted the whole Catholic idea of "sacraments".

And the bad feeling endured for hundreds of years.

However, today, many Protestants are beginning to explore the "sacramental" tradition of the Catholic Church, and many Catholics are involved in Bible study at every level.

There really isn't much basis to the accusation that Catholicism isn't biblically-based.

As the Vatican Council put it in the 1960s:

This Council urges all the Christian faithful
to learn the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ
by frequent readings of the Scriptures...because
'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'.

So, any Catholic bookstore you enter these days is well-stocked with Bibles and books about the Bible, ranging from books for beginners to books on technical scholarship. Catholic parishes and dioceses nation-wide sponsor programs in Bible study, and Catholic Bible scholars are among the best in the world.

The whole idea that Catholics don't value the Bible is a caricature from the distant past that is only believed these days by people who don't want to know any better.

Q: I recently read that when the Israelites left Egypt in the Exodus, they didn't cross the Red Sea but something called the "Sea of Reeds". I always thought it was the Red Sea. What's the difference?

A: The two bodies of water are quite different.

The Red Sea is the large body of water that separates Africa from the Arabian peninsula. In the north, it narrows to the Gulf of Suez.

For centuries, people believed that that this was the body of water crossed by the Hebrew tribes on their way out of Egypt, the same water that Moses parted and in which the Egyptians drowned. The great movie "The Ten Commandments" makes a big deal out of that scene.

But in ancient Hebrew, the body of water that the Jewish people crossed was called "yam suph" (which is translated "sea of reeds"), and this refers to a marshy area of papyrus that connects northern Egypt to the Sinai peninsula.

Another translation of the Hebrew term could be "sea of the end" (as in "extinction"), and it could be taken to mean "the water in which the Lord demonstrated his power and delivered his people from captivity".

The bottom line is that "Red Sea" was a mistranslation of the Hebrew by Greek translators long ago.

In any case, it's not unknown to have a natural phenomenon (like the wind) dry up a marshy area so it can be walked on. If you read classical Roman history, you can find the Roman general Scipio Africanus capturing New Carthage because the wind drove back the waters of the lagoon.

It's important to remember that when these stories about the Exodus were finally written down, they combined several traditions. This means that you have lots of repetition and sometimes even different versions of the same story.

So it's sometimes hard to rely on any of the early biblical books for precise "history", as we use the term.

The Bible is a book of FAITH rather than HISTORY, and this means that whether "yam suph" means "Red Sea" or "Sea of Reeds" or "Sea of the End", the reality of faith is still the same, and the lesson is still the same: God is the Deliverer, and he led his people out of Egypt.

So it's important not to get too caught up in literal translations and precise historical locations. Those aren't the point. The point is that the whole Bible is a statement about REVELATION (God's message) that elicits FAITH from the reader.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

EATING:

Yep, that's right: EATING.

You say: "What's with that? EATING isn't a theological topic".

I say: "You obviously haven't thought a lot about it".

After all, in every religion that I know of, the most sacred experience happens within the context of a meal.

Obviously, the Holy Eucharist – from the Last Supper – would be the most familiar for a Catholic.

Here's a thought or two on the REAL significance of MEALS (and I'm not talking about "grab'n' go", either):

A MEAL is a magical ritual.

Its purpose is to realize the dream of the alchemist: the universal transubstantiation of things.

It starts with the magical powers of digestion. Onions, peppers, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, bread, beef, chicken, fish, lobsters, oysters, sweets, cheese, wine, beer...

They are all different entities.

They have different names.

They have different properties.

And yet, through the alchemic operations of the body, they lose their identity. They cease to be what they were.

They are assimilated; they become like the body.

They are incorporated; they become one with the body.

A meal is the triumph of the body over the food. All differences become sameness.

But another transformation takes place when the etiquette is added to the food. Like in the sacrament, the REAL thing happens when words are added to bread

and wine.

Now the guests at the meal are TRANSFORMED.

True, they continue to be ambassadors, army officers, professors, bankers, clergymen...

But just as in a vegetable soup, many different vegetables are cooked into one single broth, so the different guests become one single soup.

They eat together, they become COMPANIONS.

This word is very suggestive. It comes from the Latin "com" (meaning "with") and "panis" (meaning "bread").

COMPANIONS are those who eat bread together.

The purpose of a meal is not the pragmatical end of nourishment and not only the pleasures of eating.

It is hoped that eating together will become an occasion of companionship, friendship.

The guests assimilate the food.

The ritual assimilates the guests...

From

"The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet"

By Rubem Alves

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"We become what we think about all day."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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

and YOU ARE THERE!

May the weekend be a good one.

Try and snag a nap or two.

But don't forget God in the process.

Cheers from me.

Woody