

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 11 May, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Well, the 7-week Season of Easter is coming to an end.

This coming Sunday is PENTECOST, the birthday of the Church, and it commemorates that event when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in Jerusalem, turning them into courageous and forthright witnesses of Jesus...whereas before, they had simply been a small group of terrified men, cowering in fear.

So they began to preach openly that Jesus had RISEN and was beyond time and space, making himself available to everyone.

The world was introduced to something brand-new.

Are we a part of it...or are we just "on-lookers"?

The following prayer outlines how we should feel (and act) as followers of Christ:

Lord,
send your gift of SPIRIT to fill me.

Touch me
with TRUTH that burns like fire,
with BEAUTY that moves me like the wind.

And SET ME FREE:

FREE to try new ways of living.
FREE to forgive myself and others.
FREE to love and laugh and sing.
FREE to lay aside my burden of security.
FREE to join the battle for justice and peace.
FREE to see and listen and wonder again
at the gracious mystery of things and persons.

FREE to be,
to give,
to receive,
to rejoice as a child of your SPIRIT.

Let me live life as it ought to be lived...
without FEAR,
without RESENTMENT,
without BLAME,
without HATRED.

Touch me with Your SPIRIT
so that I may REALLY live.

Best wishes for the month of May.
Keep in touch with God in the midst of all the suffocating busyness.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

FOR FIRSTIES:

The BACCALAUREATE MASS will be held during Grad Week on Thursday, 29 May, at 1900 at the Chapel. No tickets are required; seating is "first-come; first served". More info as it gets closer.

SUNDAY IS MOTHER'S DAY:

DON'T FORGET YOUR MOM!!!!!!!!!!

AN EASTER THOUGHT:

From the writings of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, a popular preacher of the 1940s and 1950s:

I recall the legends of two brothers,
one of whom was very good,
while the other became very wicked.
One day, the wicked brother ran home,
and the robe that he wore was spotted with blood.
He said: 'I've just killed a man.'
And his brother said: 'I'll take your robe,
and you take mine. You leave'.
Then the police came
and arrested the one who wore the bloody robe,
and he was condemned to death.
When he was dying, he sent a message to his brother.
He said: 'I'm sending you a white robe.
Remember that I die to save you.'
Now that's precisely what the Lord did for us.
He wore our robe of sin.

As the good brother took upon himself
the fate of the wicked brother,
so the Lord took upon himself
all the discord and disharmonies,
all the sins and guilt of men and women,
as if he himself were guilty.

As gold is sucked into the furnace

to have its dross burned away,
so God takes human nature and plunges it into Calvary
to have our sins burned away.

Or, to change the figure:
since sin is in the blood,
Jesus poured out his blood for our redemption,
for without the shedding of blood,
there is no remission of sin.

And then, on Easter Sunday, he rose again
with his glorified, sinless human nature.

And this becomes the first note of the new creation,
the beginning of the new symphony
which will be played again and again by the Divine
Conductor.

How are the notes added?
We are the other notes,
if – like the Virgin Mary – we really consent to be added
to that first note.

How do we become added?
We become added by Baptism
by which each of us dies to the old Adam
and are thus incorporated into the new Adam: Christ.

All these notes that are added to the first note
constitute the new body of Christ –
that which is known as his ‘mystical body’ – the Church.
That is what it means to be a Christian.

DID YOU KNOW?

GAMBLING:

(As more and more states wrestle with building gambling casinos
as a means of state-revenue, it's worthwhile to consider
a couple of points made in an article in the Catholic newspaper
“Our Sunday Visitor” back in April, 1996)

A worldwide boom in gambling – increasingly sponsored by local
governments – in raising moral concerns among officials at the Vatican.

While the Vatican has issued no official response to the question, it is said to be
watching closely the statements against gambling being made by local bishops, especially
in the USA, where gambling is a \$500 billion-a-year business (note: that was 1996; it's
much higher now).

For Swiss Dominican Father Georges Cottier, Pope John Paul II's in-house theologian, the spread of gambling is no less than a sign of a "social disease". He said: "I ask whether the morality of the casinos can be defended. I don't think it can."

There is growing unease among Vatican observers, particularly with government use of gaming as a substitute for local taxation.

Mary Ann Glendon, an American attorney and a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (note: Ms. Glendon is currently the US Ambassador to the Vatican), said that state-sponsored gambling often appears as a painless way to produce much-needed revenues. But, really, it's a "regressive tax" that hits the poor hardest.

"It's a very cheap and sort of deceptive way of getting more money into the public coffers without direct taxation, but the burden of that tax falls on those people who are least able to afford it," she said.

Statistics show that lower-income people are high-percentage participants in state lotteries. "You can sort of see why: it's this dream of hitting it big and solving all your problems," she said.

In #2413 of "The Catechism of the Catholic Church", the following observation is made:

Games of chance or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling becomes an enslavement.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Even though I have an idea about other religions, some of my peers seem to have very little knowledge of mine. I was recently discussing the topic of abortion with a fellow Catholic when I heard a remark from someone nearby that we (Catholics) are too different in our beliefs from your average "Joe Public", so much so that we (Catholics) are not even Christian. My friend and I laughed about the remark, but then we discovered that we were the only people within earshot who actually believed that Catholics were indeed Christian. This scares me a bit. Did "Christianity" begin with Martin Luther? Didn't Jesus tell Peter to start his Church? Did I miss out on a few centuries of belief? I could have sworn that Christianity survived for 1500 years because of Catholics... Catholic faith...Catholic belief...the same belief that Martin Luther drew from to start his own Church. If I was wrong in any of my statements, please tell me; but if I was right, can you please explain why these individuals didn't know I was Christian?

A: You sound a little frustrated and annoyed, and I can't say that I blame you. What you experienced is the kind of ignorance that is plainly unnecessary and inexcusable.

Nevertheless, it's a sad fact that there are indeed some people within the Christian tradition who honestly believe that if someone is a Catholic, then he or she is not Christian.

In the long run, such ignorance doesn't make a lot of difference in the cosmic order of things, but in the short run, it can be very annoying (and arrogant). But if a person chooses to believe this, there's not much you can do except to calmly explain the facts of the matter to them.

I imagine that you know the general history: Martin Luther began a process of what he believed to be a “reform of the Church” because he felt that the Church of the 1500s had grown too far away from the Church of the New Testament. Others joined him, and the process created a split among Catholics at that time. These reformers have been called “Protestants”, and they soon began to be divided, one from another, over their own interpretation of the Scriptures.

The process of “Reformation” brought about a lot of clarification of belief, but it also brought a lot of bitterness and religious hatred. Much of the hatred was based on ignorance, fear and suspicion, and in some places, these still continue.

As far as Catholics are concerned, we certainly believe ourselves to be Christian. We believe that Jesus founded the Church and commissioned the Apostles to communicate the faith to the whole world (the word “catholic” means “universal” or “whole world”, in the Greek). We believe that our interpretation of Jesus’ message faithfully reflects the revelation that Jesus came to share with the world.

As a matter of fact, that message of Jesus (this includes the Bible itself) was preserved by the Catholic Church for the many centuries that led up to the “Reformation”, and that would make the Catholic Church the “mother Church” from which subsequent Christian traditions sprang.

Those who do not believe we are Christian generally criticize the Church because they don’t think we are faithful to the Scriptures. On the other hand, we believe that we are indeed faithful to the Scriptures. As I mentioned above, it was the Catholic Church that compiled the ancient sacred books of the Jewish and early Christian traditions into what we now call “The Bible”.

I have no problem with honest people who have honest disagreements over important topics. I believe that human beings will always face situations like that.

My problem is with people who automatically assume that unless everyone believes as they do, then everyone else is dead-wrong. To my way of thinking, this attitude is not a “religious” attitude at all; it’s basically a personality problem. I believe that people who live in a world where they fear and suspect anyone who is different from them are basically insecure and unsure of their own position.

So don’t allow “attitudes” to unsettle you.

As St. Peter said: “Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have an answer ready for people who ask you the reason for your hope...but give it with courtesy and respect...” (I Peter 3:15-16).

Besides, what does it really matter what people think?

Our work as disciples of Jesus is to be accountable to God and to God alone.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

ABSOLUTE EVIL:

Is there any human act which is always and absolutely wrong?

Or does the rightness and wrongness of every human act depend upon circumstances, the doer’s intention or any mitigating circumstances whatever?

The question is a good one and brings up a very common discussion: do good and evil depend on “relative” realities – realities which can change the nature of an action – making a given action good, neutral or evil, depending on the circumstances?

For the Roman Catholic tradition, the answer is pretty straightforward:
There are acts which...are always seriously wrong.

Pope John Paul II
“Veritatis splendor”,#80

The statement of the Pope repeats the Church’s view that there are indeed human acts which are always evil, no matter what the circumstances might be which surround these acts. And the acts in question are always evil because they radically contradict the good of the person made in the image of God.

For example, some moralists have developed theories which excuse people completely from being responsible for their actions.

The Church would say that this is a dangerous view because leads to an attitude which makes everything “relative”.

In a document from the 2nd Vatican Council (1960s), the Church provides a partial list of actions which must always be considered evil. This list includes the following:

- murder
- abortion
- euthanasia
- genocide
- mental or physical torture
- rape
- causing people to live in subhuman living conditions
- arbitrary imprisonment
- slavery
- prostitution
- trafficking in women or children, and
- maintaining degrading working conditions
that treat laborers as mere instruments of
profit.

There are those who say that these are not always absolutely wrong.

But the Church looks at it from a different perspective. For example, if someone believed that rape was right, that wouldn’t justify it. Even if society as a whole approved rape, that still wouldn’t justify it. The Church would teach that rape – or any of the acts on the above list – is always intrinsically evil; it is wrong in every age, place and circumstance. Circumstances cannot change the nature of the act itself.

True, “circumstances” might alter the guilt of the doer. A person who was mentally incompetent would not incur the same guilt before God as would someone who performed such an action with sufficient reflection and knowledge.

But that doesn’t alter the fact that the action itself is evil, and no circumstance can make it otherwise.

This view is based on the Church’s understanding of what is truly the moral teaching of Jesus and what is basic to human nature, as understood by the Natural Law.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“Wrong is wrong,
even if everybody is doing it;

and right is right,
even if nobody is doing it.”

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
(d. 1979)

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!

Best wishes as the pressure grows;
and don't forget to pray (it's a
“pressure-release”).
Know that you're in my prayers.
Woodie