

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 27 April, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

There was no CHURCH STUFF last week because I was on Leave most of the time. I needed to get away for a while...because I didn't get away during Spring Break. And now we're on the final slide to Graduation and the summer...and things are busy. But hopefully, they aren't so busy that we can't devote a moment or two to prayer. How about this one?

Patient God!

This day teeters on the edge of waiting,
and things seem to slip away from me –
as though everything were only memory –
and memory is capricious.

Help me not to let my life slip away from me.

O God, I hold up my life to You now,
as much as I can,
as high as I can
in this mysterious reach called "prayer".
Come close, lest I wobble and fall short.

It is not days or years I seek from You,
no infinity or enormity,
but small things and moments and awareness,
awareness that You are in what I am
and in what I have been indifferent to.

It is not new time I seek,
but new eyes and new heart...
and You.

May you find some time to be NEW in this busy "end of the year" season.

A THOUGHT FOR EASTER:

THE SUBVERSIVE RISEN CHRIST

Jesus is now among us in a new way,
the Christ who is everywhere,
beyond all limits of time and space.

On Good Friday, we saw the relationship of all humanity to God:
we kill what we should love.

We're afraid of the gift that would free us.
On Easter Sunday, we celebrate Jesus coming back
into a world that rejected him.

If you've ever been rejected, you know how unlikely it is
to come back into the midst of those who have said:
we do not want you.

Yet that's the eternal mystery we celebrate:
God is always coming back into a world
that for some unbelievable reason
does not want God.

It's almost impossible to believe that could be true.
And yet, Jesus – in his humility – finds ways to come back.

Jesus knows that the first time,
we didn't like what he had to say.
We weren't ready for that much freedom or that much truth.
Humankind can't bear that much reality or that much love
in one moment of history.

So God had to come back in a disguised form.
God had to come back, as it were, secretly,
as a subversive,
hidden...
the Risen Christ.

Now he can be everywhere, but we can't capture him.
We can't name him too precisely.
He can always break through in new and unexpected ways.

That's the Risen Christ the world is never ready for
and never expects...
and sadly, does not even want.
That's the Christ who energizes his Church,
the Christ forever beyond our control.

DID YOU KNOW?

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE INTERNET:

Recent reports have tracked a new ADDICTION in a society already overwhelmed
with addiction: HOOKED ON THE INTERNET.

It seems that people have become lost in CYBERSPACE, spending days and nights
sitting at a blinking terminal, engaged in endless electronic chatter, wandering from
website to website in search of what they are no longer certain. America seems incapable
of doing anything in moderation. The Internet cannot simply be a new tool for facilitating
research and communication. It has to become an all-encompassing "revolution", or we
want nothing to do with it.

Of course, most of us manage to keep some kind of an even keel in facing the new technology. We don't all become ADDICTS, and we don't all become Unabombers...

The Church responds to this technological "revolution" with a certain degree of studied indifference, at least in the theological sense. Mankind's creations are not judged IN THEMSELVES but in what mankind does with them.

The INTERNET is not blessed or sinful in itself. The good – or the evil – that the INTERNET can accomplish will be determined by how it is used or abused.

A more realistic concern is that the INTERNET will be just another dominating "noise" in lives already filled with a jumble of distractions. Writing in a past issue of the magazine COMMONWEAL, John Garvey noted:

I am not opposed to the technology of the Internet...what's wrong is us...with our need for distraction and our unwillingness to encounter silence or stillness. Our fear may be a fear that silence will show us to be empty...and this says more about us than any of the ways we choose to distract ourselves.

...In contemporary society, the argument might be made that men and women are constantly searching for distractions, particularly noise to drown out the SILENCE. All the various accoutrements of technological modernism are centered on the creation of noise: phones, radios, CDs, television, videos. The INTERNET seems to be just more noise contributing to the technological cacophony.

We need time for SILENCE. The examined life cannot take place within the noise that dominates our society. Contemporary society seems to fear SILENCE more than death itself.

As Garvey notes, there seems to be a fear that in SILENCE, what will be encountered is the emptiness of lives with many little gods, but no GOD. The clutter that surrounds us distracts us from that Truth.

(Excerpted from the newspaper
"Our Sunday Visitor",
12 May, 1996)

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, can Roman Catholics truly be called "biblical" Christians? After all, they seem to rely more on "tradition" than on the Scriptures.

A: This is a question that often comes from fundamentalist Christians who rely on their own "personal" ability to interpret the Scriptures.

And the answer is YES; Roman Catholics can certainly be considered "biblical" Christians.

Having said that, however, some explanation is in order, because Catholics don't approach the Bible in quite the same way as some other traditions of Christianity do.

Roman Catholics consider the Bible to be the inspired and revealed word of God. The information found in the Bible was compiled from the traditions of Judaism (Old

Testament) and from the preaching of the Apostles and the communities they founded in the Apostolic Age (New Testament). It didn't just "drop out of the sky" from God.

The Bible doesn't exist in a vacuum, and the Catholic understanding of it is that it's not meant to be only a "personal" document, subject to the interpretation of each individual believer.

Much of the Protestant understanding of the Scriptures centered around the belief that humans can interpret the Bible through the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They saw no need for a role for any priest or church-body to be finally involved in the process. The "personal" interpretation was the "last word".

But Catholics see this as an invitation to chaos.

Catholics believe that the Church that gave birth to the New Testament and recognized the importance of the Jewish books of the Old Testament. The Church gathered the books into one single volume (the Bible) and decided which of the documents of those early ages actually contained the message of our salvation.

It was the Catholic Church – through the direction of the Holy Spirit – that created the Bible as we know it...through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So, for a Christian to rely exclusively on his or her "personal" interpretation of Scripture actually misses a very important facet of God's revelation.

Catholics believe that the Bible is a gift of God to his Church and that the Bible finds it home within the Church. So Catholics look to the Church for the "big picture" of the Bible's significance. This is what forms the TRADITION of the Church, and for a Catholic, this is a crucial part of the whole scheme of "revelation". TRADITION is not something separate from the Bible; on the contrary, TRADITION is built on the Church's interpretation of the Bible over the ages.

Catholics look to what Jesus said to the Apostles in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go out to all the nations, and
baptize them...teach them to observe
all that I have taught you. And know
that I am with you all days, even to
the end of the age.

We Catholics take this as Jesus' promise that he would indeed be present in the Church as a whole to preserve it from error in its interpretations and to keep our teachings free from deviations from his Spirit.

So, for a Catholic, the Church stands as God's instrument in interpreting what salvation means, and the Church both gets its information from the Bible and interprets it. We believe that the Holy Spirit has operated in the Church in this way since the beginning.

Catholics do not believe in "rugged individualism" when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. Instead, we interpret the message of Christ to mean that the truth of his message can best be expressed within the LIVING COMMUNITY OF FAITH, which is the Church...and all "personal" interpretations need to be compared with and judged by the living interpretation of the Church throughout the ages (TRADITION).

Thus, Catholics are indeed "biblical" Christians, but we believe in the need to operate within the framework of a LIVING COMMUNITY OF FAITH – the Church – which serves as the interpreter of salvation and of God's revelation to human beings.

And this is what TRADITION means: the accumulation of biblical interpretation over the centuries, guided by the promise of Christ to be with us all days, even to the end of the age.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

THE “HAIL, MARY”:

At first glance, this might not seem like “theology” in the technical sense, but this brief prayer does indeed provide some thoughts on the fact that Mary of Nazareth has played a big role in Church belief from earliest times.

The prayer itself is sometimes called “The Angelic Salutation” – from the fact that the first part of it is the greeting of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, as recorded in the first part of Luke’s Gospel:

Hail, Mary, full of grace;
the Lord is with you.

Luke 1:28

And the next line is taken from roughly the same place. After she agrees to be the mother of Jesus, Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist), who says to her:

Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Luke 1:42

One can find indications that these two sentences were combined as one prayer as early as the 6th century. A final sentence was sometimes added:

Because you have conceived Christ,
the Redeemer of our souls.

Several ancient rituals – the “Liturgy of St. James” (celebrated in Antioch), the “Liturgy of St. Mark” (from Alexandria in Egypt), the “Ethiopic of the Twelve Apostles” (source of early Christian worship in Ethiopia) contain this prayer in honor of Mary. So does the “Ritual of Severus of Antioch”, who died in AD 538.

So it seems clear that the Early Church valued these Scriptural words and used them to honor Mary as Mother of Christ.

The prayer is also found in liturgical books from Rome in the 600s and was used at several times during the liturgical year: the Feast of the Annunciation in March, for example, and parts of Advent right before Christmas.

Even though it was found consistently in those liturgies of the early centuries, it didn’t become a household prayer until the 11th century. It was at that time that local churches in Europe incorporated it into popular devotion. In 1198, for example, Bishop Odo of Siliac prescribed that new members of the Church learn the “Hail, Mary”, along with the “Our Father” and the Creed by heart.

The second part of the prayer appeared much later. Since the first part (above) is really two simple salutations, it was felt that there should be an actual petition. So by the 1400s and 1500s, the familiar second part was added:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“True glory consists
in doing what deserves to be written,
in writing what deserves to be read,
and in so living as to make the world
happier and better for our living in it.”

Pliny

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!

Hope you'll all withstand
the pressures of the next several weeks.
Know that you're in my prayers.
And let me know if I can ever be of help
in any way.

Woodie