

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 18 May, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

As we come to the end of the Academic Year, everyone's thoughts turn to the approaching exams.

Perhaps you're worried and anxious.

Perhaps the exams frighten you.

Perhaps it all seems bigger than you can handle.

If so, perhaps you need to pray:

O Creator God!

Let the light of Your splendor
brighten the darkness of my mind.

Make my tongue speak wise things.

Give me keenness of comprehension,
ability to retain,
method and ease of acquiring,
precision in interpreting,
plentiful grace in speaking.

Inspire my testing
and keep me calm
in the face of what I don't understand.

I commend all my work to Your care
now and always.

Amen.

May you all have every success in this exam period; may God give you excellent recall and skill in making sense of what you've studied.

And may He keep you calm and recollected.

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.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE MUSLIM VISION OF JESUS:

(Taken from "Newsweek", 27 March of 2000)

At the onset of Ramadan, two years ago, Vatican officials sent greetings to the world's Muslims (Note: the Vatican send greetings every year at Ramadan), inviting them to reflect on Jesus as a "model and permanent message for humanity". But for Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad is the perfect model for humankind, and in the Qur'an (in Arabic only), they believe the very Word of God dwells among us.

Even so, Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet and revere him as Isa ibn Maryam – Jesus, the son of Mary (Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an). At a time when many Christians deny Jesus' birth to a virgin, Muslims find the story in the Qur'an and affirm that it is true. "It's a very strange situation, where Muslims are defending the miraculous birth of Jesus against Western deniers," says Seyyed Hossein Nasr, professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University. "Many Westerners also do not believe that Jesus ascended to heaven. Muslims do." Indeed, many Muslims think of themselves as Christ's true followers.

What Muslims believe about Jesus comes from the Qur'an, not the New Testament (which they consider tainted by human error). They also draw upon their own oral traditions, called "hadith", and on experts' commentaries. In these sources, Jesus is born of Mary under a palm tree by a direct act of God. From the cradle, the infant Jesus announces that he is God's prophet, though not God's son, since Allah is "above having a son", according to the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, the Muslim Jesus enjoys unique spiritual prerogatives that other prophets, including Muhammad, lack. Only Jesus and his mother were born untouched by Satan. Even Muhammad had to be purified by angels before receiving prophethood. Again, in the Qur'an, Muhammad is not presented as a miracle-worker, but Jesus miraculously heals the blind, cures lepers and "brings forth the dead by (Allah's) leave".

In this way, Jesus manifests himself as the Messiah (or "the anointed one"). Muslims are not supposed to pray to anyone but Allah. But in popular devotions, many ask Jesus or Mary or John the Baptist for favors. (According to one recent estimate, visions of Jesus or Mary have occurred 70 times in Muslim countries since 1985).

Although Muhammad supercedes Jesus as the last and greatest of the prophets, he still must die. But in the Qur'an, Jesus does not die, nor is he resurrected. Muslims believe that Jesus asked God to save him from crucifixion, as the Gospels record, and that God answered his prayer by taking him directly up to heaven. "God would not allow one of his prophets to be killed," says Martin Palmer, Director of the International Consultancy in Manchester, England. "If Jesus had been crucified, it would have meant that God had failed his prophet."

When the end of the world approaches, Muslims believe that Jesus will descend to defeat the antichrist...and also, to set the record straight, his presence will prove that the crucifixion was a myth and eventually he will die a natural death. "Jesus will return as a Muslim," says Nasr, "in the sense that he will unite all believers in total submission to the One God."

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...everyone who will be taking exams this coming week.

...anyone in the Corps who is carrying a heavy burden of worry and concern.

...all our military brothers and sisters – and their families – throughout the world.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, the older interpretation of Sunday as “The Lord’s Day” used to use the word “servile” in describing the kind of work that should be avoided on Sundays. What did that word mean?

A: The word “servile” means “having to do with a slave”.

In using that word, the Church was attempting to make sure that in the early days, slaves and menial workers in the ancient Roman Empire had some relief – at least once a week – from the back-breaking work that was their daily lot. Sundays became days of rest, designed by the Creator not only for worship, but for human recuperation.

As the Church organized itself and formed its own code of law (Canon Law), the word was kept. Prohibiting “servile” work on Sundays was the Church’s way of trying to make sure that Catholics not only worshiped on Sundays but also preserved Sundays as different from ordinary “work days”.

The point was to try and increase appreciation that Sundays were “Resurrection” days and that they should be filled with the worship of God and also relaxation of mind and body.

The current Canon Law doesn’t use the word “servile” anymore, but the emphasis is still the same:

On Sundays and other holydays of obligation,
the faithful are obliged to assist at Mass.

They are also obliged to abstain from such work
or business that would inhibit the worship

to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord’s Day,
or the due relaxation of mind and body.

In commenting on the observance of Sunday, the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” says that Sunday is consecrated to Christian piety, good works and humble service to the sick and elderly. It urges Christians to devote time and care on Sundays to their families and relatives and to use the day for reflection and meditation (which furthers the growth of the interior life).

The “Catechism” also acknowledges that traditional activities like sports and dining-out requires some people to work, something which is also true for public and social services and necessities. But everyone should set aside some time for leisure and worship, and employers should be respectful of their employees.

The emphasis of the law is based on the fact that everyone should use the day for prayer, leisure and family, rather than for that kind of work which is “dehumanizing” (or “servile”). People should not engage in the kind or amount of labor that destroys the spirit of the day and makes for “business as usual”.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

DEIFICATION:

You probably don't use this word in everyday speech.

Perhaps you've never even heard of it.

If so, that's too bad because it's a concept that sums up the spiritual thrust of Early Christianity, and it's central to the Christian mystery.

It's pronounced "dee-if-i-cay-shun", with the accent on the "cay".

Comes from the Latin word "deus", meaning "God".

Sometimes it's called "divinization".

And it's found very prominently in the Eastern tradition of Christianity (Greek, Russian, etc.).

It refers to the belief that men and women – because they've been redeemed by God's grace – are actually involved in a process whereby they're elevated to share the life of God...or, in other words, DIVINIZED.

You might remember St. Paul's observation:

I have been crucified with Christ;
yet I live, no longer I,
but Christ lives in me.

Insofar as I live in the flesh,

I live by faith in the Son of God

who has loved me and given himself up for me.

Galatians 2:19-20

Or you might have read St. Peter's thought, when he speaks of believers as ...sharers of the divine nature.

II Peter 1:4

And St. John, too, observed:

Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we shall be has not yet been revealed.
We do know that when it is revealed,
we shall be like him,
for we shall see him as he is.

I John 3:2

In short, by our faith, we humans actually participate in the divine reality.

The idea appealed to early Christian writers, and as early as the 100s AD, the writer Irenaeus commented on the idea:

...if the Word of God has been made human,
it is so that human beings may be made gods.

Later on, other writers, notably St. Augustine in the 400s, put it more simply:

God became man

so that man could become God.

What it seems to have meant to them can be found in the creation-story of Genesis, where God says:

Let us make man in our own likeness,
after our own image...

Genesis 1:26

As humans who have been redeemed by grace, we actually are united in an intimate way with the energies of God, so much so that we are literally transformed into heavenly realities...and are restored to the original "image" that God had in mind at creation but which was lost through the sin of Adam.

The early writers didn't believe that we humans could enter into God's actual ESSENCE, which is mysterious and inaccessible...but they did believe that by faith, we could become a part of God's energies...and thus be elevated to a new level of life.

And this is what "salvation" means: by practicing our faith and growing more and more intimate with God through Jesus, we mortals are incorporated into the energies of God as He brings His Kingdom into its fulness.

True religion, then is a PROCESS; not a single moment, but a unity of many moments...in which we are identified, step by step, more and more, with God through grace, which is poured out freely on each believer.

It is a process of RETURN to the God from Whom we originally came.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"We do not see things as THEY are;
we see things as WE are."

The Talmud

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 you start the exams.
Stay calm and collected...
and know that you'll be in my prayers.
Woodie