

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 19 October, 2008

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Lately, I've heard a lot of stories about personal suffering, ugly and depressing stories.

Don't know why, but sometimes these types of things all seem to happen at once.

Perhaps there's been a full moon.

In any case, it's beneficial to think about suffering once in a while and to pray about it...because try as you might, you can't escape from it in this life.

O God of power and life!

I come before You as a simple human being...

and I often suffer, sometimes more than I want to admit.

Do not allow my suffering to make me bitter...or cynical.

Instead, may it make me more human,

more able to understand others,

more approachable,

more gentle with people.

May I understand that I am called to serve others,

not to lord it over them,

not to dominate them.

Let me become Jesus for someone today.

Let my own suffering be one with his...

That together, we may change someone's life.

May God bless your weekend.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST

We will be having the annual Fall CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST on Tuesday, 28 October, at the West Point Club at 0615. More details to follow next week.

DID YOU KNOW?

OCTOBER:

4TH October was the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

He's the patron of Quartermaster Corps and also of prisoners-of-war.

And as long as we're on the topic of OCTOBER...

Catholics have generally considered October as the "Month of the Holy Rosary. This is because it was in October of 1571 that the Christian forces of Europe won an important

naval battle against the Muslim Turks at Lepanto Strait (near western Greece). The pope at the time had called on Catholics to pray the Rosary, and the Christian victory was seen as an answer to the prayers.

It wasn't long afterward that October was designated as the "Month of the Holy Rosary".

Not everyone uses the Rosary as his or her favorite form of prayer, but if you do, you might like to understand its history a little more. I thought I'd provide a brief history of the custom.

Early in the Church's history, the monks and desert hermits used to recite the Psalms as their daily prayer. Some of the early writings testify to the fact that certain of the "Desert Fathers" would recite every one of the Bible's 150 psalms as part of their daily schedule of "pray and work".

Not only would they recite the psalms, but they would apply the theme of each psalm to the life of Christ or the Virgin Mary. For example, Jesus uttered a line from Psalm 22 as he was dying on the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), so as the monks would recite that particular psalm, they would focus their minds on the death of Jesus. Each psalm came to have a specific theme that was applied to Christ's or Mary's life as described in the Scriptures.

Later on, the psalms were arranged in such a form that all 150 of them would be recited each week (rather than daily) by communities of monks and nuns...and the themes remained constant.

Anyway, the question was soon asked: "What about people who can't read?"

So they came up with a solution: people who couldn't read but who wanted to pray with the monks could recite one "Our Father" for each psalm and meditate on the particular theme. Those who did this used beads to keep track of the repetitions, and they meditated on the Scriptural themes as they recited the prayers.

By the 12th century, the "Hail, Mary" was substituted for the "Lord's Prayer" in some areas of the Church, and the 150 repetitions were grouped in sections of 10 (decades). The themes (called "Mysteries") were continued so that the person reciting the prayers had something to meditate on, and these "mysteries" were nothing more than the old psalm-themes from the time of the monks and hermits.

The popular preacher St. Dominic (d. 1221) popularized this type of prayer (because at the time, most people couldn't read) through his preaching.

So the Rosary is supposed to be a prayer-form that combines vocal-prayer and mental-prayer. The recitation of the prayers is a "cover" for a deeper meditation on the "mysteries" of the lives of Jesus and Mary.

People sometimes criticize the Rosary because of the repetitiveness of the vocal prayers, but many of the world's religious traditions have a tradition of repetitive vocal prayer which is supposed to lead to deep meditation. The thought is simple: as the body creates a predictable rhythm of sound, the mind can leave the physical world behind and rise into the reality of another plane.

The words become almost unimportant as the spirit enters the world of "mystery".

Some people criticize the Rosary because they object to "praying to Mary", but this is just plain ignorance. The Catholic Church has never believed that Mary is to be worshipped. As Pope Paul VI wrote in 1974:

The ultimate purpose of devotion to the Blessed Virgin

is to glorify God and lead Christians to commit themselves to a life which conforms absolutely to his will...

Mary conformed her life to the will of the Father, and we honor her for that.

And as we sometimes draw our own strength from that of any close friend, we draw spiritual strength from her who was chosen to be the Mother of Jesus.

The Eastern Church (Catholic and Orthodox, both) has its own form of the Rosary, but instead of using the "Our Father" and the "Hail, Mary" they simply repeat what is called "The Jesus Prayer":

Lord Jesus, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

But whatever prayer is used, the thought is the same: to rise out of daily life for just a bit and "to rest in the Lord".

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, you may have answered this at some other point, but I was wondering if you could give a brief sketch of the Catholic Church's stance on evolution.

A: Sure.

Keep in mind that it's very easy to look on the whole topic of evolution very simplistically. You can see the battles that have gone on in the field of education over the last 100 years between the "creationists" and the "evolutionists".

The "creationists" have been those who hold a very fundamentalist – or literal – view of the Bible. They generally believe that several thousand years ago, God created the world with all its general forms much as we see them today.

On the other hand, the "evolutionists" – and Charles Darwin is always the big name here – believe that the process of "creation" is actually a continuing process of life-forms evolving from one state to another. These people don't hold much with the literal interpretation of the Bible.

And the conclusion has traditionally been that "creationism" and "evolution" are two competing theories.

This is the "popular" interpretation.

But in 1950, Pope Pius XII stated that belief in the evolutionary origin of the human body does not conflict with the Catholic Faith as long as it does not deny "that souls are immediately created by God".

In a way, he was echoing St. Augustine, 1500 years earlier, who argued, in a curious phrase, that all natural kinds of things were created by God in the first moment of time but that they made their appearance only GRADUALLY.

The late Pope John Paul II wrote extensively about the topic. Basically, his conclusions are:

- a) The Bible teaches in figurative language that the universe was created and is kept in existence by the absolute and incomprehensible God; but
- b) The Bible does NOT give a scientific account of HOW this happened or for how long the process has been going on.

He spoke not of one "theory" of evolution but of different "theories" of evolution, reminding us that there are several different ways of looking at the picture of physical and material development.

For a Catholic, then, it becomes a matter of allowing science to do its job and analyze the material universe and all its developments. In the Catholic view, belief in an evolutionary process is not contrary to the Bible (unless you happen to be a literalist) because God can create through evolution just as easily as by any other method.

But Catholics also recognize a unique “spiritual” reality within human beings that cannot be analyzed scientifically. You can use the word “soul” for this reality if you like.

And this unique spiritual side of human life makes “human” life different from any other kind of life.

This is not an area to which the different “theories” of evolution apply.

Since it is outside time and space, it is not subject to the “laws” of science, nor is it subject to analysis or scientific experimentation.

So Catholics walk the middle line between the extremes, understanding that God can create in any way at all, that the Bible is NOT supposed to be a “science book” and that scientists have a legitimate and God-given responsibility to search for truth by their scientific methods.

At the same time, we insist that there’s an area where science has no expertise: the area of “spiritual” reality. And it’s the “spiritual” reality that we keep separate from the different theories of physical evolution.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

POLITICAL THEOLOGY:

Bring this topic up in some circles, and you’ll have a fight on your hands. It’s a topic that raises a lot of emotions.

The term has been used since the 1960s, and it can be defined in this way:

An effort to apply the values of the Scriptures
to political realities and societies.

The trouble begins when you look at the abuses throughout the centuries, and these abuses usually begin when either politics or theology attempts to use the other for its own purposes.

A good example would be the “Imperial Cult” of ancient Rome. In that setting, different oaths were required of different levels of society, but everyone had to make formal sacrifice to the “genius” of Caesar. This wasn’t a real religion but an attempt to test political loyalty. The early Christians were suspect not because they practiced a different religion (indeed, many different religions were tolerated by the Roman government) but because they were suspected of treason when they refused to worship the Emperor.

Again, in the 4th century, Constantine made the Christian religion legal (AD 313), and Theodosius made it the “state” religion (AD 380 or so). Once again, they didn’t make these moves so much because of religious conviction but because they figured that such moves would bring unity to the Empire.

Again, the Nazis presented Hitler not simply as a political figure but more as a “messianic” figure. Prayers in schools were not “for” Hitler; they were directed “to” Hitler. This devotion was required in support of the political process.

So, POLITICAL THEOLOGY has not had a particularly appealing history: either religion has used politics for its own ends, or politics has made religion into a tool to

achieve political goals. Nowadays, people are wary of the new Religious/Political Right in the USA, which many view as a religious movement that uses politics for its own ends.

So, the question remains: Should religion and politics mix?

Before an answer can be given, two things have to be remembered:

- a) If religion withdraws from the political process, then politics has one less critic. This would mean that religion would be expected to agree with everything about the political process. In effect, religion would have to “keep its mouth shut”.
- b) If religion is merely a “personal” or “private” entity in people’s lives, then what does this mean about social relationships and responsibilities...like racial issues, sexual issues, etc.? Don’t the Scriptures urge us to champion justice and mercy, not only privately but as a society?

So, it’s a complicated question, and the answers aren’t easy to arrive at.

Today, POLITICAL THEOLOGY needs to avoid the mistakes of the past and at the same time remain faithful to the biblical injunction to build a world of justice and mercy for all peoples WITHOUT sinking into the extreme practices of extreme people.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“The highest privilege there is,
is the privilege of being allowed
to share each other’s pain.”

Fr. Andrew, SDC

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!!

Hang in there...and watch your backs.
You’re always in my prayers.

Wood out!