

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 1 February, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

This time of year can seem especially long...almost as if it's never going to end.

Seems like the vacation times...like Christmas Break ...fly right by, but the rest just drags.

We're really "victims of time", and it often seems as if there's no escape.

The only option for us Catholic Christians is to commend the present to God and to learn – patiently – to trust His designs.

After all, God's time isn't our time, and that's a hard lesson to learn:

Patient God!

This day teeters on the edge of waiting,
and things seem to slip away from me –
as though everything was 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,
not infinity and 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,
but new eyes and new heart I seek...
and You.

May God keep you safe and sane in the next week.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST
will be held next Wednesday, 4 February, at the West
Point Club at 0600. You can get tickets from any
Chaplain; they're free (but you need one).

CANDLEMAS DINNER

Every year around this time, the Chaplain's Office hosts a dinner at Ike Hall for catholic Cadets. Nothing formal...just a chance to get together for a change of pace. This year's dinner will be next Friday (6 February) at 1815.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

If you'd like to join the Knights, there will be a 1st Degree this coming Tuesday, 3 February, at 1900 at the Chapel. All catholic men are welcome to join.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE DAYS OF THE WEEK:

I'm guessing that you never think very much about the days of the week (except when you're counting the days until the weekend arrives).

Perhaps I'm misjudging.

Still, it doesn't seem like much of a hot topic.

And that's unfortunate...because it's quite possible to look at them as part of a religious setting.

And the reason for that is that they came from a religious setting, and, in many cases, they still preserve a religious significance.

The "week of 7 days" originated among the Semitic folk of the Middle East, and it was based on a logical subdivision of the 28-day lunar month. In portraying God as Creator in Genesis 1, it's presumed that everyone who heard or read the story would understand the "7-day week".

This '7-day week' entered the Greek culture, where the days were named after the sun, the moon and the 5 planets visible to the naked eye. These heavenly bodies were presumed to have special powers and were honored as deities.

When the Germanic peoples gained their influence within the Roman culture, they renamed several of the days after their own gods, and the names we use today are a combination of Greek/Roman and Germanic religions:

Sunday – day of the sun;
Monday – day of the moon;
Tuesday – Tiw's day (Germanic god of war);
Wednesday – Woden's day (Germanic high-god);
Thursday – Thor's day (Germanic high-god);
Friday – Frigg's day (Germanic goddess of love);
Saturday – Saturn's day.

The early Christians emphasized only the first day of the week, the Lord's Day (or Sunday). It was not the Sabbath of the Jews (which was Saturday), but it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.

On Sundays, these believers held an elaborate ritual of Scripture-reading, prayer, hymns and the Eucharistic Memorial of bread and cup.

Wednesdays and Fridays also came to be considered special: Wednesday was supposedly the day on which Judas betrayed Christ (the Wednesday of Holy Week is still called “Spy Wednesday”), and Friday, of course, was the day of Jesus’ death. By the end of the 1st century, both days came to be days of fasting (or “station-days” – “station” was a Roman military term for “keeping watch”).

Some scholars feel that the early Christian practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays developed in opposition to the Jewish custom of fasting on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

This tradition of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays continued for several hundred years and eventually became part of the Lenten observance.

Christian religious traditions associated with weekdays revolved around three activities:

- a) PRAYER (privately or with other believers) in the primitive “house-churches” of ancient times;
- b) FASTING; and
- c) DAILY MASS (with seasonal themes or celebrations of the lives of the martyrs).

Thus it was that the early believers sanctified even “time” itself and kept the Mystery alive in the everyday affairs of daily life.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, my roommate and I were discussing Baptism and what it means and why we have it. He is concerned about why there has to be an act of Baptism and why we just can’t say that a person is baptized. I was wondering if you could answer this and also explain the significance of Baptism in general.

A: Good question...but one which requires a long answer.

I’ll try and make it concise without subtracting from its completeness.

The significance of Baptism for the Christian can best be expressed if I quote a passage from a 4th-century Christian preacher about it:

Baptism is God’s most most beautiful and magnificent gift...

We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal and most precious gift. It is called GIFT, because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; GRACE, since it is given even to the guilty; BAPTISM, because sin is buried in the water; ANOINTING, because it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; ENLIGHTENMENT, because it radiates light; CLOTHING, because it veils our shame; BATH, because it washes; and SEAL, because it is our guard and the sign of God’s Lordship.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Oratio 40:3-4

As I said, St. Gregory lived in the 4th century, and it's apparent that by that time, the Sacrament occupied a pretty central role in the initiation of people into the Christian faith.

And that's how the Church has always looked at Baptism: as a Ritual of Initiation.

It begins with a JOURNEY of faith, and for most Catholics, that JOURNEY begins at birth.

The Catholic tradition has considered infant-baptism to be a necessary procedure because it surrounds a child with a family of faith right from the beginning...and after all, the development of a personal faith is not only a personal matter; it involves the community of believers. As the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (#1253) puts it:

Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe.

The faith required for baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop.

So Baptism is not a private matter. It initiates the one being baptized, and it also involves the Christian community in the responsibility of passing on the Faith.

It begins the initiation that is completed by Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist, and all of these are done within the community of believers. Indeed, our belief is that this Sacrament incorporates us into the whole Body of Christ.

We believe that the general effects of Baptism can be summarized as follows:

- a) purification from sins; and
- b) rebirth in the Holy Spirit.

And the water used in Baptism is symbolic of these effects. Water purifies and cleanses; it also regenerates and gives rebirth.

So through the power of God, the water brings about what it symbolizes.

Now, about the other question you asked...or rather, your friend asked: Why there has to be an act of Baptism and why can't we just say that a person is baptized.

I interpret the question to mean: why does there have to be a visible ceremony; why can't a person simply convert in the privacy of his or her heart.

And the answer is not complicated. Jesus put it this way:

No one can enter the Kingdom of God
without being born of water and the Spirit.

John 3:5

And from the beginning, the Apostles baptized publicly with water, the early Christians continued the practice, and generation after generation of Christians have done it that way ever since.

Certainly Baptism is accomplished in the privacy of the human heart by conversion, but it has always involved the use of water, the words and the public act of the profession of faith. It is an event of the whole community of believers because the faith of Christ is not just an individual phenomenon. It's a community phenomenon. That's what "church" means to us Catholics: we're all connected.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“Great FAITH is not the FAITH
that always walks in the light
and knows no darkness...
but the FAITH that perseveres
in spite of God’s seeming silences.”

Fr. Andrew, SDC
“Meditations for Every Day”

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 to the Yearlings as you celebrate
YOUR weekend; hope it’s a good one.
You’re all in my prayers.

Woodie