

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 1 March, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

LENT always brings up the question: what can I do to make this season a success.

May I suggest that you consider working on your power of SPEECH.

In the New Testament, St. James says:

Among all the parts of the body,
the tongue is a whole wicked world in itself...

We use it to bless the Lord and Father,
but we also use it to curse men
who are made in God's image.

The blessing and the curse come out of the same mouth.

James 3: 6 and 9

Who among us is totally perfect in the power of SPEECH?

No one.

And that's my point.

Wouldn't it be great if we could each follow the advice of Sirach in the Old Testament:

Never repeat what you are told...

Whether to friend or foe, do not talk about it.

Have you heard something? Let it die with you...

A wise man will keep quiet until the right moment...

The man who talks too much will get himself disliked.

Sirach, portions of Chapters 19 and 20

So my wish for you is that you have a GREAT Lent!

Better than that, however...may you have a QUIET Lent!!

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

A CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST
will be held at the West Point Club on Tuesday,
3 March, at 0615. Donation is \$2.00, if possible.
Sign up with your Company Catholic Rep.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

This traditional Lenten devotion will be held each
Friday of Lent at 1700. It will be followed by a
simple supper of bread and soup to symbolize the
simplicity of life that Lent asks us to practice.

DID YOU KNOW?

LENTEN TRIVIA:

LENT: The word “Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten” which means “to lengthen”. This is a reference to the lengthening of daylight hours as Spring approaches. Symbolically, it also connotes the coming of the light of Christ’s Resurrection after the darkness of Christ’s death.

MARDI GRAS: “Mardi Gras” means “Fat Tuesday”, as you already know. Even though we associate that day with “party hearty”, it didn’t really begin like that. Since the fasting in Lent used to be so strict (no meat, alcohol, eggs, butter, milk), people used to use the day before Ash Wednesday to get rid of the perishables in the house. The Eastern Church used to have “Clean Monday”, when they would scrub all their pots and pans, getting rid of even the traces of fat. So, “Fat Tuesday” may refer to gaining some weight by eating up all the forbidden food but also to the practical preparation for the GREAT FAST of Lent.

QUARANTINE: Our English word (which has a medical connotation) actually comes from a Latin word meaning “forty”, and it originally referred to the forty days of Lent – when public sinners who sought readmission to the Church were asked to live apart from their families and friends as a part of their penance. Hence, a “quarantine” separates people or groups of people from associating with the rest of humanity.

PRETZELS: Because fat, eggs and milk were forbidden in Lent in earlier times, little breads (which we call “pretzels”) were made as a substitute. They’re made only of flour, water and salt. They were deliberately formed in the shape of two arms crossed in prayer, and you can find a picture of a pretzel depicted in a Vatican manuscript from the 5th century. In Latin, these breads were called “bracellae”, and the word became “pretzel” in English.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I have a question, and I don’t know if you’ve addressed it before. How come the cross in Most Holy Trinity Chapel has a figure of the Risen Christ on it? I thought that Protestants always portrayed the cross in that way, while Catholics used the image of Jesus suffering.

A: Actually, you’re headed in the right direction: the classic Protestant depiction of the cross is indeed different from the Catholic depiction.

Protestants (with the exception of Episcopalians and Lutherans) usually use a simple cross...with no depiction of Christ on it. Just a simple cross.

Catholics do use a figure of Christ, either a suffering figure (as you mentioned), but also the triumphant figure of the Resurrected Christ (like the one at our Chapel).

The difference can be traced to the Protestant Reformation, when the Protestant Reformers felt that using things like statues and pictures and stained-glass windows in churches was a direct violation of the First Commandment.

When you learned the Ten Commandments, you probably learned the shortened version of the first one: “I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me”.

Actually, though, if you were to read the whole text of the Ten Commandments (either in Exodus 20 or in Deuteronomy 5), you would see that there’s more to it. The rest of it is as follows: “Neither shall you carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on earth below or in the waters beneath the earth...” And it goes on to forbid the worship of idols.

The Protestant Reformers felt that the old Catholic custom of having pictures, statues or stained-glass windows was a direct violation of that commandment (they felt that Catholics “worshipped” the statues, etc.) and that Catholics at the time went overboard with “images”.

And in some cases, they were right. There were lots of abuses.

So, in converting Catholic churches to Protestant churches at that time, the Protestants went through and took out (and unfortunately, sometimes destroyed) lots of the statues and the artwork. They believed that they were “purifying” the Christian religion.

Our Catholic tradition has always valued statues and artwork because we believe that in creating these things, human beings are displaying their faith in God. The statues are not “idols”; they’re tangible reminders of Jesus, Mary and the saints.

Anyway, those early Protestant churches were very plain and simple, whereas Catholic churches continued to be richly decorated.

The cross (or crucifix) was a part of this picture. Protestants felt that the depiction of Jesus on the cross violated the spirit of the First Commandment. Catholics felt that it was nothing more than a chance to remind themselves either of the sufferings of Christ or of his Resurrection. We have never worshipped these figures.

Over the centuries, Protestants have come to accept the beauty of statues and stained-glass windows, and many Protestant churches use them extensively. On the other hand, Catholics were reminded by the Reformation that it’s necessary to always see beyond these “images” and guard against them being used in a superstitious way.

And that’s the brief history.

For Catholics, BOTH types of depiction (suffering or victorious) of Jesus on the cross can lead us to meditate on and appreciate our basic beliefs about Jesus: his suffering and death, which brought us redemption...and his victorious Resurrection, which paved the way to our own resurrections.

Hope that answers your question.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

ENVY:

Well, we’ve been talking about the “Seven Capital (or Deadly) Sins” for the last couple of weeks, and we SPECIFICALLY talked about the first one – Pride – last week.

Now we move on to the second on the list: ENVY.

And incidentally, these are called “capital” sins because moralists have always considered them the root from which all other sinfulness grows. The whole list is as follows:

Pride
Envy
Anger
Sloth
Avarice
Gluttony
Lust

Anyway, ENVY...

The dictionary defines ENVY in this way:

A feeling of discontent and resentment
aroused by the contemplation of another's
desirable possessions or qualities,
with a strong desire to have them for oneself.

Catholic morality would accept this as a basic idea, but it would go on to add some other thoughts.

For Catholics, ENVY is rooted in a deep difficulty that a person may have in trusting God's love. An ENVIIOUS person has forgotten that God loves him or her UNIQUELY and PERSONALLY.

Because of this, such a person is very INSECURE and actually doubts his or her own value. He or she is constantly occupied by worrying about what other people have or what they think, and this can lead to being JEALOUS of someone else. It can also lead to wanting to have what the other person has and being resentful that the other person is "successful" in some way.

When can this occur?

Most frequently, it can occur in settings that are heavily COMPETITIVE or in an atmosphere where COMPARISONS of people's performance are constantly being made.

In such cases, the GOOD of someone else can become EVIL for the person who is JEALOUS. The GOOD of someone else can seem to threaten or lessen one's own excellence.

This perception can lead to ENVY, and after ENVY, the next step is generally HATRED. Once HATRED sets in, the "other person" becomes a constant threat to one's own well-being.

It's a vicious spiral.

How to deal with it?

Catholic morality would say that such a person – filled with ENVY or perhaps even HATRED – needs to do something to address his or her own INSECURITY.

In a spiritual sense, such a person needs to deepen a sense of God's love for himself or herself as a UNIQUE person and also to deepen a feeling of compassion for others. Compassion is a feeling which recognizes the unique value of each individual, with his or her own successes and failures.

ENVY is difficult to completely eradicate, but unless it's controlled, it can do tremendous damage to the human personality.

That's why it's listed as one of the SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“If the hole in the ozone layer
were caused by too much talking,
would I talk less?
What if it were caused by too much worrying...?
Unattributed

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!!

All good wishes for a successful Lent.
May you become Christ for someone this weekend.
Woodie