

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)  
Week of 8 February, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

As I write this, I'm looking at the "Prayer of St. Richard of Chichester", a long-time favorite Catholic prayer. St. Richard was bishop of Chichester in England in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, and he made his reputation by standing up to King Henry III. Richard believed that the Church should not be controlled by the State.

During his final years, Richard was known for his generosity to the poor, and he was canonized by Pope Urban IV in 1264, not too long after his death – highlighting the fact that his religious fervor was well-known and notable, even in his own lifetime.

His prayer is a description of the centrality of Jesus in his own Christian life as well as a pretty thorough description of what anyone's "relationship with Christ" should be.

Perhaps it will strike a chord in you:

Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,  
For all the benefits which Thou hast given me,  
For all the pains and insults which Thou hast borne for me.

O most merciful friend, redeemer and brother!  
May I see Thee more clearly,  
Love Thee more dearly, and  
Follow Thee more nearly.

To all of you, may Christ continue to be friend, redeemer and brother.

## THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

### DAILY MASS

is offered each weekday morning in the  
Catholic Chaplain's Office at 0630. Everyone  
is welcome.

## AND JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU'D HEARD EVERYTHING:

Last Monday (2 February) was "Groundhog Day", and you probably know the supposed role of the groundhog in predicting the weather.

For you groundhog watchers (and for you Latin scholars), the following couplet from the Middle Ages presents another method which seems to vie for an equal role here:

Si sol splendescat Maria purificante,  
Maius erit frigus post festum quam fuit ante.

If the sun should shine on Mary's Purification,

It will be colder after the Feast than before.

The Feast of Mary's Purification (also called the "Feast of the Presentation of Jesus") is on 2 February each year.

Why should the groundhog get all the credit?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

##### ST. VALENTINE'S DAY:

Next Saturday (14 February) is St. Valentine's Day.

Yet again, Catholic religious tradition has become a concrete part of Western culture.

And yet again, there approaches that long-standing, always au-courant, lively and therapeutic festival that celebrates the only thing in life that makes sense without making any sense: HUMAN LOVE.

There were at least two Valentines in the Church's history, and they both gave up their lives for the Faith.

The one we celebrate on 14 February was probably a priest and was killed on 14 February, 270 AD, during a persecution by the Roman emperor Claudius II. In Rome, a basilica was dedicated in his honor in 350 AD, and it wasn't too long before his death-day was associated with guys and girls exchanging a promise of love.

This was done in different ways over the centuries, but the custom of exchanging "valentines", gifts and other expressions of love and affection soon evolved.

The legend says that Valentine was in jail, awaiting execution for his Faith, and he sneaked a note to the daughter of his jailer, signing it with the words "from your Valentine".

Another legend says that he cured the jailer's daughter of blindness, and another set of stories described him as the friend of children who tossed notes of affection into his cell.

Non-Christian legends claim that the custom comes from the "Lupercalia" – a Roman pagan celebration of the pastoral god Lupercus ("Pan" in Greek mythology). This celebration came under the patronage of Juno, goddess of marriage, and it was a time on or around 14 February when young Romans chose partners, proposed marriage or became engaged. When the Roman Empire became Christian (313 AD), Valentine replaced Juno as the focus of the custom.

Some people claim that in early England, there was the belief that birds chose their mates on that day. Chaucer mentioned this fact as well as observing that notes of love were exchanged on Valentine's Day.

Others hold to the belief that this "valentine" tradition was more or less an accident. They claim that it was accidentally associated with St. Valentine's feast-day because it always falls at the time of nature's transition to Spring, the season of lovers.

Whatever the background, 14 February is as good a time as any to let those who are special to you know that you love them...

**AND DON'T FORGET TO SEND YOUR MOTHER A VALENTINE!**

#### GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, two weeks ago in CHURCH STUFF, you had an article about MAGIC, and in the article, you listed different ways in which MAGIC can be morally objectionable.

One of the way you mentioned as objectionable was DREAM INTERPRETATION. I'm writing to ask if you would explain why it's wrong. I took a course on DREAM INTERPRETATION in high school, and I've never considered it in the same category as MAGIC.

A: OK, the Church's attitude on DREAM INTERPRETATION doesn't include the studies that psychologists do on DREAM SYMBOLISM or DREAM PATTERNS. These studies are based on the desire to understand the physical and emotional nature of the human being as a means of increasing the mental and psychological health of patients AND to better understand the human being in general.

But the Church objects to DREAM INTERPRETATION as a RELIGIOUS ACT, and this is based on the attempt by all kinds of people over the centuries to interpret each dream as a source of divine revelation. This can easily descend into superstition and can be a danger to the true understanding of what religion is supposed to be.

For the Church, RELIGION centers around one's response to God in the present...not around one's desire to "tell the future" in some way.

The Church believes that God can certainly speak to human beings through dreams. The example of Joseph in the Book of Genesis, as well as lots of other biblical stories, gives ample testimony to this.

The trouble comes when one asks the question: how does a person know when a dream is a divine sign. The Church would discourage people from assuming "divine intervention" in 99% of such cases because of the real danger of superstition and even exploitation of individuals in such situations. This is an area in which simple ignorance and the human desire to "know divine secrets" and to "predict the future" can easily overcome good judgment.

Catholic tradition believes that "real" and "healthy" religious practice involves simply putting oneself into God's hands for whatever concerns the future and giving up all unhealthy curiosity about trying somehow to "control" or predict the events yet-to-come.

## THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

### DETACHMENT:

The word itself means "a separation".

When you apply it to spiritual matters, it means "a willingness to give up a lower value for a higher one".

It doesn't mean that what you give up is necessarily bad in itself.

It simply means that you are willing to give up something so as to free yourself for a HIGHER purpose.

Such an idea of DETACHMENT can be found as early in the Bible as the story of Abraham, who was willing to leave his country or to even sacrifice his own son (Genesis 12 and following).

For Christians, however, the supreme example of DETACHMENT is found in the person of Jesus who sacrificed his human life to achieve God's plan of salvation.

And Jesus asked a similar attitude of his followers.

His conditions of discipleship are as follows (Matthew 16:24):

"Whoever wishes to follow me  
must deny self,

take up the cross  
and follow me.”

Or as he said to a rich young man (Luke 18:22):

“Sell all that you have  
and distribute it to the poor,  
and you will have treasure in heaven;  
then come and follow me.”

This DETACHMENT extends to the most sacred human ties (Luke 18:29-30):

“There is no one who has given up  
house or wife or brothers or parents or children  
for the sake of the Kingdom of God  
who will not receive back  
an overabundant return in the present age  
and in the age to come, eternal life.”

St. Paul spoke in other ways:

“Put to death the parts of you  
that are earthly...”

Colossians 3:5

and

“...you should put away the old self  
of your former way of life...  
and put on the new self,  
created in God’s way.”

Ephesians 4:22-3

For himself, Christ went through a passion and death to a resurrection; likewise, we follow him through our own sufferings and DETACHMENT into a kind of death which also leads to resurrection.

The early Christians took this idea of DETACHMENT very seriously.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 115 AD) – among many others – offered himself for martyrdom, the supreme act of DETACHMENT. This is DETACHMENT from one’s very self.

After the Age of Martyrs was over (c. 400 AD), virgins and hermits began to give up all their worldly goods to seek God.

St. Benedict (500 AD) urged his monks to

“...love God with your whole heart...  
Renounce yourselves  
in order to follow Christ;  
discipline your body;  
do not pamper yourself,  
but love fasting.”

Rule of St. Benedict  
4:1 and 10

And so on, throughout Catholic history.

The point of DETACHMENT is to LIFT the mind and heart, to FREE the personality so that one may rise above the bounds of mortality and enter into union with God.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“In an avalanche,  
each snowflake pleads ‘not guilty’.”

Stanislaus Lec

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...

and even if you don’t always remember it,  
ya’ll are constantly in my prayers.

Woodie