

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)
Week of 15 February, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Well, even though the temperatures have warmed up a bit of late, it's still the time of what I call the WINTER DOLDRUMS.

I'm sick of the cold weather, and I need SPRING BREAK to come quickly.

It's possible that this is true for you, too...especially in your spiritual life. This can be the "grim" time of year, and the grimness can easily work its way into the "inner man" or the "inner woman".

I've always liked the following passage from Scripture. It somehow helps me to battle the WINTER DOLDRUMS. Perhaps it can help you as well:

My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for an ordeal.
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.
Cling to him; do not leave him...
Whatever happens to you, accept it...
since gold is tested in the fire
and God's chosen ones in the furnace of humiliation.
Trust him, and he will uphold you.
Let us fall into the hands of the Lord,
not into the hands of men.
For as his majesty is,
so too is his mercy.

Sirach, Chapter 2

Best wishes in battling the WINTER DOLDRUMS, whether they be "inner" or "outer".

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

NO 1715 MASS ON SUNDAY

Because of the long weekend, there will be NO Sunday mass in WH5300 at 1715.

NO 0630 MASS ON MONDAY

Because of the Monday holiday, there will be NO 0630 Mass in the Chaplain's Office on Monday morning. The 0630 Mass will resume on Tuesday.

DID YOU KNOW?

POSTURES AND GESTURES:

What position do you adopt when you pray in public?

The early Christians prayed with their HANDS UPRAISED, like the priest at Mass. They would stand and face EAST, because the sun – a symbol of Christ – rose in the EAST. As a matter of fact, early churches were so constructed that the congregation would always stand facing EAST.

They stood while they prayed because they believed that STANDING was a natural expression of respect, reverence and readiness.

In ancient times, many religions used the STANDING position when they worshiped; they only knelt when they were adoring the gods of the Underworld.

For Christians, STANDING at prayer was the norm for hundreds of years. As a matter of fact, the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) instructed Catholics to STAND for the entire Mass on Sundays and during the Pentecost season (Canon 20).

KNEELING at prayer was present in the Church from the beginning (although not nearly as prominently as STANDING). The Apostle Paul was described as KNEELING at prayer with the Christians at Miletus (Acts 20:36). KNEELING was gradually introduced into public worship as a sign of penance, supplication and adoration. It also laid an emphasis on the divinity of Christ and the unworthiness of people in his presence. By the middle of the 900s, records of the Synod of Tours indicate that it had become the common posture of people at Mass. An exception was made for the reading of the Gospel, when the more ancient practice of STANDING was preserved.

FOLDING ONE'S HANDS is also a part of many people's prayer-posture.

It came from the Germanic peoples of Europe during the age of feudalism. When people took an oath of allegiance to the local noble, they placed their folded hands between the hands of the lord as a sign of submission and subjection. This gesture was seen as a fitting way for Christians to approach the Lord of heaven and earth, and it remained a very popular way to express one's prayerful sentiments.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, have all the popes been honorable men? I've recently heard some stories about earlier popes which make me wonder.

A: No, they haven't always been honorable men.

Over the course of the centuries, there have been several who have been anything but honorable. In some cases, a couple have been completely immoral, at least to all outward appearances.

Probably among the worst was Alexander VI (1492-1503), who was interested in three things: gold, women, and advancing the careers of his relatives (especially his son, Cesare Borgia). And then there was John XII (955-964), the son of the warlord who ruled Rome at the time. Legends say that John XII (who was only 18 years old when elected) died of a stroke at age 27. Supposedly, he was in bed with a married woman when this happened.

My favorite story concerns Pope Formosus (891-896). He was a gifted and well-educated man who was elected pope at or around the age of 75. He served for four-and-a-half years and then died.

Nine months later, his successor – Pope Stephen VI , who was bitterly opposed to Formosus – had his decaying corpse dug up, dressed in pontifical vestments and solemnly tried in a mock trial (known in history as “The Cadaver Synod”). A deacon stood by Formosus’ corpse to answer questions at the trial.

Poor Formosus was found guilty of “perjury, having coveted the papal throne, and of having violated the canons of the Church”. All of his official acts and ordinations as pope were declared null and void, and, as if that weren’t enough, the three fingers of his right hand (with which he gave the sign of blessing) were hacked off, and his body was buried in a common grave.

Later on, the body was dug up again and thrown into the Tiber River (a sympathetic hermit found the body and re-buried it).

A later pope – Theodore II – had the body dug up again (third time) and re-buried with full honors in St. Peter’s. He decreed that the trial had been bogus.

Still later, another pope – Sergius III – reversed the process yet again and declared that the trial had been legitimate and that poor Formosus was guilty all along. This final indignity aroused such anger among the population that Sergius backed off.

What does all this show?

Some would say that because of people like these, the Catholic Church is wrong to have popes (we’ve had 263 of them).

I don’t agree. That’s like saying that because some Christians are sinners, we ought to “screen” Church members and only keep the good ones.

I’m perfectly comfortable with the fact that some popes have not been good men (although I wish they had been). The Church survives such people because the Church exists by God’s power and not by human power. So in a kind of odd way, “bad” popes are useful because they demonstrate the abiding presence of God, which enables the Church to survive the “bad” popes. The Church is able to rise above these temporary conditions and continue to witness to the power of the Holy Spirit throughout the centuries.

The bottom line is that the teaching of the Catholic Church doesn’t depend on the saintliness of popes (or of anyone else, for that matter). Catholic teaching depends on the presence of God’s Holy Spirit with the Church.

And after all, didn’t St. Peter, the first pope, once deny Christ three times?

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

SEVEN DEADLY SINS:

Perhaps you’ve heard of these.

They’re sometimes called the “Seven Capital Sins” (the word “capital” comes from the Latin “caput”, meaning “head”; these sins were supposedly at the “head” of every human being’s tendency to do evil, and all other sins flowed from them).

These seven sins are the following:

- a) Pride
- b) Envy
- c) Anger
- d) Sloth
- e) Avarice

- f) Gluttony
- g) Lust

The word “sin” can be misleading here because we usually think of ‘sin’ as “some act which we will do”, but that’s not really the primary intent of this list throughout the ages.

The primary intent is to point out those areas of human personality which contain basic tendencies toward evil.

So perhaps they should be called the “Seven Basic Tendencies”.

In any case, this list is not found in Scripture.

It comes instead from the experiences of the “Desert Monks” of the early Christian centuries, and they viewed them as seven (sometimes eight) human tendencies which can lead a person to evil. In 390 or so, a monastic founder named Evagrius Ponticus spoke of

The eight vicious thoughts,
sinful drives, that a monk
has to battle.

From that point on, people began to think about “lists” of sins, and by the time of the Middle Ages, the so-called “Capital Sins” proved to be a popular theme in preaching, art, drama, literature and spiritual writing.

Along with the Creed and the Ten Commandments, they were easy “teaching tools”.

Sometimes, they were pictured as a tree with “Pride” as the trunk of the tree and the other six “sins” as the branches. The belief was that “pride” was and is the root of all the evil done by human beings. In his “Rule for Monks”, St. Augustine spoke of

...Pride which lurks even in good works,
seeking to destroy them.

In recent decades, it has become fashionable for writers not to speak only of “sin” as a personal act. They often build on the theme of “sin”, seeing it in an atmosphere of corporate, cultural and national climates in every age.

Such writers sometimes comment that in recent decades, it has become “trendy” to see some of the “Capital Sins” as almost respectable. Thus, the sin of Pride is legitimized as “Self-Esteem”; Anger is justified as “Assertiveness”, etc. These writers would consider that modern corporations have almost NEUTRALIZED sin and freed employees from any type of MORAL RESPONSIBILITY.

And also, some feminist writers have wondered whether this ancient list of “Deadly Sins” adequately identifies the WORST of personal and social evils. Some would propose alternative “Deadly” sins, like cruelty, hypocrisy, snobbery, treachery, self-negation and aimlessness.

But however you list them, it’s valuable to examine those inclinations in the human heart that can be that make evil an attractive option and why these inclinations are the root of all the evil we do.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“It is no great thing to be humble
when you are brought low;
but to be humble when you’re praised
is a great and rare attainment.”

St. Bernard

(d. 1153)

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!!

Stay well and sane.

Stay connected to God through Jesus.

And have a great LONG WEEKEND!

Woodie