

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 18 January, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

January can be a dull month in so many ways.

Christmas Break is over, the happiness associated with Christmas has dimmed considerably, home and family are often far away...

So, I thought I'd share the following with you in the event you ever feel this way:

God...are You there?

I've been taught and told I ought to pray,
but the doubt won't go away.
Yet neither will my longing to be heard.
My soul sighs, too deep for words.
Do You hear me?

God...are You there?

Are You where LOVE is?

I don't love well or often..anything or anyone...
but when I do, when I take the risk,
there's a sudden awareness of all I've missed;
and it's good, it's singing good.
For a moment, life seems as it should.
But I forget, so busy soon,
that it was...or what...or whom...

Help me!

God...are You there?

May God, Who IS there, bless your comings and goings this coming week.

May you know His presence.

May you feel His power.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

BLESSING OF THROATS

In honor of the Feast of St. Blaise (3 Feb), the Blessing of Throats will be offered at all the Masses over the weekend of 31 Jan-1 Feb. at the Chapel and in WH5300.

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 on Friday evening, 6 February, at 1815. More info later.

DID YOU KNOW?

The TABERNACLE – so familiar to Catholics – has some history behind it.

You would know it as the large and costly container in which the consecrated bread is stored, and usually it's located in the front of most Catholic churches right near the main altar.

But in the Early Church, there was no such thing.

In early times, the consecrated bread for Holy Communion was kept after Mass for the sick of the area, but it was kept in private homes (usually the home of a deacon). The churches of that time didn't reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the church-building itself or even give it the permanent place of honor that it has today.

By the Middle Ages, all that had changed.

In France and England, for example, the Blessed Sacrament was hung in a pyx (a small, box-like container) over the main altar of the churches. Often, the pyx was in the shape of a dove.

Sometimes, too, a crosier (a bishop's staff) was fixed behind the altar, and it was so made as to have a small space built into it as a container for the Blessed Sacrament.

In Germany, the normal custom was to keep the Sacrament in a niche in the wall, covered with an iron door. In larger churches, the niche was replaced by a large "Sacrament House", which stood near the main altar and was built in the form of an artistically-decorated tower.

Finally, from Italy in the 16th century, there spread the custom of using the TABERNACLE (from a Latin word, meaning "tent" or "hut"). It was a costly shrine that was solidly fixed in the center of the main altar.

Not until 1863 did the church insist on this method of reservation of the Sacrament for every Catholic church.

More recently, liturgical and architectural focus has begun to return to the ancient attitude: namely, that the focus in a Catholic church should be the ALTAR – where Holy Mass is celebrated – and not the TABERNACLE (which really reserves the Sacrament for the use of the sick). The TABERNACLE can still be in the middle, but many modern churches also offer the option of constructing special chapels to reserve the Sacrament.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I was recently asked if I had been "saved". How should a Catholic respond to this question?

A: This is a question that you hear a lot about these days, and it's basically one which is generally asked by "fundamentalist" Christians.

They're good people, people of faith, who have faith in Jesus and want everyone to have that same faith. They basically want to know if you have been saved by the blood of Jesus. They believe that if you can say "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior" that two things happen:

- a) your salvation is assured, and
- b) you will go to heaven.

This means that once your salvation has been accomplished through your profession of faith, you cannot lose it.

A Catholic has a bit of a problem with the interpretation of this, mostly because the Catholic interpretation of Scripture believes that salvation is a PROCESS rather than a one-time event. It has a past, present and future reality, all at the same time.

A Catholic response to the question "Have you been saved?" would go something like this:

Yes, I have been saved, and I am currently working out my salvation in fear and trembling. And I joyfully anticipate and hope for the coming of Jesus at the end of time. Only on that day will my salvation be complete.

This is based on St. Paul's idea in I Corinthians 15:28:

When all things are subjected to the Son,
then the Son himself will also be subjected
to the One who put all things in subjection
under him, so that God may be all in all.

The Catholic view is that this PROCESS develops in ten stages:

- a) God sends his Son into the world.
- b) God's Son is faithful until death.
- c) The Father raises the Son from death.
- d) The Son ascends to the Father's right hand.
- e) The Son, now glorified, now sends the Spirit upon the Apostles.
- f) The Spirit gives the Apostles the power to make disciples of all nations by believing what Jesus commanded.
- g) We must repent, believe and be baptized.
- h) We must work out our salvation in fear and trembling.
- i) We must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood (Holy Communion).
- j) When the Son comes in the fullness of his glory, our bodies will be re-made according to the pattern of his glorified body. Then, God will be "all in all".

So a Catholic would be uncomfortable with a simple "yes" to the question "Have you been saved?" because a simple "yes" doesn't seem to incorporate the idea of "working out our salvation in fear and trembling", as Paul told the Philippians in his Letter to them (2:12).

We certainly believe that we have been saved by the blood of Christ, but we also believe that we are PLAYERS in the drama – in taking the merits of Christ and applying them to every moment of our lives.

It's a PROCESS, and we believe it takes a LIFETIME of cooperation with God's grace.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW?

AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY:

This doesn't refer to any specific religion.

Instead, it refers to BASIC concepts that have always been the foundation of life in the African continent. They can be found in just about every area of African society.

There are a seven basic concepts:

- 1) The ACTIVE presence of the Creator-God in the world:
God is considered Father and Mother: present, alive, active and in direct communication and collaboration with creation. God is the beginning without an end. Human beings reflect God's presence in a special and unique way.
- 2) A UNIFIED sense of reality:
For the African, divinity and humanity are not isolated from each other. The visible and invisible interact. The world of the spirits participates in the human world. All the beings in the Universe and beyond exercise influence over one another.
- 3) Life as the ULTIMATE gift:
Life is the prime gift of the Creator to the creature. It is to be received gratefully, sustained, enhanced and safeguarded. Rituals of birth and burial are very sophisticated, and between birth and death, rituals of healing fulfill a most important role in the African village.
- 4) The FAMILY and the COMMUNITY as the place to be born, live and die.
A vital link exists between an individual and members of the same family, clan and community. Being born into a family inserts a person into a "current" which determines one's existence and survival. An African is incomplete when alone.
- 5) The ACTIVE role of ancestors:
Ancestors are sometimes called "the living dead". They are seen as having left a great heritage to their families, and they continue to influence those families from beyond the visible world. They are intermediaries between God and the people.
Also, elderly people are accorded special respect in African society. They are believed to be in special communion with the ancestors because they lived and worked with them earlier in their lives.
- 6) The sense of ORAL tradition:
The "spoken word" has great power in African spirituality for three reasons: the spoken word derives from the Divine Presence in the world; the spoken word comes from human beings (the most privileged part of creation); and the spoken word makes history real. music, song, dance, poetry, proverbs, story-telling, art and ritual are immensely important, and when an African prays, he or she uses all those forms of expression.

7) The SACREDNESS of nature and the environment:

Africans see the presence of the Divine in all creation.
Everything carries a message of God's presence. All space
is sacred and to be respected.

These seven concepts are the core of the African worldview and African spirituality.
They may be expressed differently in different parts of Africa, but they are universal
"operating procedures" in African religion.

In coming to Africa, both Christianity and Islam were and continue to be influenced
by these values. For example, basic Christian communities are powerful because of the
native African belief in the sacredness of family and the community, and the liberation
movements in parts of Africa flow from the traditional belief in the sacredness of the
human being.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"If we could read the secret history of our enemies,
we would find in the life of each one
enough sorrow and suffering to disarm all hostility."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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!!

Hey, best wishes for the weekend.

Stay warm.

And how 'bout we say a prayer for each other.

Woodie