

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)
Week of 22 February, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Time goes so quickly around here that you might not realize that LENT begins on this coming Wednesday (25th).

It's time for me and you to think about what kind of LENT we're going to have this year.

It's a serious time in the Church, a time of REPENTANCE, a time of DEEP THOUGHT about the kind of life that we're leading, a time to repeat the great PENITENTIAL PSALM of King David from the Old Testament (Psalm 51). Here are parts of it:

Have mercy on me in your goodness, O God.
In your great tenderness, wipe out my faults.
Wash me of my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.

Instill some joy and gladness into me.
Let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.

Create a clean heart in me.
Put into me a new and constant spirit.

This broken spirit of mine is my sacrifice.
You will not scorn my crushed and broken heart.

The whole Psalm is worth reading – again and again – during LENT.
May your LENT this year be the best ever in your life.

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.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Mass schedule for Ash Wednesday (25 Feb) is
as follows:

0615 – WH5300
1205, 1700, 1900 – Chapel

FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Just for your reference...

Catholics are asked to **ABSTAIN** from meat on Ash Wednesday and on all the Fridays of Lent (including Good Friday).

Catholics are also asked to **FAST** on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (one full meal, two lesser ones).

ABSTINENCE is asked of all those between the ages of 14 and 59.

FASTING is for those between 18 and 59.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

This traditional Lenten devotion will be held each Friday of Lent at the Chapel 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?

LENT:

Here it is again, just when you thought you were safe.

The annual forty-day period when the Church asks you and me to **GET SERIOUS**.

The **ASHES** on Ash Wednesday are supposed to be a **BEGINNING!**

Why **FORTY DAYS**?

Because important events in the Bible are usually described as lasting for “forty days”: Noah in the ark (Genesis 6-9), Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18), the tribes of Israel in the desert for forty **YEARS** (Deuteronomy 2:7), Jesus’ time of trial in the desert (Matthew 4), Jesus’ time with the Apostles after the resurrection (Acts 1). “Forty” connotes a lengthy period of time.

Why **ASHES**?

Well, in classical times, **ASHES** always signified personal sorrow and repentance. Before the days of Personal Confession in the Church, a sinner’s penance was **PUBLIC**, and he or she might have to stand at the Church door for forty days, dressed in rough clothing and sprinkled with **ASHES** (as a sign of sorrow). Then, at Easter, he or she would be received back into communion with the Church.

For us, **ASHES**, can signify that we are serious about entering into this time of preparation for the Great Holydays of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

What about **FASTING**?

Well, in the ancient Church, they relied heavily on **FASTING** as an expression of their religious seriousness. As a matter of fact, from AD 400 to 800, only one meal each day – usually in the evening – was permitted, and this meal couldn’t include flesh-meat, fish, alcohol or even eggs or milk products. Sundays didn’t count; they were always celebrated as “Little Easters”.

What about **ALMSGIVING**?

It means “giving money to the poor”, and early Christians used to take the money they saved on groceries and give it to the poor.

More modern Lenten practice encourages this type of “negative” penance (denying yourself), but it also encourages “positive” penance (doing good deeds and increasing one’s spiritual practices).

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, what are the Dead Sea Scrolls? What is their significance to me as a Catholic? What is the Church’s position on them?

A: Well, anyone who reads the Bible should know a little bit about the Dead Sea Scrolls...so here goes:

The term “Dead Sea Scrolls” refers to 5 groups of documents discovered in caves in several wadis (a “wadi” is a dry gully or riverbed that fills up during rainy seasons) that empty into the western side of the Dead Sea in Israel. The whole collection includes portions of countless ancient documents that date from as early as 250 BC and as late as 700 AD.

In popular parlance, however, the term “Dead Sea Scrolls” refers to the 5th group of the documents, and those are what we’ll be talking about here.

The Dead Sea Scrolls (5th group) are the remains of a library. No one knows for sure whose library it was or its original location. The documents in this group date from as early as 250 BC and as late as 68 AD.

They were found quite by accident during the years between 1947 to 1956 by Bedouin shepherds in 11 caves near the Dead Sea. The first discovery was in 1947, when a shepherd found 7 scrolls (plus fragments); when their significance was realized, more searches were conducted, and by 1956, 10 other caves were found, containing not only scrolls and fragments but also pottery pieces with inscriptions on them.

It became clear to scholars that these were indeed the remains of a library, but as I mentioned, there was no indication of where the whole collection came from. Some have concluded that the documents were written in a nearby ancient Jewish religious settlement (almost like a monastery) called Qumran. Other people feel that this library was brought to the caves from Jerusalem for safekeeping before the Romans attacked and destroyed the city in 70 AD.

The term “scroll” is a bit deceptive. Only a small portion of the discovery is actually in “scroll” form; most are fragments, and some of them are no larger than a human fingernail. Still, after years of analysis, the scholars have identified about 800 separate manuscripts, and sometimes, they had only a fingernail-sized scrap to work from.

These manuscripts can be divided into “biblical” and “non-biblical” literature. The biblical stuff was easier to identify because the scholars already had the Bible to use as a comparative document. In the total collection, about 20-25% of the fragments and scrolls are biblical material. Every book in the Hebrew Bible (much of our “Old Testament”) is represented, except for the Book of Esther. There is nothing from what we call the “New Testament”, so this was evidently an exclusively Jewish library.

The remainder of the material (non-biblical stuff) is hymns, bible commentaries, wisdom literature, letters, legal texts – and there’s even a set of hidden-treasure directions on a scroll made of copper-foil (it reveals 64 locations of buried treasure, giving a

description of what is buried at each location, plus its value). Conservative estimates have placed the whole treasure at 60 tons of precious metal, and scholars have concluded that, if real, it could easily have been the contents of the Temple treasury in Jerusalem, hidden away when the Roman army appeared in Galilee prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

To give you some idea of what the Bible scholars were facing: Cave #4 had over 500 manuscripts in it, but they were all in tatters; not a single scroll was intact, and estimates claimed that there were 15,000 fragments that the scholars had to piece together. In effect, they had to assemble 500 jigsaw puzzles, with 90% of the pieces missing.

Now, as to the significance of these scrolls, you have to remember that even though there was nothing from what we call the “New Testament” as part of this find, the whole picture is immensely valuable for Christians.

First of all, with information from the scrolls, many parts of the “Old Testament” can be more easily understood; some parts of the Bible have already been clarified and re-written, based upon findings in the scrolls themselves.

Secondly, one can get a much clearer picture of the world in which Jesus and the early Christians lived, and this will make portions of the “New Testament” easier to understand and appreciate. For example, the scrolls paint a fascinating picture of the Pharisees and helped to understand a lot about why and how they agreed and disagreed with Jesus.

Anyway, this might help to give you a sketchy picture of a very complicated and very interesting field of study. Scholars will be poring over these fragments/scrolls for decades yet, but each success they have will help to add immeasurably to our understanding the Bible.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

(Note: last week, I presented an overview of the “Seven Deadly Sins”.

The first of them is PRIDE, and this week, I’ll take a look at why it’s considered to be the first on the list)

PRIDE:

In traditional Catholic moral teaching, PRIDE is the first of the seven DEADLY sins. And this is so because in its warped form, PRIDE is the root of all the other evils that people do.

Understood this way, PRIDE involves a self-centered and perverse sense of SELF-ESTEEM and SELF-LOVE. This doesn’t mean that SELF-ESTEEM and SELF-LOVE are harmful in themselves; it simply means that they can reach a level which goes beyond acceptable moral boundaries.

PRIDE can also be a good thing.

But in its objectionable form, it is a self-aggrandizement that ignores God’s sovereignty and the worth of other people, and it warps a true sense of self-worth in an individual. It can often involve disregard or contempt for ideas and judgments other than one’s own.

One of the most obvious aspects of this type of PRIDE is an attitude called VAINGLORY. This is an inordinate effort to demonstrate one’s own excellence. The person who is possessed by VAINGLORY suffers from an insatiable need for approval.

On the other hand, legitimate PRIDE is quite different. If PRIDE is based in truth, then it is certainly legitimate. When it’s based in truth, PRIDE understands that

everyone's talents are a gift from God and that the only healthy way to broaden your personality is to follow several steps:

- a) abandon yourself to God's providence;
- b) respectfully listen to others;
- c) admit that you need to be saved by Christ; and
- d) acknowledge your continual need to be supported by the gifts and talents of others.

The Scriptures constantly refer to illegitimate PRIDE, and in the story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), the couple is brought down specifically by their PRIDE. They fell for the temptation of the serpent:

... You will be like God...

In the Book of Sirach (3:27), you can find the following thought:

For the affliction of the proud man,
there is no cure; he is the offshoot
of an evil plant.

Or again – Sirach 10:12-13:

The beginning of PRIDE is man's stubbornness
in withdrawing his heart from his Maker;
for PRIDE is the reservoir of sin,
a source which runs over with vice.

And really, you could reduce the idea of ILLEGITIMATE PRIDE that we've been talking about to that first line:

...man's stubbornness in withdrawing
His heart from his Maker.

So when a person isolates him/herself from God and rest of humanity and makes self absolute or central, either ignoring all others or using them solely toward the achievement of his or her own private ends, that person has the vice of PRIDE...and it's not a pretty thing.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"You have the power
to save so many from death;
but you do not care to do so...
And the price of the ring on your hand
could save the lives of a multitude."

St. Ambrose of Milan
(d. 397 AD)

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!!

Cheers from me for the weekend (especially for the Firsties)
Woodie