

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 3 May, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps!

You may never have thought much about it, but most of us spend a good portion of our lives trying to “find ourselves”.

Deep in our hearts, we need to come face-to-face with the person we really are. It can be a fearsome experience, but it can also bring great peace.

In order to do it right, we need God:

Gracious Father and Mother of us all!
Help me find myself.

I am
a mixture of motives and excuses,
a blur of memories,
a quiver of hope,
a knot of fear,
a tangle of confusion,
a restless wanderer.

I wander somewhere between
gratitude and grievance,
wonder and routine,
high resolve and undone dreams,
generous impulses and unpaid bills.

Help me to accept what I am
so I can begin to be yours.

Make me
small enough to snuggle,
young enough to question,
old enough to forget,
foolish enough to act for peace,
skeptical enough to doubt the efficiency
of anything and anyone
but You.

Let the power of Your Presence
empower me,
heal me,
lift me up.

May the God of healing and strength change your lives and make you whole!

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

BACCALAUREATE MASS

The annual BACCALAUREATE MASS will be held at the Chapel on Thursday, 21 May, at 1900. Firsties and their families are invited. No tickets or reservations are needed; seating is “first come, first served”.

A THOUGHT FOR EASTER:

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS:

Have we ever really listened to Jesus’ words:

“My going will be advantageous to you...” (John 16:7);

“Listen, I’m with you till the end...” (Matthew 28:20);

“If I don’t go,

the Paraclete won’t come to you;

but if I do go,

the Spirit of truth will come and teach you everything...” (John 16:7 and 13).

And so, in the Easter Season,

we celebrate the event of Jesus’ ASCENSION.

Does it mean anything to you?

Have you ever thought about it?

Here’s what one spiritual writer sees in it:

The essential teaching of Scripture...

is that Christ, by his Resurrection and ASCENSION,

has departed from this PRESENT WORLD,

corrupted by sin

and destined for destruction,

in order to enter a NEW WORLD...

much more real than our present world

because it alone possesses TRUE LIFE.

However, it is vain to seek ‘where’ it is

just as it is wrong to imagine it ‘far away’.

This NEW WORLD – where Christ awaits us –

is not far from us;

it is not ‘outside’ our world

but TRANSCENDS it.

It is of ANOTHER order.

(P. Benoit, OP)

At the ASCENSION,
Christ didn't 'go away';
he disappeared.
DEPARTURE causes an absence,
but DISAPPEARANCE inaugurates a hidden presence.
On ASCENSION DAY,
Christ became INVISIBLE
and began sharing his Father's infinite might.
Because of that, he's closer to each of us
than he ever was before.

He acquired the very influence
the boundless efficacy,
that enables him to fulfill everything with his presence.

His ASCENSION
is not a going-up in space
but a going-up in power.

CHRIST remains the most ACTIVE person
in the history of the world.

DID YOU KNOW?

ST. FLORIAN:

St. Florian is the patron of MPs and the MP Branch.

His feast is Monday (4 May).

Florian was an officer in the Roman army in Noricum (present-day Austria).

During the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian (AD 303), he surrendered himself to the Roman governor Aquilinus, when Aquilinus' soldiers were arresting any and all Christians in the locale.

Florian declared himself to be a Christian.

For this, he was scourged and afterward was thrown into the River Enns with a large stone fastened around his neck.

He gave his life for his Faith.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...everyone taking exams in a week, especially those in academic difficulty.

...all our military brothers and sisters – and their families – throughout the world,
especially those in areas of great risk.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, we have come to think of Hell as a pretty specific concept. How did it develop?

A: There's no doubt it's a great word...and how often some of us use it every day!

Of course, it's a theological concept, too...and unfortunately, it's one of those ideas that has gotten really warped over the course of time. Much of the warping is due to silly presumptions, so let's try and set the record straight.

The word HELL is Scandinavian in origin (Old Norse, to be precise), and it came into the English language through Old English. For them, it was a pagan concept; it referred to the "place of concealment for the dead".

For Christians, it has been used to refer to a condition of punishment and sorrow after death, a condition which is eternal.

Notice that I didn't say a PLACE of sorrow. That's because the word PLACE wouldn't be appropriate. Eternal realities are beyond time and space, and PLACE doesn't mean anything after you leave the dimensions of time and space. Similarly, HEAVEN shouldn't be referred to as a PLACE either, but that's another discussion.

This sounds picky, but it isn't really. Many of our religious concepts are thought of as time-space realities, and that's no good. The spiritual life cannot ultimately be examined or judged by time-space criteria; that's why science, as we know it, is not in a position to offer any "last word" on spiritual realities. Science is confined to the world of matter.

So, we shouldn't think of HELL as being in any way similar to an eternal burning building. Burning buildings are time-space realities.

Unfortunately, much of our literature (eg, Dante and his INFERNO) and many of our ideas have latched on to the fire-and-brimstone picture. They got it from the Gospels, where Jesus once used a burning dump outside Jerusalem to illustrate what he meant by "eternal desolation". Unfortunately, the "fire" part stuck, and it has sometimes made our mental picture of HELL something a little too material. We often miss the real significance.

The Catholic Church believes that there is indeed a condition of eternal desolation and sorrow. We use the word HELL, although other words are just as good. All of us could end up in that condition if we were to die in a state of grievous personal sin, rejecting God.

Over the centuries, there have been many arguments about this condition. Some Early Church writers argued that a God of mercy could never permit anyone to suffer ETERNAL pain. This opinion didn't catch on in the Church.

And so, the Church believes that there is such a condition as HELL: eternal deprivation of God based on one's personal choice.

But as a recent writer said: "As Catholics, we have to believe that there is indeed a HELL and that it is possible for humans to end up in that condition, but we don't have to believe that anyone is actually there".

This would be true, even for Judas.

It's an interesting concept, and it appeals to me: while we believe that it's possible to completely separate oneself from God, we are not asked to believe that anyone has actually done it.

"Judgment after death" is a mystery, and the specific details and results are a secret in the mind of God. We have some pointers, but we're in no position to comment on who is in what category, except to simply say what has been said above: whoever dies in a state of grievous personal sin, without repentance...and rejecting God, consigns him- or herself to the condition we have come to call HELL.

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 to follow God's will or even to 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 come after 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 (Colossians 3:5):

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

Or in another place (Ephesians 4:22-23):

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

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

The early Christians took this idea of DETACHMENT very seriously.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (115 AD or so) – 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 (AD 400 or so), virgins and hermits gave up all their worldly goods to seek God.

In the "Rule of St. Benedict" (500 AD), he 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.

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 transcend the bounds of mortality and enter into union with God.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"The only true gift
is a portion of yourself."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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 whether you remember it or not,
you're always in my prayers.

Woodie