

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 29 March, 2009

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Well, it's been a couple of weeks since the last CHURCH STUFF.

I was away for a week, and then we had Spring Break.

But now we're back to the grind, and it's not a bad idea to check our spiritual lives.

And since one of the three classic pillars of Lent is PRAYER (along with ALMSGIVING and FASTING), let's think a bit about PRAYER, and specifically, one of the most familiar of all prayers: "The Lord's Prayer".

Here goes:

I cannot say OUR, if my religion has no room for others  
and their needs.

I cannot say FATHER, if I do not demonstrate this relationship  
in my daily life.

I cannot say WHO ART IN HEAVEN, if all my interests and pursuits  
are in earthly things.

I cannot say THY KINGDOM COME, if I am unwilling to give up  
my own sovereignty and accept the will of God in my life.

I cannot say THY WILL BE DONE, if I am unwilling or resentful  
of having it in my life.

I cannot say ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN, unless I am truly  
ready to give myself to His service, here and now.

I cannot say FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE  
THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US,  
if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, if I deliberately  
choose to remain in a situation where I'm likely to be tempted.

I cannot say DELIVER US FROM EVIL, if I am not prepared to fight  
in the spiritual realm with the power of prayer.

I cannot say AMEN, unless I am also willing to honestly say:  
"Cost what it may; this is my prayer".

So, the next time you pray the words of Jesus, think deeply about what you're saying.  
The words are action-packed.

## THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

### PERSONAL CONFESSION

The annual Lenten RECONCILIATION SERVICE will be held next Tuesday evening (31 March) at the chapel at 1900. If you want to make Personal Confession before Easter, you are most welcome to do it at this Service (or stop in at the Washington Hall office anytime).

## STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Every Friday of Lent at 1800, there will be STATIONS OF THE CROSS at the Chapel. Each week, the Ceremony will be followed by a simple supper of bread and soup...to preserve the spirit of fasting.

### DID YOU KNOW?

#### PALMS:

With Palm Sunday so close (5 April), let's deal with some trivia on the subject.

At the beginning of his last week of earthly life, Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem by crowds waving palm and olive branches.

The palm that we use in the USA is generally "ground palm" from Texas. In other countries, willow or cedar branches are used; some places even use flowers.

In 1513, Ponce de Leon sailed into what is now Tampa Bay on Palm Sunday. He named the land "tierra florida" ("flowering land") because he was impressed with the abundance of flowers and because in his native Spain, the people used flowers to celebrate Palm Sunday. The name stuck, and we call the location "Florida".

Palms blessed on Palm Sunday have always held a special place in Catholic households. Some people place a piece of palm behind their crucifix as a reminder of this event in the life of Jesus.

In earlier times, people would save the palm and burn a little when a storm threatened. This custom may have come from Slavic countries where it used to be common to scatter bits of palm around farm-fields to protect the fields and the animals against bad weather and disease.

The Church always considered this practice to be more superstition than anything else, a hold-over from Greek and Celtic times, when certain plants were thought to have mystical powers.

### GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I'm writing to ask a rather sensitive question...My friends and I have been having a debate concerning masturbation and pornography. Are these things illegal in the Catholic Church? Does it center around intent, or is merely looking at pornographic pictures a sin in itself? I know the Catholic Church has made some adaptations as the years have gone by and am wondering what the current ruling is.

A: It's all a very delicate topic, especially in print...but at the same time, the topic is one which is part of everyday life for lots of people...and it certainly has a moral side...so it's good to examine exactly what's involved.

You've actually asked about two separate, but sometimes related, ideas: the use of pornography and the act (or habit) of masturbation.

I'd like to start my answer by giving you the Catholic Church's moral judgment on both, and it's stated in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (CCC).

First, pornography:

Pornography consists in removing real or simulated

sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the marriage act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other.

It does grave injury to the dignity of the participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others.

It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world.

It is a grave offense.

CCC, #2354

Now masturbation:

By masturbation is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. Both Church teaching and the moral sense have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action...

The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.

CCC, #2352

So, both pornography and masturbation are seen by the Church as gravely “disordered”.

Here’s the reason.

Quoting the “Catechism” again:

Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

CCC, #2351

In plain English, the Church’s view is that sex is a gift from God to be used for continuing the human race by bringing children into the world AND to develop the love and devotion of a man and a woman within the setting of marriage.

So the sexual power is meant to be used for continuing life AND for creating a wonderful, loving and nurturing bond between a man and a woman within the commitment of marriage.

The Church believes that any other use of sex is “disordered”...mainly because any other use of sex defeats God’s purpose. Catholic morality would see masturbation and pornography as selfish acts, whereas the sacredness and the dignity of sex are basically destroyed in order to bring a selfish pleasure to individuals.

Basically, the Church’s attitude is based on the conviction that sex has to be used in the service of LOVE and LIFE according to the design of God.

In your question, you ask the following:

Does it center around intent, or is merely looking at pornographic pictures a sin in itself?

Certainly, “intent” plays a part in any moral act, but it doesn’t change the nature of the act itself. For example, looking at pornography may not produce sexual arousal, but it certainly creates an atmosphere where human dignity is lessened and where the viewer contributes to the cheapening of the sacredness of sex in the design of God.

This is called an “occasion of sin” – an atmosphere which can easily lead someone to commit sin...and to knowingly put one’s self (or someone else) in in an occasion of sin is itself a sinful act.

So the act of viewing pronography, even without sexual arousal, has a serious moral dimension and contributes to a lessening of moral sensitivity.

It makes the viewer an accomplice in doing what is wrong.

I think that the rule-of-thumb that should be the “bottom line” here is what I said above: sex has to be used in the service of LIFE and LOVE according to the design of God.

Anyway, that’s the Catholic view.

#### THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

##### ANONYMOUS CHRISTIAN:

This is a term popularized by the German Catholic theologian Karl Rahner in the 1960s. It was his attempt to describe those who are “justified by grace” even though they remain outside the formal Christian community.

He was attempting to explain how people who do not know Christ – that is, are not church members, have not been baptized, do not confess Christ and may not even believe explicitly in God – might attain to eternal salvation.

His reasoning centered around the presence of “God’s grace in the world and in the hearts of men and women”. He believed that God’s “will for salvation” is present not only in Christians’ “explicit faith” but also in their “preconscious openness” to the Mystery of God.

Rahner felt that every human being had to come to grips with the Mystery of God in his or her life and that the spiritual “wrestling” that results from that life-struggle” can be called “God’s grace”, even though it needs to come to full and complete expression in the Church.

In his words, an “anonymous Christian” is “a person who lives in a state of Christ’s grace through faith, hope and love yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his or her life is oriented in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ”.

Rahner’s concern was somehow to positively address the religious lives of the vast majority of humanity – which does not embrace the Gospel in any direct or explicit way. He believed that one cannot set limits to God’s saving power; he also believed that “grace” is found widely in the world.

He believed further that this “grace” can be “justifying” and can save even those who – through no fault of their own – do not possess every formal aspect of formal Christianity that the Church usually expects.

#### UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“Science investigates;  
religion interprets.  
Science gives people knowledge,  
which is power.  
Religion gives people wisdom,

which is control.”

Dr. Martin Luther King

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, as always.

Keep plugging along.

And know that you’re in my prayers.

Woodie