

shepherds of Christ†



A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS
AND OTHERS INTERESTED IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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SPECIAL ISSUE!

This is a special, expanded issue for the purpose of giving an overview of the spiritual life. At times it is profitable for us to review briefly the various elements which comprise the spiritual life. We hope this special issue will be helpful for such an exercise, and that it will speak to the heart as well as to the mind.

Chief Shepherd of the Flock

An Overview of the Spiritual Life

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; he runs away because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. (Jn 10:11-15)¹

The Good Shepherd gave His life so that we may have life and have it in abundance. In this issue we offer an overview of the life Jesus came to give. We begin by presenting a brief sketch of the spiritual life. This will be followed by content which speaks in a more detailed manner about the various dimensions of the spiritual life -- our life in Christ.

A Sketch of the Spiritual Life

The Christian life is rooted in the great event of the Incarnation. We must consequently always focus our gaze upon Christ, realizing that the Father has spoken to us in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It only remains for us, then, to strive to understand with greater insight the inexhaustible truth of the Word Incarnate (Heb 1:1-2).

What was the condition of the human race at the time of Christ's coming? In some ways, people were much the same as we are today. There were those just being born into this world of human drama. There were those who, in death, were leaving it, some of whom had grasped but little of life's meaning. There were those who were healthy and vigorous. There were those who were sick and lame. Some especially felt the burdens, the grief, the suffering of the human

WE ARE EXPANDING OUR READERSHIP!

We are expanding our circulation by explicitly inviting to our readership those who are not priests, but who are interested in the spiritual life.

The Newsletter will still be written for priests in a special way. Yet we feel much of the material will also be of interest to those who are not priests.

To reflect the fact that we are now expanding our readership to include all interested parties, we think it is appropriate to offer a new act of consecration which is not worded for priests only, but one suitable for all.

condition. Others were ebullient and desired all the pleasures life could provide. There was some good being accomplished. Immorality, however, was rampant. What St. Paul tells us concerning the time that immediately followed Christ's existence certainly could also be applied to the time of His entrance into the world. It is, in short, an ugly picture that St. Paul depicts for us (Rom 1:22-32).

Into such a depraved condition Jesus entered, with a full and generous Heart, to lead the human race from the depths of sinfulness to the vibrant richness of a new life in Himself. Through His enfleshment, this Christ became the focal point of all history. The authentic hopes and dreams of the human family, now so overshadowed by the ugliness of sin, came converging upon this Christ. He would gather them up in Himself, give them a new luster and brilliance and dynamism, and would lead the human family back to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Christ was radically to release us from the dominion of sin and elevate us to a new level of existence. This life Christ has given us is not a type of superstructure which is erected atop human existence. Although nature and grace are distinct, they do not lie side by side as separate entities. Rather, grace permeates nature. The Christian is one graced person. The Christian is one who has been raised up, caught up, into a deeper form of life in Christ Jesus. Nothing that is authentically human in the life of

the Christian has been excluded from this new existence. Whatever is really human in the life of the Christian is meant to be an expression of the Christ-life. The simple but deep joys of family life, the wonderment at nature's beauty, the warm embrace of a mother for her child, the agony of crucial decision making, the success or frustration that is experienced in one's work, the joy of being well received by others, and the heartache of being misunderstood—all these experiences are intended to be caught up in Christ and made more deeply human because of Him.

Jesus has come, then, not to destroy anything that is authentically human, but to perfect it by leading it to a graced fulfillment. The more God-like we become through Christ, the more human we become.

We, through our incorporation into Christ which occurs at Baptism, are meant to relive the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In doing so, we are not only accomplishing our own salvation, but we are assisting in the salvation of others also. The Incarnation continues all the time. Christ, of course, is the one Who fundamentally continues the Incarnation. But He enlists our help. The world no longer sees Jesus, no longer is able to reach out and touch Him. We are the ones who now, in some way, make Christ visible and tangible. In union with the invisible, glorified Christ, and depending on Him as our source of life, we continue the Incarnation in its visible and temporal dimensions. This is our great privilege. This is our great responsibility.

The Christian is initiated into the mystery of Christ, into his or her role in prolonging the Incarnation, through Baptism (Rom 6:3-4).

It is not sufficient, however, that we be incorporated into Christ through Baptism. All forms of life require nourishment. So, too, our life in Christ must be continually nourished. How can we continually keep in contact with Christ? There are various ways as we live our life within the Church. We contact Christ in a most special way through the liturgy, above all in the Eucharistic liturgy. Through our most special and most personal meeting with Jesus in the Mass, we are more deeply incorporated into Christ. Also, we should remember that all the sacraments make up part of the Church's liturgy.

The reading of Scripture provides another special

opportunity for meeting Jesus. This is true for both Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament prefigures the New Testament and leads to it. It is obvious, however, that we meet Christ especially in the pages of the New Testament. How true it is to say that not to be familiar with Scripture is not to know Jesus properly. We should resolve to read from Scripture daily.

We also meet Jesus in our interaction with others. Everyone we meet, everyone we serve, is in the image of Jesus. We have to take the means to grow in this awareness. If I truly believe that everyone has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, how should I treat everyone?

These, then, are some of the ways we keep in contact with Jesus. Common to the various ways of meeting Jesus is a certain degree of prayerful reflection. Our contact with Jesus in the liturgy, in Scripture, and in our interaction with others, and so forth, will not be all that it should be unless we are persons of prayer. The light and strength of prayer enables us to keep in contact with Jesus as we should.

We live out our Christ-life in an atmosphere of love. Indeed, the life Jesus has given us is centered in love. It has its origins in the mysterious love of God (Jn 3:16).

Our new life in Jesus has arisen out of God's fathomless love. Christ, in His descent into human flesh, has established a milieu of love. The life He came to give can flourish only in the framework of love. Indeed, we can summarize the meaning of the Christian life by stating that it is our loving response to God's love. The pierced Heart of Jesus, this Heart which shed its last drop of blood in the greatest love for each one of us, is the symbol of God's tremendous love for us. Christ's Heart also calls us to respond by giving ourselves in love to God and neighbor. Yes, Jesus invites us to respond to God's love by giving ourselves in love to Him in an ever closer union. The more closely we are united to Him, the greater is our capacity to love God and neighbor. The more closely we are united with Jesus, the more closely He unites us to the Father in the Holy Spirit, with Mary our Mother at our side.

The Indwelling of the Trinity and the Life of Grace

The spiritual life, the life of holiness, begins at Baptism. Archbishop Luis Martinez says:

"When we are born we are endowed by God with all we need for our human life, a complete organism, and a soul with the full range of faculties. Of course they are not all developed from birth, but we have them then as the source of everything we are going to need in life. And thus it is also in the spiritual order. When someone is baptized, he receives in all its fullness that supernatural world which the Christian carries within his soul. He receives grace, which is a participation of the nature of God; the theological virtues, which put him in immediate contact with the divine; the moral virtues, which serve to regulate and order all his life; and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the divine, mysterious receivers for picking up the Spirit's inspirations and movements."²

Another author states: "The Three Divine Persons inhabit the sanctuary of our soul, taking their delight in enriching it with supernatural gifts and in communicating to us a Godlike life, similar to theirs, called the life of grace.

"All life, however, implies a threefold element: a *vital principle* that is, so to speak, the source of life itself; *faculties* which give the power to elicit vital acts; and lastly, the acts themselves which are but its development and which minister to its growth. In the supernatural order, God living within us produces the same elements. He first communicates to us *habitual grace* (the life of sanctifying grace) which plays the part of a *vital supernatural principle*. This principle deifies, as it were, the very substance of the soul and makes it capable, though in a remote way, of enjoying the Beatific Vision and of performing the acts that lead to it.

"Out of this grace spring the *infused virtues* and the *gifts of the Holy Spirit* which perfect our faculties and endow us with the immediate power of performing Godlike, supernatural, meritorious acts.

"In order to stir these faculties into action, He give us actual graces which enlighten our mind, strengthen our will, and aid us both to act supernaturally and to increase the measure of habitual grace that has been granted to us.

"Although this life of grace is entirely distinct from our natural life it is not mere-

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ly superimposed on the latter. It *penetrates it through and through*, transforms it and makes it divine. It assimilates whatever is good in our nature, our education and our habits. It perfects and supernaturalizes all these various elements, directing them toward the last end, that is toward the possession of God through the Beatific Vision and its resultant life.”³

Our being in the state of sanctifying of grace and the special indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity within us always exist together. We cannot have the one without the other. Our life of grace, which is a sharing in Trinitarian life, allows us to know and love Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a most intimate fashion. Through grace we are in the image of the Trinity, and we enjoy special relationships with the Divine Persons.

Again, we listen to the words of Archbishop Martinez as he speaks about our relationships with the Divine Persons:

“Love, we have said, is the foundation of devotion to the Holy Spirit, as it is also the foundation of Christian perfection. But love as a reflection of God, as His own image, is something that encloses within its simplicity a boundless wealth and a variety of forms. Who can fathom the depths of love?”

“Human love in all its manifestations is admirably in harmony with the love of charity; it is confident in filial love, trusting in friendship, sweet and fruitful in the love of husband and wife, disinterested and tender in the love of a mother. Our love of God must include all these forms of human love; every fiber of our heart must vibrate when the harmonious and full canticle of love bursts forth from it. But since God is one in essence and triune in Persons, our love for Him takes on a particular aspect accordingly as it is directed to each one of the divine Persons.

“Our love for the Father is tender and confident like that of children; eager to glorify Him as His only-begotten Son taught us to do by word and example. Love for the Father is the intense desire to have His will fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven. Our love for the Son, who willed to become flesh for us, is characterized by the tendency to union with Him and transformation into Him; by imitation of His example, participation in His life, and the sharing of His sufferings and His Cross. The Eucharist, mystery of love, of sorrow, and of union, reveals the characteristics of this love.

“Love for the Holy Spirit also has its special character, which we should study in order completely to understand devotion to Him. We have explained how the Holy Spirit loves us, how He moves us like a divine breath that draws us to the bosom of God, like a sacred fire that transforms us into fire, like a divine artist who forms Jesus in us. Surely, then, our love for the Holy Spirit should be marked by loving docility, by full surrender, and by a constant fidelity that permits us to be moved, directed, and transformed by His sanctifying action.

“Our love for the Father tends to *glorify* Him; our love for the Son, to *transform* ourselves into Him; our love for the Holy Spirit, to *let ourselves be possessed and moved by Him*.”⁴

Life In and With Jesus

◆ The spiritual life centers in Christ. Here are words from the *Jerusalem Catecheses*: “When we were baptized into Christ and clothed ourselves in him, we were transformed into the likeness of the Son of God. Having destined us to be his adopted sons, God gave us a likeness to Christ in his glory, and living as we do in communion with Christ, God’s anointed, we ourselves are rightly called ‘the anointed ones.’”⁵

◆ Msgr. Robert Guste says: “Ideal Catholics held up to us by the Church are the saints. As you read their lives, what do you notice? One after the other, they were men and women who had a deep, personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Their hearts were on fire with love for Him...”⁶

◆ When we are baptized we are incorporated into Christ’s paschal mystery of death and resurrection. St. Paul speaks of this marvelous union with Jesus: *You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we too should begin living a new life.* (Rm 6:3-4).

Christ has structured the Christian life by the way He lived, died, and rose from the dead. It is obvious, then, as Paul tells us above, that the pattern of death-resurrection must be at the heart of the Church’s life. Individually and collectively, we continually die with Christ so that we may continually rise with Him. Thus we pass over in a process of ongoing religious transition to a greater participation in Christ’s resurrection. It is true that our participation in Christ’s resurrection will reach its completion only in eternity. Nevertheless, we begin the life of resurrection here upon the earth, in the here and now of human life, in the midst of joy and pain; in the experience of success and failure, in the sweat of our brow, in the enjoyment of God’s gifts. As Christians, we should have a sense of dynamic growth concerning our here and now life of resurrection.

We cannot maintain the life of resurrection or grow in it without a willingness to suffer. This does not mean that we need to feel overwhelmed and heavily burdened in our lives. The greater portion of suffering for most Christians seems to be an accumulation of ordinary hardships, difficulties, and pains. At times, however, deep suffering, even suffering of agonizing proportions, can enter into one’s life. Whether the sufferings one encounters are of either the more ordinary variety or the more rare and extreme type, Christians must convince themselves that to relate properly to the cross is to grow in resurrection, and growth in resurrection means we will also have an increased capacity to help give resurrection to others.

◆ The Church invites us to share deeply in the passion of Christ, in the cross of Christ. She does so that we might share deeply in His life of resurrection—here and hereafter. The more we die with Christ, the more we share in His life of resurrection—here and hereafter. Our ultimate goal here below is not the cross, but resurrection—the newness of life the cross leads to - here below as well as in eternity.

We are meant to share in all of the mysteries of Christ here below—we are meant to relive them in our own lives. And all of these mysteries are directed to the crowning mystery of Jesus, His resurrection: “As the Church is ever re-enacting, during all the ages, the life story of her Divine Spouse—undergoing in the Mystical Body what He suffered in His Natural Body, so it must be too, in some measure, for every individual Christian that lives in real unity with Christ. It was thus that the saints understood the life of the Divine Master. *They not merely contemplated it, they lived it.* This was the source of the immense sympathy they were capable of experiencing for Him in His different states. They felt in a certain measure what He felt, and what is true of Our Lord’s life considered as a whole must be true in no imperfect or limited manner of that which was the supreme and crowning mystery in that life—namely, the Resurrection. *This must be, not merely a fact in Christian history, but a phase of Christian experience ...* We do not readily perceive that, in God’s plan, not only the Cross, but the Risen Life that followed it, is meant to be part of our terrestrial existence. Christ did not pass from the Cross straight to heaven. The Christian is not meant to do so either. In the case of Jesus the Cross preceded, prepared and prefaced a risen life on earth. In the case of the Christian the Cross is meant to play a somewhat similar role—that

is, to be the prelude to a risen life, even here below.

“The Cross cannot be completely understood except it is viewed in the full light of the Resurrection. It is the latter, not the former, that is the ultimate mystery for us...The Cross is a means, not an end; it finds its explanation only in the empty tomb; it is an entrance into life, not a mode of death. Any death that enters into God’s plan must necessarily issue forth in life. If He lays upon us the necessity of dying it is in order that we may live...In order that we may live as we ought, our rebellious nature must be crucified. Crucifixion always remains the only mode of salvation.

“God sends trials and crosses simply to deaden in us the activity of the forces that make for the decay of the spiritual life, in order that that spiritual life may develop and expand unimpeded. According as the life of perverse nature ebbs away from us on our cross united with Christ’s, the Divine Life that God has placed in all whom He has called begins to make itself more manifest and to display increased vigour and vitality...It is to that Resurrection, that life in death, that God directs all the circumstances of our life—it is the object He aims at in His dealing with us.”⁷

In his above words, Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., speaks about a special episode of our participation in the resurrection of Jesus. He speaks of our Christ-life, our life of grace, in the highly developed state. We should all strive for this state. We must realize, however, that all those who live in the state of grace are, in an essential way, living the life of resurrection. They are alive in Christ Jesus.

◆ The following words of St. John Eudes remind us of the glorious goal the Christian is called to: the most intimate union with Jesus.

“I ask you to consider that our Lord Jesus Christ is your true head and that you are a member of his body. He belongs to you as the head belongs to the body. All that is his is yours: breath, heart, body, soul and all his faculties. All of these you must use as if they belonged to you, so that in serving him you may give him praise, love and glory. You belong to him as a member belongs to the head. This is why he earnestly desires you to serve and glorify the Father by using all your faculties as if they were his.

“He belongs to you, but more than that, he longs to be in you, living and ruling in you, as the head lives and rules in the body. He desires that whatever is in him may live and rule in you: his breath in your breath, his heart in your heart, all the faculties of his soul in the faculties of your soul...

“You belong to the Son of God, but more than

that, you ought to be in him as the members are in the head. All that is in you must be incorporated into him. You must receive life from him and be ruled by him. There will be no true life for you except in him, for he is the one source of true life. Apart from him you will find only death and destruction. Let him be the only source of your movements, of the actions and the strength of your life.

“Finally, you are one with Jesus as the body is one with the head. You must, then, have one breath with him, one soul, one life, one will, one mind, one heart. And he must be your breath, heart, love, life, your all. These great gifts in the follower of Christ originate from baptism. They are increased and strengthened through confirmation and by making good use of other graces that are given by God. Through the holy eucharist they are brought to perfection.”⁸

◆ St. Ignatius of Antioch was deeply consumed with love for Jesus: “At last I am well on the way to being a disciple. May nothing, seen or unseen, fascinate me, so that I may happily make my way to Jesus Christ! Fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of the whole body, cruel tortures inflicted by the devil—let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ.”⁹

◆ Cardinal Newman tells us: “Everyone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work. We are not born at random... God sees every one of us; He creates every soul. He lodges it in a body, one by one, for a purpose. He needs, He deigns to need, every one of us.”¹⁰

Because of the uniqueness of each Christian's existence, he or she presents Christ with a unique opportunity. Each Christian has the vocation to offer Christ his or her humanity so that Jesus can live in that individual in a special way. This Jesus is Priest, Prophet and King. To the extent that an individual Christian offers his or her humanity to Jesus, that person has an unique opportunity to help to continue the work of the redemption--an opportunity that no one else can fulfill. Likewise, to the extent that an individual fails to offer his or her humanity to Christ, Jesus loses the opportunity to continue His redemptive work according to that person's uniqueness.

◆ Concerning the prophetic or teaching office of Christ, each of us has the ever-present opportunity of witnessing to the truth of Christ by the way we live. Mother Teresa gives a striking example of this. She says: “I received a letter from a wealthy Brazilian man. He assured me that he had lost his faith -- not just his faith in God but his faith in humanity as well. He was fed up with his situation and everything around him. He only thought about suicide.

“One day, walking on a busy street downtown, he saw a television set in a store window. The program was about our Home for the Dying in Calcutta, and it showed our Sisters taking care of the sick and the dying.

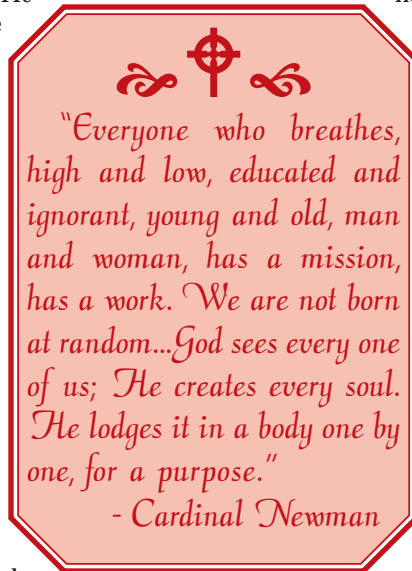
“The man confessed that when he saw that, he felt the urge to kneel and pray, after many years of not ever kneeling or praying.

“From that day on, he recovered his faith in God and in humanity, and he was convinced that God still loves him.”¹¹

◆ St. Paul, one who loved Jesus so deeply, has left us these words: “*But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God’s and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us; always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh.*” (2 Cor 4:7-11).

◆ Here are words from St. Claude La Columbière, one of the great apostles of devotion to the Heart of Christ. Speaking to Jesus, Claude says:

You share my burdens,
 You take them upon yourself.
 You listen to me fondly when I tell you my troubles.
 You never fail to lighten them.



I find You at all times and in all places.
 You never leave me.
 I will always find You wherever I go.
 Old age or misfortune will not cause You to abandon me.
 You will never be closer to me than
 When all seems to go against me.
 No matter how miserable I may be,
 You will never cease to be my friend.
 You tolerate my faults with admirable patience.
 You are always ready to come to me, if I so desire it.
 Jesus, may I die praising you!
 May I die loving you!
 May I die for the love of you.¹²

The Father's Will For Us -- Our Source of Peace

◆ Pope John Paul II instructs us: “The Church, as a reconciled and reconciling community, cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is love (see 1 John 4:8) and who out of love created human beings (see Wisdom 11:23-26; Genesis 1:27; Psalms 8:4-8) . . . He created them so that they might live in friendship with Him and in communion with one another.

“God is faithful to His eternal plan even when man, under the impulse of the evil one (see Wisdom 2:24) and carried away by his own pride, abuses the freedom given to him in order to love and generously seek what is good, and (instead) refuses to obey his Lord and Father. God is faithful even when man, instead of responding with love to God’s love, opposes Him and treats Him like a rival, deluding himself and relying on his own power, with the resulting break of relationship with the One who created him. In spite of this transgression on man’s part, God remains faithful in love.

“It is certainly true that the story of the Garden of Eden makes us think about the tragic consequences of rejecting the Father, which becomes evident in man’s inner disorder and in the breakdown of harmony between man and woman, brother and brother (see Genesis 3:12 ff; 4:1-16). Also significant is the Gospel parable of the two brothers (the parable of the ‘prodigal son’; see Luke 15:11-32) who, in different ways, distance themselves from their father and cause a rift between them. Refusal of God’s fatherly love and of His loving gifts is always at the root of humanity’s divisions.

“But we know that God . . . like the father in the parable (of the prodigal son), does not close His heart to any of His children. He waits for them, looks for them, goes to meet them at the place where the refusal of communion imprisons them in isolation and division. He calls them to gather about His table in the joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation.

“This initiative on God’s part is made concrete and manifest in the redemptive act of Christ, which radiates through the world by means of the ministry

of the Church.”¹³

◆ *In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you,’ and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.’ (Jn 20:19-21).*

The world needs peace. Individual nations need peace and families need peace. The Church needs peace. Each of us individually needs peace. We must work for peace through prayer, fasting, and other Christ-like activities.

And just what do we mean by peace? St. Augustine says peace is the tranquility of order. God has put order into His creation and this order must be respected and promoted if peace is to prevail. To the extent that the human family lives according to God’s will—lives according to the order or the plan God has established for creation—to that extent does peace exist in the various segments of human society. To the extent there are violations of God’s plan, of His will, to that extent peace is absent.

If we are to be instruments of peace, we ourselves must be at peace. Our personal peace is that tranquility of order which results from our doing God’s will. The more we are united through love with God in the doing of His will, the more we experience peace.

Sometimes the sense of peace we experience is so strong that we can “feel” it pulsating throughout our being. These are periods of what we may call the experience of extraordinary peace. This type of peace usually is not an everyday occurrence.

Most of the time we live immersed in a more subdued kind of peace which results from our daily attempts to do God’s will in love. It is that peace which is a welcome and sustaining companion as we walk the path of everyday life with its usual assortments of joys and disappointments, successes and failures, laughter and tears.

Occasionally, very deep suffering may enter our lives. It is during these times that we need special determination to preserve ourselves in a basic peace of spirit despite the very significant pain. One may wonder how a person can be at peace amidst the experience of great suffering. St. Francis de Sales in one of his writings—and I have not been able to locate the exact place—offers an analogy which I think is very helpful. He asks us to picture an ocean body of water at the time of a violent storm. The surface of the water becomes extremely turbulent. Francis asks us, as we use our imagination, to descend beneath the surface of the water into its depth. What do we find? The more deeply one descends away from the turbulent surface, the calmer the water becomes. Likewise, says the saint and doctor of the Church, should it be with us during times of profound suffering. Although the surface of the spirit may be very agitated, one can still maintain basic peace of spirit by going deep down to one’s center where God is more directly experienced. Here the person experiences a calm, a basic peace, although the suffering remains.

If we are trying to do God’s will in love, God intends us to be at peace. The more we conform to God’s will, the more we are living according to the order He intends for us. In turn, the more our lives are in harmony with the order established by God, the more we experience peace—peace being the tranquility of order. The more we ourselves live in this manner, the more fit instruments we become for promoting God’s order and consequent peace throughout the various segments of society.

◆ St. Dominic was an outstanding witness to the peace of the Lord: “Dominic possessed such great integrity and was so strongly motivated by divine love, that without doubt he proved to be a bearer of honor and grace. He was a man of great equanimity, except when moved to compassion and mercy. And since a joyful heart animates the face, he displayed the peaceful composure of a spiritual man in the kindness he manifested outwardly and by the cheerfulness of his countenance.”¹⁴

◆ Shortly before he was to die from cancer, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin left us these inspiring words about peace: “It is the first day of November, and fall is giving way to winter. Soon the trees will lose the vibrant colors of their leaves and snow will cover the ground. The earth will shut down, and people will race to and from their destinations bundled up for warmth. Chicago winters are harsh. It is a time of dying.

"But we know that spring will soon come with all its new life and wonder.

"It is quite clear that I will not be alive in the spring. But I will soon experience new life in a different way...

"What I would like to leave behind is a simple prayer that each of you may find what I have found—God's special gift to us all: the gift of peace. When we are at peace, we find the freedom to be most fully who we are, even in the worst of times. We let go of what is non-essential and embrace what is essential. We empty ourselves so that God may more fully work within us. And we become instruments in the hands of the Lord."¹⁵

◆ St. Teresa of Avila, one of the three women doctors of the Church, tells us how the spiritual life is summed up in loving conformity to the Father's will:

"All that the beginner in prayer has to do -- and you must not forget this, for it is very important -- is to labor and to be resolute and prepare himself with all possible diligence to bring his will in conformity with the will of God. As I shall say later, you may be quite sure that this comprises the very greatest perfection which can be attained on the spiritual road."¹⁶

Again she states: "...love consists ... in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything."¹⁷

The Holy Spirit and Mary

The late Archbishop Luis M. Martinez of Mexico strikingly speaks of the ongoing cooperation of Mary with the Holy Spirit regarding the reproduction of Jesus within us: "Christian life is the reproduction of Jesus in souls..."

"Now, how will this mystical reproduction be brought about in souls? In the same way in which Jesus was brought into the world, for God gives a wonderful mark of unity to all His works. Divine acts have a wealth of variety because they are the work of omnipotence; nevertheless, a most perfect unity always shines forth from them because they are the fruit of wisdom; and this divine contrast of unity and variety stamps the works of God with sublime and unutterable beauty.

"In His miraculous birth, Jesus was the fruit of heaven and earth...The Holy Spirit conveyed the divine fruitfulness of the Father to Mary, and the virginal soil brought forth in an ineffable manner our most loving Savior, the divine Seed, as the prophets called Him..."

"That is the way He is reproduced in souls. He is always the fruit of heaven and earth.

"Two artisans must concur in the work that is at

once God's masterpiece and humanity's supreme product: the Holy Spirit and the most holy Virgin Mary. Two sanctifiers are necessary to souls, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, for they are the only ones who can reproduce Christ.

"Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary sanctify us in different ways. The first is the Sanctifier by essence; because He is God, who is infinite sanctity; because He is the personal Love that completes, so to speak, the sanctity of God, consummating His life and His unity, and it belongs to Him to communicate to souls the mystery of that sanctity. The Virgin Mary, for her part, is the co-operator, the indispensable instrument in and by God's design. From Mary's maternal relation to the human body of Christ is derived her relation to His Mystical Body which is being formed through all the centuries until the end of time, when it will be lifted up to the heavens, beautiful, splendid, complete, and glorious.

"These two, then, the Holy Spirit and Mary, are the indispensable artificers of Jesus, the indispensable sanctifiers of souls. Any saint in heaven can co-operate in the sanctification of a soul, but his co-operation is not necessary, not profound, not constant: while the co-operation of these two artisans of Jesus of whom we have just been speaking is so necessary that without it souls are not sanctified (and this by the actual design of Providence), and so intimate that it reaches to the very depths of our soul. For the Holy Spirit pours charity into our heart, makes a habitation of our soul, and directs our spiritual life by means of His gifts.



The Virgin Mary has the efficacious influence of Mediatrix in the most profound and delicate operations of grace in our souls. And, finally, the action of the Holy Spirit and the co-operation of the most holy Virgin Mary are constant; without them, not one single character of Jesus would be traced on our souls, no virtue grow, no gift be developed, no grace increased, no bond of union with God be strengthened in the rich flowering of the spiritual life.

"Such is the place that the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary have in the order of sanctification. Therefore, Christian piety should put these two artisans of Christ in their true place, making devotion to them something necessary, profound, and constant."¹⁸

The Church

We live out our spiritual lives within the Church. The Church is a multi-splendored reality. Let us reflect upon some of the key ideas connected with the Church.

◆ Henri de Lubac states: "The Church is a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity, not only preparing us for the life of unity but bringing about even now our participation in it. She comes from and is full of the Trinity. She is for us -- in a favourite phrase of Bossuet -- 'Jesus Christ ... communicated'. She is 'the Incarnation continued.' She is, as Dietrick Bonhoeffer used to say, 'the presence of Christ on earth' --- she speaks with 'the authority of Christ living and present in her.' ... St. Paul applies to her this same word 'mystery' which he had first used of Christ. She is after all, the spouse of Christ and his body."¹⁹

◆ Fr. Bruno Forte tells us: "The Church comes from the Trinity, reflects in itself the Trinitarian communion—oneness in diversity—and journeys toward the Trinity, to the final handing over of all things to Christ, so that he might hand them over to the Father and God might be all in all. As 'a people gathered in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' the Church is the Church of the Father. In his universal salvific plan, God has willed it to be a sign and instrument of the unity of people among themselves and with him. It is the Church of the Son, who through his incarnation and the paschal mystery has

placed it in history as His Body. It is the Church of the Spirit, who makes the Risen Christ present in human history and enriching the people of God with charisms and ministries, leads it toward the promised future goal.”²⁰

◆ The fact that the Church is here on earth a reflection of the Trinitarian Community easily leads us to reflect upon the Church as the Body of Christ, since this name given to the Church also emphasizes the communal aspect of the Church. St. Paul tells us: *For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts -- all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body -- so it is with Christ. We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free men, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink. And indeed the body consists not of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body'; it does not belong to the body any the less for that. Or if the ear were to say, 'I am not an eye, and so I do not belong to the body', that would not stop its belonging to the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how would there be any hearing? If the whole body were hearing, how would there be any smelling?*

Now Christ's body is yourselves, each of you with a part to play in the whole. And those whom God has appointed in the Church are, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers; after them, miraculous powers, then gifts of healing, helpful acts, guidance, various kinds of tongues. Are all of them apostles? Or all prophets? Or all teachers? Or all miracle-workers? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all of them speak in tongues and all interpret them? (1 Cor 12:12-17; 27-30)

◆ Some two thousand years ago Christ walked the earth teaching, healing the sick, forgiving sins, extending His mercy and kindness. By such a life which culminated in death and resurrection, Christ redeemed the world. This objective redemption was accomplished by Christ alone. Through it, He won for people of all time the necessary graces for their salvation and sanctification.

However, it is necessary that such graces be distributed to each individual as one plays out his or her part in the drama of human existence. Such a distribution of grace is the work of subjective redemption.

Jesus still walks the earth as the work of redemption continues. However, He now walks the earth according to a different type of existence. He does not walk the earth in His physical body, but rather in His Mystical Body, the Church, the People of God. Through the members of His Church, Christ continues to be present as He teaches, administers the sacraments, extends His mercy -- all done through the members of His Body, the Church. This mystical Christ, in turn, derives all supernatural power from

Christ, the Head, who reigns gloriously with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Church, therefore, is the earthly continuation of Christ's redemptive Incarnation. This mission which the Church has, although a great responsibility, is also a great privilege. In proportion as each Christian offers and commits himself or herself to Christ, the Church in her entirety more and more mirrors forth Christ to the world. This Christ, whom the Church portrays to the world, is the Christ who is Prophet, King and Priest.

◆ We now reflect upon the Church as Spouse of Christ. Fr. Joseph Murphy, S.J., tells us: "John Paul II always quotes the rich doctrinal and patristic traditions of the Church which refer to Christ as the Spouse of the Church and the Spouse of souls, given to both in the Eucharistic mystery. For him the key to understanding the sacramentality of marriage, not to mention the nature of humanity, is the spousal love of Christ for the Church demonstrated in Ephesians 5. Christ is the Head of the Church as Savior of His Body. The Church is exactly that Body which receives from Him all that through which it becomes and is His Body. As Head and Savior of the Church He is also Bridegroom of His Bride..."²¹

◆ The Church is a mother to us. Henri de Lubac speaks concerning this beautiful truth:

"The Church is my mother because she brought me forth to a new life. She is my mother because her concern for me never slackens, any more than do her efforts to deepen that life in me, however unenthusiastic my cooperation. And though in me this life may be a fragile and timid growth, I have seen its full flowering in others..."

"Happy those who from childhood have learnt to look on the Church as a mother! Happier still those whose experience, in whatever walk of life, has confirmed its truth! Happy those who one day were gripped by (and whose appreciation of it ever grew) the astonishing newness, richness and depth of the life communicated to them by this mother!"²²

◆ Avery Dulles, S.J., the well-known theologian who has written much about the Church, observes: "The Church, as I have already contended, is essentially a mystery of grace, a wonderful encounter between the divine and the human. Even in its visible structures, the Church is not a mere organization to be judged on grounds of efficiency, but a sacrament of God's saving deed in Jesus Christ. From this it follows, in my judgment, that the Church's forms of speech and life, and indeed its entire corporate existence, must be such as to mediate a vital communion with Christ the Lord. The Church must be a place of prayer and worship, praise and witness. Any institutional change in the Church must be carefully assessed for its effect on the spiritual life of the members. Does it intensify their faith, their hope, their charity? Does it help them to center their lives on Christ and to ground their existence in the God who raised him from the dead?"²³

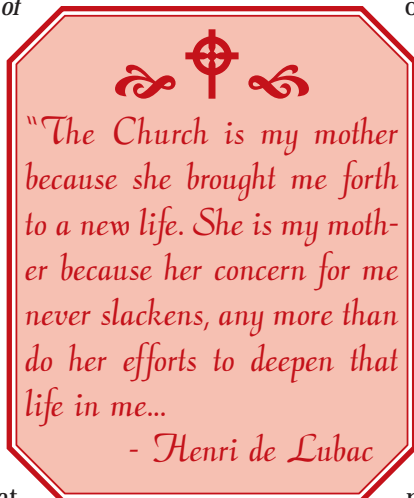
◆ Fr. Gerald Vann, O.P., speaks movingly about our life in the Church:

"If you live in the Church and try to use the power of the Church to increase the life of the Church, then the power of the Church will make you yourself whole; and in your wholeness you will help to make your family and make your world.

But you will be building for a more than earthly beatitude because you will be building the city which is eternal. Here you build in shadow, you build for a future which is invisible, and so you can only build in hope. And often your plans will be wrecked and your dreams come crashing about your ears, and you will need the strength of the Rock which is Christ to give you patience and fortitude...

"And when death has come to you...the Church will bless you for the life you have added to it, and there will be men to heed you better than they did when you were here..."

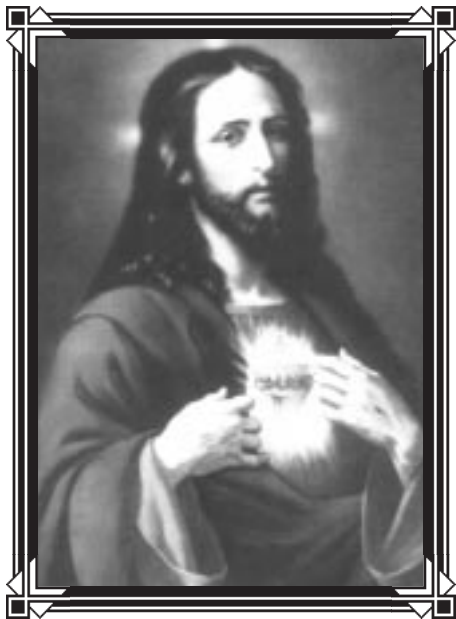
"But you, for your part, will be no longer in the shadow but in the glory of the Light inaccessible; you will be in the City that is yours because you helped to build it; you will see Him at last as He is, and be wholly with Him; and you will have no more any mourning or weeping or any other sorrow, for all these former



"The Church is my mother because she brought me forth to a new life. She is my mother because her concern for me never slackens, any more than do her efforts to deepen that life in me..."

- Henri de Lubac

things will have been transmuted into happiness and peace, and you will walk with Him--together with all those you have helped to bring to Him, even until the end of the world--you will walk with Him in happiness for ever, in the cool of the eternal evening.”²⁴



The Sacraments

The Church's existence centers in her liturgy. Vatican II says: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows."²⁵ The Church's liturgical life is centered in the sacraments and, most especially, in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. We will briefly consider the sacraments in general, and then more extensively develop ideas about the Mass.

The sacraments are special encounters with Christ. Jesus unites Himself with the sacramental sign as He offers His grace to the recipient. In this sense, Christ and His sacraments become one; the sacrament and its minister are merely instruments that Christ employs to give Himself anew. The primary sacramental encounter is between Jesus and the recipient.

Christ offers Himself through the Church and her sacraments so that we might become ever more united to Him. This incorporation into Christ begins at baptism, through which the Christian becomes a member of both Christ and the Church. What is more, this incorporation into the life of Christ means being incorporated into his paschal mystery. Death-resurrection was the summary mystery of Christ's redemptive existence. Death-resurrection was the central mystery whereby Christ gave us life, and it is the central mystery that the Christian must relive in Christ.

Each one of the sacraments deepens our incor-

poration into Jesus' death-resurrection; each one achieves this in a somewhat different manner according to its primary purpose; finally, and very importantly, each of the sacraments deepens this incorporation within an ecclesial framework. The sacraments, because they are realities of both Christ and his Church, intensify the Christian's relationship not only with Jesus, but also with the members of the Church and, ultimately, with all others.

The Eucharist

◆ The death-resurrection of Jesus, which is encountered in a special way through the sacraments, is most especially renewed in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Consequently, we can see the logical connection between the sacraments and the Mass. Indeed, all of the sacraments point to the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

◆ *At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us* (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 17)²⁶

◆ *The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. They should be instructed by God's word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 48)²⁷

◆ *Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ the Lord desired to set before us in a very special way this remarkable union whereby we are united one with another and with our divine Head, a union that no word of praise can ever sufficiently express. For in this sacrifice the sacred ministers act not only as the representative of our Saviour, but as the representative of the whole Mystical Body and of each one of the faithful. Again, in this act of sacrifice, the faithful of Christ, united by the common bond of devotion and prayer, offer to the eternal Father through the hands of the priest, whose prayer alone has made it present on the altar, the Immaculate Lamb, the most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the Church's universal need. Moreover, just as the divine Redeemer, while dying on the Cross, offered Himself to the eternal Father as Head of the whole human race, so now, 'in this clean oblation' He not only offers Himself as Head of the Church to His heavenly Father but in Himself His mystical members as well. He embraces them all, yes, even the weaker and more ailing members, with the deepest love of His Heart.* (Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis AAS*, XXXV, 232-233)²⁸

◆ Pope John Paul II states: "This worship, given therefore to the Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, above all accompanies and permeates the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. But it must fill our churches also outside the timetable of Masses. Indeed, since the Eucharistic Mystery was instituted out of love, and makes Christ sacramentally present, it is worthy of thanksgiving and worship. And this worship must be prominent in all our encounters with the Blessed Sacrament, both when we visit our churches and when the sacred species are taken to the sick and administered to them.

"Adoration of Christ in this sacrament of love must also find expression *in various forms of Eucharistic devotion*: personal prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, Hours of Adoration, periods of exposition—short, prolonged and annual (Forty Hours) - Eucharistic benediction, Eucharistic processions, Eucharistic congresses. A particular mention should be made at this point of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ as an act of public worship rendered to Christ present in the Eucharist, a feast instituted by my predecessor Urban IV in memory of the institution of this great Mystery.

"All this therefore corresponds to the general principles and particular norms already long in existence, but newly formulated during or after the Second

Vatican Council.

“...The Church and the world have a great need of Eucharistic worship. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and in contemplation that is full of faith and ready to make reparation for the great faults and crimes of the world. May our adoration never cease.”²⁹

◆ The following words of Fr. M. Raymond, O.C.S.O., emphasize the great importance regarding personal holiness and one’s participation in the Mass: “Mass, inasmuch as it is Christ’s offering, is not only always acceptable to God, but is of infinite value as well.

“But, inasmuch as it is your offering and mine, and that of every other member of the Mystical Body ... we can limit the effectiveness of God’s great Act of Love; we finite beings can set bounds to the veritable flood of God-life made possible by the Infinite Son of the Infinite Father.”³⁰

Yes, the effectiveness of each Mass, which makes the sacrifice of Calvary sacramentally present, depends in part on the holiness of the entire Church offering it with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit, including the holiness of the individual priest offering and the holiness of his participating congregation.

◆ Fr. Maurice de la Taille, S.J., formerly professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and a universally recognized authority on the Mass, also points out the great importance of personal holiness in the Church relative to the effectiveness of the Eucharistic sacrifice: “It is, then, of the greatest importance that there should be in the Church many holy, many very holy persons. Devout people, men and women, who should be urged by every means to higher sanctity, so that *through them the value of our Masses may be increased* and the tireless voice of the Blood of Christ, crying from the earth, may ring with greater clearness and insistence in the ears of God. His Blood cries on the altars of the Church, but, since it cries through us, it follows that the warmer the heart, the purer the lips, the more clearly will its cry be heard at the Throne of God. Would you wish to know why for so many years after the first Pentecost the Gospel was so marvelously propagated, why there was so much sanctity amongst the Christian people; why such purity in heart and mind, such charity, the sum of all perfection? You will find the answer when you recall that in those times the Mother of God was still on earth giving her precious aid in all the Masses celebrated by the Church, and you will cease to wonder that never since has there been such expansion of Christianity, and such spiritual progress.”³¹

If all, then, have a responsibility to grow in holiness in order to render the Mass more efficacious, the

priest has a special duty to do. His duty must always be to grow in holiness -- to grow in union with Christ the Priest of Christ Who leads us to the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary on our side.

◆ The Sacrifice of Calvary is sacramentally present in the Mass. When we pray the Morning Offering, we are united to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We offer our prayers, our sufferings, our joys, our sorrows, pleading to God that great graces be bestowed upon us through our prayerful actions as we act in love according to the Father’s will. Whether we are eating, taking care of a sick parent, playing tennis with a friend, working at our job, we can help bring down great graces for the world.

When we pray the Morning Offering prayer we offer our prayers to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, with the prayerful assistance of Mary, our Mother. Let us pray together with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is no other prayer.

“My dear Father, I offer You this day all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings in union with Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in the Holy Spirit.

“I unite with our Mother, Mary, all the angels and saints, and all the souls in purgatory to pray to the Father for myself, for each member of my family, for my friends, for all the people throughout the world, for all the souls in purgatory, and for all other intentions of the Sacred Heart.



“I love You, Jesus, and I give You my heart. I love you, Mary, and I give you my heart. Amen.”

◆ Fr. Edward Leen, C.S. Sp., tells us: “Unless we are pleasing to God we cannot be saved, we cannot realize the purpose of our divine adoption. We cannot please God unless we resemble Jesus Christ, and the Blessed Sacrament is instituted for the very object of perfecting in us this likeness. Bodily food is transformed into the flesh of him that receives it; this heavenly food, the food of our souls, which is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, has the directly opposite effect: it changes him who receives it into Itself. It must not be forgotten that the presence in us which follows the reception of Holy Communion is a living active presence. Our Lord is more present with us than is a person with whom we are speaking. As He influenced whilst on earth those who allowed themselves to fall under the charm of His Personality, so He exercises a profound effect on the soul of the communicant, if that soul wishes to submit to His action. We cannot be in the society of one who is good without being incited to goodness; we cannot be with Our Lord—and we are as close to Him as our desires extend—without receiving the effects of His virtue and without being stirred to become as he was, without being drawn, in a mystical sense to become one with Him, to become ‘Christified.’”³²

◆ From a spiritual journal: “Go to the tabernacle. Jesus will give us our answers. He is waiting for us to come. We must come and sit in silence and let Him work in our hearts. We must not be filled with fear, we should be filled with hope and joy. We must pray to the Holy Spirit to give us His wisdom to know the will of the Father. Mary is our Mother. She will help us with all our trials and all of our struggles. We must discipline our thoughts and go to the Heart of Jesus. It is through the Eucharist that we will be strengthened for our trials.

“This is how I am with Jesus. I am empty. I want Him to make Himself known to me. I didn’t have much theological knowledge when I started sitting in front of the tabernacle. I was looking for love from Jesus. Nobody loved me the way my soul wanted to be loved. I craved to be with Jesus. I wanted my heart filled. I wanted the craving I felt inside satisfied. I thirsted for love. I sat with Him present in the tabernacle and He filled me. He revealed Himself to me. He was the Bridegroom of my soul and I His bride. As I became more intimately united to Him, sitting there in silence and going to Him, I cried. I was so filled with love. I found what I was looking for all my life. He wrote the knowledge of Himself on my soul. He wrote this knowledge in the intimate moments I spent with Him at Mass after Communion and before the tabernacle.

“I struggle intently to do His work, and I am weary from running the race. I am

*“It must not be forgotten
that the presence in us
which follows the reception
of Holy Communion is a
living active presence. Our
Lord is more present with
us than is a person with
whom we are speaking.”*

- Edward Leen

tired, I am truly human, but the unquenchable love I have for Him in my heart is at the core of my existence. It is in Him I exist and in Him I love. I love Him so intently and yet I am so unworthy of His gifts given to me. I long more for the desire to help souls, and His desires become mine through my deep union with Him especially after the reception of the Eucharist. On this day (Feast of the Assumption), I felt the unquenchable purity of the Heart of Mary and the joy of dwelling deeply in His Heart in her pure love. It was a special gift He gave to me, to be wrapped in Mary's Heart despite my faults. He gave Himself so completely to me. I only long for this, knowing this presence.

◆ Mother Teresa of Calcutta shares these thoughts with us: "I make a holy hour each day in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. All my sisters of the Missionaries of Charity make a daily holy hour, as well, because we find that through our daily holy hour our love for Jesus becomes more intimate, our love for each other more understanding, and our love for the poor more compassionate. Our holy hour is our daily family prayer where we get together and pray the Rosary before the exposed Blessed Sacrament for the first half hour, and the second half hour we pray in silence. Our adoration has doubled our vocations. In 1963, we were making a weekly hour together, but it was not until 1973, when we began our daily holy hour that our community started to grow and blossom."³³

◆ St. Peter Julian Eymard, founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, tells us: "The Eucharist, behold the Christian's treasure, his delight on earth. Since Jesus is in the Eucharist for him personally, his whole life ought to be drawn to it like a magnet to its center."³⁴

Priesthood

The above thoughts on the Eucharist easily lead us to thoughts on the priesthood:

◆ The *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* now speaks to us concerning the priest and his relationship with the Eucharist:

"If the service of the Word is the foundational element of the priestly ministry, the heart and the vital center of it is constituted, without a doubt, in the Eucharist, which is, above all, the real presence in time of the unique and eternal sacrifice of Christ.

"The sacramental memorial of the death and Resurrection of Christ, the true and efficacious representation of the singular redemptive Sacrifice, source and apex of Christian life in the whole of evangelization, the Eucharist is the beginning, means, and end of the priestly ministry, since 'all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed

towards it.' Consecrated in order to perpetuate the Holy Sacrifice, the priest thus manifests, in the most evident manner, his identity.

"There exists, in fact, an intimate rapport between the centrality of the Eucharist, pastoral charity, and the unity of life of the priest, who finds in this rapport the decisive indications for the way to the holiness to which he has been specifically called.

"If the priest lends to Christ, Most Eternal High Priest, his intelligence, will, voice and hands so as to offer, through his very ministry, the sacramental sacrifice of redemption to the Father, he should make his own the dispositions of the Master and, like him, live those gifts for his brothers in faith. He must therefore learn to unite himself intimately to the offering, placing his entire life upon the altar of sacrifice as a revealing sign of the gratuitous and anticipatory love of God."³⁵

◆ Vatican II tells us: "Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry. True, the grace of God can complete the work of salvation even through unworthy ministers. Yet ordinarily God desires to manifest His wonders through those who have been made particularly docile to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit...

"This most holy Synod desires to achieve its pastoral goals of renewal within the Church, of the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and of dialogue with the modern world. Therefore it fervently exhorts all priests to use the appropriate means endorsed by the Church as they ever strive for that greater sanctity which will make them increasingly useful instruments in the service of all of God's People."³⁶

What Vatican II puts before seminarians regarding spiritual formation can also obviously be implemented by priests: "Spiritual formation should be closely linked with doctrinal and pastoral training. Especially with the help of the spiritual director, such formation should help seminarians learn to live in familiar and constant companionship with the Father, through Jesus Christ His Son, in the Holy Spirit. By sacred ordination they will be molded in the likeness of Christ the Priest. As friends they should be used to loyal association with Him through a profound identification of their whole lives with His. They should live His paschal mystery in such a way that they know how to initiate into it the people entrusted to them. They should be taught to look for Christ in many places: in faithful meditation on God's word, in active communion with the most holy mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and the divine Office, in the bishop who sends them, and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, the young, the sick, the sinful and the unbelieving. With the trust of a son, they should love and honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to His disciple by Christ Jesus as He hung dying on the cross."³⁷

◆ Pope John Paul II builds upon the teaching of Vatican II: "There can be no doubt that the exercise of the priestly ministry, especially in the celebration of the sacraments, receives its saving effects from the action of Christ himself who becomes present in the sacraments. But so as to emphasize the gratuitous nature of salvation which makes a person both 'saved' and a 'savior' -- always and only in Christ -- God's plan has ordained that the efficacy of the exercise of the ministry is also conditioned by a greater or lesser human receptivity and participation. In particular, the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the leadership of the community in charity."³⁸

◆ Father Arthur Culkins, a contemporary Marian scholar, offers us these words on Mary and the priest:

"If every Christian ought to see himself in the Apostle John, entrusted to Mary as her son or daughter, how much more ought priests to recognize themselves as sons of Mary, as the subject of a 'double' entrustment to her. I say 'double' because they are successors of John by a twofold title: as disciples and as priests. This is beautifully drawn out by our Holy Father in his "Holy Thursday Letter to Priests" of 1988: 'If John at the foot of the Cross somehow represents every man and woman for whom the motherhood of the Mother of God is spiritually extended, how much more does this concern each of us, who are sacramentally called to the priestly ministry of the Eucharist in the Church!'

"Although Jesus had already entrusted every priest to his Mother from the height of the Cross and the Pope has done it even hundreds of times, it is still

necessary for the priest to do so himself if he would truly experience the power and the protection of the Mother of God in his life as her Divine Son intends it. Priests who have done so know the difference it makes".³⁹

◆ Fr. Jean Galot, S.J. gives us these insightful words on the priesthood: "Christ requires of the Twelve a more complete consecration, more like his own. He calls upon them to forsake everything to follow him and thereby associates them more closely to his own Incarnation..."

"Consecration, too, establishes a special bond between priests and the redeeming mystery of Christ. Because Jesus brings his own consecration to fruition through sacrifice, those on whom he bestows his pastoral power are called upon to realize in themselves the definition of the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. Priests cannot limit their sacrificial offering to the ritual performance of the Eucharist. They are called upon to commit themselves completely by making that total gift of their own selves which the Eucharist implies for their own personal lives. Their commitment to sacrifice is not just the one required of every Christian by virtue of the universal priesthood but the one demanded of them by a consecration that is specifically the priest's own.

"As to the mission of the priest, it is entirely an expression of redemptive Incarnation in its pastoral aspect. The Incarnation is revealed in this mission because the powers bestowed on the priests to be exercised in the name of Christ are divine powers: the power to hand down revealed truth authoritatively, the power to offer... Christ's own sacrifice in the Eucharist, the power to forgive sins and to mediate Christ's holiness, the power to lead the community and to promote the development of a kingdom which is God's own. Thus, the priest emerges as the man of God, the man in whom God acts with a special power.

"The priestly ministry brings redemption to fruition also because of the indissoluble bond which Christ establishes between service and sacrifice. The Son of Man has come to serve and to give his life as a ransom for mankind. Prolonging this service of the Son of Man and making it available to men in every age and place means prolonging at the same time the sacrifice that imparts freedom. All the aspects of the priestly ministry bear the distinctive mark of sacrifice. The priest cannot impart the truth and the life of Christ, nor live his pastoral love, without a profound commitment to the way of the cross."⁴⁰

And here are further words of Fr. Galot: "As a mediator, the priest is a shepherd in the name of God, or more precisely in the name of Christ, and through Christ, in the name of the Father. In the priest is realized the prophetic oracle of Ezekiel in which Yahweh promises to be the Shepherd of his people. (Ezek 34).

"Some implications of this principle must be underlined. The priest does not draw the inspiration for his pastoral zeal from his own feelings, from his own personal resolve to create a better world. He is shepherd on the strength of God's pastoral intention

and represents specifically Christ the shepherd. Consequently he is called upon to fulfill his pastoral mission not according to ideas of his own and his own personal ambitions, but in keeping with God's own dispensation and the design of salvation devised by the Father and carried out by Christ. Like Jesus himself, the priest is at the service of the Father."⁴¹

◆ Pope John Paul II speaks to his brother priests: "*In a certain way prayer is the first and last condition for conversion*, spiritual progress and holiness. Perhaps in the recent years — at least in certain quarters — there has been too much discussion about the Priesthood, the priest's 'identity', the value of his presence in the modern world, etc., and on the other hand there has been too little praying. There has not been enough enthusiasm for actuating the Priesthood itself through prayer...in order to confirm the priestly identity. It is prayer that shows the essential style of the priest; without prayer this style becomes deformed. Prayer helps us always to find the light that has led us since the beginning of our priestly vocation, and which never ceases to lead us, even though it seems at times to disappear in the darkness. Prayer enables us to be converted continually, to remain in a state of continuous reaching out to God, which is essential if we wish to lead others to Him. Prayer helps us to believe, to hope and to love, even when our human weakness hinders us.

"Prayer likewise enables us continually to rediscover the dimensions of that kingdom for whose coming we pray every day, when we repeat the words that Christ taught us. Then we realize what *our place is in the realization of the petition*: 'Thy kingdom come', and we see how necessary we are in its realization."

And here are further words of John Paul II to priests: "Dear brothers: ...you who have put your hand to the plough and do not turn back, and perhaps even more those of you who are doubtful of the meaning of your vocation or of the value of your service: think of the places where people anxiously await a priest, and where for many years, feeling the lack of such a priest, they do not cease to hope for his presence. And sometimes it happens that they meet in an abandoned shrine, and place on the altar a stole which they still keep, and recite all the prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy; and then, at the moment that corresponds to the transubstantiation a deep silence comes down upon them, a silence sometimes broken by a sob... so ardently do they desire to hear the words that only the lips of a priest can efficaciously utter... So deeply do they feel the absence of a priest among them!... Such places are not lacking in the world. So if one of you doubts the meaning of his Priesthood, if he thinks it is 'socially' fruitless or useless, reflect on this!"⁴²

◆ Here are words for the priest from Fr. Nicholas Cachia: "This sense of the belonging of the priest to his community is essential both for his personal life and for his pastoral work. He is not a stranger to that community. This is particularly true of diocesan priests. A group of diocesan priests in South Africa stated in a document they published on the spirituality of the diocesan priest: 'By virtue of his diocesan vocation... the diocesan priest belongs in a primary, immediate, and undifferentiated sense to the people of the diocese, and to the parish to which he is sent.'

"This *being with others and for others* is made concrete through service. Jesus presented himself as the Son of Man who came to serve others (cf. Matt. 20,28; Mark 10,45). John presents Jesus as laying aside his garments in order to wash the feet of his disciples, asking them to follow his example (cf. John 13, 4-16)... As the German Bishops say in a document on the priestly service: 'in all these and many other New Testament texts, there is no trace of either hierarchical triumphalism or authoritarian arrogance. On the contrary, these texts speak of a special mission of devoted and unity-oriented leadership, and of an assumption of service for the Gospel'

"The note of service immediately corrects any misunderstandings which could be connected to the authority aspect which the priest receives over his community. We have to distinguish between authority and power. Jesus taught with authority. But his teachings like his actions were always aimed at the liberation of persons. The same should be true of the Christian pastor. He receives authority with his priestly ministry, but 'this is something very different from a license to lord it over those under his care. Rather his authority always exists for the sake of service. Christ has given us the example: his ultimate service was the laying down of his life for his friends'."⁴³



Prayer

◆ Prayer is a special occasion in which we deepen our awareness of our relationship with God. In prayer we become especially aware of God's loving presence and respond with our pledge of love. Prayer deepens our desire for God and deepens our determination to carry out His will. Prayer unites us more intimately with the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

◆ The best way to pray is that method which at any particular time seems best able to put us in contact with God. For one person this may be meditative reading—for example, a prayerful reflection on a selected Scripture passage. As many passages may be prayed over as seems fruitful for a particular prayer period. For another, the best method here and now may well be a simple discussion with God concerning the happenings of one's life. Another person may choose reflection on the words of a favorite prayer. Prayer over a scene of Christ's life is another popular method. All the above are some of the common methods used in making meditative prayer. To have a deepened sense of God being present to us and we to God, and to realize that this occurs in the atmosphere of love—this is the important thing. The prayer method we use at any particular time should best serve this purpose.

No matter what prayer method I use, my prayers should always be Trinitarian and Christocentric. I should always strive to realize that the Father speaks to me through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and that I respond to the Father through and with Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

As prayer develops, it usually becomes more simplified. Beginners in the life of prayer often experience numerous ideas and images regarding God and the things of God together with various acts of the will. As prayer develops there usually occurs a simplification process which is threefold. First, acts of the intellect become fewer, even to the extent that one idea clearly predominates. The acts of the will also become fewer, and that of love more and more emerges and, in summary fashion, contains all other movements of the will. Finally, prayer's simplification process reaches out and touches everything in the person's life. The person sees life harmoniously unified in Christ, and this simplified vision gives a sense of concentrated purpose and strength to one's existence which was previously not present.

Prayer and its growth process are not void of all difficulties. The path of prayer, as with the spiritual life in general, is not always a smooth one. Sometimes we encounter lesser sufferings along the

way; sometimes the pain is more severe. The sufferings, if properly coped with, are meant to lead to greater union with God. It is once again a question of living Christ's paschal mystery of death and resurrection.

One of the common difficulties encountered in prayer is that of coping with distractions. It is only in higher mystical prayer, during which God takes special hold of the faculties, that distractions are completely absent. In the more ordinary stages of prayer, we will always have to cope with them. The challenge, then, is to strive to bypass distractions when they do occur. Essential concentration on God and the things of God is still possible although distractions come and go.

Dryness in prayer is another common suffering. Often God bestows sweet consolations upon one beginning the life of prayer in order to help the person become initiated into the rewarding but arduous life of prayer. Often, as prayer progresses, the periods of emotionally-felt consolation may become less frequent. A dryness of the emotions is noticeably present. The person, grounded in the practice of prayer, is now strong enough to continue in it even though times of emotionally-felt consolation may be less frequent. One is learning to seek God, rather than just God's gifts of consolation. In seeking God, the person will also receive consolations as God chooses to give them.

Of all the difficulties encountered during prayer, surely the most painful is to experience God as seeming to be distant. This is such a penetrating type of suffering because it strikes at the very heart of prayer—the fact that prayer is a special meeting with God in which I strive to be aware of God with heightened consciousness.

There are two basic reasons for God seeming to be distant. God can actually be more distant because the person is at fault. There is something of considerable significance which the person is doing and should not be doing, or something which he or she should be doing and is not. The solution to the difficulty is obvious. Corrective action should be taken. If, however, upon examination the person honestly cannot discover any such significant commission or omission, he or she can be reasonably assured that this is a trial associated with prayer's growth process. Passing through this trial successfully, the person will discover that the relative darkness has turned into a greater light, and a closer love union with God in Christ is now experienced.

◆ We should not be afraid to look at ourselves in prayerful self-reflection. Prayerful reflection upon myself in union with Jesus will give me a growing sense of peace and security, resulting from an increased prayerful awareness of how much Jesus loves me as this unique companion. If there is pain involved in prayerful self-reflection, the pain soon fades to the background. In prayer Jesus shows us how lovable we are. He loved us unto His brutal death. Redeemed by the love of God, how can we be unlovable? We have been touched by Jesus' redemptive blood. We are thus beautiful in His sight. His love for us continues, and the more we surrender to the boundless love of His magnificent Heart, the more the truth, the goodness, and the beauty of our persons shine forth.

◆ Fr. John Wright, S.J., tells us: "It is frequently said that the prayer of beginners is more active and that as time goes on and prayer matures it becomes more passive. But it seems to me that we must distinguish here our attitudes and awareness from our actual activities and operations. Initially, our attitude is more active than passive. We are more conscious of doing and acting than of receiving. We are more aware of what we do by way of response than of what God does in His initiative. Gradually this changes, so that we become more and more aware of His action in us, illuminating, inspiring, strengthening, encouraging, and so forth. This means, of course, that our attitude becomes more passive. But our actual activity in operation doesn't itself become less. There is indeed a greater dependence on God's action, and what we do is done more freely, more simply, more intensively and spontaneously. Our attention, then, is more upon God than upon ourselves, but we are actually more active in the real sense. For we see more clearly, believe more deeply, love more purely, rejoice more unselfishly..."⁴⁴

◆ Thomas Merton speaks to us about the place of love in prayer: "The instinctive characteristic of religious meditation is that it is a search for truth

*Mary,
Queen of Peace,
Pray for us.*

which springs from love and which seeks to pursue the truth not only by knowledge but also by love. It is, therefore, an intellectual activity which is inseparable from an intense consecration of spirit and application of the will. The presence of love in our meditation intensifies our thought by giving it a deeply affective quality. Our meditation becomes charged with a loving appreciation of the value hidden in the supreme truth which the intelligence is seeking. The affective drive of the will...raises the soul above the level of speculation and makes our quest for truth a prayer full of reverential love and adoration striving to pierce the dark cloud

which stands between us and the throne of God. We beat against this cloud with supplication, we lament our poverty, our helplessness, we adore the mercy of God and His supreme perfections, we dedicate ourselves entirely to this worship.”⁴⁵

◆ Growth in prayer not only increases our love of God, but also enhances our loving concern for others.

A great example of this is seen in the study of the prayer life of Catherine of Sienna, saint and doctor of the Church. Sr. Mary O’Driscoll, O.P., tells us:

“Twenty-six of Catherine of Sienna’s prayers have been preserved for us. With one possible exception, they are not prayers that she herself wrote or even dictated to others. Rather, they were transcribed by her followers who were present as she prayed aloud. All of these prayers belong to the last four years of her life. They impress us by their simplicity, their intense concentration on God, who is repeatedly praised and thanked, and their constant desire for the salvation of others...

“As her prayers make evident, Catherine of Sienna was a great intercessor. In them we find her pleading with God persistently and urgently for mercy for all the world, the Church, the pope, her friends and followers, all in need. It is obvious that she does not regard intercession as merely a passing prayer to God on behalf of one or other persons in time of crisis, but rather as an expression of her deep, loving, permanent commitment both to God and to her neighbors. In Catherine’s own life, the importance and intensity of her intercession increased according as her union with God and her concern for others increased. This observation tells us something very significant about the prayer of intercession in the Christian life, namely, that it is not, as is sometimes thought, a type of prayer which one passes on the way to the heights of mystical prayer, as though intercession were for beginners and mysticism for those who are advanced in the spiritual life, but as a type of prayer which belongs most particularly to the life of contemplative union with God.”⁴⁶

◆ Pope Paul VI on the rosary: “As a Gospel prayer,

centered in the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is therefore a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation—the Jesus that each Hail Mary recalls is the same Jesus Whom the succession of the mysteries proposes to us...By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord’s life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded.”⁴⁷

◆ In speaking of Fatima, Pope John Paul II also speaks of the rosary.

On May 12, 1982, Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to Fatima. One of his motives for his visit was to offer thanks for Mary’s intercession in saving his life relative to the assassination attempt a year earlier.

Some fifteen years later in 1997, the Holy Father gave us the following words regarding Fatima. Lynne Weil, a newspaper reporter, gives this account: “Pope John Paul said the series of Marian apparitions at Fatima, Portugal, rank as one of the most significant events of this century.

“The string of apparitions that ended 80 years ago was ‘one of the greatest’ signs of the times, ‘also because it announces in its message many of the signs that followed and it invites (us) to follow their call’, the pope said in a letter to Bishop Serafim de Sousa Ferreira Silva of Leiria - Fatima, Portugal. The message, dated October 1, was released at the Vatican October 14 (1997).

“Pope John Paul said the event at Fatima ‘helps us to see the hand of God’ even in the 20th century, with its wars and other mass tragedies. And it showed that despite having ‘removed itself from God’, humanity was offered God’s protection, the pontiff said.

“Pope John Paul recalled that in Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death, he invoked clemency on his captors even as he was being crucified and entrusted humanity to the care of his mother, Mary.

“The pope repeated the exhortation stemming from the Marian apparitions at Fatima that the faithful recite the rosary every day. He asked pastors to recite the rosary, and to teach others to recite it, daily. —CNS”

Relationship with Others

◆ Growth in the Christ-life gives us an increased awareness of our relationships with others. That is to say, the true Christian is keenly aware that, to a great degree, God intends each of us to press on toward maturity in the spiritual life through proper relationships with our fellow human beings. Indeed, the Christian imperative reminds us that we are to walk life’s path, not in isolation, but hand in hand with our brothers and sisters of the human family.

To authentically relate to others, we must be aware of who they really are. We must be able to penetrate beyond surface appearances, which may or may not be appealing to us, and contact others in their core existence. When we are truly in touch with others at the core of their beings, we are aware of their awesome dignity. We are conscious that these persons are created and redeemed by God in His overwhelming love for them. Fortified with this proper awareness, we are then in a position to relate to others as we should.

In order to be in touch with the inner self of others, we must be aware of or in touch with our own inner or true self. This awareness, in turn, is also an awareness that our self is in the image of God, that we have been divinized in Christ, that we are oriented toward love of God and neighbor. Here, then, we see the profound interaction between the three awarenesses and loves: awareness and love of God, self and neighbor.

As Christians, consequently, we should have a maturing sense of how our existence is, in varied ways, profoundly interlinked with the existence of others. This reality of union with others is not limited to those we directly meet but includes all members of the human family.

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◆ Our relationship with others includes a Christ-like spirit of service.

In rarer moments of heroic reflection, we perhaps have dreamed of sensational ways through which we may be called to lay down our lives for our neighbor. For most of us, however, such opportunities will probably never occur, and this is just as well. Our courage could well be far less in a real situation than it is in the inflated proportions of dreamlike musings. Most people perform much better in the less heroic atmosphere of everyday sameness. Yet each day, so ordinarily similar to both the one which has preceded and the one which will follow, offers constant opportunities for the laying down of one's life for others. If these daily opportunities are less sensational than the more heroic occasions, they are much more numerous and therefore much more consistently present as possibilities for serving others.

Dying daily for others means many things. It means curbing those persistent, selfish tendencies which, if left unchecked, gradually narrow our vision so that we hardly think of anyone but ourselves. Dying daily for others means working at being kind and patient—seemingly little things, but immensely important in maintaining a spirit of harmony in the course of human affairs. Dying daily for others means fidelity to our work, even though this fidelity must be expressed amid temptations such as discouragement, laziness, and disinterest. Dying daily for our neighbor means these and many other things, some of which we all share in common, some of which are peculiar to each person's uniqueness. One of these common elements is this: dying for others in daily and varied fashion is an expression of our present concern while at the same time it increases our capacity for future love.

Jesus, of course, is our great exemplar regarding the service of others: *But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* (Mt 20:25-28).

The Christian and the World

God calls us to share His love for His creation. Growth in Christ develops our awareness of this truth. The Christian should have a deeper love for the world than the non-believer. All that is good and true and beautiful, all that we humans reach out for in hope, all the possibilities for our true earthly progress, all the worthwhile and enthusiastic dreams of the human heart for a better world—yes,

the Christian should yearn more deeply for all this than the non-believer. Why? Because the Christian knows that the world belongs to Christ. The Christian knows that the human race's pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful is ultimately a pursuit of Christ. The Christian knows that any authentic step forward that the human family takes marks a deepening of the Christic evolutionary process whereby mankind and this world are more fully united to the center and the crown of the universe—Christ Himself.

Obviously, we do not love and embrace the world's sinful dimension. A holy sadness should touch us when we reflect upon the sinful depravity that defiles the world's Christic image. We do not refuse secular involvement, however, because of the world's sinfulness. We must behave in a way that is different from the way much of the world thinks and acts, yet we must be different in a way that does not make us shirk our responsibility towards the secular. All of us, whether we live within monastery walls or within the explosiveness of the inner city, have this responsibility—each in his or her own way.

Purification

Growth in the spiritual life entails an ongoing and progressive purification. This purification enables us to grow in union with God as it allows God to increasingly possess us through the Christ-life of grace.

The process of purification takes many forms. It comprises everything which cleanses us more and more of the false self -- the self which operates outside of God's will -- and which allows the true self, the Christ-like self, to increasingly emerge.

One of the forms of purification is what has traditionally been called asceticism. Asceticism is that active self-purification aimed at helping the divine image in us to be more manifest and operative. Asceticism helps us to become more like the persons God wants us to be.

The Christian must experience an ongoing conversion away from the non-authentic self to a greater Christ-likeness, to greater development of the authentic self. Asceticism is the graced control, the active self-purification, of one's total being.

Christian asceticism is at the service of freedom, of life. In aiding us to be more Christ-like, it helps us be more alive. Far from confining our capacity to live and to enjoy life, asceticism contributes to the ongoing process of our being persons capable of deeper love, and, therefore, capable of greater life. One who practices a reasonable asceticism is not one who is less interested in love and life. Such a person is rather one who is willing to bear with the hardships involved in a reasonable, graced control of one's being with all its various dimensions -- intellect, will, memory, emotions, and so forth -- so that one may be more alive, more capable of authentic love.

The Vision of Faith

◆ Vatican II speaks to us about faith in today's world, a world which is to a considerable degree, characterized by unbelief:

"The remedy which must be applied to atheism, however, is to be sought in a proper presentation of the Church's teaching as well as in the integral life of the Church and her members. For it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit who renews and purifies her ceaselessly, to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible.

The result is achieved chiefly by the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see difficulties clearly and to master them. Very many martyrs have given luminous witness to this faith and continue to do so. This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer's entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy. What does the most to reveal God's presence, however, is the brotherly charity of the faithful who are united in spirit as they work together for the faith of the gospel and who prove themselves a sign of unity." 48

◆ As the virtue of infused love assimilates us to God's loving activity, and this gives us a special, God-like capacity for the exercise of love, so the infused virtue of faith, as St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, assimilates us to the divine knowing (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Boeth de Trinitate*, q. 3, a.1)

Through faith we share in God's knowing activity in a special way, and we are able to know God and creation in relationship to God in a supernatural, God-like fashion.

If we are to properly progress in the spiritual life, we must allow this vision of faith to more and more penetrate our activities. Increasingly, we should become contemplatives in action: we should view reality in a way that is similar to God's view of reality. Increasingly, everything we see should remind us of God because everything that is really good and true and beautiful does reflect God. The beauties of nature, for example, manifest this beauty; the raging storm at sea reflects his power; and the goodness, the kindness, and the love that we observe in others around us tell us that God is infinitely good and kind and loving.

The vision of faith allows us to see the human family and the world in a manner that differs from the nonbeliever's view. As contemplatives in action, we should act upon this vision. Every man, woman, and child is marked with the blood of Christ. If Jesus loved them so much--indeed, if he *now* loves them so much--can we be indifferent to their needs, both spiritual and material? Can we be indifferent to all the problems that burden modern men and women? If we are Christians of living faith, we know that we cannot be indifferent. This vision of faith should inspire us to action according to our vocation, talents, opportunity, time, and energy. We should be laboring to make the human family and the world more reflective of Christ's image.

*Heart of Jesus,
We place our trust in You.*

Trust in God

The virtue of trust is extremely important for growth in the spiritual life. Here are words on confidence, on trust, in God from St. Claude La Colombière, one of the great apostles of devotion to the Heart of Christ.

"My God, I am so convinced that you keep watch over those who hope in You, and that we can want for nothing when we look for all from You, that I am resolved in the future to live free from every care, and to turn all my anxieties over to You..."

"Men may deprive me of possessions and of honor, sickness may strip me of strength and the means of serving you...but I shall never lose my hope. I shall keep it till the last moment of my life; and at that moment all the demons in Hell shall

strive to tear it from me in vain..."

"Others may look for happiness from their wealth or their talents; others may rest on the innocence of their life, or the severity of their penance, or the amount of their alms, or the fervor of their prayers. As for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself. This confidence has never deceived anyone. No one, no one has hoped in the Lord and has been confounded.

I know, alas!, I know only too well, that I am weak and unstable. I know what temptation can do against the strongest virtue. I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the pillars of the firmament; but that cannot frighten me. So long as I continue to hope, I shall be sheltered from all misfortune; and I am sure of hoping always, since I hope also for this unwavering hopefulness.

"Finally, I am sure I cannot hope too much in You, and that I cannot receive less than I hoped for from You. So I hope that you will hold me safe on the steepest slopes, that You will sustain me against the most furious assaults, and that You will make my weakness triumph over my most fearful enemies. I hope that You will love me always, and that I too shall love You without ceasing. To carry my hope once for all as far as it can go, I hope from You to possess You, O my Creator, in time and in eternity. Amen."⁴⁹

Humility

Humility is a very important virtue given to us for the spiritual journey.

Humility is both the realization of what we are as creatures of God and the concrete implementation of this realization in our Christian lives. Humility, therefore, is not an exercise in self-depreciation; it is not telling yourself that you are no good, that you really have nothing of any significance to contribute to the service of God. Humility is based on truth. It is compatible with the recognition that God has given a person certain gifts, even great gifts, of nature and grace. If we do not recognize our God-given gifts, we do not thank God for them as we should, nor properly develop these gifts according to His will. God wants us not only to recognize the good that is in us, but also to realize the source of this goodness. Although we have a responsibility to cooperate with His graces, God is the One Who is chiefly responsible for what we are. If one person has advanced to a level in the Christian life that is beyond the level of another, it is ultimately because God has given that person greater graces.

If humility is based on truth and, consequently, allows us to properly recognize our gifts, it also necessitates that we admit to the evil within us, which is also part of the truth and must be acted upon. Humility not only bids us to admit that there is evil in us, but also tells us that, as creatures of God, we should conform to His will and work against this evil side of our persons. In summary, humility allows us to properly evaluate both the good and evil within ourselves.

Here is a quotation from St. Paul which helps us to preserve, and grow in, humility: *Who made you so important? What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why are you boasting as though it were your own?* (1 Cor 4:7).

And in the *Letter of James* we read: *Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.* (Jm 4:10)

Strength in Weakness

"and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong. (2 Cor 12:10)

According to the wisdom of the world, it is often thought to be a sign of weakness if one feels a sense of powerlessness and admits the same. According to the wisdom of Christ, it is of paramount importance that one admits weakness and powerlessness and builds upon this realization.

If we do not admit our weakness and our helplessness, then we are living a lie. Jesus has told us that without Him we can do nothing. It is a sign of Christian maturity if we not only admit to our weakness theoretically, but con-

sistently live this realization. It is not a question of giving in to this weakness, of capitulating to it in an evil way. It is rather a question of realizing our helplessness and throwing ourselves into the arms of Christ. Then we become strong with his strength; then his grace more and more strengthens us and we actually are surprised at the depth of our Christian existence.

At certain rather rare points along the path of life, we become overwhelmed, for various reasons, with the burden of life. We feel adrift upon the turbulent waters of worry and anxiety; fear gradually strengthens its paralyzing grip. Life temporarily seems to be too much, and we feel ourselves deluged, barely capable of coping with the harshness of the human condition. Such episodes, painful as they are, are magnificent opportunities for Christian growth. If we act as we should at such times -- abandon ourselves anew to Jesus -- then our Christian life takes on a new depth and vitality; for we have become so much more closely united to Jesus Who is our nourishment, our life, our happiness.

Of course, it is not only at times of special trial and anxiety that, realizing our helplessness, we should turn to Jesus. If we are spiritually sensitive, we will always be aware of our weakness. But, very importantly, this realization of our powerlessness is not meant in any sense to make us feel depressed or discouraged. If we build properly upon the understanding of our weakness, we will experience deeper peace, and love, and security -- because Jesus is very near.

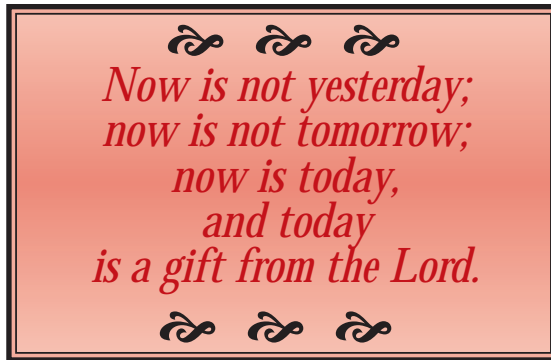
Living in the Present Moment

I suggest that one of the most difficult acts of self-discipline in the spiritual journey is to concentrate on the present moment. We have a very strong tendency to often disregard the importance of the present moment by focusing in a wrong way on the past or in a wrong way on the future. When we give in to this tendency we suffer a significant spiritual loss. There are proper occasions for thinking of the past and the future. For example, we have to learn from the past and we have to prepare for the future, but our great emphasis has to be upon the present. There is a latin axiom which says, *age quod agis*, which means: do what you are doing, concentrate on the present. And, of course, we are familiar with the term in the history of spirituality: the sacrament of the present moment. Growth in self-discipline should include a greater determination to get as much as we can out of the present moment. People with a terminal illness

have an opportunity, as they prepare for death, for increased prayer, contrition, love of God. For those who have this opportunity of knowing with some certainty the time of their death, I'm sure as they look back on their lives, they are saddened by the times they did not use time and opportunities for the service of the Lord properly, and are overjoyed at those times in which they did use the present opportunity properly. A great means we have of living in the present properly is a

greater focus upon our Lord. For if I have that awareness of the fact I am united with Jesus here and now, why should I be concerned so much about the future or the past? Yes, a great help in living in the present and deriving all the good we can from it for ourselves and others is an ever greater focus on Jesus, because the more I focus upon Jesus and the more I live with Him in the present moment, the more I am satisfied with the present moment. And so let us resolve to grow in that self-discipline which is required to really live in the present with the fullness of our being as much as is possible, with the help of God's grace. To do so is extremely important for proper growth in the spiritual life.

Now is the time. Now is the time to live and to love. Now is the time to become more united to Christ, to be more one with Him. Now is not yesterday; now is not tomorrow; now is today, and today is a gift from the Lord.



Surrender to God

God gives ultimate meaning to our lives. God reveals to us how the laughter and the tears, the work and the play, the pain and the joy, all fit together. As we live in God, God gathers up what would otherwise be the fragmented pieces of our lives, and arranges them into harmonious unity. This unity emanates from our living according to God's plan, a plan embodying a way of existence that leads to an ever greater experience of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

We can put obstacles in the way of God's transforming designs, of God's plan for us. We can at times say "no" to God's initiative. We can refuse to be open to God's tender, loving touch. We can engage in a process of self-enclosure. We can determine to map out our own path to supposed happiness, forgetting that plans for happiness which exclude God are ultimately plans for experiencing frustration and emptiness. Briefly, we can act in an obstinate fashion regarding God's offer of Self-communication.

At other times, it is not so much stubbornness which leads us to say "no" to God; it is fear. We realize that the closer we come to God, the more God will ask of us, gently but firmly. We fear the white heat of God's love. Such episodes along the spiritual journey are crucial. If we keep pulling back from the intensity of God's love, if we keep refusing what this love wants to accomplish in us and through us, then we will live on a rather superficial level.

We must strive to overcome whatever attitude prevents us from increasingly giving ourselves over to God. We must realize that progress in the spiritual life is measured by the degree to which we abandon ourselves to God. We must realize that, if we hope to grow spiritually, we must increasingly allow God to direct our lives.

Let us pray, then, for an increase in the spirit of abandonment to God. As we live more according to this attitude, we will experience in greater measure the warmth and security of God's love, this God Who is the ground of our being, the goal of our existence, the source of our happiness.

Mind and Heart

♦ Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., astutely observes: "There is an appalling dearth of thinking in our times even in the theological domain, where the strangest conclusions are sometimes drawn from the most tortured syllogisms. However, there is also what may be simply and accurately described as a lack of heart. When the powers of the mind have gone as far as they can go and concluded as much of



truth as lies within their possibilities, then those powers must give humble heed to the heart. Is not, in fact, a humble mind one that has energetically exhausted all its potential in order to recognize its limitations?

“All that I have written seems to me as a little straw,” concluded St. Thomas Aquinas toward the end of his life. His humble assessment of himself and his works was accurate. For is not indeed everything that the mind can achieve really only ‘straw’ before the greatness of God and his incredible designs? He is a God, however, who is glorified by our gathering all the ‘straw’ we can for his service and the directing of our own free willed lives, while vigorously routing a temptation toward torpor of intellect.

“Yes, a mind is for using. Its sound conclusions call for the most serious pondering. And for the heart to claim absolute sovereignty whether over life itself or the decisions that make for life’s unfolding pattern is clearly an unjustified and perilous assumption. Yet, for the mind to insist on its supreme authority in decision making, including the decision to disregard the evidence of the heart, is a counter insistence fraught, if not always with peril, at least with frequent and sometimes very serious loss to the proprietors of mind and heart. Indeed, it is the mind that delivers to the will the evidence on which the will pronounces. Nonetheless, cerebral conclusions need enfleshing with what only the heart can contribute: the finding of love that can never, if the love is real and true, be at enmity with the mind but which can sometimes unseat the mind’s best justified decisions or even topple them.”⁵⁰

◆ Mother Mary Francis further writes: “The foundress of the Poor Clare nuns, St. Clare of Assisi, was a woman who quite noticeably and even notably used her mind. Just the fact of her being the first woman in history herself to write a Rule of Life for nuns indicates a mind well occupied with the proper business of a mind. The complementary fact that she trailed beauty after her, shed loveliness about her, took ladyhood as a continual manner of living gives evidence that her heart was in good partnership with her mind. It was the same with...her mentor, St. Francis of Assisi, whose great mind was enlightened by God and used by himself to initiate a whole new way of religious life in the Church, while his heart made of him a poet, a singer, and sometimes a dancer, on occasion, while delivering his sermons.”⁵¹

◆ The following words are from a paper prepared by Fr. Stephen J. Rossetti for the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishop’s Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry. This paper was later published in the quarterly *Human Development*, from which we quote. Fr. Rossetti is president and chief executive officer of Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland.

“At our Institute, we recently ran a study that found that the average intelligence quotient of our priest

patients is 122, which is well above the societal norm of 100. This places our men in the upper 7 percent of their peers. Priests, as a group, are very bright men.

“Also in their education and training, they have developed their intellectual skills well. Catholic priests are verbal men who engage regularly in public speaking. They can debate ideas and abstract concepts easily. Indeed, these qualities are important to the successful ministry of a priest.

“Nevertheless, having a personal relationship with Jesus also means praying from the heart, the place within which he dwells. Yet so many of the men who wither in priesthood cannot find the ‘heart’ because they are stuck in their ‘heads’...

“Developing a personal relationship with God, or anyone else, involves the important task of moving our prayer and dialogue out of the head and into the heart. In this case, the term *heart*, used in a metaphorical sense, does not refer only to one’s affective life; it primarily indicates ‘the locus of vital forces in a person, to quote from Xavier Leon-Dufour in the *Dictionary of the New Testament*. It is one’s most ‘hidden place’, the place where ‘the spirit of the Son dwells.’⁵²

The Mystical Life

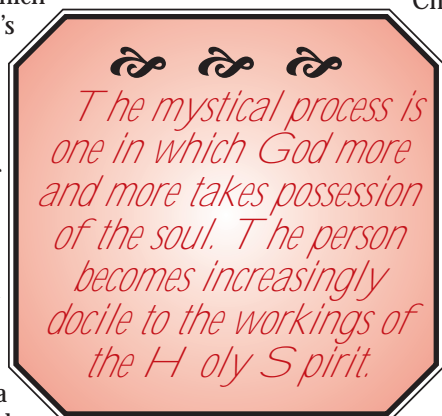
Gustave Thils gives a very good description of some of the key elements of the mystical life: “It has been said, quite accurately, that Christianity is *basically mystical*. As we have explained, to live as a Christian is to participate in the very life of God and to perform our temporal task according to the indications of His divine will. Every Christian will understand, without difficulty, that this participation in the divine life is, of its very nature, the mystical life in germ. What could be more mystical than the very life of God? What other foundation for mysticism could we desire? What other source of mysticism could we expect? And, on the other hand, how could a Christian say that he is in the state of grace and deny that he is on the way to the Christian mystical life? Certainly, there is mysticism and mysticism. But the essential will always be incontestably the participation in the life of God. Every Christian is, consequently, rich with the very foundation of all mysticism.

“This divine foundation can be found in a Christian who is still physically and morally a child. In this case, one cannot yet speak of Christian mysticism. Mysticism requires, in a general way, the realization of the ... presence of God. First of all, the mystical life implies a certain form of consciousness: a realization of presence, an intimate connection, a deep certitude, an interior evidence, an intuition ... experience, which are employed with all the nuances and all the precisions given by the spiritual authors, and the object of this consciousness: the Transcendent Being, the Lord and Master of the supernatural order, the God Who is love.

“This realization of ... presence manifests itself in the ... life of faith, hope and charity. Many of the faithful have been able to live it at certain moments of their existence, in very brief fashion, but really; some after they have gone to Holy Communion; others in the course of a visit to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament; others on the occasion of a liturgical ceremony, an ordination, a consecration; still others in the solitude of their home, in joy, in suffering, in mourning. If we must avoid speaking lightly of mysticism, it is also important not to underestimate certain minor transitory forms of true and authentic mysticism. In order that one might be able to speak of the mystical life, it is necessary that this realization of the presence of God become *habitual*. It must be customary, easily found again, met within the course of one’s daily existence, taken up again as soon as the mind is active, and easily enlivened in joy, even during periods of darkness or of aridity in faith.

“In order that the Christian life reach the mystical level, this habitual realization of the...presence of God must be *predominant* ...

“The realization of the ... presence of God, which is habitual and predominant: this is what we will henceforth call the mystical level of the Christian life. We dare not say that many Christians are at this point. But certain persons are at this point ...”⁵³



Between the occasional realization of God's presence and the habitual and predominant realization of His presence there are all the stages and all the degrees.

The mystical process is one in which God more and more takes possession of the soul. The person becomes increasingly docile to the workings of the Holy Spirit. The predominant realization of God's presence leads to a deepened desire to do the Father's will in all things, thorough Christ, in the Holy Spirit, with the maternal assistance of Mary.

The mystical process is very much Christ-centered. The person becomes increasingly transformed in Christ. When the mystical experience becomes consistent and predominant, the person can say with the deepest meaning: *I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Ga 2:19-20)

*Immaculate
Heart of Mary,
Pray for us.*

Heart of Christ, Heart of Mary

Pope John Paul II speaks to us movingly concerning the Heart of Christ: "The Heart of the Redeemer enlivens the whole Church and draws men who have opened their hearts 'to the inscrutable wealth' of this unique Heart....

"I desire in a special way to join spiritually with all those who inspire their human hearts from this Divine Heart. It is a numerous family. Not a few congregations, associations and communities live and develop in the Church, taking their vital energy in a programmed way from the Heart of Christ. This spiritual bond always leads to a great reawakening of apostolic zeal. Adorers of the Divine Heart become people with sensitive consciences. And when it is given to them to have a relationship with the Heart of our Lord and Master, the need also reawakens in them to do reparation for the sins of the world, for the indifference of so many hearts, for their negligence.

"How necessary these ranks of vigilant hearts are in the Church, so that the love of the Divine Heart shall not remain isolated and without response! In these ranks, special mention deserves to be made of all those who offer up their sufferings as living vic-

tims in union with the Heart of Christ pierced on the cross. Transformed in that way by love, human suffering becomes a particular leaven of Christ's saving work in the Church...

"The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us, above all, of those moments when this Heart was 'pierced by the lance,' and, thereby, opened in a visible manner to man and the world. By reciting the litany and venerating the Divine Heart in general, we learn the mystery of the Redemption in all its divine and human profundity."

And the Pope also speaks to us about the heart of Mary: "The Immaculate Heart of Mary was open to the word, 'Woman, there is your son.' It went to meet spiritually the Heart of the Son opened by the soldier's lance. The heart of Mary was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ loved man and the world, offering up himself on the cross, even to that lance stroke from the soldier.

"Consecrating the world to the Immaculate heart of Mary means approaching the same Source of Life, through the Mother's Intercession, that life which flowed forth from Golgatha, the source which gushes out ceaselessly with redemption and grace. Reparation for the sins of the world is continually being accomplished in it. It is ceaselessly the font of new life and holiness.

"Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning under the Cross of the Son. More: it means consecration of this world to the pierced Heart of the Savior, by bringing the world back to the very source of its Redemption. Redemption is always greater than man's sin and 'the sin of the world.' The power of Redemption infinitely surpasses the whole range of evil in man and in the world.

"The Heart of the Mother is aware of it, more than anyone in the whole cosmos, visible and invisible. This is why she calls. She does not call only to conversion; she also calls upon us to let ourselves be helped by her, the Mother, to return to the source of the Redemption."⁵⁴

The Theology of Consecration

A. Boussard gives an extremely fine and concise sketch of the theology of consecration:

"By the Incarnation, in and of itself, the Humanity of Jesus is consecrated, so that in becoming Man, Jesus is ipso facto constituted Savior, Prophet, King, Priest, and Victim of the One Sacrifice that was to save the world. He is the 'Anointed', par excellence, the 'Christ' totally belonging to God, His Humanity being that of the Word and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When, by a free act of His human will, He accepts what He is, doing what He was sent to do, He can say that He consecrates 'Himself'. In Christ, therefore, what might be called His 'subjective' consecration is a perfect response to the 'objective' consecration produced in His Humanity through the Incarnation.

"And what Christ does brings with it a 'consecration' for His disciples, a very special belonging to God, since He imparts to them His own life precisely by making them participate in His own consecration.

"Through Baptism Christians also are consecrated and 'anointed' by the power of the Spirit. They share, in their measure, in the essential consecration of Christ, in His character of King, Priest, and Prophet (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; 7 Peter 1:3-4; Rev. 5:9, etc.). With Christ and through Christ, they are 'ordered' to the glory of God and the salvation of the world. They do not belong to themselves. They belong to Christ the Lord, who imparts His own life to them...

"The vocation of those who have been baptized is to 'live' this consecration by a voluntary adherence—and one that is as perfect as possible—to what it has made of them. Living as 'children of God', they fulfill subjectively their objective consecration; like Jesus, they consecrate themselves. This is the deeper meaning of vows and baptismal promises, together with the actual way of life corresponding to them. The baptismal consecration is the fundamental one, constitutive of the Christian. All consecrations which come after it presuppose and are rooted in it..."⁵⁵

Act of Consecration (new)

“Jesus, You show us Your Heart as symbol of Your life of love in all its aspects, including Your most special love for each of us as unique individuals. Out of Your great love for us, You died a brutal death, nailed to the wood of the cross. Out of Your great love for us, You rose gloriously from the dead.

“From Your pierced Heart the Church with her life-giving Sacraments was born. In the Eucharist, Crown and Center of the Church’s life, You continue to give Yourself to us with the deepest, most tender, most on-fire, most complete love.

“Jesus, since in Your great love You give Yourself so completely to us, it is only fitting that we make a gift to You in return. It is entirely fitting that we give ourselves completely to You. Yes, we consecrate ourselves to Your most loving Heart. Each of us says to You, O Lord, our Savior and our Friend: ‘Jesus, take me wholly, take me completely to Your magnificent Heart. Out of love I give myself to You. Live in and through me. In love You give Yourself completely to me. In love and in a spirit of reparation, I want to give myself, with the help of Your grace, entirely to You. Take me, Jesus, to an ever closer union with the Father, in the Holy Spirit, with Mary my Mother at my side. Pierced, Glorified, Eucharistic Heart of Jesus I place my trust in You.’”

“Dear Blessed Virgin Mary, I consecrate myself to your maternal and Immaculate Heart, this Heart which is symbol of your life of love, including your most special love for me as this unique individual. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. In a return of love, I give myself entirely to your motherly love and protection. You followed Jesus perfectly. You are His first and perfect disciple. Teach me to imitate you in the putting on of Christ. Be my motherly intercessor so that, through your Immaculate Heart, I may be guided to an ever closer union with the Pierced, Glorified, Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the flock.”

A Prayer for Priests

Many of the laity pray for us priests, and consistently so. Is it not also fitting that we priests pray for all our brothers in the priesthood, and consistently so? There follows a prayer that can aid us in this endeavor.

“Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, we pray that in the great love and mercy of Your Sacred Heart that You attend to all the needs of Your priest-shepherds throughout the world. We ask that You draw back to Your Heart all those priests who have seriously strayed from Your path, that You rekindle the desire for holiness in the hearts of those priests who have become lukewarm, and that You continue

to give Your fervent priests the desire for the highest holiness. United with Your Heart and Mary’s Heart, we ask that You take this petition to Your heavenly Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen”.

The above prayer is taken from the prayer manual of Shepherds of Christ Associates, a facet of Shepherds of Christ Ministries. The associates are members of prayer groups which meet regularly to pray for all the needs of the entire human family, but most especially for priests. If you would like a copy, or copies, of this prayer manual, and further, if you would like information on how to begin a Shepherds of Christ prayer chapter, contact us at:

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P.O. Box 193
Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193 U.S.A.
Phone (toll free): 1-888-211-3041,
Phone: 1-513-932-4451
Fax: 1-513-932-6791

Letters

◆ Dear Fr. Carter,

I have been reading the newsletter book *Shepherds of Christ* meditatively since it came. All the articles are deep theology and spirituality. If only priests read it properly and prayerfully, a change towards Christ cannot but come. All my Diocesan priests got the book and are reading it. I have sent a few copies to the seminary rector in South India whom I know, asking him to read it and also order the newsletter. I am sure they will profit by it.

Bishop S.A. Aruliah
Cuddapah
India

◆ Congratulations on a first-class publication.

Gerard Joubert, O.P.
Houston, Texas

◆ Rev. and Dear Fr. Carter,

Compliments of the Easter Season to you! After reading your recent newsletter *Shepherds of Christ*, I found it very profitable and thought of making a request for subsequent copies as the one I read was given to me by one of our priests.

I shall, therefore, be very thankful if you do me the favour of sending me copies of the newsletter in the future. May God bless your apostolate most abundantly.

In union of prayers in the Lord’s Vineyard, I remain,

Sincerely yours in the Lord
Rev. Fr. Charles Anemelu
Berkeley Heights, New Jersey

NOTES:

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See *Notes*, page 20



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Notes...

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