

# shepherds of Christ<sup>+</sup>

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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## Chief Shepherd of the Flock

**I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd is one who 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 and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep. This is 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<sup>1</sup>).**

He hung upon a cross on a hill called Calvary. Death was near. How much Jesus had already suffered! He had been brutally scourged. Much of His sacred body was a bloody, open wound. He had been derisively crowned with thorns. In a terribly weakened condition, He carried the heavy cross to the hill of Golgotha. There He was stripped of His garments and mercilessly nailed to the cross. After all this brutal and agonizing suffering, Jesus finally died.

Truly, the Good Shepherd had laid down His life for His sheep. That magnificent Heart, overflowing with love for His Father and all of us, had beat Its last:

**It was Preparation Day, and to prevent the bodies remaining on the cross during the sabbath—since that sabbath was a day of special solemnity—the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus, they found He was already dead, and so instead of breaking His legs one of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance. And immediately there came out blood and water. (Jn 19: 31-34).**

Indeed, from the pierced Heart of Christ the Church with her sacraments was born. Two of these sacraments, the Eucharist and Baptism, are symbolized by the blood and water flowing from Christ's side. The sacrament of Orders was, of course, also born from the pierced Heart of Christ. We who are priests can never adequately thank Jesus for allowing us to

receive this great and most special sacrament. The best way we can try to thank Him, though, is to utilize our priesthood to the fullest. We priests have the great privilege and the great responsibility of being special companions of the Chief Shepherd of the flock, Jesus Himself.

Jesus laid down His life for His sheep. Being shepherds of the Chief Shepherd we, too, are called to lay down our lives for the flock. Relatively few priests in the course of the Church's history have been called to lay down their lives in physical martyrdom. All, though, have been and are called to lay down their lives for the flock by giving themselves in loving service according to the Father's will.

We are effective shepherds to the extent we are united with Christ. Let's resolve each day of our priestly existence to utilize all the means available to deepen our union with Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the flock.

## Notes from a Karl Rahner Retreat

The following is an excerpt from notes taken during a retreat given by Father Karl Rahner, one of the most eminent theologians of our time. The retreat was given to a group of candidates for the priesthood. The notes were edited and put into book form.

"Really only a *holy* priest is neither a mere religious functionary nor an overly zealous religious fanatic. He is not bitter in spite of the true bitterness of human existence. He does not try to escape into neurotic extravagances. He is able to persevere patiently with God and to accept from Him his vocation to follow Christ as a priest without demanding the same thing from everyone else. The holy priest knows how to give things up, pure and simple, without tarnishing his relationship to the world. He can give up everything because he truly loves God and finds everything again in Him. We are on the way toward this type of priestly existence—with God' grace—and our concrete life is a mixture of its basic elements. And we should have confidence that the God who couples His incalculable call to the priesthood onto the common religious

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# Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

My dear fellow priests,

We wish to say a very warm and cordial hello to all our fellow priests! This is our first issue of *Shepherds of Christ*, and it is, indeed, a real pleasure to come into your company through the printed word.

The purpose of this spirituality newsletter for priests is to offer yet another aid to priests in the development of their spiritual lives. We live in very critical times for both the Church and the world. We priests, by our very vocation, are in a most advantageous position to make an extremely significant contribution to the betterment of both Church and world. And the more we ourselves grow spiritually according to the Gospel message, the more we are able to help the Church and the world progress according to God's will.

The newsletter will be sent to you six times yearly, free of charge. However, we certainly very much appreciate your donations to help cover the cost of printing and mailing.

Finally, we invite you to send us your comments and observations. *Shepherds of Christ* is your newsletter, and we want it to be a newsletter which speaks as effectively as possible to you concerning growth in the priestly way of spiritual life.

*Ed Carter, S.J.*

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tendency will also bring to completion in us the good work that He began."<sup>2</sup>

In the above passage, Rahner reminds us of the necessity of holiness for the priest. Some misconstrue what holiness is. Holiness is simply leading the God-life of grace—received at Baptism—as best as one can with the help of God's ongoing gift of graces. And since this life of grace, which is a participation in Trinitarian life, is given to us through the mediation of Christ, this grace-life has a Christic structure. In other words, the call to holiness is the call to put on Christ, to follow Christ as closely as possible. Each day let us strive to know Christ more intimately, to love Him more ardently, and to follow Him more closely. If we live in this manner, we are growing in the life of holiness.

## 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 indwelled 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 is 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..."<sup>3</sup>

## Act of Priestly Consecration

Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the flock, I consecrate my priestly life to Your most Sacred Heart. From Your pierced Heart the Church was born, the Church You have called me, as a priest, to serve in a most special way. You reveal Your Heart as symbol of Your love in all its aspects including Your most special love for me, whom You have chosen as Your priest-companion. Help me always to love You in return. Help me to give myself entirely to You. Help me always to pour out my life in love of God and neighbor. 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. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. You love me with a most special love as this unique priest-son. 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 that, through your Immaculate Heart, I may be guided to an ever closer union with the pierced Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the flock.

## The New Catechism and Thoughts on the Priesthood

Here are some inspiring words on the priesthood from the new Catholic Catechism:

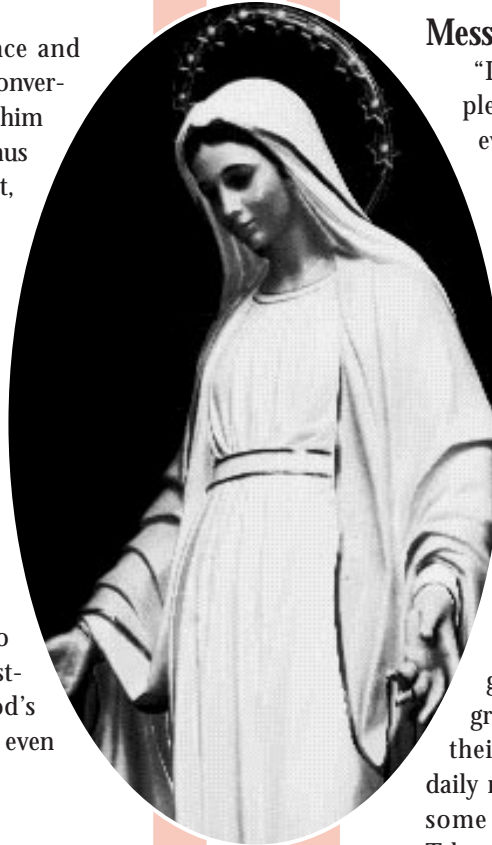
“Before the grandeur of the priestly grace and office, the holy doctors felt an urgent call to conversion in order to conform their whole lives to him whose sacrament had made them ministers. Thus St. Gregory of Nazianzus, as a very young priest, exclaimed:

“We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify, lead by the hand and counsel prudently. I know whose ministers we are, where we find ourselves and to where we strive. I know God’s greatness and man’s weakness, but also his potential. (Who then is the priest? He is) the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ’s priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God’s image, recreates it for the world on high and, even greater, is divinized and divinizes.”<sup>4</sup>

## Vatican II on the Priesthood

Vatican II reminds us of the purpose of our being priests, of being shepherds of Christ, Who is Chief Shepherd of the flock:

“The purpose, therefore, which priests pursue by their ministry and life is the glory of God the Father as it is to be achieved in Christ. That glory consists in this: that men knowingly, freely, and gratefully accept what God has achieved perfectly through Christ, and manifest it in their whole lives. Hence, whether engaged in prayer and adoration, preaching the Word, offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, ministering the other sacraments, or performing any of the other works of the ministry for men, priests are contributing to the extension of God’s glory as well as to the development of divine life in men.”<sup>5</sup>



## Messages from Jesus and Mary

(We recognize and accept that the final authority regarding these messages rests with the Holy See of Rome, to whose judgment we willingly submit. The decree of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, A.A.S. 58, 1186, approved by Pope Paul VI on October 14, 1966, states that the Imprimatur is no longer required on publications that deal with new revelations, apparitions, prophesies or miracles, provided that they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals.—The Editor.)

### Message of Our Lady of Medjugorje

“Dear children, today I am calling you to complete surrender to God. Everything you do and everything you possess give over to God so that He can take control in your life as King of all that you possess. That way, through me, God can lead you into the depths of the spiritual life...”<sup>6</sup>

### Message of Jesus

“I love My priests with an overwhelming, burning love! I have given them the great privilege and great responsibility of acting in My name in a most special way. In My great love for My priests, I call them to the highest holiness.

“Let them not be afraid of the call to holiness. I give them abundant graces to grow in holiness. They must resolve to respond to these graces. They must resolve to use the means to grow in holiness. The Mass must be the center of their lives. They must pray much, including the daily recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours. At least some of their prayer should be made before the Tabernacle, where I grant special graces. Nor should they neglect the other ordinary means for the pursuit of holiness.

“I love each of My priests with a most special love! Each day I call them by name. Each day, I call them to come, in union with Mary, to My Heart. I ask them to dwell within My Heart. Here I will give them a sense of My great love for them. Here I will enlighten and strengthen them regarding their priestly ministry. Here I will give them special peace and joy. I am Lord and Master! I urgently request that My priests answer My call. In My great and special love for them, I give them this message!”<sup>7</sup>

### Message of Jesus

“Trust in Me, My child...Open yourself up to Me and trust. Why do you not see that Satan wants to stop you and that he does not want the world to get these messages. Such messages of love and comfort! If he

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can work on you, you will stop. Don't be fooled by him. He is the great deceiver. He plans to trip you up... You, My child, are strong in Me. I need you to do My work. Laboring in your head, looking for proof, not totally trusting in Me—those come from him. Step on his head. Open your heart to Me and My love—no room for a drop of doubt. I am truly here talking to you, little one. Think about My passion and death. I loved you. I love you this much still today. My heart is so on fire for love of you. You can't even begin to know how much love I have for you. Just be open to all I send you and cast your doubts away. It is your act of trusting that helps you develop trust in Me. Step-by-step you ascend the stairs and you get closer each time to trusting more in Me. It is your taking each little step that counts. Ascend My steps each day, every day. A

million times a day you can trust or worry. You choose, 'Do I trust or not trust?' How could you not trust after all I did to prove My love for you? Focus on My passion, on My wounds, on My love, on Me..."<sup>8</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. Karl Rahner, S.J., *Spiritual Exercises*, Herder & Herder, pg. 155.
3. A. Boussard in *Dictionary of Mary*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., pp. 54-55.
4. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pg. 397.
5. *The Documents of Vatican II*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, No. 2, America Press edition.
6. Message of Our Lady of Medjugorje, July 25, 1988, as contained in Daniel Golob's *Live the Messages*, The Riehle Foundation.
7. Message of Jesus to a chosen one.
8. *God's Blue Book*, messages received by Rita Ring, Our Lady of Light Publications, pg. 52.

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