

# shepherds of Christ

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1994

## CONTENTS

Chief Shepherd of the Flock .....	1
Cardinal Bernardin On Priests as Shepherds ...	1
Editor's Corner.....	2
Henri Nouwen On Union With Jesus.....	2
St. John Eudes On Union With Jesus.....	2
Karl Rahner On Imitation of Christ ....	3
St. Teresa of Avila On Doing God's Will ..	3
John Powell On Saying "Yes" To The Will of God .....	3
St. Louis de Montfort On Consecration .....	3
Act of Priestly Consecration .....	3
Shepherds of Christ Associates .....	4

## 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>).

A faithful shepherd takes care of his sheep in all their needs. This includes providing them with the proper food. Jesus, the perfect Shepherd, abundantly provides for the nourishment of His flock. In the Eucharist He gives Himself in His body, blood, soul, and divinity for our spiritual growth. He also feeds us through His word, through His teaching. The gospel of John, in chapter 6: 35-59, combines both of these ways—Christ nourishing us through His teaching and through the Eucharist. This particular section of John's gospel gives us Jesus' great discourse on the Bread of Life. The first part, verses 35-50, speaks of the teaching of Jesus as nourishment, as the bread of life. This first part contains, therefore, the so-called sapiential theme. The second part, verses 51-59, speaks of the Eucharist as our heavenly nourishment. This part, therefore, contains the sacramental theme.

Both aspects of the Bread of Life theme reveal God's tremendous love for us. The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus' great love for us, and His teaching is summed up in terms of love—God's overwhelming love for us and our duty to love God and neighbor in return. Each day we should pray for an increased realization of how much God, in Christ Jesus, loves each of us with a most special, unique love. Growing in this awareness and living according to this awareness are the keys to growth in the spiritual life. The more we are convinced of how much Christ loves us as unique individuals, the more able are we to enter into a deep love relationship with Jesus. And if we have the proper

love relationship with Jesus, everything else falls into place. Yes, as our union with Jesus grows, He leads us, amid all the pain and all the joy, to a closer union with the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary, our Mother, at our side.

## Cardinal Bernardin On Priests as Shepherds

"One of the most beautiful images of Christ is that of shepherd. In chapter 10 of John's gospel Jesus calls Himself the good shepherd and explains what this means. The good shepherd, He says, finds pasture for his sheep; he brings back to the fold those who have strayed; if necessary, he lays down his life for them..."

"The image of shepherd supports and enriches the concept of priest as servant. The Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry strongly emphasized this concept in *As One Who Serves*. The priest, the committee stated, 'is to be a servant of the People of God, holding them accountable for what they have been and can be. He serves them by calling forth leadership and coordinating ministries. His is a service which calls the people to remember and to celebrate the presence and power of the Risen Lord. In the fullest sense, he is a servant of the human family.'

"Our hearts must be moved with pity when we see people who are suffering, whose lives are empty, who are searching vainly for meaning. Through our ministry and our presence, we must do all we can to bring them the riches of the gospel, so that they will come to know the Lord and experience His love and peace in their lives. This is the shepherd's work. This is *our* work as priests who follow in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd and carry on His mission."

"A priest, because of the Person he represents and the message he brings, is one whose ministry is expected to bring people joy, consolation, and hope. Admittedly, a priest cannot remove all the pain and frustration which are part of the human condition. But this ministry can help people cope better with trials and sufferings by seeing them in the light of the Transcendent. While we are obliged to do all we can to



# Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

Hello again! We hope the vast majority of you received the first issue of *Shepherds of Christ*. For whatever reasons, some apparently did not receive their copies. For those who did not, we briefly restate a few remarks concerning this spiritual newsletter for priests. We offer it as yet another aid to priests in the development of their spiritual lives. 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. We also invite your comments and observations.

Yes, we offer this newsletter as yet another aid to help us live our priesthood as true shepherds of Christ. And in these complex times we need all the help we can get!

There are many conditions in today's Church and world which can lead a priest into a state of ongoing discouragement if he does not mount a counteroffensive. And his plan of action must be rooted in his personal relationship with Jesus, this Jesus Who loves each of us with an unfathomable love. Let us always remember the words of St. Paul: "Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked..."

"For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 35-39).

**Bernardin** continued from page 1

promote a better life in this world by building a society rooted in justice and love, in the final analysis our earthly accomplishments and their immediate joys and sorrows are transitory. The ultimate fulfillment of all we attempt, the lasting remedy for all we suffer, lies in life eternal.

"My personal experience convinces me that what people actually want and need is usually much less complex and spectacular than we sometimes imagine. People are not looking for religious leaders who can solve all their problems or answer all their questions. Often they know the answers already; or they know their problem has no immediate solution. More than anything else, people look to us who minister to them for our presence as loving, caring, and forgiving people. They want our help in their efforts to handle pain and frustration. They look to us for understanding; they seek a sensitive and consoling response to their hurt feelings; they need the spiritual comfort we can

bring through our ministry of word and sacrament. They want someone who will pray with them, whose presence will remind them that, no matter what their difficulties might be, God really loves them and cares for them. They want assurance that God will never abandon them. This is the preferred style of spiritual leadership in our day."<sup>2</sup>

## Henri Nouwen On Union With Jesus

Fr. Henri Nouwen has been one of the most influential spiritual writers of our times. His following words emphasize the overwhelming importance of the Christian leader—and as priests we are certainly called to be leaders—to be intimately united with Jesus:

"Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our times. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice, and guidance. Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen again and again to the voice of love and to find there the wisdom and courage to address whatever issue presents itself to them. Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it, our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. But when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and true witnesses without being manipulative."<sup>3</sup>

## St. John Eudes On Union With 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. We, as priests, have the special privilege and responsibility of seeking this union with Christ in the highest degree:

"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 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, so that these words may be fulfilled in you: *Glorify God and bear him in your body, that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in you.*

"You belong to the Son of God, but more than that, you ought to be in him as 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. He must be both the source and the purpose of your life, so that you may fulfill these words: *None of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master. While we live, we are responsible to the Lord, and when we die, we die as his servants. Both in life and in death we are the Lord's. That is why Christ died and came to life again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

"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."<sup>4</sup>

## Karl Rahner On The Imitation of Christ

The following is an excerpt from notes taken during a retreat given by Fr. Karl Rahner, S.J. The retreat was given to a group of candidates for the priesthood. The notes were edited into book form: "We should not reduce participation in the life of Jesus to some sort of moral relationship. Moral influence coming from Jesus must be made possible by and based on an ontological

influence. By reason of the Incarnation of the Word and the whole history of the life and death of Jesus, each of us is already personally involved in the life of Jesus. In fact the whole world including the life of every human being is really affected and determined by His human existence. In a narrower and historically perceptible sense, after being affected by Him we are incorporated by Baptism into that community which is His Body, and by this sacramental-ontological determination of our historical existence, we were drawn even further into His life..."

"The imitation of Christ consists in a true

entering into *His* life and *in Him* entering into the inner life of the God that has been given to us."<sup>5</sup>

## St. Teresa of Avila On Doing God's Will

The close union with Jesus which Henri Nouwen, St. John Eudes, and Karl Rahner talk about centers in our doing Christ's will out of love for Him. Jesus' will for us is, of course, the same as His Father's will for us. St. Teresa of Avila, one of the two women doctors of the Church (the other is St. Catherine of Siena) tells us how the spiritual life is summed up in loving conformity to God'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."<sup>6</sup> Again she states: "...love consists...in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything."<sup>7</sup>

## John Powell On Saying "Yes" to the Will of God

A very popular spiritual writer of our time, Fr. John Powell, S.J., gives us thoughts concerning saying "yes" to God's will. His words easily follow the above thoughts of St. Teresa:

"There have been quite a few times in my life when I have felt the winds of God's grace in the sails of my small boat. Sometimes these graces have moved me in pleasant and sunlit directions. At other times the requested acts of love were born in darkness of struggle and suffering. There have been springtimes and there have been long, cold winters of struggle for survival. God has come to me at times with the purest kindness, at times with the most affirming encouragement, and at other times with bold and frightening challenges. I think that all of us have to watch and pray, to be ready to say 'yes' when God's language is concrete and his request is specific—'yes' in the sunlit springtimes and 'yes' in the darkness of winter nights."<sup>8</sup>

## St. Louis de Montfort On Consecration

A contemporary Marian scholar, Fr. Arthur Collins, offers the following thought concerning St. Louis de Montfort, one of the greatest of Marian apostles: "Perhaps, in the final analysis, the greatest contribution of this Breton saint to the theology of Marian consecration is precisely in his insistence on Mary's mediation as willed by God."<sup>9</sup>

St. Louis de Montfort himself sums up, in a few words, his thoughts on consecration, "The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus."<sup>10</sup>

## A Priestly Consecration

The previously quoted words of St. John Eudes remind us of the extremely close union we are called to have with Jesus. As we realize Jesus' tremendous and most special unique love for each of us, we are asked to give ourselves in a return of love to Jesus. We are called to strive to live the union described by St. John Eudes. In other words, we are called to continue to say "yes" to the objective consecration we received in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Orders. There follows a suggested

act of 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 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.

## Shepherds of Christ Associates

We have started a spiritual movement which has a connection with this particular newsletter. The movement is called Shepherds of Christ Associates. The associates belong to groups, or chapters. These groups meet on a regular basis. One of the primary purposes of the groups is to pray for all the needs of all priests the world over. A particularized intention of the groups is to pray for the spiritual success of this newsletter.

The movement offers a spiritual way of life for the members of the chapters. The chapters are open to all—to all persons of all vocational states of life. A handbook which explains the movement, offers the spiritual way of life, and provides details for procedures at chapter meetings, is available upon request. You may obtain this by writing us at the address on the back page of the newsletter.

### NOTES

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. Archbishop Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *Called To Serve, Called To Lead*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, pp. 17-20.
3. Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, pp. 31-32.
4. St. John Eudes, from a treatise on the Admirable Heart of Jesus, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., Vol. IV, pp. 1331-32.
5. Karl Rahner, S.J., *Spiritual Exercises*, Herder & Herder, pp. 117-118.
6. St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, translated by E. Allison Peers, Doubleday & Co., "Second Mansions", p. 51.
7. Ibid., "Fourth Mansions", p. 76.
8. John Powell, S.J., *The Christian Vision*, Argus Communications, p. 147.
9. Arthur Collins, *Totus Tuus: John Paul's Program of Marian Consecration and Entrustment*, Academy of the Immaculata, p. 177.
10. St. Louis de Montfort, *God Alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis de Montfort*, Montfort Publications, p. 327.
11. Alban Dachauer, S.J., *The Sacred Heart*, Bruce Publishing Co., pp. 117-118.

Shepherds of Christ, a spirituality newsletter for priests, is published bi-monthly by Shepherds of Christ Ministries, P.O. Box 193, Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193. While distribution is free of charge to all priests in the U.S., and growing internationally, donations are still very much appreciated. Inquiries and comments are welcome, as are address changes and addresses of the newly ordained. Permission to reproduce intact is granted for non-commercial use. Editor Father Edward Carter S.J. is Professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. John Weickert is President. Good Shepherd illustration is by Brother Jerome Pryor S.J. Layout and graphic design are by Larry Memering. Also dedicated to the spiritual advancement of priests is a worldwide network of lay/religious prayer chapters, Shepherds of Christ Associates, headquartered at 2919 Shawhan Road, Morrow, Ohio 45152, U.S.A., telephone toll free 1-888-211-3041, fax 513-932-6791.

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