

# shepherds of Christ

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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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>).**

Yes, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for His sheep. The Good Shepherd's magnificent Heart, overflowing with love for His Father and all of us, was pierced so that the waters of our salvation might flow forth: **"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).**

Bonaventure, the Franciscan saint and doctor of the Church, comments on the pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd: "Then, in order that the Church might be formed out of the side of Christ sleeping on the cross...the divine plan permitted that one of the soldiers pierce open His sacred side with a lance. While blood mixed with water flowed, the price of our salvation was poured forth, which gushing forth from the sacred fountain of the heart gave power to the sacraments of the Church..."<sup>2</sup>

Another doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, also refers to the source of life which is the pierced Heart of Jesus: "On the cross he made a great exchange. The purse which held our price was opened, for when the soldier's spear opened his side, the price of the whole world flowed forth."<sup>3</sup>

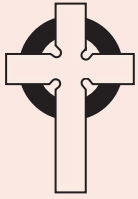
Finally, we have the words of the Church herself concerning the pierced Heart of Jesus. In the preface for the Mass of the Sacred Heart we read in part:

"Lifted high on the cross, Christ gave his life for us, so much did he love us. From his wounded side flowed blood and water, the fountain of sacramental life in the Church. To his open heart the Savior invites all...to draw water in joy from the springs of salvation."<sup>4</sup>

Yes, the Church reminds us that Jesus the Good Shepherd invites all to come to His open Heart, this Heart which symbolizes His love and calls for our love in return. The Church invites all to come to Jesus' pierced Heart in order to be clothed with the graces which the Heart of Jesus longs to give us in abundance. We priests have the privilege and responsibility to lead the members of Jesus' flock to the pierced Heart of Jesus in order that they may be showered with the graces which are necessary for their salvation and ongoing sanctification. As a good shepherd under Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, the priest has to lead the sheep to the only source of true nourishment, the pierced Heart of Christ. The more we priests ourselves dwell within the pierced Heart of Jesus, as the Church invites all to do, the more we are able to lead others to this sacred refuge and source of all spiritual nourishment. As we ourselves dwell within the pierced Heart of Jesus, Christ gives us an increased awareness of how much He loves each person with the most special and unique love. Jesus has chosen each priest to be a most special ambassador to spread the message of this overwhelming love of His Heart for each individual. The more we priests ourselves grow in the awareness of how much Jesus loves each of us as His priest-companions, the more we are able to teach to others the truth of Jesus' special love for each individual. And the more we priests realize how much Jesus wants the love of each individual, the more we are also able to teach His truth to others.

Jesus suffered and died for the entire human race, but He did it in a manner which makes it true to say He also did it for each individual in a most special way. Notice how personalized St. Paul makes the redemptive suffering and death and love of Jesus. In the letter to the Galatians he does not use the plural, but the singular: **"I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2: 19-20).**





# Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

We wish all our priest-readers a most happy and blessed New Year. During this coming year and always may God give us all abundant graces for our own spiritual growth and for the fruitfulness of our priestly ministry.

The feast of Christmas, which we have just celebrated, is an excellent time to remind ourselves of the reason for the Incarnation: **“Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.”** (Jn 3: 16).

This brief scriptural passage in its own way summarizes the religion Christ came to give us. The passage in effect tells us that we are to be aware of God's love lavishly given to us in Jesus Christ, and that we are to respond with a love of our own, that we are to believe in Jesus Christ. We know, of course, that the biblical concept of faith includes the entire person, including the act of love whereby a person gives oneself to the following of Jesus. To repeat, the above passage from John's Gospel summarizes Christian existence: the awareness of God's love for us in Christ and our response of love in Christ—our love of God and neighbor.

A number of entries in this issue contain ideas regarding devotion to the Heart of Christ. I mention this consequent to what I have just said because devotion to the Heart of Christ gives us the same summary of Christian existence as does the above passage from John. Pius XII has left us these words: “...we readily understand that devotion to...the Heart of Jesus is essentially devotion to the love with which God loved us through Jesus and is at the same time an enlivening of our love for God and man. Or, to put it in other words, this devotion is directed to God's love for us in order to adore Him, to thank Him and to spend our lives imitating Him.”<sup>5</sup>

*Ed. Carter, S.J.*

## The Eucharist: Source and Summit of Christian Life

Our personal relationship with Christ is characterized by the realization of the great, special love of His Heart for each of us and of our need to love Him in return. The chief source for growth in this personal relationship with Jesus is the Eucharist. The New Catechism tells us: “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical mysteries and work of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”<sup>6</sup>

## Pope John Paul II, St. John Vianney and The Heart of Christ

Pope John Paul II reminds us of the key role devotion to the Heart of Jesus played in the life of the inspirational priest-saint, John Vianney, the Cure of Ars: “The Cure of Ars is a model of priestly zeal for all pastors. The secret of his generosity is to be found without doubt in his *love of God*, lived without limits, in constant response to the love made manifest *in Christ crucified*. This is where he bases his desire to do everything to save the souls ransomed by Christ at such a great price, and to bring them back to the love of God. Let us recall one of those pithy sayings which he had the knack of uttering: ‘The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.’ In his sermons and catechesis he continually returned to that love: ‘O my God, I prefer to die loving you than to live a single instant without loving you...’

“Dear brother priests, nourished by the Second Vatican Council which has felicitously placed the priest's consecration within the framework of his pastoral mission, let us join Saint John Vianney and seek the dynamism of our pastoral zeal in the Heart of Jesus, in his love for souls. If we do not draw from the same source, our ministry risks bearing little fruit.”<sup>7</sup>

## Henri Nouwen on the Need for Theological Reflection

Henri Nouwen, one of the most influential writers of our times, also refers to the Heart of Christ in these provocative words on theological reflection: “Few ministers and priests think theologically. Most of them have been educated in a climate in which the behavioral sciences, such as psychology and sociology, so dominated the educational milieu that little true theology was being learned. Most Christian leaders today raise psychological or sociological questions even though they frame them in scriptural terms. Real, theological thinking, which is thinking with the mind of Christ, is hard to find in the practice of the ministry. Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologists, pseudo-sociologists, pseudo-social workers...”

“The task of future Christian leaders is not to make a little contribution to the solution of the pain and tribulations of their time, but to identify and announce the ways in which Jesus is leading God's people out of slavery, through the desert to a new land of freedom...In short, they have to say ‘no’ to the secular world and proclaim in unambiguous terms that the incarnation of God's Word, through whom all things came into being, has made even the smallest event of human history into Kairos, that is, *an opportunity to be led deeper into the heart of Christ...*

(emphasis that of the editor).

“Thinking about the future of Christian leadership, I am convinced that it needs to be a theological leadership. For this to come about, much—very much—has to happen in seminaries and divinity schools. They have to become centers where people are trained in true discernment of the signs of the time. This cannot be just an intellectual training. It requires a deep spiritual formation involving the whole person—body, mind, and heart. I think we are only half aware of how secular even theological schools have become. Formation in the mind of Christ, who did not cling to power but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, is not what most seminaries are about. Everything in our competitive and ambitious world militates against it. But to the degree that such formation is being sought for and realized, there is hope for the Church of the next century.”<sup>8</sup>

## Promises of Our Lord & Rahner’s Commentary

The following promises of Our Lord were given to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque regarding those who are devoted to His Heart. Following the promises is Karl Rahner’s commentary on the same.

1. I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their homes.
3. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all in death.
5. I will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Lukewarm souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.
9. I will bless every place in which an image of My Heart is exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who promote this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be blotted out.
12. I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on the First Fridays in nine consecutive months the grace of final penitence; they shall not die in My disgrace, nor without receiving their Sacraments. My Divine Heart shall be their refuge.<sup>9</sup>

Here is Rahner’s commentary regarding these promises: “Taken in their entirety, these promises affirm and offer no more than our Lord promised in the Gospel to absolute faith...What is new in these promises is therefore not their content, but the circumstances of their fulfillment, the fact that what has already been promised in substance in the Gospels is now attached precisely to devotion

to the Sacred Heart. To anyone with a grasp of the devotion, who practices it in the deep unconditional faith that it demands, this ‘new’ element in the promises will offer no special problem.”<sup>10</sup>

## Act of Consecration

Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, I consecrate my priestly life to Your Heart, pierced on Calvary for love of us. 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 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 and love. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. You love me with the most special love as this unique priest-son. In 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 Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, who leads me to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

## Vatican II on Priestly Holiness

Living out our life of consecration is living the life of holiness. Vatican II speaks to us about the priestly life of holiness: “By the sacrament of orders priests are configured to Christ the Priest so that as ministers of the Head and co-workers of the episcopal order they can build up and establish His whole Body which is the Church. Already, indeed, in the consecration of baptism, like all Christians, they received the sign and the gift of so lofty a vocation and a grace that even despite human weakness they can and must pursue according to the Lord’s words: **‘You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.’** Mt 5:48.

“To the acquisition of this perfection priests are bound by a special claim, since they have been consecrated to God in a new way by the reception of orders. They have become living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, so that through the ages they can accomplish His wonderful work of reuniting the whole society of men with heavenly power. Therefore, since every priest in his own way represents Christ Himself, he is also enriched with special grace...

“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 works through those who have been made particularly docile to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because of their intimate union with Christ and their holiness of life, these men can say with the Apostle: **‘It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.’**” (Gal 2:20<sup>11</sup>).

## St. Charles Borromeo On The Necessity of Prayer

One of the most necessary means for growth in the life of holiness of which Vatican II speaks is prayer. St. Charles Borromeo speaks to priests about this: “We must meditate before, during and after everything we do. The prophet says, *‘I will pray, and then I will understand.’* When you administer the sacraments, meditate on what you are doing. When you celebrate Mass, reflect on the sacrifice you are offering. When you pray the office, think about the words you are saying and the Lord to whom you are speaking. When you take care of your people, meditate on the Lord’s blood that has washed them clean. In this way, *all that you do becomes a work of love.*

See St. Charles Borromeo, page 4

“This is the way we can easily overcome the countless difficulties we have to face day after day, which, after all, are part of our work: in meditation we find the strength to bring Christ to birth in ourselves and in other men.”<sup>12</sup>

## The New Catechism and Social Justice

Our life of holiness must have a social dimension. The more we go to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, with Mary our Mother at our side, the more we grow in concern for others. One aspect of our concern for others is our work in promoting social justice. The new Catechism reminds us of truths upon which social justice must be based: “Social justice can

be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man...

“Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature...”

“Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as ‘another self’, above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity. No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man ‘a neighbor’, a brother.

“The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’

“The same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one’s enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy.”<sup>13</sup>

### NOTES

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. Bonaventure, tr. by E. Cousins, Paulist Press, pp. 154-155.
3. The Liturgy of the Hours, Catholic Book Publishing Co., Vol. IV, 1727.
4. The Sacramentary, Catholic Book Publishing Co., p. 463.
5. Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas*, Catholic Mind, (1956), Part IV.
6. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 397.
7. Letter of Pope John Paul II to All Priests of the Church for Holy Thursday 1986, St. Paul Editions.
8. Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, Crossword Pub., pp. 65-70.
9. Alban Dachauer, S.J., *The Sacred Heart*, Bruce Pub., pp. 147-148.
10. Karl Rahner, S.J., as in *The Heart of the Redeemer*, Trinity Communications, p. 140.
11. The Documents of Vatican II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, America Press Edition, Ch. 3, No. 12.
12. The Liturgy of the Hours, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 1727.
13. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, op. cit., p. 460.

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