

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



MAY/JUNE 1995

REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

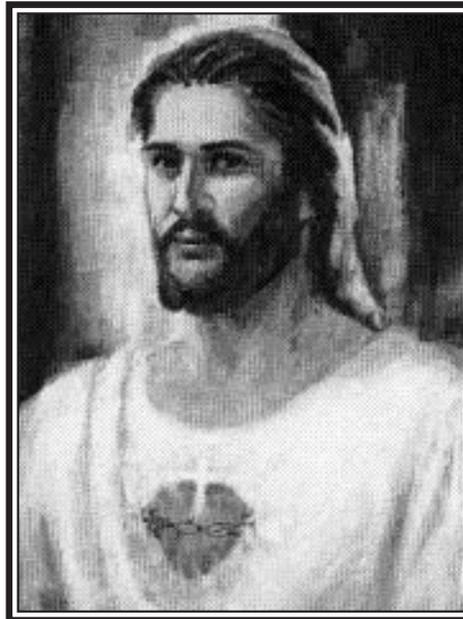
"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd is one who lays down His life for His sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep.

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: 11-15¹).

We have all seen many pictures of the Good Shepherd. Regarding those I myself have seen, I have come to the following conclusion: creating images of the Good Shepherd seems to bring out the best in artists, at least in the majority of them. Most representations of the Good Shepherd I have seen are able to portray the love, the concern, the tenderness, and the strength of Jesus to an admirable degree.

Yes, Jesus the Good Shepherd reveals to us the above characteristics. He shows to all His love, concern, tenderness, and strength. But Jesus also reveals Himself to us on a most individual basis. He reveals Himself to me as *my* Savior—so loving, so concerned about me, so tender, so strong. He reveals Himself to me as the God-man Who longs to have a deep love relationship with me as this unique individual. What is my response? Is my response modeled after that of St. Paul, who realized Christ's gift of Himself in His passion and death was made for each of us in a most personal way, and, realizing this to the depths of his being,

gave himself completely to Christ in the deepest love? Notice how personalized 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 I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake." (Gal 2:19-20).



Reflections on Union with Jesus

The above considerations easily lead us to the following reflections:

◆ Jesus invites us but He does not coerce. He offers a religion which expands the person, not one which morbidly constricts. He offers us the fullness of life, but He does not say there will be no suffering involved. He wants us to live the human condi-

tion as His intimate friends.

◆ Living our life with Jesus is not meant to be a part-time occupation: "Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31).

◆ To follow Jesus is not to lessen our being authentically human. Rather to follow Jesus allows us to be more human. In Christ we have a deepened, graced capacity to be human.

◆ Jesus has died and risen. We have been baptized into His death and resurrection. Each Christian act is characterized by this Christic pattern. Whether we work or play, experience success or failure, are admired or ridiculed, taste ecstatic happiness or feel especially afflicted by the sorrowful aspect of human existence, we are dying

See *Reflections on Union with Jesus*, page 2



Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

This particular time of the year witnesses the ordination of young (and, more and more, not so young!) men to the priesthood. It is a time of happiness, when we rejoice with the newly ordained and with their parents and friends.

This time of the year, with its numerous ordinations, offers each of us who have been given the great gift of the priesthood an opportunity to reflect upon our own priestly existence. As we profusely thank God for the great gift of being a priest of Jesus Christ, we have the timely opportunity to ask ourselves how we have used our priestly existence, how we are using it now, and how we intend to use it in the future. We can ask ourselves these questions given to us by St. Ignatius Loyola: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?"

This time of the year also offers us an appropriate opportunity to resolve to begin to pray for priests on a daily basis—if we do not already do so. Here is a suggested prayer: "Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, we pray that in the great love and mercy of Your Heart 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 priestly Heart and Mary's maternal Heart, we ask that You take this petition to your heavenly Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit."

Ed Carter, S.J.

Reflections on Union with Jesus continued from page 1

and rising with Jesus.

◆ Why should the world's harsh dimension blind the Christian concerning its basic truth, goodness, and beauty? For to travel life's journey with this friend Jesus is to share His vision, a vision which permits us to see the world's Christic image, which nothing—absolutely nothing—can destroy.

◆ Jesus loves each of us as precious, unique individuals. Allowing the realization of this simple but awesome truth to guide us is to walk the path which leads to the highest holiness.

◆ The committed Christian must consistently ask, "Is Jesus really the focal point of my existence?"

◆ "How many Christians really listen to Jesus' message and live it?" is a question I can ask but cannot answer. "How do *I* listen to Jesus' message and live it?" is a question I should ask and can answer.

◆ Jesus gathers up what are otherwise the all-too-fragmented pieces of my existence—the joy and the pain, the laughter and the tears, the success and the failure—and molds these into a Christic unity.

◆ We are an enigma to ourselves when we seek happiness apart from the way of Jesus, knowing within the depths of our being that following such a path leads to hideous frustration.

◆ This or that person may not realize our present suffering. But Jesus knows—and He cares.

◆ The tender and reassuring touch of Jesus—we can vividly experience this in all sorts of situations, and sometimes when we least expect it.

◆ Jesus chose to lead much of His life in an obscure and disparaged place called Nazareth. This tells us something if we have ears with which to hear.

◆ It is sad but true that many Christians seem to have little or no desire for learning more about Jesus. Yet they eagerly pursue further knowledge concerning all sorts of other things. Let us pray for the grace never to be so blind.

◆ To grow in union with Jesus is to be increasingly possessed by His love. So possessed, we eagerly want to spend ourselves in love for God and neighbor, no matter what the cost.

◆ Jesus loved us and poured Himself out for us until there was no more to give. This is the poignant beauty of His life.

◆ How can we refuse to love anybody, since all have been touched by Jesus' redemptive blood?

◆ Jesus looked at me, and His gaze was so attractive. Jesus has reached out and touched me, and brought me to His Heart. This has been by happiness.

◆ Jesus has left His indelible imprint upon the human condition by the way He loved—in laughter and in tears, in work and in relaxation, in suffering and in rejoicing.

◆ At times we can refuse the voice of Jesus—we do not respond, we do not give, we do not grow in selflessness, we simply do not live as we should. Is it because of fear, or laziness, or sensuality, or pride, or rationalization?

◆ The acclaimed and the unnoticed, the lettered and the uneducated, the old and the young, the laborer and the scholar, the comely and the homely—people from all classes and situations have, over the ages, been inspired by the One called Jesus.

◆ His enemies have tried to stamp out the memory of Jesus. Yet He and His message are still

vitaly present, so much so that for countless persons life is meaningless without Him.

◆ Our own enthusiasm for Jesus can be aided by recalling the fervor of those who have preceded us in the cause of Christ. One of these, St. Ignatius of Antioch, wrote during the first ages of Christianity: “Neither the kingdoms of this world nor the bounds of the universe have any use for me. I would rather die for Jesus Christ than rule the last reaches of the earth. My search is for Him Who died for us; my love is for Him who rose for our salvation.”²

◆ Jesus knows our weakness far better than we ourselves. Still He expects great things of us. Indeed, He has left us a unique formula, one that seems strange to the unbelieving: our weakness plus His strength can accomplish the marvelous, whether the marvelous be hidden or well-known, whether it appear to others as extremely important or seemingly insignificant.

◆ “My one hope and trust is that I shall never have to admit defeat, but that now as always I shall have the courage for Christ to be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would bring me something more...” (Ph 1:20-21).

Thomas Merton on the Need for Silence

Here are some inspiring and insightful words of Thomas Merton on the need for prayerful silence in our lives:

“Silence does not exist in our lives for its own sake. It is ordered to something else. Silence is the mother of speech. A lifetime of silence is ordered to an ultimate declaration, which can be put into words, a declaration of all we have lived for.

“Life and death, words and silence, are given us because of Christ...In Him we die to illusion and live to truth. We speak to confess Him, and we are silent in order to meditate on Him and enter deeper into His silence, which is at once the silence of death and of eternal life—the silence of Good Friday night and the peace of Easter morning.

“We receive Christ’s silence into our hearts when first we speak from our heart the word of faith. We work out our salvation in silence and in hope. Silence is the strength of our interior life. Silence enters into the very core of our moral being, so that if we have no silence we have no morality. Silence enters mysteriously into the composition of all the virtues, and silence preserves them from corruption.

“If we fill our lives with silence, then we live in hope, and Christ lives in us and gives our virtues much substance. Then, when the time

comes, we confess Him openly before men, and our confession has much meaning because it is rooted in deep silence. It awakens the silence of Christ in the hearts of those who hear us, so that they themselves fall silent and begin to wonder and to listen. For they have begun to discover their true selves.”³

The Role of Private Revelation in the Life of the Church

In these our times there have been numerous reports from around the world of events regarding alleged private revelations. Messages from alleged visionaries and locutionists abound. Many people are at least somewhat confused regarding how one should react to all this.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to offer some thoughts concerning the role of private revelation in the life of the Church.

First of all, we must realize the Church recognizes that private revelation has a role to play in the life of the Church. The Catechism says: “Throughout the ages, there have been so-called ‘private revelations,’ some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history.”⁴

We would now like to offer the thoughts of some contemporary theologians regarding this role of private revelation: Harvey Egan, S.J., says: “Private revelations often presuppose the gift of prophecy. *Prophetic* revelations commission the mystic to address the entire Church, or a significant portion. He must deliver a message, plead for a particular devotion, call for conversion and penance, warn against certain aberrations in Church life...suggest new styles of life or spiritual doctrine, or foretell the future. Those post-apostolic, prophetic revelations, therefore, apply the faith in a practical way to daily Christian living.”⁵

Jordan Aumann, O.P., observes: “There have always been persons gifted with prophecy, as is testified by Scripture and the processes of canonization of the servants of God. Nevertheless, private revelations do not pertain to the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in Scripture and Tradition under the vigilance of the Church.”⁶

Karl Rahner, S.J., offers the following regarding private revelation: “A private revelation as a mission to the Church signifies...an imperative which, within the context of a particular historical

situation of the Church, points out a particular course of action from among the many possible according to the universal and public revelation as the one most urgently needing to be realized. The new feature in such a private revelation consists therefore not in its particular material elements but in the imperative marking and shifting of accentuation within the possibilities of Christianity...Hence the private revelation as a mission to the Church can be conceived as a heavenly imperative interpretation of the particular situation of the Church at this time; it answers the question as to what is most urgently to be done *here and now* in accordance with the general principles of the faith.”⁷

It would be wrong, consequently, to deny the existence and proportionate importance of private revelation in the life of the Church. Such an attitude would be in opposition to the teaching of the Church and that of reputable theologians. Private revelation is yet another sign of God’s overwhelming love towards us. In His great love He has given us the truths of faith as contained in public revelation. In His ongoing love for us He gives us private revelation to aid us in the living of public revelation. We should not, therefore, be indifferent to the role God has assigned to private revelation in the life of the Church.

It might be well at this point to offer a description of what occurs when a person receives an apparition and/or locution (message). Joseph de Guibert, S.J., one of the most eminent mystical theologians of this century, says:

“A distinction is made between corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual visions. This distinction can also be applied to locutions. In corporeal visions and locutions there is a real perception by the external senses; the person who is seen or heard may be really present, or (in corporeal visions) the body which appears may be formed in the air, or a change may be affected at the moment the light-rays impinge on the eye, or (in corporeal locutions) a real acoustical vibration may be produced in the ears. In imaginative visions and locutions there is no perception by the external senses, but, rather, a Divine action on the imagination or the internal senses...In intellectual visions and locutions the Divine action directly affects the intellect.”⁸

What should one’s attitude be regarding alleged instances of private revelation which have not yet been the subject of official Church investigation—and perhaps never will be? First, one should always recognize that the final authority regarding private revelations rests with the Holy See of Rome, to whose judgment we should willingly submit. Secondly, one may personally act upon these

messages of private revelation if a person observes that they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals and that they help bring one closer to God. Our Lord has said: “...a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit.” (Mt 7:17-18).

A good example of what we have just said is the situation regarding the alleged apparitions and messages at Medjugorje. The Church’s investigation of this site is ongoing. No definitive decision has been made. In the meantime, the Church is *not* forbidding the faithful to go to Medjugorje. She is *not* forbidding them to personally accept the messages, presuming, again, they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals. Millions of pilgrims have gone to Medjugorje, including thousands of priests and hundreds of bishops.

An outstanding example of the importance of the role of private revelation in the life of the Church is that of Fatima. The Church has formally approved the message of Fatima as being worthy of belief. In her July 13, 1917, message, Our Blessed Mother said: “The war (World War I, then raging) is going to end. But if people do not stop offending God, another and worse one will begin in the reign of Pius XI. When you shall see a night illuminated by an unknown light (January 2, 1938), know that this is the great sign that God gives you that He is going to punish the world for its many crimes by means of war, hunger, and persecution of the Church and the Holy Father.

“To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on the five first Saturdays. If my requests are granted, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she will scatter her errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and various nations will be destroyed...

“But in the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph, the Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, Russia will be converted, and a certain period of peace will be granted to the world.”⁹

There is more to the requests of Our Lady of Fatima besides those elements contained in the above message. But these aspects of the Fatima message are obviously critical ones.

Because enough people did not respond to Mary’s requests made at Fatima, we did have World War II and all the horrors connected with the rise of Russian dominated Communism. Again, Fatima is a prime example of the importance the role of private revelation can assume in the life of the Church. Popes Pius XII and Paul VI made visits to Fatima, as has Pope John Paul II.

Concerning new apparitions, revelations, etc., there was an important decree issued under Pope Paul VI. This 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. It is presumed that such publications contain nothing contrary to faith and morals.

Here are some current messages of private revelation. Readers obviously are free to make up their own minds concerning them:

Jesus: “I want adoration of the Eucharist back. I want people to know I am God and I am coming to them in Holy Communion. I want the Blessed Sacrament exposed. I want My churches open. Union with Jesus, the love of Jesus, trust, faith, love for one another, love of God—I want all of

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Mary,
Queen of Peace,
Pray for us.

these preached from the pulpit!

“You are under attack, My beloved priests, and you, in your busyness, are being led away from your union with Jesus. Bring yourselves back to Me and let Me give you My love...I wait for My beloved ones at the altar. I long for private union with My beloved ones.

“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Come and be lifted up to heights you never dreamed possible. I am God. Put your lives in My hands. Let me run your life. Bring your lives back to Jesus in the tabernacle.”¹⁰

Mary: “Dear children! Today again, I want to call you to begin to live the new life from today onward. Dear children, I want you to comprehend that God has chosen each one of you in order to use you for the great plan of salvation of mankind. You cannot comprehend how great your role is in God’s plan. Therefore, dear children, pray so that, through prayer, you may comprehend God’s plan toward you. I am with you so that you can realize it completely.”¹¹

St. Catherine of Sienna

Igino Giordani offers us insightful thoughts concerning Catherine of Sienna, Saint and Doctor of the Church: “All the strivings of theologians and diplomats and preachers and missionaries are to no avail if they do not lead to love. By loving, one gives the life of God to the loved one. As St. John of the Cross will say: ‘Where you do not find love, implant love and you will find love!’ And Christ said to Catherine: ‘He who knows himself to be loved cannot do otherwise than love; in loving he will put on the spirit of Christ crucified, and in the tempestuous sea of many troubles he will find himself at peace.’”¹²

Elsewhere, Giordani observes: “Man is like a candle to be lighted—to be lighted in God. The combustible material is love. As the heavenly Father will say to Catherine: ‘Your material is love because I have created you for love; hence without love you cannot live.’ Without love one must die: a lamp without oil goes out.

“This light is lighted day by day above all at the flame of the Eucharist, sacrament of love. ‘The soul,’ Jesus will say on another occasion to Catherine, ‘receiving this Sacrament lives in me and I in it...’”¹³

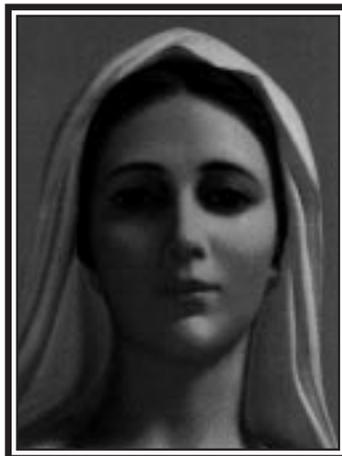
The Heart of Christ

June is the month especially dedicated to the Heart of Christ. In the preface of the Mass for the Solemn Feast of the Sacred Heart, the

Church puts before us these words: “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.”¹⁴ Who would want to refuse the Savior’s invitation?

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 of 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 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 Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, Who leads me to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit in Our Lives

As the closing words of the act of consecration remind us, Jesus leads us to the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary at our side. The Holy Spirit desires to fashion us into an ever greater likeness of Christ according to Jesus’ pattern of death-resurrection. Mary our Mother cooperates with the

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Immaculate
Heart of Mary,
Pray for us.

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Spirit, Whose spouse she is, in this process. Obviously, we should pray to the Holy Spirit each day. There are many ways we can do this. We can do this by simply turning our attention to the Spirit at various times during the day as we ask for His guidance. This method can also be complemented by saying certain established prayers. Here is one of these: "Come Holy Spirit, almighty Sanctifier. God of love, Who filled the Virgin Mary with grace, Who wonderfully changed the hearts of the apostles, Who endowed all your martyrs with miraculous courage, come and sanctify us. Enlighten our minds, strengthen our wills, purify our consciences, rectify our judgment, set our hearts on fire, and preserve us from the misfortunes of resisting Your inspirations. Amen."

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Letters

We thank all those who have taken the time to write us. We very much appreciate your letters. Space limitations permit us to publish only a few of these:

Dear Ed, I just wanted to take this chance to thank you for sending to me the Shepherds of Christ Newsletter. I have appreciated it very much, both to keep in touch with what you are doing and to enjoy the rich variety of topics needed for priestly reflection today—topics like friendship, prayer, and the Holy Spirit (a subject close to a Paulist's heart) in recent issues.

Sincerely,

Larry Boadt, CSP
Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ

I like your newsletter very much. Shepherds of Christ gave me plenty of food for prayer!

Fr. Michael A. Becker
St. Rose of Lima, Altoona, PA

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. "St. Ignatius of Antioch, The Letters," as in *The Fathers of The Church*, Fathers of the Church, Inc., p. 110.
3. *A Thomas Merton Reader*, Thomas McDonnell, editor, Doubleday, p. 459.
4. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #67, p. 23.
5. Harvey Egan, S.J., *Christian Mysticism*, Pueblo Publishing, p. 311.
6. Jordan Aumann, O.P., *Spiritual Theology*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., p. 429.
7. Karl Rahner, S.J., *Theological Investigations*, Helicon Press, Vol. III, pp. 338-339.
8. Joseph de Guibert, S.J., *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, Sheed & Ward, pp. 355-356.
9. *Our Lady of Fatima's Peace Plan from Heaven*, Tan Publishers, pp. 4-5.
10. *God's Blue Book: The Fire of His Love*, messages received by Rita Ring, Shepherds of Christ Publications, p.35.
11. Our Lady of Medjugorje, October 25, 1987, message as in *Live the Messages* by D.R. Golob, The Riehle Foundation.
12. Igino Giordani, *Catherine of Sienna*, Bruce Publishing, p. 122.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.
14. *The Sacramentary*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., p. 463.

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