

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

The Word of God

“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)

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. This first part contains, therefore, the so-called sapiential theme. The second part, versus 51-59, speaks of the Eucharist as our heavenly nourishment. This part, therefore, contains the sacramental theme.

Concerning the teaching of Jesus which has been left to His Church, the Second Vatican Council states: “But in order to keep the gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, ‘handing over their own teaching role’ to them. This sacred tradition, therefore, and sacred Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face.”²

We priests have a special privilege and respon-

sibility to nourish ourselves with the teachings of Jesus. The more we meditate on this teaching, the more we love it, the more we ourselves live it, the more apt instruments we become in assisting the Good Shepherd in the feeding of His flock.

Reflections on the Word of God

◆ Getting to Know Jesus

“Philip said, ‘Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.’ ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip,’ said Jesus to him, ‘and you still do not know me?’” (Jn 14:8-9)

We can come to know Jesus in various ways. To hear about Jesus during the Scriptural readings of the liturgy, or to hear about him in a homily, or to experience Jesus in other ways through life within the Christian community—these are all means by which we can meet Jesus and come to know Him better.

We should also realize that prayer is a very effective and necessary means for growing in knowledge and love of Jesus. Some apparently think that, if they meet Jesus by experiencing Him in and with their neighbor in various ways, this is sufficient. We should not underestimate this communitarian manner of experiencing Jesus. It is extremely important, and we cannot do without it. But in order to know and love Jesus as we should, we also need the one-to-one situation which prayerful quiet offers. At times we need to be alone with Jesus.

We can see the necessity of this by considering how a friendship with a human person develops and grows. We can certainly grow in knowledge and live with a friend as we experience him or her in the company of others. But I think we all admit that at times we must also be alone with the other if the friendship is properly to be and to grow. I can never get to know a friend as I should merely by being with him or her in the company of other people. I also need the one-to-one experience so that I and my friend can share on a more personal and intimate basis. If this holds

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“Go now to those
to whom I send you
and say whatever
I command you.”

—Jer 1:7

Reflections

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true for my personal relationship with a human person friend, it also holds true for my friendship with Jesus. And it is especially as I receive Jesus in the Eucharist and pray before the tabernacle at other times that the one-to-one, intimate experience of Jesus is greatly nourished. It is at such moments that Jesus offers me a supreme opportunity to grow in knowledge and love of Him—this Jesus who is God, my teacher, my friend, my Savior, who died a brutal death for love of me.

◆ *Longing for God*

|| “God, you are my God, I am seeking you, my soul is thirsting for you.” (Ps 63:1)

God is the one who gives ultimate meaning to our lives. He 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 Him, He gathers up what would otherwise be the all-too-fragmented pieces of our lives and arranges them into a harmonious unity. This unity emanates from our living according to His plan, a plan embodying a way of existence that leads us to an ever greater experience of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

As we long for God and draw nearer to Him, we may possibly experience a certain fear. We realize that the closer we come to Him, the more He will ask of us, gently but firmly. We fear the white heat of His love. Such episodes along the spiritual journey are crucial. If we keep pulling back from the intensity of His love, if we keep refusing what this love wants to accomplish in us and through us, then we live on a rather superficial

level. We can still be friends with our God but we are refusing to live deeper down where the really real is more intensely experienced. We have to resist this fear which, if succumbed to, prevents us from achieving a closer union with God. God’s love for us wants our happiness; God’s love for us also brings about our happiness—if we are open to what He wants to do for us.

When we experience a greater yearning and thirst for God, we should, then, abandon ourselves to this desire. In doing so 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.

◆ *It’s God’s Work More Than Ours*

“The word of Yahweh was addressed to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.’ I said, ‘ah, Lord Yahweh; look, I do not know how to speak; I am a child!’

“But Yahweh replied,

‘Do not say, “I am a child.”

Go now to those to whom I send you
and say whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to protect you—
it is Yahweh who speaks!” (Jer 1:4-8)

At certain points along the journey of life, we become rather overwhelmed with a certain kind of fear. It is a fear emanating from the realization that God is asking something very special of us. We are afraid because of the effort required, or because we feel that we have only mediocre talent for the task to which we are being summoned.

Whatever the case may be, we can all profit by reflecting on the above scripture passage dealing with God’s call to Jeremiah. Jeremiah told God, in so many words, that he was not capable of the task he was being asked to accomplish. God replied, telling Jeremiah that he surely could perform the task he was being assigned—not because of what he was in himself, but because He, God, would be with Jeremiah.

To live the Christian calling in all its myriad aspects certainly demands our own effort. But this is an effort assisted mightily by God’s grace. God calls, invites, inspires. We are meant to respond, to cooperate, to open ourselves to the Spirit’s touch and guidance. We have a part, obviously, in accomplishing our Christian destiny. Yet God has the greater part. Whatever He asks of us, we can accomplish. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is beyond us if God calls us to it. Why, then, at times, do we tend to think and feel and act differently?

◆ *We Are Called to Serve*

“If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.” (Jn 13:14-15)

There are two basic ways according to which we can go about the performance of work. One way focuses attention on the self; the other directs attention outward toward the God-appointed service of others.

A person who assumes the first attitude is being driven by a basic selfishness. During the years of formal education, such a person studies to acquire knowledge primarily so that his or her intellectual acquisition will later make possible various kinds of personal benefits and aggrandizements. Such a person works primarily to make money, or for the personal satisfaction involved. Such a person seeks out positions of authority, power, and status, primarily in order to be looked up to and to be ministered to.

A person who performs according to the other attitude projects a different image. If one pursues knowledge, it is not only for one’s personal benefits. It is that he or she might also be variously capable of greater service to God and one’s fellow human beings. When one works, it is not only for the money and personal satisfaction involved. It is that he or she might also be of service to others. If one attains positions of authority and influence, the person is motivated, not by illusions of grandeur, but rather by the desire to labor for others, to be for others, to serve others.

The attitude the true Christian should assume is obvious. The true Christian may sometimes find it difficult and wearisome to live according to such an attitude. But he or she has no doubt it is the correct attitude. He or she has no doubt it is Jesus’ attitude, this Jesus who girt Himself with a towel and washed and dried His disciples’ feet.

◆ *Jesus and His Church*

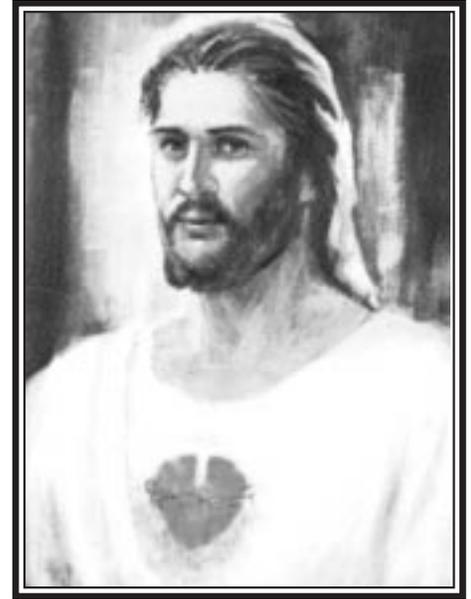
“So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.” (Mat 16:18)

The Church is experiencing trying times. Over the ages the Church has always received various kinds of criticism from those outside her fold. Currently she is also experiencing much criticism from within. Some of this criticism is bad—negative and unrealistic. During this period of the Church’s transition, a time which has seen more than its share of pain, turmoil, confusion, and anguish, the question, “why the institutional Church?” has been raised more than once. The ultimate answer, of course, is because this is the way God wants it. God has established the Church through Christ, and, as we say, that’s the

way it is and that’s the way it’s going to be.

We help one another in the Church in many different ways, in many different circumstances. We do this not sporadically, but consistently. We live the Gospel, not as isolated individuals, but as the People of God whose members are meant to be united through the closest bonds of love.

Yes, there are many good things about the Church. But there are also things which should not be. There is jealousy and pettiness. Such attitudes, unbecoming people who claim to be followers of Jesus, consistently hinder the Church’s work. There is also on the part of some the exercise of power politics which makes one want to cry out that this is the Christian community, not a ruthless political machine. There are also injustices perpetrated against innocent individuals, impersonalism, mediocrity. These are some of the faults existent within the Church. We should do all we can to lessen these. We should labor at diminishing these failings so that the Church’s Christic image may be more apparent. Yet we also have to realize that there will always be things wrong with the Church. We are a Pilgrim Church. This means we have not yet arrived at perfection—this is the state of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church of heaven. Here below the Church will always be marred with blemishes even as she reaches out in a spirit of ongoing conversion for a greater assimilation of the Gospel ideal.



We should, then, view the Church realistically. We should remind ourselves that it was established by God, not by any human person or persons. We should rejoice over the Church’s good points, sorrow over her failings. We should contribute our share to making the Church’s goodness more dynamic, more evident, more sensitive to the needs of the times, while being consumed with a holy dissatisfaction which allows us no respite concerning the evils which plague the Church, and which should not be. And, very importantly, we should mightily love the Church despite her failings. We should love the Church deeply, consistently, tenderly. The Church belongs to Jesus; it is His body. It was born from His pierced side as He hung upon the cross. The Church is Jesus’ great gift to us, a gift born of the magnificent love of His Heart.

◆ *Suffering and Happiness*

“We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body.” (2 Cor 4:8-10)

“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:4-7)

Certain people look upon religion as a type of enslavement. Religion, claim these people, puts shackles on one’s desires for full living, pleasure,

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and happiness. Religion, they continue, makes one fearful, forces one into a rigid pattern of do's and don'ts which restricts and even suffocates a person's thrust toward full personality development. Whatever the causes may be for arriving at this view, such an attitude grossly misrepresents the nature of true religion.

Jesus has come to make us happy, not to make us participate in a religion which destroys the joy-dimension of human life. Jesus has come to increase our capacity for true self-fulfillment, not to restrict us with a religion which, while encouraging morbid self-enclosures, destroys possibilities for healthy self-expansiveness. Jesus has come to show us the way to real pleasures, not to prevent us with a religion which looks askance at such. And the happiness and fulfillment Jesus has come to give us is meant for this life, not only for eternal life. Christianity is a religion which gives a here-and-now happiness which develops into a future and eternal happiness which satisfies our deepest desires to be fully alive.

Jesus has not promised us that the process of achieving happiness is without pain and suffering. Jesus was the happiest man who ever walked this earth.

He was also the man who suffered the most. Observing the life of Jesus Himself, then, we come face to face with this undeniable Christian truth: suffering, even deep suffering, is not incompatible with deep happiness. On the contrary, whether we experience suffering or whatever, such an encounter is a means to further happiness, providing we are living in Christ Jesus.

The Christian who is not fundamentally happy presents, then, a contradiction. He or she claims to be a follower of the Jesus who has promised more abundant life and happiness. To remove the contradiction, such a Christian must look to himself or herself. Such a person does not lack a basic happiness because there is anything wanting in Jesus' message. This person lacks happiness because there is something wanting in the self. In some way or another, for some reason or another, this person has failed to assimilate properly the Gospel message. The Gospel is the good news. Jesus invites us to listen to His Gospel, to respond to it, to live it ever more fully and dynamically. Jesus tells us that, if we do, we will experience a peace and happiness beyond comprehension. We know that Jesus does not lie, that

Jesus does not deceive, that Jesus does not cruelly excite the expectations of His followers and then fail to fulfill them. Again, then, if a Christian is unhappy, he or she has to look at the self and ask why. But such a person should not ask the question in isolation. It should be asked in the company of Jesus. Jesus will help the person find the answer. Jesus will help remedy the situation.

◆ *The Love Dimension*

"If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever." (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Jesus has told us love is what it's all about. Christianity, the religion of Jesus, is a religion of love. This is what Jesus wants us to realize. This is what we must realize. We understand the work of the Incarnation when we consider it in terms of love. We ourselves live Jesus when we live the love ethic He came to preach. Love marks the beginning of a truly Christian life. Love is also its main inspiration and motivation. Love is no less its goal. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus is to assimilate His message of love. To be a Christian, then, is to be a lover—in imitation of Jesus Who is the tremendous lover.

Jesus shows us His Heart as symbol of His life of love, including His mighty and tender love for each of us individually. His Heart calls for our return of love. His Heart invites us to pour out our lives in love of God and neighbor.

As we do so, love expands us, makes us grow, develops our capacity to be authentically and to become authentically. Love brings to mature expression the various potentialities of Christian personhood. It makes us what Jesus wants us to be. Christian love is meant to express itself at all times in all kinds of circumstances. It is truly a virtue for all seasons. Whether it is a time to laugh or a time to cry, it is a time to love. Whether it is a time to rejoice or a time to be sorrowful, it is a time to love. Whether it is a time to experience exhilarating success or to suffer the anguish of crushing failure, it is still a time to love. Whether it is a time to work on despite boredom, monotony, and lethargy, or a time to be carried along riding the crest of enthusiasm, it is a time for love. Love's labor is never done; there is no day which is not meant to be a love-day. Love should be as constant and as certain as the never-failing cycle of night following day and day following night.

◆ *The Eucharist*

"Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me.' He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.'" (Lk 22:19-20)

In the Eucharist, through the humanity of Jesus, Father, Son and Holy Spirit communicate themselves to us anew. Through the intimate gift of the Eucharist, they strikingly manifest their love for us and ask for our response of love. In, with, and through Jesus we respond. Each experience of the Eucharist is meant to strengthen our love-bond with Jesus, so that we can say with increased meaning along with St. Paul, **"For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing**

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

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 8:38-39)

The Eucharist not only deepens our union with God in Christ. In receiving the Eucharist we pledge ourselves to deepen our love-union with all members of the Body which is the Church. We pledge to use those means which foster union. We determine to avoid that which causes selfish divisiveness.

The Eucharist also reminds us of our relationship with all members of the human family. Jesus died and rose for all. The Eucharistic making present of this paschal mystery nourishes our determination to assist in the work of ongoing redemption. The light we receive from the Eucharist points to what we should be doing. The strength of the Eucharist assists us to act according to the light we receive.

The Eucharist, then, possesses the rich capacity to help us maintain and develop our personal relationship with God, with members of the Church, and with all other members of the human family. And it will do just this—if we so allow it.

◆ **To Choose Jesus**

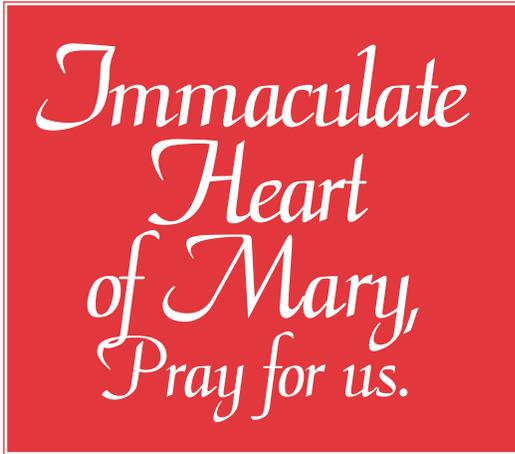
“Then Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘What about you, do you want to go away too?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.’” (Jn 6:67-69)

Even after years of close friendship with Jesus, a Christian can decide to make a radical break and go his or her way. In the mysterious depths of one’s free will, a person decides, for whatever reason, no longer to walk side by side with Jesus. This Jesus, who was once such an inspiration, who so often manifested His mercy, who offered a challenging goal to achieve the true, the good, and the beautiful, who whispered His loving and tender concern—this Jesus is now rejected.

On a lesser scale, a Christian can variously reject a deep intimacy with Jesus while still fundamentally maintaining the friendship. It may be a case of superficial living in general. Jesus keeps calling to a more dynamic Christian existence, but the person keeps resisting, because he or she is fearful, or perhaps just too lazy, or whatever.

Or it may be the barrier between the person and Jesus is more pin-pointed: Jesus is asking a very definite something, and He is refused. Such a Christian presents a paradox. The person knows there is no other way but Jesus, and, therefore, he or she basically commits one’s life to Christ. On the other hand, the person does not commit oneself as fully as one could, and thus seems to be saying, “You are the only one, Jesus, who can lead me to real happiness here and hereafter—but I don’t want to follow you too closely.”

The only mature Christian attitude, we know, is to choose Jesus once and for all, and to live out the full implications of this choice. Of course, there will be failings on the part of the Christian who makes this option for Jesus. But he or she will strive to avoid developing that attitude which says, “I will go so far with you, Jesus, but no farther. I want to come close to you, Jesus, but not too close.” To choose Jesus, then, and to live this choice consistently, dynamically, lovingly, and without reserve, is true Christian logic. It is to realize with Peter that Jesus is the one and the only one.



Christmas Meditation

At this Christmas season, these words of Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., are particularly appropriate:

“The swaddling bands in which Mary wrapped the Infant afforded but an imperfect shelter against the chilliness of the icy draughts. There is no doubt but that the straw was rough and coarse in spite of all Mary’s efforts to make of it a clean and smooth bed for the tender Infant limbs. The manger, to be sure, was a sorry cradle for a King, and that the august King of heaven and earth. Doubtless, it was all very comfortless, but that is only one aspect of the birth of Jesus in the stable. It was not all wretchedness and misery. In this life of the God-Man loveliness and greatness, obscurity and splendor, weakness and power ever go hand in hand, and it is the splendor and power and greatness that dominate. They are but enhanced by the dark shadows of poverty, isolation and suffering. The shadows of the life of Jesus but serve to throw the splendors into stronger relief. The stable was a wretched abode, but in it was a sanctuary as worthy of God as it is possible for a created thing to be worthy of Him. That sanctuary was Mary’s soul. In it the Child-God could nestle to His Heart’s content and find delight. He is God and for Him, therefore, spiritual realities are more real than material realities. In His eyes the splendors of His Mother’s soul transformed the cavern into an abode of palatial splendour and beauty. The mother love of Mary wrapped the soul and heart of Jesus in a mantle of warmth that was grateful in the extreme. God had never before experienced the like from a human person. Mary lavishes tenderness mingled with adoration on the Child. She ministers to Him the warmth, the light, the comfort, denied by the cavern. Joseph’s affection and adoration were a pale but still a true reflex of the love and worship of Mary. It is not easy to satisfy God. The saints, even great ones, find Him exacting in His requirements. Yet here God was satisfied. He could ask no more from the two than they had given. For they had given without niggardliness. They had given all that their hearts and souls were capable of. The hostelry in which the new-born God found shelter was not, after all, such a mean one. It was the greatest and the most beautiful that our earth has ever seen or ever will see. It was not all lowliness and sordidness that surrounded the nativity of the Saviour. Man could not take from Him His greatness, nor could the humble circumstances to

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which their blindness condemned Him obscure it. He was great, in spite of all that man could say or do or judge and His greatness burst in splendour through the lowly conditions of the Nativity. Trumpets proclaim the birth of princes. Never did earth re-echo to strains comparable to those that announced the birth of the Great Prince of Heaven, Mary's Son. Never was such a radiance diffused through the palaces of kings as flooded the wide spaces in the center of which was the manger. Men may not, but God always does recognize true greatness, and He sets His seal upon it."³

In Memory of Henry Nouwen

The recent death of Fr. Henri Nouwen, one of the most widely read of contemporary spiritual writers, offers us a special occasion to share with you the following excerpts from his voluminous writings:

◆ "There are two realities to which you must cling. First, God has promised that you will receive the love you have been searching for. And second, God is faithful to that promise.

"So stop wandering around. Instead, come home and trust that God will bring you what you need. Your whole life you have been running about, seeking the love you desire. Now it is time to end that search. Trust that God will give you that all-fulfilling love and will give it in a human way. Before you die, God will offer you the deepest satisfaction you can desire. Just stop running and start trusting and receiving."⁴

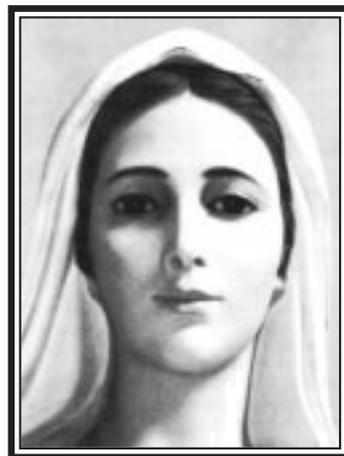
◆ "Do not hesitate to love and to love deeply. You might be afraid of the pain that deep love can cause. When those you love deeply reject you, leave you, or die, your heart will be broken. But that should not hold you back from loving deeply. The pain that comes from deep love makes your love ever more fruitful."⁵

◆ "The first response, then, to our brokenness is to face it squarely and befriend it. This may seem quite unnatural. Our first, most spontaneous response to pain and suffering is to avoid it, to keep it at arm's length; to ignore, circumvent or deny it. Suffering—be it physical, mental or emotional—is almost always experienced as an unwelcome intrusion into our lives, something that should not be there...

"When this is, indeed, our spontaneous attitude toward our brokenness, it is no surprise that befriending it seems, at first, masochistic. Still, my own pain in life has taught me that the first step to healing is not a step away from the pain,

but a step toward it. When brokenness is, in fact, just as intimate a part of our being as our chosenness and our blessedness, we have to dare to overcome our fear and become familiar with it. Yes, we have to find the courage to embrace our brokenness, to make our most feared enemy into a friend and to claim it as an intimate companion. I am convinced that healing is often so difficult because we don't want to know the pain. Although this is true of pain, it is especially true of the pain that comes from a broken heart. The anguish and agony that result from rejection, separation, neglect, abuse and emotional manipulation serve only to paralyze us when we can't face them and keep running away from them. When we need guidance in our suffering, it is first of all a guidance that leads us closer to our pain and makes us aware that we do not have to avoid it, but can befriend it."⁶

◆ "Prayer is often considered a weakness, a support system, which is used when we can no longer help ourselves. But this is only true when the God of our prayers is created in our own image and adopted to our own needs and concerns. When, however, prayer makes us reach out to God, not on our own but on his terms, then prayer pulls us away from self-preoccupation, encourages us to leave familiar ground, and challenges us to enter into a new world which cannot be contained within the narrow boundaries of our mind or heart. Prayer, therefore, is a great adventure because the God with whom we enter into a new relationship is greater than we are and defies all our calculations and predictions. The movement from illusion to prayer is hard to make since it leads us from false certainties to true uncertainties, from an easy support system to a risky surrender, and from the many 'safe' gods to the God whose love has no limits."⁷



◆ Nouwen spent a number of months in a Trappist monastery. From his diary written during those months he tells us his reason for taking time out to seclude himself within monastery walls for a time: "The more I became aware of these paradoxes, the more I started to see how much I had indeed fallen in love with my own compulsions and illusions, and how much I needed to step back, and wonder, 'Is there a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections of my little world? Is there a still point where my life is anchored and from which I can reach out with hope and courage?'"⁸

◆ During his stay in the monastery, Nouwen derived this insight concerning the life of contemplation, a life all are called to share according to their state of life and particular occupation: "Contemplative life is a human response to the fundamental fact that the central things in life, although spiritually perceptible, remain invisible in large measure and can very easily be overlooked by the inattentive, busy, distracted person that each of us can so readily become. The contemplative looks, not so much around things, but through them into their center."⁹

◆ The following words of Nouwen have particular application to the priest-leader: "The world says, 'when you were young you were dependent and could not go where you wanted, but when you grow old you will be able to make your own decisions, go your own way, and control your own destiny.' But Jesus has a different vision of maturity: It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go. Immediately after Peter has been commissioned to be a leader of his sheep, Jesus confronts him with the hard truth that the servant leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader

is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross. This might sound morbid and masochistic, but for those who have heard the voice of the first love and said 'yes' to it, the downward-moving way of Jesus is the way to the joy and the peace of God, a joy and peace that is not of this world."¹⁰

Words From John Welch, O.Carm.

Here are some excerpts from the writings of Fr. John Welch, O. Carm., a contemporary commentator on Carmelite Spirituality:

◆ "John of the Cross believed that when a personality is not centered on God, but is centered on some part of God's creation, the personality is dysfunctional. When the true center emerges, false centers die, and the personality heals. From this center a person hears his or her name more clearly than ever before and other people are valued as brothers and sisters. John learned that true community is formed when each one is related not only to the others, but most especially to the Mystery at the center of all lives."¹¹

◆ "Contemplation, or an openness to God's transforming love, no matter how it is approaching, is the sure attitude, the 'solution' to a life given to fragmentation and idolatry."¹²

◆ Again speaking of St. John of the Cross, Welch says: "John teaches that our human development is ultimately a process of divinization; we begin to share in God's knowing and loving. The story of our lives is told in God's Word. Fasten your eyes on this Son of God, John urges.

"Contemplation is an openness to the activity of God in our lives, however God approaches us. It is not a question of this or that lifestyle, but a sensitive listening to God's invitation from deep within our lives, no matter what the source of our human experience. Contemplation is a willing acceptance of being emptied of what is not God, and being filled with God; John wrote of it as a loving 'inflow of God.'

"In the process our humanity is transformed. We begin to live from an interior place where our prayer is God's prayer and our activity is God's activity. Such a transformatory humanity sees the world clearly, possesses it in God, and works in a manner which is cooperative with God's Kingdom.

"John of the Cross tells the human story as a love story, God's love pursuing us into life, freedom, and a loving union. It is a story of graciousness at the core of life."¹³

Help Needed

Shepherds of Christ Ministries is expanding, including the increased mailing of the newsletter to priests in various parts of the world. The more we expand the circulation of the newsletter, the more it needs to be translated into other languages. We have begun a Spanish edition. We need help regarding all other languages.

We need culturally sensitive priests to review translations for theological correctness, and also to possibly help in the translations themselves. If you are able and willing to help in the ministry to priests around the world, please contact me (Edward Carter, S.J.) at the Shepherds of Christ mailing address which you will find on the back of the newsletter.

If you yourself are not able to help us, perhaps you could suggest names of others—clergy and/or laity—who could possibly be of assistance. Thank you very, very much for your prayerful consideration of this important request.

The Heart of Mary

Pope John-Paul II gives us these inspiring words: "Be blessed above all things, Handmaid of the Lord, who obeyed the Divine Call in the fullest way! Be greeted, you who united yourself entirely with your Son's redemptive consecration! Mother of the Church! Enlighten the People of God on the way of faith, hope and charity! Help us to live with all the truth of the consecration of Christ for the entire human family in the contemporary world. By entrusting, O Mother, the world, all individuals and all peoples to you, we also entrust to you the very consecration of the world, putting it in your Maternal Heart.

"O, Immaculate Heart! Help us to overcome the threat of evil, which so easily takes root in the hearts of men today and, with the incommensurable effects, already weighs upon our contemporary existence and seems to close the way toward the future.

"Free us from hunger and war! From nuclear war, from incalculable self-destruction, from every kind of war, free us! From the sin against the life of man at its dawning, free us! From the hatred and debasement of the children of God, free us! From every kind of injustice, national and international, free us! From the ease treading down God's commandments, free us! From sins against the Holy Spirit, free us! Free us!

Receive, O Mother of Christ, this cry charged with the sufferings of all mankind! Charged with the suffering of entire societies. Reveal yourself once again, in the story of the world, to be merciful! May this cry halt evil! May it transform consciences!

May the light of hope, reveal itself to all in your Immaculate Heart! Amen."¹⁴

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

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Act of Consecration, continued from page 7

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.

Letters

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

Dear Fr. Carter,

Thanks so much for the spirituality newsletter. I'll be using the Sept.-Oct. issue for meditations for the rest of the year and beyond.

I was a little down due to the fact that there are four terminal cancer patients in the parish and it is hard to cope—with them, their families, and oneself. Then your lovely newsletter came

and truly lifted my spirits.

Please accept the enclosed to support your grace-filled ministry.

In Christ,
Fr. Walter E. Heinz
Pomeroy, Ohio

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Dear Father,

Using your reflections is like making a retreat—great for reviewing.

God bless you,
Fr. Edmund Schreiber
Franklin Park, Illinois

Dear Friend,

I want to thank you for publishing *Shepherds of Christ*. I really do appreciate your thoughtfulness of helping us pastors to keep our mind's focus on Jesus.

Thank you,
Rev. Gerald Cernoch
Shiver, Texas

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," No. 7, American Press Edition.
3. Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., *In the Likeness of Christ*, Sheed & Ward, pp. 45-46.
4. Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*, Doubleday, p. 12.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
6. Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, Crossroad, pp. 75-76.
7. Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, Doubleday, pp. 88-89.
8. Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*, Doubleday, p. 14.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
10. Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, Crossroad, pp. 62-63.
11. John Welch, O. Carm., *The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today's Pilgrim*, Paulist Press, p. 84.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
13. John Welch, O. Carm., *When Gods Die*, Paulist Press, p. 205.
14. Pope John-Paul II, *Prayers and Devotions*, edited by Bishop Peter Canisius Johannes van Lierde, O.S.A., Viking, pp. 357-358.