

# shepherds of Christ<sup>†</sup>

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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## Chief Shepherd of the Flock

### Mother at Our Side

*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 us. As He was near death, an awesome episode in the work of redemption took place: *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son". Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother." And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.* (Jn 19:25-27).

Speaking of Mary, Vatican II tells us: "In an utterly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace."<sup>2</sup>

Mary is the Mother of Jesus. She is also our Mother. The above words of Scripture and of the Second Vatican Council attest to this.

Yes, Jesus has given us Mary as our spiritual Mother. As He hung on the cross, Jesus told John to look upon Mary as his Mother, this John who represented all of us. In His moment of deepest anguish and suffering, Jesus was thinking of us. As the undescrivable physical pain racked His body from head to toe, as the unfathomable spiritual anguish penetrated to the depths of His magnificent Heart, Jesus was thinking of us. If we allow this scene to penetrate into our hearts, if we take the time to contemplate the depth of Jesus' and Mary's

love for us as their Hearts were pierced with grief, we are truly overwhelmed with the magnificent greatness, sorrow, and tenderness of the scene.

The fact that Mary is our Mother, the fact that she has such a powerful role to play in our salvation in no way detracts from the mediatorship of Christ. Vatican II states: "The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on His mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union."<sup>3</sup>

In her loving, maternal role, Mary cooperates with the Holy Spirit in forming Christ in us. Pope John Paul II tells us: "The Church knows that 'all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on mankind originate... from the divine pleasure...' This saving influence is sustained by the Holy Spirit, Who, just as He overshadowed the Virgin Mary when he began in her the divine motherhood, in a similar way constantly sustains her solicitude for the

brothers and sisters of her Son."<sup>4</sup>

Mary, our Mother is ever with us, guiding us, teaching us, caring for us, protecting us, loving us. With her maternal assistance we go to the Father through and with Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Mary nourishes our growth in Christ with a very tender and specialized love for each of us. She regards each of us as a precious, unique individual. John Paul II again speaks to us: "Of the essence of motherhood is the fact that it concerns the person. Motherhood always establishes a *unique and unrepeatable relationship* between two people: *between mother and child and between child and mother.* Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood. For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way, and this is true both for the mother and

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for the child.”<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Father then applies these ideas to Mary and us: “It can be said that motherhood ‘in the order of grace’ preserves the analogy with what ‘in the order of nature’ characterizes the union between mother and child. In the light of this fact it becomes easier to understand why in Christ’s testament on Golgotha His Mother’s new motherhood is expressed in the singular, in reference to one man.”<sup>6</sup>

This is the awesome and consoling truth—you and I are very precious to Mary. She shows us her Heart as a symbol of her life of love, including her most special, unique love for each of us individually. Yes, she loves each of us much more than we can ever fathom. It is our great privilege and responsibility to love her in return. She asks for this love, she asks for our trust, she asks us to come to her maternal and Immaculate Heart, so that she can lead us ever closer to the Heart of her Son, Jesus.

Are we sorrowful, anxious, troubled? Let us go to Mary our Mother and ask her to console us. Let us ask her for the grace to handle our sorrow, our anxieties, our troubles properly—according to God’s will. In this way our suffering will bring us closer to Christ as it simultaneously allows us to contribute to the ongoing Christianization of the world.

Are we especially joyful, happy, basking in the glow of a goal successfully accomplished? Let us go to Mary and ask her to help us handle our joy, our happiness, our success as God intends. Let us petition her not to allow our joy to make us forgetful of God, our God Who is the source of all true joy, success and happiness.

Yes, Mary invites us to come to her in all circumstances—whether it be in joy or sorrow, success or failure, laughter or tears. Mary wants us

to share in her maternal wisdom so that we may understand how to use our various experiences to come closer to God in Christ. Sharing our lives with Mary in this fashion, and on a consistent basis, requires that we love her, that we trust her, that we surrender ourselves to her maternal love.

Help us, Mother Mary, to probe ever more deeply into the depths of your love for us. Help us to realize more and more that to be loved by you is to experience a sweetness, a warmth, a tenderness, a serenity, a security, which makes us cry out, “O Mother, how good and loving you are!”

## The Eucharist

◆ Pope John Paul II reminds us: “The Eucharist is above all else a sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of the Redemption and also the sacrifice of the New Covenant...”

“It is therefore very opportune and necessary to continue to actuate a new and intense education, in order to discover all the richness contained in the new liturgy. Indeed, the liturgical renewal that has taken place since the Second Vatican Council has given, so to speak, greater visibility to *the Eucharistic Sacrifice*. One factor contributing to this is that the words of the Eucharistic Prayer are said aloud by the celebrant, particularly the words of consecration, with the acclamation by the assembly immediately after the elevation.

“All this should fill us with joy, but we should also remember that *these changes demand new spiritual awareness and maturity*, both on the part of the celebrant—especially now that he celebrates ‘facing the people’—and by the faithful. Eucharistic worship matures and grows when the words of the Eucharistic Prayer, especially the words of consecration, are spoken with great humility and simplicity, in a worthy and fitting way, which is understandable and in keeping with their holiness; when this essential act of the Eucharistic Liturgy is performed unhurriedly; and when it brings about in us such recollection and devotion that the participants become aware of the greatness of the mystery being accomplished and show it by their attitude.”<sup>7</sup>

◆ He gave His last breath! He gave the last beat of His Heart for love of each one of us! How can we refuse Jesus who spread His arms on the cross and gave His life for you and for me? How can we not trust Him when He loved us so much that He allowed them to tear His flesh, to crown Him with piercing thorns, and, lastly, to hang Him on a cross? He endured all this for love of each of us, and that same love has prompted Him to still be with us in His Eucharistic presence—in the Mass and in the tabernacle. And we can at times take His Eucharistic presence so lightly!

Death has no power over our Savior. Locked in the tomb, He rose triumphant on the third day as He had foretold. He has come to give us life. He gives us the sacrament of Baptism that initiates us into His life. This life He gives us is centered in love—love of God and neighbor. He came to show us the way and His way is love. He died for love of us and He rose for love of us! Each day He calls

out to each of us to be His close companions, to march on a world that has to a large degree forgotten God, that has forgotten how to love. It is a struggle to live in the world, but the battle is won with hearts that are filled with His love, hearts that are empowered by the grace that He pours out in the Eucharist. He calls out for us to come to the Eucharistic Sacrifice and be fed with His very flesh and blood! He invites us to converse with Him as we pray before the tabernacle. The Eucharist is our greatest source of spiritual nourishment. It is Jesus’ great gift to us—the gift of Himself. This is the love He gives. This is the love He asks us to share.

Yes, the Eucharistic Christ calls out ever so gently in His tender voice and with His burning Heart. He calls out to us and says, *Come to me, all you who labor and are over burdened, and I will give you rest.* (Mt 11:28). But in

our blindness we can turn away, forgetting to realize the true treasure in our midst. Jesus remains with us this day in the Eucharist, really present, body and blood, soul and divinity, as really present as He was when He walked this earth. And He calls out in a gentle voice, with a burning Heart, “My beloved friends, I long for your love. Open up your hearts to Me. I am the Son of God! I have all the power! You cannot do anything without Me!”

◆ Fr. Robert M. Schwartz, theologian and former president of the United States National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy, tells us: “The eucharist is the privileged moment in which the eschatological Christ quickens and guides the pilgrim journey of the church. This celebration nourishes transcendent values, deepens insight into the present identity of the community, and draws attention to its future goal; therefore, it is truly the source of conversion to the life of the kingdom, changing the lives and desires of those who participate in it. There, Jesus himself is offered to the community gathered





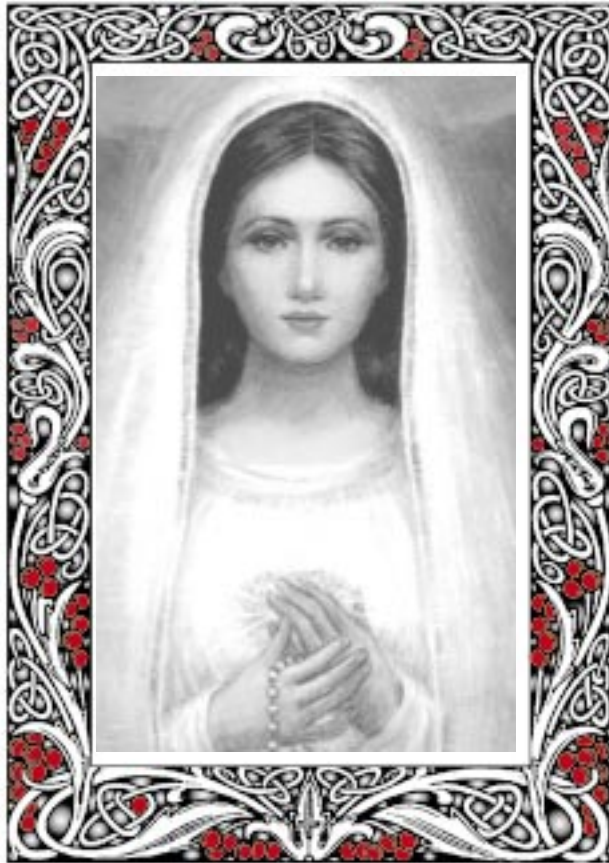
in worship as a foretaste of the goal of ecclesial existence: perfect communion of life and love in Christ. This dynamic presence of Jesus embodies the grace of his life, death and resurrection, giving power and efficacy to ministry. Since the eucharist renders Jesus present both as crucified servant and as eschatological Lord, it is the source of pastoral charity and the pattern of ministerial spirituality. Because service is the sign of the kingdom and the way which leads to its consummation, the Eucharistic Christ unites the present and the future in himself by nourishing the community with his self-giving love as messianic priest.”<sup>8</sup>

## Our Union with the Resurrected Christ

The Church invites us to share deeply in the passion of Christ, in the cross of Christ. She does so that we might share deeply in His life of resurrection—here and hereafter. The more we die with Christ, the more we share in His life of resurrection—here and hereafter. Our ultimate goal here below is not the cross, but resurrection—the newness of life the cross leads to—here below as well as in eternity.

We are meant to share in all the mysteries of Christ here below—we are meant to relive them in our own lives. And all of these mysteries are directed to the crowning mystery of Jesus, His resurrection: “As the Church is ever re-enacting, during all the ages, the life story of her Divine

Spouse—undergoing in the Mystical Body what He suffered in His Natural Body, so it must be too, in some measure, for every individual Christian that lives in real unity with Christ. It was thus that the saints understood the life of the Divine Master. *They not merely contemplated it, they lived it.* This was the source of the immense sympathy they were capable of experiencing for Him in His different states. They felt in a certain measure what He felt, and what is true of Our Lord’s life considered as a whole must be true in no imperfect or limited manner of that which was the supreme and crowing mystery in that life—namely,



the Resurrection. *This must be, not merely a fact in Christian history, but a phase of Christian experience . . .* We do not readily perceive that, in God’s plan, not only the Cross, but the Risen Life that followed it, is meant to be part of our terrestrial existence. Christ did not pass from the Cross straight to heaven. The Christian is not meant to do so either. In the case of Jesus the Cross preceded, prepared and pre-faced a risen life on earth. In the case of the Christian the Cross is meant to play a somewhat similar role—that is, to be the prelude to a risen life, even here below.

“The Cross cannot be completely understood except it is viewed in the full light of the Resurrection. It is the latter, not the former, that is the ultimate mystery for us. . . The Cross is a means, not an end; it finds its explanation only in the empty tomb; it is an entrance into life, not a mode of death. Any death that enters into God’s plan must necessarily issue forth in life. If He lays upon us the necessity of dying it is in order that we may live. . . In order that we may live as we ought, our rebellious nature must be crucified. Crucifixion always remains the only mode of salvation.

“God sends trials and crosses simply to deaden in us the activity of the forces that make for the decay of the spiritual life, in order that that spiritual life may develop and expand unimpeded. According as the life of perverse nature ebbs away from us on our cross united with Christ’s, the Divine Life that God has placed in all whom He has called begins to make itself more manifest and to display increased vigour and vitality. . . It is to that Resurrection, that life in death, that God directs all the circumstances of our life—it is the object He aims at in His dealing with us.”<sup>9</sup>

In his above words, Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., speaks about a special episode of our participation in the resurrection of Jesus. He speaks of our Christ-life, our life of grace, in the highly developed state. We should all strive for this state. We must realize, however, that all those who live in the state of grace are, in an essential way, living the life of resurrection. They are alive in Christ Jesus. St. Paul tells us: “*You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in His death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with Him and joined Him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glory, we too might have a new life.*” (Rom 6:3-4).

## The Father’s Merciful Love

Pope John Paul II instructs us: “The Church, as a reconciled and reconciling community, cannot forget that at the source of her gift and mission of reconciliation is the initiative, full of compassionate love and mercy, of that God who is

love (see 1 John 4:8) and who out of love created human beings (see Wisdom 11:23-26; Genesis 1:27; Psalms 8:4-8) . . . He created them so that they might live in friendship with Him and in communion with one another.

“God is faithful to His eternal plan even when man, under the impulse of the evil one (see Wisdom 2:24) and carried away by his own pride, abuses the freedom given to him in order to love and generously seek what is good, and (instead) refuses to obey his Lord and Father. God is faithful even when man, instead of responding with love to God’s love, opposes Him and treats Him like a rival, deluding himself and relying on his own power, with the resulting break of relationship with the One who created him. In spite of this transgression on man’s part, God remains faithful in love.

“It is certainly true that the story of the Garden of Eden makes us think about the tragic consequences of rejecting the Father, which becomes evident in man’s inner

disorder and in the breakdown of harmony between man and woman, brother and brother (see Genesis 3:12 ff; 4:1-16). Also significant is the Gospel parable of the two brothers (the parable of the 'prodigal son'; see Luke 15:11-32) who, in different ways, distance themselves from their father and cause a rift between them. Refusal of God's fatherly love and of His loving gifts is always at the root of humanity's divisions.

"But we know that God...like the father in the parable (of the prodigal son), does not close His heart to any of His children. He waits for them, looks for them, goes to meet them at the place where the refusal of communion imprisons them in isolation and division. He calls them to gather about His table in the joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation.

"This initiative on God's part is made concrete and manifest in the redemptive act of Christ, which radiates through the world by means of the ministry of the Church." <sup>10</sup>

## The Action of the Holy Spirit

Archbishop Luis Martinez speaks to us of the action of the Holy Spirit upon us: "Love for the Holy Spirit also has its special character, which we should study in order completely to understand devotion to Him. We have explained how the Holy Spirit loves us, how He moves us like a divine breath that draws us to the bosom of God, like a sacred fire that transforms us into fire, like a divine artist who forms Jesus in us. Surely, then, our love for the Holy Spirit should be marked by loving docility, by full surrender, and by a constant fidelity that permits us to be moved, directed, and transformed by His sanctifying action.

"Our love for the Father tends to *glorify* Him; our love for the Son, to *transform* ourselves into Him, our love for the Holy Spirit, to *let ourselves be possessed and moved by Him*." <sup>11</sup>

## Priesthood

♦ The following words are from a paper prepared by Fr. Stephen J. Rossetti for the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry. The paper was later published in the quarterly *Human Development*, from which we quote. Fr. Rossetti is president and chief executive officer of Saint Luke Institute in Silver, Maryland. In the following words he talks about a key factor regarding the priest's personal relationship with Jesus:

"Catholic priests are verbal men who engage regu-

larly in public speaking. They can debate ideas and abstract concepts easily. Indeed, these qualities are important to the successful ministry of a priest.

"Nevertheless, having a personal relationship with Jesus also means praying from the heart, the place within which he dwells. Yet so many of the men who whither in priesthood cannot find the 'heart' because they are stuck in their 'heads'...

"Developing a personal relationship with God, or anyone else, involves the important task of moving our prayer and dialogue out of the head and into the heart. In this case, the term *heart*, used in a metaphorical sense, does not refer only to one's affective life; it primarily indicates 'the locus of vital forces' in a person, to quote from Xavier Jean-Dufour in the *Dictionary of the New Testament*. It is one's most 'hidden place', the place where 'the spirit of the Son dwells'.

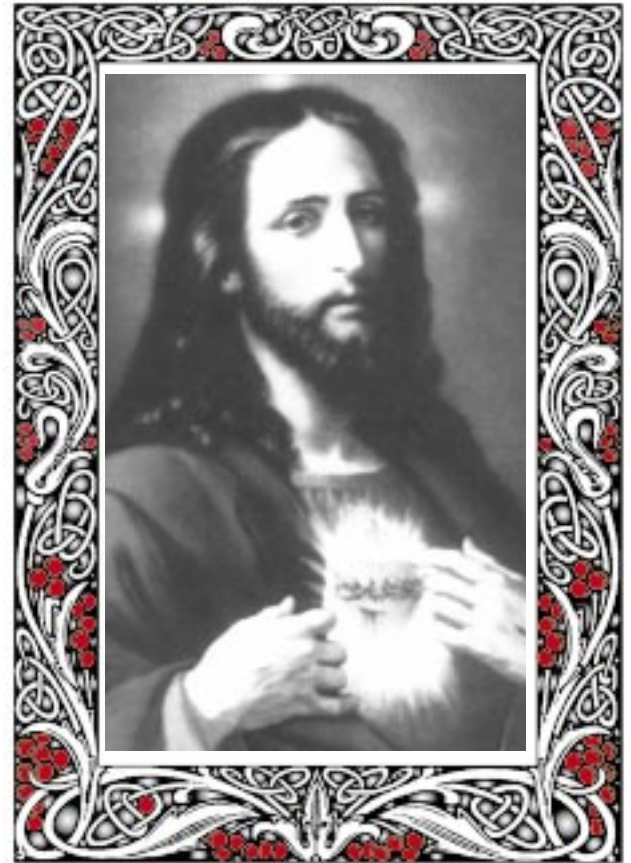
"Moving out of the head and into the heart can be very difficult for a man who may have little idea how to deal with his affective side, much less the deeper dimensions of his self. In touching his inner heart, he makes himself vulnerable to God and to others. This can be a terrifying prospect.

"Yet it is so important to open ourselves to the other. We have a great desire to be known and to be loved. It is in the heart that we experience both...

It is important to note that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Praying from the heart means being vulnerable before God. It means praying from our brokenness. This is difficult. It is hard enough for us to accept that we are broken, much less to learn to pray out of our brokenness... To have a truly personal relationship with God, we must learn to accept our own failings and to pray from the heart." <sup>12</sup>

♦ The theologian, Jean Galot, S.J., tells us that it is the shepherd's quality that best epitomizes the priestly functions.: "By tracing our steps back to the origin of the priestly ministry, we can find in the very words of Christ a principle of unity by reference to which all the priestly functions can be grasped as a unity. This is the quality of the shepherd. Jesus defines himself as a shepherd, thus suggesting what constitutes the ministry of his own priesthood. Since his priesthood is a new and original creation, and loftier than the Jewish priesthood, it is the shepherd's quality that best epitomizes the priestly functions.

"Christ the shepherd leads the flock by the word he speaks and guarantees the truth of his teaching by the supreme testimony which is the gift of his own self. He offers himself in sacrifice in order to impart to his sheep a bountiful life, especially through the Eucharist. The three functions—preaching, worship, and leadership—become the expression of the shepherd's love, and from that love they draw their inspiration." <sup>13</sup>





# The Christian and the Social Order

Bishop John Kinney of St. Cloud, Minnesota, U.S.A., issued a pastoral letter on social justice on August 20, 1998. Here are excerpts from the letter: “Every human being is created by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and called to communion with God. For this reason every person has a sacred dignity... Each of us is so loved by God that the only possible response we can offer is to love God in return and to love and respect all that God has created.

“In this sacred dignity all humans are equal... The dignity of the human person means that all life is sacred. Christians respect the lives of all humans and extend this respect to all of creation. Life is a loving gift of the Creator. Our response— always and everywhere—must be to show loving respect for such a gift. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of the Church’s teaching about people and about how we organize our society.

“Today we hear a great deal about individual rights. Many of us are quick to claim personal rights against the claims of others, sometimes against the good of the community. Catholic social teaching offers a balanced view of individual rights. Human rights flow from our God-given dignity. They belong to us precisely as humans, and they belong to all people... They are part of what it means to be a human person. Human rights surround and protect the dignity of each person.

“The most fundamental human right we can name is the right to life. From conception to natural death, people have the right to live their lives as fully as they can. Catholic teaching condemns abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide as grave sins against the Creator of all life. The Church is becoming increasingly clear on its condemnation of the evil of capital punishment. Another fundamental human right is having the means necessary to live our lives in dignity. The right to life means that each and every person on this planet has the right to a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one’s family. Every person has the right to adequate food, clothing, housing, health care, education, employment and a safe environment. It is not enough to speak of the right to life without acknowledging the right to live that life in the dignity reflective of creatures made in the image of God.”<sup>14</sup>

## Prayerful 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 merely 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 and the peace of Easter morning.

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

“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... 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.”<sup>15</sup>

## Thoughts from a Nun

Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., a Poor Clare nun, offers these insightful reflections: “The love of the religious woman for her crucified Christ has to be the center, the root, the meaning of her life. If it is not so, what reason would there be for not terminating one role of service in favor of something more personally inviting, more ‘modern’, more novel, more self-pandering? And in the hours of that deep travail of the spirit, of the heart, that must come to all and from which women consecrated in religious life are assuredly not excluded or excused, what will keep the religious faithful in her consecration except a profound and tender love for a Divine Bridegroom. Hers.

Religious life must be a life of service, true enough. Service to mankind, service to the Church, service to one’s own community. But that is its expression, not its core. Its inmost core is spousal love for Christ. Not to hold Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul, and yes, of the heart, will inevitably leave a religious sooner or later with nothing but doing that tries to supply for the want of being and always tragically fails...

“Women, long or presently downtrodden, crying out for respect and recognition, are already in that very action power figures in the most profound sense. Power is to be acknowledged not only in vindication of rights and assumption of certain primacies, desirable and praiseworthy as such may be, but also and more radically in each new expression of the triumph of love and suffering over wrong and even evil. The all powerful God was all-triumphant on the cross. One needs to search out the meaning of things.

“Who are the great power figures in the Passion of Christ? The period of Jesus’ earthly life was hardly one offering historical verification of woman leading nations or holding high offices in government. Yet then, as now, or in that later century when a young peasant girl was to lead all the French forces to victory and make possible the crowning of the Dauphin at Rheims, or again when a young Sienese woman was to prevail upon the Pope to betake himself back to his proper home and throne in Rome when no male forces had been able either to

persuade or to force him in that direction, women have been power figures.

Indeed, woman must exercise her powers, but she needs to know what they are. She has the right and the duty of her womanhood to discover and point out beauty, to confess the truth about herself, first to herself and then to all, to persevere in goodness under whatever travail... And there is her fashioning by God himself for suffering. Tears are her best battle cry. Nor is that a play on words.

“We see the love-companies of woman following after Jesus. We find them fearlessly stepping out of the shouting and menacing crowd to make their way through the bands of soldiers and gather around a pain-staggering Jesus. No one, it appears, dared to halt them. Or, evidently, even thought of it. And to do what? Shout out protest? Shriek for justice? No, just to weep for the One they loved. They risked their lives and the lives of the infants on their arms just to make clear to Jesus that they loved him more than their lives. There was Veronica, who...fearlessly manifested a love-power so great that she could simply part the soldiers and ruffians surrounding Jesus on his Way of the Cross and make her way through to offer solace to him whom she loved more deeply than life itself. Again—to do what? Utter an impassioned and wholly deserved condemnation of his murderers? No, just to wipe the sweat and the blood from his face. Under the Cross, man was outnumbered by woman. Two feminine power figures stood there with strength of love so great that no soldier dared drag or even wave them away. Two women. The Immaculate Mother of God and a converted woman of the streets.”<sup>16</sup>



or thing. Within the soul is this driving thirst for this intense union with God. It is a driving force that leads a soul, such as a martyr, to choose Him rather than one's own life on earth. It may not be that God will call us to martyrdom, but living in today's world which is permeated to such a great degree with secularism, we have many occasions each day to suffer little martyrdoms as we strive always to live in His truth. These little encounters with death, as I will call them, bring us closer to Him Who is the Truth. For every time we choose to die to that part of the world which is untruth and live for Him, we experience a new sharing in His resurrection.

“So many today think that suffering is something to steer clear of. True, we may take those means of alleviating suffering which are according to God's will. But in this life, suffering is inevitable. A study of the life of our Savior shows us this. In His truth He teaches us that suffering encountered according to the Father's will truly leads to greater life.

“I must speak further of the truth, for it is that I wish to address. There is but one truth, it is found in Jesus. That center of truth is found within all of us. But this place is affected by our surroundings and the information we allow ourselves to take in. In the purity of our reading material, in the proper screening of all we watch and things we engage in, we can keep this center of truth most optimally connected to Him Who is the absolute Truth.

“The truth is found in living in God's will. At every moment the Father wishes us to live according to His plan with Christ, in the Holy Spirit, aided by the maternal intercession of Mary. Living in this way, we help to bring about the reign of Jesus' Heart and the triumph of Mary's Heart.”

◆ St. John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church, instructs us: “Strive to preserve your heart in peace and let no event of this world disturb you. Reflect that all must come to an end.”<sup>17</sup>

◆ St. Theresa of Lisieux, recently made doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II, has left us these inspiring words: “Neither do I desire any longer suffering or death, and still I *love* them both; it is love alone that attracts me, however. I desired them for a long time; I possessed suffering and believed I had touched the shores of heaven, that the little flower would be gathered in the spring time of her life. Now, abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass! I can no longer ask for anything with fervor except the accomplishment of God's will in my soul without any creature being able to set obstacles in the way.”<sup>18</sup>

◆ Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J., says, “The Church is...a sign. It must signify in a historically tangible form the redeeming grace of Christ as relevantly given to...every age, race, kind, and condition. Hence the Church must incarnate itself in every human culture.”<sup>19</sup>

## Various Thoughts

◆ Here are words from a spiritual journal: “For there is but one thing I seek—it is the desire of my soul to live in truth. As I live in Him, His truth lives in me, and I act in His truth. There is but one truth and it is His truth. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is alive in us and we live in His truth.

“I see the martyrs, those that were willing to give their lives for Him, for this truth. Many went to a brutal death in total isolation, wanting only their God. Within the soul is this intense craving for God that cannot be satisfied by any earthly person, place,

## A Scriptural Reflection

*Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, “My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.” “Why were you looking for me?” he replied “Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?” But they did not understand what he meant. (Lk 2:46-50).*

The above scene describes how Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple after having been separated from him. Returning home after the Passover celebration, they finally realized Jesus was not with them, and returned to Jerusalem to search for him. The scene has various lessons for us concerning God's will.

The scene reminds us of the guiding principle of Jesus' life—loving conformity to His heavenly Father's will. In some way Jesus knew He was supposed to remain in the temple at this particular time although Mary and Joseph were returning home. His course of action was no different in this instance than it had been in the past and would be in the future. His Father's will was made manifest and he obeyed. His Father showed the way and he followed. The Father's way was always Jesus' way, all day, everyday, in all matters. As followers of Jesus, his guiding principle has to be ours also.

This event in Christ's life also demonstrates that conformity to God's will sometimes occasions hurt regarding loved ones. Jesus knew that his remaining behind would cause suffering for Mary and Joseph—we can well imagine their anxiety. Jesus was sorry this had to be. He certainly was not insensitive to the feelings of Mary and Joseph, yet he had to let it all happen. There can be similar situations in our own lives. Precisely because we are striving to seek out and do God's will, we know we are causing hurt to loved ones. Yet we know there is no other course of action, if we are to be open to God's designs and true to ourselves.

The finding of the child Jesus in the temple illustrates still a further point regarding conformity to God's will. Mary and Joseph knew that somehow it was God's will that Jesus remain in Jerusalem as they themselves headed back to Nazareth. Yet they did not comprehend why all this happened. They recognized God's will, but they did not understand it. Yet they accepted His will along with the pain it had occasioned in their lives. The application of this lesson to our own Christian lives is vividly manifest. Often there occurs a happening we do not understand. We realize that somehow this is God's will, at least His permissive will. Yet we do not understand, and our lack of comprehension is part of our pain.

It is obvious from all the above that conformity to God's will in love is the only way, although not always an easy way. At times one can be tempted to be resentful and even rebellious when confronted with the aspects of embracing God's will. Such resentment and rebellion, if consented to, becomes only a dead-end street, a path leading to bitterness and unhappiness. We know this. We know that the only sure guide we have in the quest for happiness is God's will. We know, despite what our feelings may tempt us to do, that the only way to true happiness is God's way. We know that God wants our happiness much more than we do ourselves. We know that if He permits suffering to cross our paths in doing His will, He likewise grants us the grace to encounter this pain properly and profitably as a step toward greater Christian holiness. We know, then, deep down at the center of our existence, that God's will is our happiness.

## A Prayer for Priests

Many of the laity pray for us priests, and consistently so. Is it not also fitting that we priests pray for all our brothers in the priesthood, and consistently so? There follows a prayer that can aid us in this endeavor.

“Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, we pray that in the great love and mercy of Your Heart that 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 Heart and Mary's Heart, we ask that you take this petition to your heavenly Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen”.

*The above prayer is taken from the prayer manual of Shepherds of Christ Associates, a facet of Shepherds of Christ Ministries. The associates are members of prayer groups which meet regularly to pray for all the needs of the entire human family, but most especially for priests. If you would like a copy, or copies, of this prayer manual, and, further, if you would like information on how to begin a Shepherds of Christ prayer chapter, contact us at:*

Shepherds of Christ, P.O. Box 193, Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193, U.S.A.

Phone (toll free): 1-800-211-3041

Phone 1-513-932-4451

Fax: 1-513-932-6791

## 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 a 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 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 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

Dear Father,

Yesterday I received your letters and the book, Spirituality Newsletters.

I am delighted because there is so much material coming on to my desk it is well-nigh impossible to read much of it. However, your gift looks to me as if it will fill a great need for us here. We simply do not have the time to read a great





website: <http://www.shepherds-of-christ.org>  
E-Mail: [info@shepherds-of-christ.org](mailto:info@shepherds-of-christ.org)

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# shepherds of Christ

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P.O. Box 193  
Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193  
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## Letters

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deal and have often thought it would be a great thing if one of us could digest a great deal of the writings we receive, summarize them and send them to the rest of us. However, that too is quite impractical we find. And I rather think that what you have sent is the very thing we need, and because it is on spirituality it will be the greatest help and inspiration. I have to tell you that all the priests here are great workers, and all of them work long hours manually in travel by boat, in caring for light plants, boat engines, buildings, etc., just to support their stations, (most on pretty lonely islands) so that they have little money to buy good books, and little time to read them if they get them. What you have sent seems to really fill a bill for us. It seems at first sight to be the essence of the great need we have, for the development of the priest himself in spirituality.

Thank you very much indeed. I am really grateful.

Yours very sincerely and fraternally in Our Lord  
Bishop D.C. Morre  
Diocese of Alotau  
Papua new Guinea

Dear Fr. Carter,

I look forward to receiving my Shepherds of Christ newsletter. Each issue is truly an uplifting experience.

Would it be possible to take articles from the newsletter for publication in my parish bulletin? I would like to share such inspiring information with my parishioners.

Sincerely in Christ,  
Rev. W. Paysse  
Slidell, Louisiana

## NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", America Press edition, no. 61
3. *Ibid.*, No. 45.
4. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *The Mother of the Redeemer*, United States Catholic Conference, No. 38.
5. *Ibid.*, No. 45.
6. *Ibid.*, No. 45.
7. Pope John Paul II, Letter, *The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*, Pauline Books and Media, No. 9.
8. Robert M. Schwartz, *Servant Leaders of the People of God*, Paulist, p. 154.
9. Edward Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*, Sheep and Word, pp. 290-300.
10. Pope John Paul II, as in *Celebrate 2000!*, Servant Publications, pp. 140-141.
11. Archbishop Luis Martinez, *The Sanctifier*, Pauline Books and Media, p. 68.
12. Stephen J. Rossetti, "Spirituality of the Priesthood", as in *Human Development*, Vol 18, No. 1, Spring, 1997, pp. 26-32.
13. Jean Galot, S.J. *Theology of the Priesthood*, Ignatius Press, p. 137
14. Bishop John Kinney, as in *Origins*, CNS Documentary Service, Sept. 10, 1998, Vol. 28, No. 13
15. *A Thomas Merton Reader*, Thomas Mr Donnell, editor, Doubleday, p. 459.
16. Mother Mary Frances, P.C.C. *Forth and Abroad*, Ignatius Press pp. 180-184.
17. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., "Maxims and Counsels", Doubleday and Co., No. 75, p. 679
18. *Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, p.280.
19. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Doubleday, p. 63.