

shepherds of Christ†

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Priesthood

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd 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 as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; he runs away 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)

Yes, the Good Shepherd has given His all for us. Through His life, His brutal and agonizing suffering and death on the cross, and His glorious resurrection, He has achieved new life for us. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, Jesus has provided His Church with priests who play a major role in the dispensing of this life which Jesus has come to give and to give most abundantly. There follow various thoughts on the priesthood.

♦ Pope John Paul II states: "It is within the Church's mystery, as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension, that every Christian identity is revealed, and likewise the specific identity of the priest and his ministry. Indeed, the priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the sacrament of orders, is sent forth by the Father through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, to whom he is configured in a special way as head and shepherd of his people, in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world."²

♦ The Holy Father further states: "The priest finds the full truth of his identity in being a derivation, a specific participation in and continuation of Christ himself, the one high priest of the new and eternal covenant. The priest is a living

and transparent image of Christ the priest."³

♦ Fr. Richard Nahman, O.S.A., tells about the priest's relationship with Christ.

"All too often Christ is one known *about*—maybe better known *about* than Napoleon, Alexander the Great, John F. Kennedy—but still only known *about* and not known. Much can be said, much can be appreciated and a great deal of dedication can spring from knowledge about someone. But a personal relationship cannot be built on mere knowledge about another. Knowledge about an individual and knowing anyone differs not in the order of knowledge but in the order of experience. One may have studied every conceivable expression of the reality 'friendship', and may know as much as there is to know *about* friendship, but if he has never had a friend, then he does not know friendship.

"It might be profitable here to ask the question: Does priestly formation today emphasize, if not in theory at least in practice, knowledge *about* Christ or knowledge of Christ?

"A priest is a man to whom Christ offers himself as the other in response to Whom he will find his own identity.

A priest is called to come to know Christ, him crucified. And this knowledge leads to love, and this love to union and this union to identity...

"The crisis of identity within the priest fraternity can only be met by establishing the ground of the individual's identity really with full intellectual conviction, in that of Christ. This is the Christian paradox—losing oneself to find oneself—to which the priest gives witness, not by what he does, but by what he is. It is the abandon in faith. But all too frequently one's reaction is one of a drowning man, clinging desperately to the neck of his would-be-saver. The more tenaciously he hangs on to what is immediately at hand, the more certainly he is bringing his own destruction.

For the priest, the dynamics of being himself, achieving and coming to realize his own identity, lies totally in the depth and intensity of his per-

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sonal relationship with Christ as a person whose dynamic, vital and real presence is 'experienced' and 'realized' in his daily life." ⁴

◆ The priest can obviously apply to himself in an appropriate way what Vatican II says concerning the spiritual formation of seminarians: "Spiritual formation should be closely linked with doctrinal and pastoral training. Especially with the help of the spiritual director, such formation should help seminarians learn to live in familiar and constant companionship with the Father, through Jesus Christ His Son, in the Holy Spirit. By sacred ordination they will be molded in the likeness of Christ the Priest. As friends they should be used to loyal association with Him through a profound identification of their whole lives with His. They should live His paschal mystery in such a way that they know how to initiate into it the people entrusted to them.

"They should be taught to look for Christ in many places: in faithful meditation on God's word, in active communion with the most holy mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and the divine Office, in the bishop who sends them, and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, the young, the sick, the sinful, and the unbelieving. With the trust of a son, they should love and honor the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to His disciple by Christ Jesus as He hung dying on the cross." ⁵

◆ The theologian, Jean Galot, S.J., has some insightful thoughts on the priest as shepherd: "As a mediator, the priest is a shepherd in the name of God, or more precisely in the name of Christ, and through Christ, in the name of the Father. In the priest is realized the prophetic role of Ezekiel in which Yahweh promises to be the Shepherd of his people (Ezek 34).

"Some implications of this principle must be underlined. The priest does not draw the inspiration for his pastoral zeal from his own feelings, from his own personal resolve to create a better world. He is shepherd on the strength of God's pastoral intention and represents specifically Christ the shepherd. Consequently he is called upon to fulfill his pastoral mission not according to ideas of his own and his own personal ambitions, but in keeping with God's own dispensation and the design of salvation devised by the Father and carried out by Christ. Like Jesus himself, the priest is at the service of the Father." ⁶

◆ *The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* reminds priests that the Eucharist must be at the center of their lives: "It is necessary to recall the irreplaceable value that the daily celebration of the Holy Mass has for the priest...He must live it as the central moment of his day and of his daily

ministry, fruit of a sincere desire and an occasion for a deep and effective encounter with Christ, and he must take the greatest care to celebrate it with intimate participation of the mind and heart.

"In a society ever more sensitive to communication through signs and images, the priest must pay adequate attention to all that which can enhance the decorum and sacredness of the Eucharistic celebration. It is important that, in such ceremonies, proper attention is given to the appropriateness and cleanliness of the place, the structure of the altar and tabernacle, the dignity of the sacred vessels, the vestments, the hymns, the music, the necessary silence, etc. These are all elements which can better contribute to a better participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In fact, a lack of attention to the symbolic aspects of the liturgy and, even more, carelessness and coldness, superficiality and disorder... weaken the process of strengthening the faith. Those who improperly celebrate the Mass reveal a weakness in their faith and fail to educate the others in the faith. Celebrating the Eucharist well, however, constitutes a highly important catechesis on the Sacrifice...

"The centrality of the Eucharist should be apparent not only in the worthy celebration of the Sacrifice, but also in the proper adoration of the Sacrament, so that the priest might be the model for the faithful also in devout attention and diligent meditation...whenever possible done in the

presence of our Lord in the tabernacle. It is hoped that priests entrusted with the guidance of communities dedicate long periods of time for communal adoration and reserve the greatest attention and honour for the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, also outside of the Holy Mass, over any other rite or gesture. 'Faith and love for the Eucharist will not allow Christ to remain alone in his presence in the tabernacle.' " ⁷

◆ The same *Directory* emphasizes the great love priests should have for the Church: "The priests, as collaborators of the Episcopal Order, form with their Bishop a sole presbyterate and participate, in a subordinate degree, in the only priesthood of Christ. Similar to the Bishop,

they participate in that espousal dimension in relation to the Church which is well expressed in the Rite of the episcopal ordination when the ring is entrusted to them...

"By this communion with Christ the Spouse, the ministerial priesthood is also founded—as Christ, with Christ, and in Christ—in that mystery of transcendent love of which the marriage among Christians is an image and a participation.

"Called to the act of supernatural love, absolutely gratuitous, the priest should love the Church as Christ has loved her, consecrating to her all his energies and giving himself with pastoral charity in a continuous act of generosity." ⁸

◆ From Fr. Benedict Groeschel's book, *A Priest Forever*, here are the inspiring words of Fr. Eugene Hamilton, who was ordained a priest very shortly before he died of cancer. The following words were written as he was beginning to write his book, *Servant, Victim, Brother, Listener, Friend*:

"These reflections will form the basis for the rest of my outlook toward the disease, life, death, the priesthood, and others. One could say they are the lens through which I look at cancer and the overall experience.

"My hope is that all those affected by this disease—the patients, families, friends, and those who care for them, will come to a certain amount of peace in their own particular situation. I have found such peace in the Will of the Father. That is where the seminarian and future priest will himself find peace as well. Cardinal Cooke realized this and chose *Fiat Voluntas Tua* ("Thy Will Be Done") as his episcopal motto. For those left behind for a while, my prayer is for your own peace as well." ⁹



Jesus, the Friend

Here is one author's reflections on Jesus' friendship with St. John. It offers us an occasion to reflect upon our own friendship with Jesus. Fr. Jean Galot, S.J. says of Jesus and John:

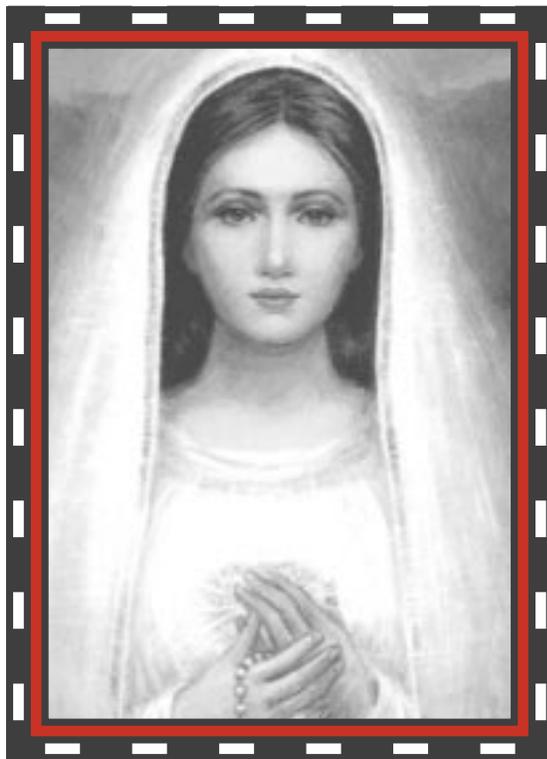
"Christ's friendship assumes different forms. His love for Peter and John appear to have been outstanding in the case of his disciples, but he loved them in different ways. His love for John is more tender, and John will be known 'as the disciple whom Jesus loved.' All the disciples were, of course, disciples whom Jesus loved, but the words indicate that he had a particularly tender love for John, a love corresponding to John's sensitive nature. John is attracted by Christ from the first moment he meets him. Until then, apparently, he had been a follower of John the Baptist in his search for an ideal way of life and a spiritual master. It is not difficult to understand that the gentle ways of Jesus must have made an immediate impression on him, compared with the harsh asceticism of the Baptist. He therefore abandons the company of the austere prophet who threatens the people with divine wrath to follow the 'lamb of God,' who has come to take away the sins of the world. He feels a special need for affection himself and is drawn to a Master whose preaching is so obviously inspired by his pity for the crowds and whose miraculous cures show that he is constantly moved by goodness. Hence he is the disciple who becomes the closest follower of Jesus, in the sense that he is the nearest to him and most sensitive to all the manifestations of his friendship. Along with Peter and James he witnesses the Transfiguration on Tabor and the agony in the garden at Gethsemane. But above all he has the good fortune to lie on Christ's breast at the Last Supper. The physical heart of Jesus has a particular meaning for him, and he abandons himself to it, so to speak. This action marks the climax of his friendship and expresses the full measure of his love; it is also destined to remain the permanent symbol of his love, for John will be called 'the disciple who leaned upon the breast of the Lord.' At Calvary John takes his place at the foot of the cross along with the woman, and Christ confides to him the one he holds dearest in this world, his own mother. He gives the most loving of his disciples his most tender gift. The friendship John has formed with the Son was destined to be continued with his mother in the same atmosphere

of gentle affection. At Calvary John also witnesses something destined to make a profound impression upon him, the piercing of the side of Jesus by the spear of the soldier. The spear of course only pierces a dead body, but it reaches the human heart on which the beloved apostle has been leaning less than twenty-four hours before in a transport of love. In the same way that the gift of his heart on the previous evening had been a symbol of his great friendship for him, so the piercing of his side now appears to John as a symbol of a love which has suffered to the bitter end. This spectacle serves to bind him to Christ more than ever and puts the seal, as it were, on their friendship.

John is the first of the apostles to arrive at the empty tomb on the morning of Easter. He is also the first one to recognize the Lord on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, because his love is more tender and therefore more perceptive. Finally, Christ promises John that his death shall be a prolongation of their friendship. The chief of the apostles is destined to undergo martyrdom, but John will only have to remain here until the Lord comes. His death will recall their intimacy at the Supper; Christ will simply come and allow the apostle's head to rest on his breast. The beautiful expression often used to describe a Christian death, 'going to sleep in the Lord', is especially applicable in the case of John, because he learned so well to know the meaning of that rest."¹⁰

The Father's Merciful Love

Pope John Paul II tells us: "The Church professes the mercy of God, the Church lives by it in her wide experience of faith and also in her teaching, constantly contemplating Christ, concentrating on him, on his life and on his Gospel, on his cross and resurrection, on his whole mystery. Everything that forms the 'vision' of Christ in the Church's living faith and teaching brings us nearer to the 'vision of the Father' in the holiness of his mercy. The Church seems in a particular way to profess the mercy of God and to venerate it when she directs herself to the heart of Christ. In fact, it is precisely this drawing close to Christ in the mystery of his heart which enables us to dwell on this point—a point in a sense central and also most accessible on the human level—of the revelation of the merciful love of the Father, a revelation which constituted the central content of the messianic mission of the Son of Man."¹¹



The Spirit Is with Us

The Resurrected Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify the world:
*Still, I am telling you the truth:
it is for your own good that I am going,
because unless I go,
the Paraclete will not come to you;
but if I go,
I will send him to you (Jn 16:7)*

The task of the Holy Spirit is to imprint the mystery of Christ ever more deeply upon the whole of creation. The Spirit is gradually leading us to full communion with the Father through Christ.

As this process evolves, the Holy Spirit concentrates His action upon the Church.

The Church progressively evolves by assimilating more perfectly the mystery of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides this process. He is the soul of the Church. He constantly labors to unite the diversified elements of the Church so that she is constantly being formed more and more according to the image of Christ.



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The Holy Spirit as Sanctifier not only guides the entire Church, but He also guides each member of the Church. He strives to deepen the image of Christ which has been indelibly imprinted upon the Christian through Baptism and Confirmation. He labors to guide the Christian so that his or her activity becomes increasingly Christ-like. In this regard we notice the biblical distinction between living according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. To live according to the flesh does not refer only to sins against chastity. It refers to anything in one's life which is not according to the Spirit. Therefore, capitulating to intellectual pride, something "spiritual," would be living according to the flesh.

On the other hand, to live according to the Spirit can include the most intense involvement with material creation. This is Christ-like activity as long as one is following the lead of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, the Holy Spirit promotes the process of our growing as sons and daughters of the Father in Christ: "All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God; for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory." (Rom 8:14-17).

Mary's Presence

Fr. Rene' Laurentin, one of the world's foremost Mariologists, speaks to us concerning Mary's presence to Christ: "Mary is present throughout the life of Christ...She introduced him into the human family, unfolded his humanity, accompanied him throughout his hidden life until he reached the age of thirty. She became involved in his ministry by suggesting to him the sign of Cana (John 2:1-22). During the three years of separation, her spiritual communion deepened further. She was one with him physically and morally during his suffering and death on Calvary, through compassion with his passion. She prepared for and accompanied, through her prayer, the birth of the Church (Acts 1:14). Finally, she rejoined her son in the glory of the Assumption."

Laurentin also speaks about the presence of Mary in the life of the Church: "Mary's discreet and universal presence continues throughout the life of the Church: visible and invisible, in history, its churches, its religious art. The call for her intercession appears throughout the dogmatic history of the Councils and the various complex struggles within the Church which, during the Carolingian era, inspired the famous antiphon: 'You have conquered all heresies throughout the world.'

"She was also the inspiration for the initiatives and victories of the Church. Many feasts were instituted in order to commemorate her efficacious assistance. From the earliest centuries, the most ancient churches were dedicated to her since she was the first temple of God and remains the model of all others. Mary, model of the Church, is also the model of the churches where the eucharistic presence of the Lord is renewed and where prayer takes place continuously."

Present to the universal Church, Mary is also present to the individual Christian. Laurentin quotes from the writings of numerous holy men and women who give witness concerning this personal presence of Mary. There follow some of Laurentin's quotations regarding this testimony.

He refers to St. Anthony of Padua: "And St. Anthony of Padua, Doctor of the Church, whose canonization broke all records, taking place less than two years after his death, concluded one of his principal homilies with this prayer: 'We beseech you, Our Lady, our hope, tossed about as we are by the storm. You, Star of the Sea, bright ray, direct us towards safe harbour, assist our arrival by the protection of your presence. (Sermon 3 in Praise of the Virgin, op. 1, p 163.)"

Laurentin also refers to Jean Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians, and one of the most prominent figures of the French School of Spirituality. He quotes Olier: "One Saturday Mary became interiorly present to my soul...She recalled to me that her dear son had told me that he would only live in me through her...as if she were a sacrament by which he wished to communicate his life to me. (*Brettonvillers, L'esprit de Monsieur Olier*, t. 1, 1, 9 pp. 396-397)."

And it is not surprising that Laurentin, in his discussion of Mary's presence to us, refers to *St. Louis de Montfort*, one of the greatest apostles of devotion to Mary. Laurentin says: "Let us not pick any further from the petals of the dossier (Laurentin refers to the list of citations he has made concerning Mary's presence to us) which stretches over the centuries and which seems to justify de Montfort's prediction in his *Treatise on True Devotion* (no 46): 'At the end of the world, the greatest saints will be those who are most devoted to praying to the most Holy Virgin, and who *have had her always present...* in order... to have her as their powerful helper in *their time of need*' " ¹²

Let us remind ourselves, regarding St. Louis de Montfort, that his Marian devotion is deeply Christocentric. J. Patrick Gaffney, S. S. M., tells us: "Montfort's intense devotion to Mary is clearly Christocentric. So strongly does the saint insist upon the point that he forcefully teaches that if devotion to Mary alienated us from Jesus it would have to be rejected as a diabolical temptation...with Mary we enter into a more intense and more immediate union with the Incarnate Wisdom. To wrench Mary from salvation history and therefore from Christian life is, for Montfort, to reject the plan of salvation as decreed by the Father." ¹³

The Eucharist

◆ *“At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 47) 14*

◆ *The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively. They should be instructed by God’s word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 48) 15*

◆ *“Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ the Lord desired to set before us in a very special way this remarkable union whereby we are united one with another and with our divine Head, a union that no word of praise can ever sufficiently express. For in this sacrifice the sacred ministers act not only as the representative of our Saviour, but as the representative of the whole Mystical Body and of each one of the faithful. Again, in this act of sacrifice, the faithful of Christ, united by the common bond of devotion and prayer, offer to the eternal Father through the hands of the priest, whose prayer alone has made it present on the altar, the Immaculate Lamb, the most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the Church’s universal need. Moreover, just as the divine Redeemer, while dying on the Cross, offered Himself to the eternal Father as Head of the whole human race, so now, ‘in this clean oblation’ He not only offers Himself as Head of the Church to His heavenly Father but in Himself His mystical members as well. He embraces them all, yes, even the weaker and more ailing members, with the deepest love of His Heart. (Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis AAS*, XXXV, 232-233) 16*

◆ Fr. Bruno Forte tells us: “If the Eucharist forms the Church, it is also true that the Church makes the Eucharist. The Word is not proclaimed if there is no one to announce it; the memorial is not celebrated if there is no one to do it in obedience to the Lord’s mandate. Word and Sacrament, therefore, require

the ministry of the Church, the service of proclamation, of the celebration of the sacrifice, and of the regathering of the human family into the unity of the holy people of God. The eucharistic Church is totally ministerial: totally committed to this threefold role: prophetic, priestly and royal. Every baptized person is formed by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King, and consequently, in communion with all the others, committed to proclaiming the Word of God with his or her life, to celebrating the Easter memorial in order to bring about in history the justice of the... Kingdom of God.” 17

◆ From a spiritual journal we are given these words concerning the Mass: “I love you, Jesus, I love you. I love you, in the deepest love that I experience in uniting in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Let our hearts sing with the love of God as we are transformed more and more into the creatures that are more like the Father intends us to be. In this great mystery of God’s burning love for His creatures, we unite with our beloved Savior in deepest union. In the Holy Eucharist, He gives Himself to us, and we become one with the Father through Jesus, in the

Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us a share in His life and He nourishes this life with His own Body and Blood. We become one in Him, and we are united more deeply to each other. We are one body in Him.”

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

The Trinity and the Church

◆ Fr. Bruno Forte, a professor of Theology on the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Italy, tells us: “The Church comes from the Trinity, reflects in itself the Trinitarian communion—oneness in diversity—and journeys toward the Trinity, to the final handing over of all things to Christ, so that he might hand them over to the Father and God might be all in all. As ‘a people gathered in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ the Church is the Church of the Father. In his universal salvific plan, God has willed it to be a sign and instrument of the unity of people among themselves and with him. It is the Church of the Son, who through his incarnation and the paschal mystery has placed it in history as His Body. It is the Church of the Spirit, who makes the Risen Christ present in human history and enriching the people of God with charisms and ministries, leads it toward the promised future goal.” 18

Three Great Teachers of Prayer

St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Ignatius of Loyola have all spoken with great spiritual insight on prayer. Fr. Thomas McKenna, C.M., offers some astute observations concerning their spiritual doctrine: “Confessing that the approach to God happens only in God’s terms, Teresa nonetheless painted the way there in warm and welcoming colors. Her chronicle of the journey through a series of successively enclosed chambers (mansions) is classic among the descriptions of the mystical path. Sparkling as it does with images of emerging butterflies and bubbling artesian wells, it depicts her move from active to passive contemplation. Hardly a passive personality, Teresa initiated a prodigious reform within the Carmelites and this also testified to the synergy between genuine interior life and effective apostolic action.”

“If Teresa sketched resting points along the spiritual ascent, her prodigy, John of the Cross, fixed his gaze on the summit. Compactly in his poetry but also in interpretive prose, John detailed the melting-down and recasting of human desire as it draws near the Divine. His is a shadowy passage through a twilight of the senses and spirit, an intensely dark nocturne, and out into a dawn streaked with the divine light. Over the course of that night, the darkness that blinded the traveler is

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revealed as the radiance of God, which at the earlier stage could not be recognized for the light it was...

"Ignatius of Loyola took a different tact as he found intimacy with God in the press of active service. As he interacted with his times and circumstances, he discovered certain patterns of divine guidance embedded within his experience and subsequently constructed an imaginatively rich method to help others appropriate theirs. Basic to his logic was a conviction that the Spirit of Jesus is 'afoot in the universe,' particularly within each individual, and that therefore the Spirit-filled person is able to know by both interior and exterior signs which activities are the genuine works of Christ. Such a mystical perception of the world ties the closest of bonds between prayer and ministry, providing the apostle to view all activities in their relation to their divine ground, and conversely to find that source in all things." ¹⁹

Special Days

There are certain days which make us especially glad to be alive. Sometimes,—but not always—the weather is consonant with our inner feelings. If it happens to be fall (I speak as a resident of the mid-west in the U.S.A.), the air is crisp, quickened with October freshness. The leaves spellbind us with their rich and varied colors—their golds, and reds, and browns. The sky is autumn blue, clear blue, crowned with a golden sun. Or, if it happens to be spring, a deep and fresh greenness seems to cover everything, breathing forth new signs of hope for the world. A gentle breeze mixed with the sun's warmth in a perfect mixture makes us eagerly seek the out-of-doors.

Regardless of what the weather may be, special days, in the ultimate meaning of our present use of the word special, awaken us in a unique way regarding the beauty of life. We feel an inner glow. Life has a mysterious freshness on these days, making us especially aware of its grandeur, its tenderness, its expansiveness, its capacity to call us forth to greatness. On such days the splendid drama of life deeply attracts us, takes hold of us in those inner depths where we are most alive, where we are most ourselves.

We need these days on which we feel deeply alive. If such days do not periodically refresh us with their pleasant arrival, then boredom and the monotonous aspect of daily living, the drudgery of life, would be too much for us. As the little child needs to be especially refreshed on occasion by a surprise gift of candy or a toy, so all of us need periodic excursions into the realm of these special kind of days. They, too, are often pleasant surprises, for usually we cannot forecast their advent with any degree of precision.

We should make the most of these special days.

They are precious gifts which God lovingly offers us. Through them God enlivens the awareness of our lives, and gives us the desire to refurbish what may have become a rather lethargic type of existence. We can fall into a rut of wasting many of the opportunities which each day presents. Our lethargic condition can cause us to squander much of life's precious moments. We must allow the beauty of the special kind of day we have been describing to once again enliven our appreciation of the value of life. We must determine not to squander existence, but to drink in its preciousness from the depths of our being in Christ Jesus Our Lord, Who leads us to the Father, in the Holy Spirit, with Mary our Mother at our side.

Words of Therese

St. Therese of Lisieux, recently declared to be a doctor of the Church, was given special insight by God into spiritual matters. Here are some excerpts from her writings:

◆ "This year, June 9, the feast of the Holy Trinity, I received the grace to understand more than ever how much Jesus desires to be loved". ²⁰

◆ "I understand so well that it is only love which makes us acceptable to God, that this love is the only goal I ambition. Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to the Divine Furnace, and the road is the surrender of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms." ²¹

◆ "Oh, if all weak and imperfect souls felt what the least of souls feels, that is, the soul of your little Therese, not one of you would despair of reaching the summit of love. Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simple surrender and gratitude." ²²

◆ "...He (Jesus) finds few hearts who surrender to Him without reservations, who understand the real tenderness of His infinite Love." ²³

Various Thoughts

◆ Here is an excerpt from a spiritual journal: "I envision the sorrowful face of my beautiful Mother. I can see the face, so sorrowful—words cannot express the sorrow. This is the face Jesus saw on the way to Calvary. How could anyone describe the face Christ saw as Mary walked the nightmare path!

"I feel I am suffering, and I want relief. Behold the face of Mary on the way to Calvary. Behold the face of Christ as Mary looked at Him. Endurance! His face was covered with blood and wounds. This was the face of Mary, this was the face of Jesus. His way is the way of the cross—and the cross leads to resurrection. In all the sufferings, Jesus and Mary were comforted as they peered into each other's eyes. Let us be wrapped in the love of these two Hearts. Pure love unites with pure love and we are caught in the embrace. This love is found in dwelling in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. We are comforted by their love, even in suffering, even in great suffering."

◆ Here is an excerpt regarding Edith Stein, recently canonized by Pope John Paul II. The description refers to her life in the Carmelite Convent: "Edith did find some difficulty in adapting to community life. Her ineptitude at manual labor was a unique cross. She told Frau Conrad-Martius how difficult it was to get used to 'all the little details of the religious life'. But even these difficulties became part of her joy; they were like the 'small change' of the immense treasure that she offers the Lord and that he redeemed in joy. What counted was the essence of this life that she had so long desired, hoped for and awaited—the total oblation of herself to him whom she loved, a lasting presence with him, total absorption in him and therefore, always greater nearness to him. How could Edith help but be joyful? And when news came from the outside, how could she not but offer these heartaches as a pledge of her love for her Lover?." ²⁴

The Christian and the Social Order

Pope John Paul II instructs us: "In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a *concrete commitment to solidarity and charity*, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife and the care which the different generations give to one another. In this sense the family too can be called a community of work and solidarity. It can happen, however, that when a family does decide to live up fully to its vocation, it finds itself without the necessary support from the State and without sufficient resources. It is urgent therefore to promote not only family policies, but also those social policies which have the family as their principal object, policies which assist the family by providing adequate resources and efficient means of support, both for bringing up children and for looking after the elderly, so as to avoid distancing the latter from the family unit and in order to strengthen relations between generations.

"Apart from the family, other intermediate communities exercise primary functions and give life to specific networks of solidarity. These develop as real communities of persons and strengthen the social fabric, preventing society from becoming an anonymous and impersonal mass, as unfortunately often happens today. It is in inter-relationships on many levels that a person lives, and that society becomes more 'personalized.' The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of state administration. People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose, since life itself has a unique value which the State and the market must serve. Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in that truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations."²⁵

*Immaculate
Heart
of Mary,
Pray for us.*

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:

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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.



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Letters

◆ Dear Ed,

Thank you for *Shepherds of Christ* which I treasure and read as spiritual reading. It contains a volume of practical recommendations.

Let's pray for each other...

Rev. Msgr. James J. Rugel
Oak Ridge, New Jersey

◆ Dear Fr. Edward,

The peace of the Lord be always with you. Recently I received your newsletter, *Shepherds of Christ* from my Bishop. It is very interesting for me and the priests who are working with me in this parish.

I would like to ask you for the cassettes (Newsletters on cassettes).

Could you please supply me with these cassettes, which will be of great help to priests and the thirty catechists working in the same parish.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Hilary Abela
Mpiketoni
Kenya

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
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3. *Ibid.*, No. 12.

4. Fr. Richard Nahman, O.S.A., "I Am a Priest—What Am I?" *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, January, 1971, pp. 272-273.
5. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Decree on Priestly Formation", American Press edition, No. 8.
6. Jean Galot, S.J., *Theology of the Priesthood*, Ignatius Press, p. 144.
7. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests as in Inside the Vatican*, November 1994, Special Supplement. For quotations within the excerpt, see C.I.C. can. 929; Missale Romanum, Instituto generalis, nn 81; 298; S. Congregation for the Divine Cult, Instruction Liturgical instauraciones (5 September 1970, 8 c: AAS62 (1970), 701).
8. *Ibid.*, No. 13.
9. Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., *A Priest Forever*, Our Sunday Visitor Pub., pp 106-107
10. Jean Galot, S.J., *The Heart of Christ*, Newman Press. pp. 137-139.
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12. Fr. Rene' Laurentin, *A Year of Grace with Mary*, translated by Monsignor Michael J. Wrenn, Veritas, pp 113-119.
13. *God Alone, The Collected Works of St. Louis de Montfort*, Montfort Publication, p. xv.
14. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," American Press edition, No. 47.
15. *Ibid.*, No. 48.
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17. Fr. Bruno Forte, *He Loved Them to the End*, St. Paul Books & Media, p. 97.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
19. Fr. Thomas McKenna, C.M., as in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, The Liturgical Press, p. 662
20. *Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, p. 180.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
24. Jean de Fabrègues, *Edith Stein*, St. Paul Books and Media, p. 72.
25. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *On the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*. St. Paul Books and Media, No. 49