

shepherds of Christ

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Priestly Ministry and Priestly Holiness

"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 10:11-15)¹

Yes, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us, His flock. From His pierced side, the Church was born. At the heart of the Church's life is the priesthood. The Church, to such a great degree, depends upon her ministerial priesthood. Indeed, priests have been given a great privilege and a great responsibility. Included in the priest's accepting the responsibility connected with his role in the Church is his obligation to strive for ever greater holiness in Christ. As we can see by the writings which follow, there is a most intimate connection between the fruitfulness of the priest's ministry and his personal holiness.

♦ Vatican II tells us: "Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry. True, the grace of God can complete the work of salvation even through unworthy ministers. Yet ordinarily God desires to manifest His wonders through those who have been made particularly docile to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit..."

"This most holy Synod desires to achieve its pastoral goals of renewal within the Church, of the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and of dialogue with the modern world. Therefore it fervently exhorts all priests to use the appropriate

means endorsed by the Church as they ever strive for that greater sanctity which will make them increasingly useful instruments in the service of all of God's People."²

What Vatican II puts before seminarians regarding spiritual formation can also obviously be implemented by priests: "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 Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to His disciple by Christ Jesus as He hung dying on the cross."³

♦ Pope John Paul II builds upon the teaching of Vatican II: "There can be no doubt that the exercise of the priestly ministry, especially in the celebration of the sacraments, receives its saving effects from the action of Christ himself who becomes present in the sacraments. But so as to emphasize the gratuitous nature of salvation which makes a person both 'saved' and a 'savior' -- always and only in Christ -- God's plan has ordained that the efficacy of the exercise of the ministry is also conditioned by a greater or lesser human receptivity and participation. In particular, the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the

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word, the celebration of the sacraments and the leadership of the community in charity.”⁴

◆ The following words of Fr. M. Raymond, O.C.S.O., are closely connected with what has gone before. His words emphasize the great importance regarding personal holiness and one’s participation in the Mass: “Mass, inasmuch as it is Christ’s offering, is not only always acceptable to God, but is of infinite value as well.

But, inasmuch as it is your offering and mine, and that of every other member of the Mystical Body ... we can limit the effectiveness of God’s great Act of Love; we finite beings can set bounds to the veritable flood of God-life made possible by the Infinite Son of the Infinite Father.”⁵

Yes, the effectiveness of each Mass, which makes the sacrifice of Calvary sacramentally present, depends in part on the holiness of the entire Church offering it with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit, including the holiness of the individual priest offering and the holiness of his participating congregation.

◆ Fr. Maurice de la Taille, S.J., formerly professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and a universally recognized authority on the Mass, also points out the great importance of personal holiness in the Church relative to the effectiveness of the Eucharistic sacrifice: “It is, then, of the greatest importance that there should be in the Church many holy, many very holy persons. Devout people, men and women, who should be urged by every means to higher sanctity, so that *through them the value of our Masses may be increased* and the tireless voice of the Blood of Christ, crying from the earth, may ring with greater clearness and insistence in the ears of God. His Blood cries on the altars of the Church, but, since it cries through us, it follows that the warmer the heart, the purer the lips, the more clearly will its cry be heard at the Throne of God. Would you wish to know why for so many years after the first Pentecost the Gospel was so marvelously propagated, why there was so much sanctity amongst the Christian people; why such purity in heart and mind, such charity, the sum of all perfection? You will find the answer when you recall that in those times the Mother of God was still on earth giving her precious aid in all the Masses celebrated by the Church, and you will cease to wonder that never since has there been such expansion of Christianity, and such spiritual progress.”⁶

If all, then, have a responsibility to grow in holiness in order to render the Mass more efficacious, the priest has a special duty to do so. His goal must always be to grow in holiness -- to grow in union with Christ the Priest, this Christ Who leads us to the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary at our side.

◆ As just stated, the life of holiness, the spiritual life, centers in one’s love-union with Christ. The fruitfulness of the priest’s ministry depends on his union with Jesus. St. John beautifully and powerfully states this truth:

John 15:1-5

*I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit
he prunes
to make it bear even more.
You are clean already,
by means of the word
that I have spoken to you.
Remain in me, as I in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
unless it remains part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.*

◆ To grow in holiness, to advance in the spiritual life, requires a growth in surrender to Christ. Growth in holiness means allowing Jesus to possess us more and more. The more He possesses us, the more He can use us as instruments in the work of the kingdom. The more the Savior possesses us, the more fruitful our ministry. The summit of holiness for all Christians, and in a special way for the priest who is configured to Christ in a unique way through the sacrament of Holy Orders, is succinctly and movingly stated by St. Paul: “***I have been crucified with Christ, and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.***” (Ga 2:19-20)

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

Jesus

◆ Henri Nouwen, who taught at some of the most prestigious universities, and who has been one of the most prolific spiritual writers of our times, has left us these words from one of his published spiritual journals: “Father George Strohmeier, the co-founder of L’Arche Community in Erie, Pennsylvania, is visiting for a few weeks. This morning I had a chance to speak with him about being a priest for L’Arche.

“He told me about his ‘conversion’ when he came to Trosly for the first time. His hours of adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament and his contacts with Père Thomas were the two main causes behind his more radical turn to Jesus. As he told his story, it became clear that Jesus is at the center of his life. This would seem obvious for a priest, but such is not always the case. George has come to know Jesus in a way few priests have. When he pronounces the name of Jesus you know that he speaks from a deep, intimate encounter. His life has become simpler, more hidden, more rooted, more trusting, more open, more evangelical, and more peaceful. For George, being a priest at L’Arche means leading people -- the handicapped and their assistants -- always closer to Jesus.

“I now know for sure that there is a long, hard journey ahead of me. It is the journey of leaving everything behind for Jesus’ sake. I now know that there is a

way of living, praying, being with people, caring, eating, drinking, sleeping, reading, and writing in which Jesus is truly the center.”⁷

◆ From a spiritual classic we read about Jesus: “He is here with us in our churches, the same in Heart and mind as He was in those days when He pronounced the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Shepherd. As He never then showed coldness, aloofness or displeasure towards those who approached Him, no matter how stained their souls were with sin, He does not do so now. Our badness cannot modify His goodness, nor can it rob Him of His interest in us. He looks out on us from the Tabernacle with the same yearning love, the same expectancy, the same hopefulness which no rebuff on our part can chill, as He exhibited to all those whom He encountered while on earth...



“...A moment comes when a decisive sacrifice is asked ... It may be a mere nothing, but it involves a deliberate choice. The soul’s spiritual destiny (not necessarily its salvation) hangs in the balance, and it does not realize that it is so. Friendship with Jesus demands a certain renouncement and the soul pauses, hesitates and then -- refuses. It reasons that it can be saved without foregoing this thing -- it is not a sin to cleave to it. Conscience pleads that though it is not a sin to cling to the object desired, the delicate demands of friendship with the Lord call for its surrender. The soul replies that -- what it is pressed by grace to forego cannot be of such consequence and to cleave to it is not positively forbidden by God’s law. The decision is taken against the Lord. Instantly the ideal of life is lowered. It is no longer the love of Jesus which is its inspiring principle, but a selfish determination to secure salvation at the least cost to nature and to self. The gradual decline continues. Faults multiply. Every gratification that is not incompatible with God’s positive

will is sought. There is less and less effort made to struggle against deliberate venial sins. The externals of a life of piety remain. There is nothing outstanding in the way of guilt -- but the habitual disposition of the soul is one of estrangement from God. Examinations of conscience do not disclose anything seriously wrong -- and yet, one feels that everything is wrong. And then comes over the soul a sense of isolation, of loneliness, of dereliction, and of powerlessness to move hand or foot to escape from the miserable impasse to which it has come. Its efforts at release, like those of the poor ensnared sheep, only serve to entangle it more securely in the thorns and briers. The soul lives under a haunting fear and is continually pricked by the thorns of remorse.

“In the state of utter helplessness it can do nothing but cry piteously to the Master it has abandoned. Its cries do not fall on deafness. The Good Shepherd is not far off and His approach is guided by the piteous bleating of the poor lost thing ... Our Lord wishes us to understand that nothing can oppose an insurmountable barrier to His love except one thing alone -- which he has given us Himself, and which He will not do violence to, even by His grace -- that is, our free will. He looks anxiously for the first stirrings of that will, its first feeble attempts to respond ... and as He notices them, His Heart throbs with pleasure. He craves our love, but He is too delicate to force it. It has no value for Him unless freely given ...

“...when it is a question of the soul and the soul’s life -- its nearness to or remoteness from God, there are no limits to be placed to the extent of His anxious tenderness. Hence His almost extravagant joy when the sinful or the lukewarm, surrendering to the assaults of His grace, turn to Him appealingly and cast themselves at His feet with a sincere confession of their helplessness and a humble appeal for help ... Jesus is good. In that lies the explanation of His attitude towards the weak, the erring and the helpless.”⁸

The Father’s Will

St. Teresa of Avila, one of the three women doctors of the Church, tells us how the spiritual life is summed up in loving conformity to the Father’s will:

“All that the beginner in prayer has to do -- and you must not forget this, for it is very important -- is to labor and to be resolute and prepare himself with all possible diligence to bring his will in conformity with the will of God. As I shall say later, you may be quite sure that this comprises the very greatest perfection which can be attained on the spiritual road.”⁹

Again she states: “...love consists ... in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything.”¹⁰

The Holy Spirit

Jesus leads us to the Father in the Holy Spirit with Mary at our side. The Holy Spirit desires to fashion us into an ever greater likeness to Christ according to the pattern of Jesus’ death-resurrection. Mary our Mother cooperates with the Spirit, Whose spouse she is, in this process. Obviously, we should pray to the Holy Spirit each day. There are many ways we can do this. We can do this by simply turning our attention to the Holy Spirit at various times during the day as we ask for His guidance. This method can be complemented by saying certain established prayers. Here is one of these: “We adore You, Holy Spirit. Give us light, give us strength, console us. We give ourselves entirely to You. Spirit of light, we want only to do the will of the Father. Enlighten us that we may live always in the Father’s will.

“Eternal Spirit, fill us with Your divine wisdom so that we may comprehend more fully the divine mysteries.

“Give us lights, Oh Holy Spirit, that we may know God. Work within the Heart, the spiritual womb, of the Virgin Mary to form us more and more into the image of Jesus.”

Laurentin and Mary

◆ Fr. René Laurentin, one of the world's foremost Mariologists, offers us these meaningful words concerning Mary: "She was present... throughout the life of Christ -- both by her mother's love and by her commitment to him..."

Mary's presence to her son is a model for us, since, through this mother, God becomes our brother and has given her to us as mother in order to identify us with himself... We are humble children of this mother who has so profoundly adopted us in him... Mary has the mission of aiding the work of our divinization in Jesus Christ. She cooperates with him in this work of God." ¹¹



The Eucharist

At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Saviour 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. 17) ¹²

◆ *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) ¹³

◆ *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*) ¹⁴*

◆ Archbishop Luis M. Martinez offers us these inspiring words: "If we could dispose ourselves at least to think about what He suffered for each one of us! Our souls are enveloped in His tenderness and in His pain. We are the fruit of His love and His martyrdom. We increasingly receive His gifts of all kinds. We receive them tranquilly, at times joyfully. But those gifts are marked with the blood of Jesus, the blood from His veins and from His Heart. In order that we might taste the least of His consolations, Jesus had to taste the gall and vinegar of interior desolation..."

"Each communion we receive cost Jesus the sacrifice of Calvary ... Holy Communion is a banquet from heaven prepared with the blood of Jesus and the bitterness of His Heart." ¹⁵

◆ From a spiritual journal we are given these words: "When a priest is filled with the love of Jesus, he unites more deeply with Christ in the great sacrifice being offered to the Father. The faithful more easily see Jesus, through the priest, offering sacrifice to the Father. They more easily experience, at this great sacrifice, the presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

"At the Mass we unite in offering sacrifice to the Father. We all unite as one and give ourselves in such oneness with Jesus, in such love to the Father, in the Holy Spirit. We desire to die to all the things that are not of God and join in this great miracle taking place. The Father looks down and He sees the sacrifice of His Son being offered through His priest. Heaven unites to earth. Earth cries out in such jubilation at the great gift of the Almighty God, and we unite as creatures giving ourselves as a sacrifice to our beloved Creator. Do we experience the presence of God as His power flows through His priest, who takes ordinary bread and wine, and changes them into the Body and Blood of our Lord? Do we hear Jesus cry out, as He did at the Last Supper, with the intensity in His voice reflecting the knowledge of the upcoming events of His Passion and death?"

"Do we hear the priest say the words of consecration with the emotion of Jesus, about to give His life for His beloved ones? And the earth stands still. There is, at that moment, the sacrifice of Calvary sacramentally made present through the words of the priest. Oh, that God so loved the world to give His only Son as a sacrifice, and that God wants us in this deep oneness with Him! I give You myself, my Savior, my beloved Jesus, as You so willingly gave Yourself to me on Calvary. I want to die and rise more and more with You in the deepest possible love for You and for those for whom You died a brutal, bloody death on Calvary, and for whom You rose gloriously from the dead!"

*Mary, Queen of Peace,
Pray for us.*

Thoughts on the Church

◆ Weaknesses in the Church must be properly attended to. Whatever means are used to strive to correct what should not be, these means must be permeated with a spirit of compassion. Fr. Ladislav Orsy, S.J., says: “There are, there were, and there will be weaknesses in the Church. What should be the response of a Christian? It cannot be anything else than the Christian response that is compassion. Bitter criticism and aggressive accusation do not heal wounds. If anything, they aggravate the condition of the sick.”¹⁶

◆ St. Clement, Pope, writes to the Corinthians: “Why are there strife and passion, schisms and even war among you? Do we not possess the same Spirit of grace which was given to us and the same calling in Christ? Why do we tear apart and divide the body of Christ? Why do we revolt against our own body? Why do we reach such a degree of insanity that we forget that we are members one of another?...”

“We should put an end to this division immediately. Let us fall down before our master and implore his mercy with our tears. Then he will be reconciled to us and restore us to the practice of brotherly love that befits us ... A person may be faithful; he may have the power to utter hidden mysteries; he may be discriminating in the evaluation of what is said and pure in his actions. But the greater he seems to be, the more humbly he ought to act, and the more zealous he should be for the common good rather than his own interest.”¹⁷

Prayer

Here are some thoughts regarding the basic nature of Christian prayer:

“Since the entire Christian life is centered in faith, hope, and love, so also, then, is the life of prayer. In faith, hope, and love, we are receptive to God’s indwelling presence. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are intimately present to us, and we to Them.

“Our presence to God in prayer is a receptive presence. We must be open to God, we must be willing to listen to Him. Our attitude should resemble Samuel’s: “*Yahweh then came and stood by, calling as he had done before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Samuel answered, ‘Speak, Yahweh; for your servant is listening’.*” (1 Sam 3:10)

“Being open to God in prayer, listening to Him, asking Him what He would have us do, is based on the very basic truth that God is the One Who takes the initiative in the Christian life. God is granting His grace in abundance. The danger lies with us, with the possibility that we will be deaf to His call, that we will not listen properly, that our selfishness will blemish our openness.

“To be open to God in prayer means to make ourselves receptive to His love for us. It means a willing-

ness to allow that love to direct our lives. It means, therefore, a desire to increasingly conform our wills to God’s will in love.

“In prayer, then, God desires our openness. He wants us to listen. He wants us to allow Him to reveal Himself to us in greater depth. He also desires that we allow Him more and more to reveal ourselves to us -- both the good and the bad. He desires that we allow Him in His love for us to reveal to us those hidden and unrecognized recesses of our being where we still resist Him. He wants to engrave His image upon us ever more deeply. He desires to possess us more completely so that we may more fully be ourselves. God’s possession of us in grace is oriented toward bringing our total being to fulfillment. Grace perfects nature, brings it to a maturity otherwise not possible. Our uniqueness, then, along with all the other aspects of our persons, finds fulfillment in grace. Prayer, in which we open ourselves to being more intimately possessed by God, is truly a special opportunity to fulfill our search for personal authenticity -- for becoming in greater depth our true, unique selves.

“Prayer’s dialogic love-presence, uniting the Christian with God, is centered in Christ. This fact flows from the mediatorship of Jesus: He draws us to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

“In prayer, the Father, in the Holy Spirit, speaks to us through Jesus. Through His incarnate Son the Father has revealed Himself and His plan for our salvation. The Father, under the delicate touches of the Spirit, enlightens us in Christ concerning life’s meaning. The Christian can understand his or her existence only in the light of Christ. Hans Urs Von Balthasar says: “Those who consider Christian contemplation outdated and turn to the values of the world to give them fresh force are victims of illusion. Only ‘in Christ’ do things attain their ultimate meaning and end ...”¹⁸

“We are imprinted with a Trinitarian, Christ-like image. Christ, through His life, death, and resurrection has shown us how to live a God-like, a Trinitarian type, existence. In the quiet of prayer the Father bids us to look at His Son and to assimilate the mysteries or events of His life, death, and resurrection more radically into our own lives. These mysteries possess a perennial reality, a perennial dynamism. As we variously experience Christ -- and prayer is one of the chief means through which we do so -- we also experience these mysteries. We are to incorporate them ever more dynamically into our lives. Because of the fundamental transcendence of Christ’s mysteries, they are always supremely relevant to each Christian of any age. They possess a perennial vitality to meet all exigencies.

“As we gaze upon Jesus, we deepen the understanding of our own lives in the light of His. In prayer we are deepening the conviction that Jesus has the meaning of life. We come to realize more in the depths of our hearts that without Him there is no consistent and meaningful unity to all our work and play, success and failure, happiness and joy, pain and sorrow. In prayer we achieve a deeper realization of what Jesus meant when He left us these words:

I am the Way; I am Truth and Life.

No one can come to the Father

except through me. (Jn 14:6)¹⁹

Various Thoughts

◆ Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., astutely observes: “There is an appalling dearth of thinking in our times even in the theological domain, where the strangest conclusions are sometimes drawn from the most tortured syllogisms. However, there is also what may be simply and accurately described as a lack of heart. When the powers of the mind have gone as far as they can go and concluded as much of truth as lies within their possibilities, then those powers must give humble heed to the heart. Is not, in fact, a humble mind one that has energetically exhausted all its potential in order to recognize its limitations?”

“‘All that I have written seems to me as a little straw,’ concluded St. Thomas Aquinas toward the end of his life. His humble assessment of himself and his works was accurate. For is not indeed everything that the mind can achieve really

only 'straw' before the greatness of God and his incredible designs? He is a God, however, who is glorified by our gathering all the 'straw' we can for his service and the directing of our own free willed lives, while vigorously routing a temptation toward torpor of intellect.

"Yes, a mind is for using. Its sound conclusions call for the most serious pondering. And for the heart to claim absolute sovereignty whether over life itself or the decisions that make for life's unfolding pattern is clearly an unjustified and perilous assumption. Yet, for the mind to insist on its supreme authority in decision making, including the decision to disregard the evidence of the heart, is a counter insistence fraught, if not always with peril, at least with frequent and sometimes very serious loss to the proprietors of mind and heart. Indeed, it is the mind that delivers to the will the evidence on which the will pronounces. Nonetheless, cerebral conclusions need enfleshing with what only the heart can contribute: the finding of love that can never, if the love is real and true, be at enmity with the mind but which can sometimes unseat the mind's best justified decisions or even topple them. The mind of the father of the prodigal son in the Gospel must surely have rendered the father completely just conclusions: the son must be penanced. He must make reparation. He must become practiced in contrition. He must come to assess himself as a thorough-going rotter. It's all for his own good, before there be any expression of such unduly swift and overly facile pardon as might leave the boy forever unaware of the heinousness of his crimes.

"The father might well have then had it in mind to show welcome, once the son's state of soul had been made clear to him. It was good, clear thinking. But the father's heart got the better of any sound conclusions of reasonableness. He just held out his arms to his returned renegade son. And threw a party. This is Jesus' revelation of how the heavenly Father forgives ...

"It is a most wondrous partnership, that of the mind and heart."²⁰

◆ Here are words from a spiritual journal: "Jesus stood before the crowd when they condemned Him to death. He was surrounded by the hateful mob, and they agreed that our beloved Jesus, Who is love, deserved to be crucified. He had done nothing but give love, but, because of the hardness of their hearts, they cried out for His crucifixion.

"Jesus knew all those who persecuted Him, and He loved them. Jesus has a constant awareness of each person as the unique creation of the Father, including those who persecuted Him. And He loved them. Yes, He loved them, even to His brutal death on the cross.

"I have an awareness more and more that I love my brothers and sisters of the human family so much because I see them as created by my loving Father. He loves them so much. He is one with them. How can I

not love them? I see less their faults and more their beauty as His creation. I know Jesus gave the last drop of His Blood for them. How could I hate anyone that He loves so much! To love Jesus is to love my brother. I cannot love Jesus and hate my brother. Jesus is one with him. I am one in Him and He is one in me. My brother is one in Him. If I am one with Jesus and I love Jesus, then I must love my brother because he is one with Jesus and we are all one, united in Jesus our Redeemer Who died and rose that we may live, Who died and rose that we may be all profoundly one in Him and one in each other."

◆ St. John of the Cross gets to the heart of the matter in these few words: "What does it profit you to give God one thing if He asks for another? Consider what it is God wants and then do it."²¹

Thoughts from Thomas Merton

◆ "Fear is perhaps the greatest enemy of candor. How many men fear to follow their consciences because they would rather conform to the opinion of other men than to the truth they know in their souls. How can I be sincere if I am constantly changing my mind to conform with the shadow of what I think others expect of me? Others have no right to demand that I be anything other than what I ought to be in the sight of God."²²

◆ "I saw the country in a light that we usually do not see: the low-slanting rays picked out the foliage of the trees and high-lighted a new wheatfield against the dark curtain of woods on the knobs, which were in shadow.

"It was very beautiful. Deep peace. Sheep on the slopes behind the sheep barn. The new trellises in the novitiate garden leaning and sagging under a hill of roses. A cardinal singing suddenly in the radiant tree, and piles of flagrant logs all round the woodshed waiting to be cut in bad weather.

"I looked at all this in great tranquility, with my ... spirit quiet. For me, landscape seems to be important for contemplation. Anyway, I have no scruples about loving it. Didn't Saint John of the Cross hide himself in a room up in a church tower, where there was one small window through which he could look out at the country?"²³

◆ "We live in a society that tries to keep us dazzled with euphoria in a bright cloud of lively and joy-living slogan. Yet nothing is more empty and more dead, nothing is more insultingly insincere and destructive than the vapid grins on the billboards and the moronic beatitudes in the magazines, which assure us that we are all in bliss right now. I know, of course, that we are fools, but I do not think any of us are fools enough to believe that we are now in heaven."²⁴

◆ "Work occupies the body and the mind and is necessary for the health of the spirit. Work can help us to pray and be recollected, if we work properly. Agitation, however, destroys the spiritual usefulness of work and even tends to frustrate its physical and social purpose. Agitation is the useless and ill-directed action of the body. It expresses the inner confusion of a soul without peace.

"Work brings peace to the soul that has a semblance of order and spiritual understanding. Agitation -- a condition of spirit that is quite normal in the world of business -- is the fruit of tension in a spirit that is turning dizzily from one stimulus to another and trying to react to fifteen different appeals at the same time. Under the surface of agitation, and furnishing it with its monstrous and inexhaustible drive, is the force of fear or elemental greed for money, or pleasure, or power. The more complex a man's passion, the more complex his agitation.

"All this is the death of the interior life ..."²⁵

The Christian and the World

◆ Pope John Paul II makes this observation concerning today's world: "The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportionate

development of morals and ethics. For the present, this last development seems unfortunately to be always left behind. Accordingly, in spite of the marvel of this progress, in which it is difficult not to see also authentic signs of man's greatness, signs that in their creative seeds were revealed to us in the pages of the book of Genesis, as early as where it describes man's creation, this progress cannot fail to give rise to disquiet on many counts. The first reason for disquiet concerns the essential and fundamental question: Does this progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth 'more human' in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more 'worthy of man'? There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is more essential: whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all."²⁶

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 Sacred 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.



Letters

◆ Dear Ed,

Just want to tell you I liked your 1999, Issue Three, with its two articles on "Personal Uniqueness" and "Jesus". I'll be looking for a chance to use them in my retreats and liturgies. Thanks a lot.

In Christ,
Bob Thul, S.J.
Chicago, Illinois

◆ Dear Father,

Please receive my cordial greetings.

It was really an opportune moment and a gracious one to come in touch with a "Shepherds of Christ" issue. I was nearly overjoyed by the spiritual nourishment it contained. As a parish priest, I would find it highly useful if I could regularly receive it.

Also, please send me the newsletter in book form and the newsletter audio cassettes. Yours in Christ,

Fr. Felix Rashid
Tanzania, East Africa

◆ Dear Fr. Carter,

I have come to know that your newsletter, "Shepherds of Christ", so rich in spiritual resources and so useful, are now available on audio-cassettes.

I would be very grateful if I could have them, since I can no longer read.

Would you kindly place me on your mailing list and send also 10 copies of

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1999, ISSUE FIVE

shepherds of Christ

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Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193
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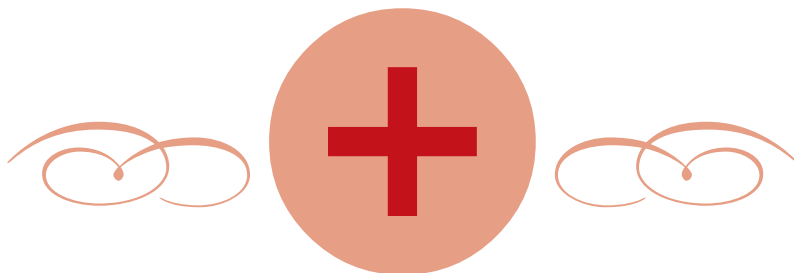
Shepherds of Christ, a spirituality newsletter for priests, is published bi-monthly by Shepherds of Christ Ministries, P.O. Box 193, Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193. While distribution is free of charge to all priests in the U.S., and growing internationally, donations are still very much appreciated. Inquiries and comments are welcome, as are address changes and addresses of the newly ordained. Permission to reproduce intact is granted for non-commercial use. Editor Father Edward Carter S.J. is Professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. John Weickert is President. Good Shepherd illustration is by Brother Jerome Pryor, S.J. Layout and design are by Joan Royce. Also dedicated to the spiritual advancement of priests is a worldwide network of lay/religious prayer chapters, Shepherds of Christ Associates, headquartered at 2919 Shawhan Road, Morrow, Ohio 45152, U.S.A., telephone toll free 1-888-211-3041, fax 513-932-6791.

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"Shepherds of Christ", together with some copies of the prayer manual for distribution?

May the good Shepherd bless your precious work and keep you in His loving care.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Fr. Luigi Gerardi
Contemplative Evangelizers
Pongai, Kenya



NOTES:

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6. Maurice de la Taille, S.J., *The Mystery of Faith*, Book 2, "The Sacrifice of the Church", translated by Joseph Carroll and P. J. Dalton, Sheed and Ward, p. 240.

7. Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, Doubleday, pp. 70-71
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11. René Laurentin, *A Year of Grace With Mary*, Veritas Publications, pp. 113-114.
12. *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy", America Press Edition, No. 17.
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24. Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence*, University Notre Dame Press, as in *Through the Year with Thomas Merton*, *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145
25. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island*, op. cit. p. 153.
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