

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



REV. EDWARD CARTER S.J., Editor

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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Trust in the Lord

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep. This is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for my sheep.” (Jn 10: 11 -15¹).

The fact that Jesus the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for each and every one of us should fill us with the greatest confidence, with the greatest trust. As St. Paul tells us: “We were still helpless when at His appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die, even for a good man—though, of course, for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die—but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Having died to make us righteous, is it likely that He would now fail to save us from God’s anger? When we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we were still enemies; now that we have been reconciled, surely we may count on being saved by the life of His Son? Not merely because we have been reconciled but because we are filled with joyful trust in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have already gained our reconciliation.” (Rm 5: 6-11).

Those words of Paul remind us that we have every motive to have the greatest trust in Our Lord. One of the major reasons we fail to progress in the spiritual life as we should is that our trust is deficient. We should pray for an increase in this extremely important virtue each

day of our lives. We should pray for an increased awareness of how much Jesus loves us as unique individuals. The more I am convinced how much Jesus loves me, the easier it is to surrender to Him in trust.

Reflections on Trust

There follow further thoughts on the attitude of trust which we should strive to possess in greatest measure:

◆ Trust does not always come easily. Especially in times of great difficulty or crisis we can experience the difficulty of trusting properly in God. Yet it is precisely then that we have a special need for trust. Despite the suffering, we must trust, even though the darkness may enshroud us. We must try to trust as did Abraham: “Though it seemed Abraham’s hope could not be fulfilled, he hoped and he believed, and through doing so he did

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

become the father of many nations exactly as he had been promised: *Your descendants will be as many as the stars.* Even the thought that his body was past fatherhood—he was about a hundred years old—and Sarah too old to become a mother, did not shake his belief. Since God had promised it, Abraham refused either to deny it or even to doubt it, but drew strength from faith and gave glory to God, convinced that God had power to do what he had promised.” (Rm 4:18-21).

◆ God can accomplish great things through us, too, if only we allow Him. What He accomplishes through us may be for the most part hidden from others, yet true greatness can still be there. But if we are to achieve truly great things, we must trust. We must trust that God will lead us on to Christian maturity. We must trust that He will aid us in the fulfillment of our roles in life. Even at those times when we are painfully

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Editor's Corner

by Edward Carter S.J.

I would like to begin this column by sharing with you material from two letters we have recently received.

Fr. Vaughn Winters writes from St. Raphael's Church, Santa Barbara, California: "Thank you for giving of yourself to minister to priests throughout the country through the Shepherds of Christ newsletter. As a priest just two years ordained, sometimes when I look around and see so many troubled priests, and also hear dire forebodings about the coming priest shortage, I wonder what I've gotten myself into, but your newsletter helps me refocus on what it is all about, and also a reminder that I am part of a vast fraternity of many healthy, solid, and holy priests. Thank you for your ministry of encouragement and strengthening." And thank you, Fr. Winters, for your inspiring words!

The following is part of a letter from Fr. Guillermo Arias, S.J., who has volunteered to help us distribute the newsletter in Puerto Rico: "I...thank and praise the Good Lord...for having inspired you and your associates to begin this most urgent apostolate among Christ's priests...You are doing one of the most important services anyone can do for the Church today with Shepherds of Christ Ministries. And I would like to be of as much help as possible." And thank you, Fr. Arias!

The above continues the feedback we have received which helps assure us that the Lord has given us a very important ministry. We would very much appreciate your prayers for the continued success of this ministry.

Also, with this issue we are making a special plea for your financial assistance. As you know, the newsletter is sent to you free of charge, although donations are always welcome. Our expenses are paid through donations received from the laity and yourselves. At this particular time, we are making it especially easy for you to financially assist Shepherds of Christ Ministries—and the chief expense of this movement is the publication of the priests' newsletter. Our expenses are increasing as we are now beginning to distribute the newsletter in other countries. Enclosed you will find a self-addressed reply envelope for donation purposes. Thank you very much for taking our appeal under consideration.

Ed Carter, S.J.

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aware of how weak we are, we must trust that we can attain true greatness and accomplish the task God sets before us. Actually, at those times during which we are especially experiencing our weakness, our optimism should grow. For the more we realize our weakness, the more we should throw ourselves into the arms of Christ. We then become strong and secure in His strength. As long as we do not surrender to our weakness, we should glory in our helplessness so

that the strength of Christ may support us. This was the attitude of St. Paul: "So I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me, and that is why I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong." (2 Cor 12: 9-10).

◆ If our days are too much colored with discouragement and pessimism, our trust has become dormant. We must rekindle it and tell ourselves that we belong to Jesus and that nothing, absolutely nothing, should destroy the basic peace and joy He desires for us.

◆ How fortunate that our Christian trust can carry us beyond the toil, the pain, the anxiety of the present moment.

◆ In times of distress we instinctively turn to Jesus, immediately realizing the need for trust. However, we do not so easily realize our need for Him during times when all goes smoothly and a sense of joy seems to touch every fiber of our being. Yet we need to be cognizant of our dependence on Jesus during these happy episodes. For, if during time of distress we need to trust in the Lord for patient endurance, during times of joy we are in no less need of His help. We must trust that He will give us the light and strength to use these periods of joy not selfishly, but as He wills.

◆ Why don't we decide once and for all to take Jesus at His word? He tells us not to worry. He tells us there is no reason to be overly anxious about anything. He tells us to trust. He loves us, His Father loves us, the Holy Spirit loves us. They love us much more than we love ourselves. Their love can cut through the bonds of any fear, any worry, any anxiety.

◆ Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., speaks about trust and spiritual childhood: "To be childlike is far different from being childish. Jesus was the one; He was anything but the other..."

"A child's glance is always outwards. To keep one's eyes habitually turned towards God, as a child looks to its parent, is the way to self-oblivion. To commit ourselves wholly to God's paternal love, to put fearless childlike trust in His goodness, and to base all one's hopes of being in the Divine favor, in life and in death, in His fatherly loving kindness and mercy, is to have attained to a lofty degree of spiritual childhood."²

◆ Fr. Gordon Aumann, O.P., describes some of the characteristics of the virtue of trust in those far advanced in the spiritual life:

"*Universal confidence in God.* Nothing is able to discourage a servant of God when he or she enters upon an enterprise pertaining to the divine glory..."

“Indestructible peace and serenity. This is a natural consequence of their universal confidence in God. Nothing can disturb the tranquility of their spirit. Ridicule, persecution, calumny, injury, sickness, misfortune—everything falls upon their souls like water on a stone, without leaving the slightest trace or alteration in the serenity of their spirit...”³



◆ In the diary of Blessed Faustina, we read these words given to her by Our Lord: “I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw

life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with trust...On the cross, the fountain of My mercy was opened wide by the lance for all souls—no one have I excluded!...The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive.”⁴

◆ St. Claude de la Columbière: “My God, I am so convinced that you keep watch over those who hope in You, and that we can want for nothing when we look for all from You, that I am resolved in the future to live free from every care, and to turn all my anxieties over to You...”

“Men may deprive me of possessions and of honor, sickness may strip me of strength and the means of serving you...but I shall never lose my hope. I shall keep it till the last moment of my life; and at that moment all the demons in Hell shall strive to tear it from me in vain...”

“Others may look for happiness from their wealth or their talents; others may rest on the innocence of their life, or the severity of their penance, or the amount of their alms, or the fervor of their prayers. As for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself. This confidence has never deceived anyone. No one, no one has hoped in the Lord and has been confounded.

“I am sure, therefore, that I shall be eternally happy, since I firmly hope to be, and because it is from You, O God, that I hope for it. I know, alas!, I know only too well, that I am weak and unstable. I know what temptation can do against the strongest virtue. I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the pillars of the firmament; but that cannot frighten me. So long as I continue to hope, I shall be sheltered from all misfortune; and I am sure of hoping always, since I hope also

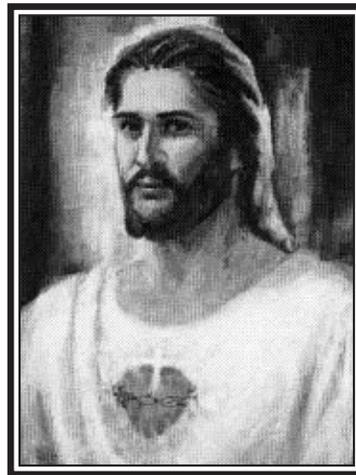
for this unwavering hopefulness.

“Finally, I am sure I cannot hope too much in You, and that I cannot receive less than I hoped for from You. So I hope that you will hold me safe on the steepest slopes, that You will sustain me against the most furious assaults, and that You will make my weakness triumph over my most fearful enemies. I hope that You will love me always, and that I too shall love You without ceasing. To carry my hope once for all as far as it can go, I hope from You to possess You, O my Creator, in time and in eternity. Amen.”⁵

Thoughts on the Eucharist

The Eucharist is our chief source for growth in trust. We should pray for a deepened awareness of this magnificent Gift.

◆ The Catechism emphasizes how all participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As priests we have the privilege and responsibility to instruct the people regarding this truth: “*All gather together.* Christians come together in one place for the Eucharistic assembly. At its head is Christ Himself, the principal agent of the Eucharist. He is high priest of the New Covenant; it is He Himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration. It is in representing Him that the bishop or priest acting *in the person of Christ the head (in persona Christi capitis)* presides over the assembly, speaks after the readings, receives the offerings, and says the Eucharistic Prayer. *All* have their own active parts to play in the celebration, each in his own way: readers, those who bring up the offerings, those who give communion, and the whole people whose ‘Amen’ manifests their participation.”⁶



◆ St. Peter Julian Eymard: “It is true also that the world does all in its power to prevent us from loving Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament with a real and practical love, to prevent us from visiting Him, and to cripple the effects of this love.

“The world engrosses the attention of souls; it finds and enslaves them with external occupations in order to deter them from dwelling too long on the love of Jesus.

“It even fights directly against this practical love and represents it as optional, as practicable at most only in a convent.

“And the devil wages incessant warfare on our love for Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

“He knows that Jesus is there, living and substantially present; that by Himself He is drawing souls and taking direct possession of them. The devil tries to efface the thought of the Eucharist in us, and the good impression made by it; for in his mind, that should decide the issue of the struggle.

“And yet God is all love.

“This gentle Savior pleads with us from the Host: ‘Love Me as I have loved you; abide in My love! I came to cast the fire of love on the earth, and My most ardent desire is that it should set your hearts on fire.’”⁷

The Heart of Christ

Jesus, in revealing His Heart as symbol of His life of love—including His overwhelming love for each of us as unique persons—invites us to have the greatest trust in Him. Here are some quotations which can help us in

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The Heart of Christ, continued from page 3
developing trust in the Heart of Christ:

◆ St. Bonaventure, Doctor of the Church, in his work *The Mystical Vine*, says: “The heart I have found is the heart of my King and Lord, of my Brother and Friend, the most loving Jesus. I say without hesitation that His Heart is also mine. Since Christ is my head, how could that which belongs to my head not also belong to me? As the eyes of my bodily head are truly my own, so also is the heart of my spiritual Head. Oh, what a blessed lot is mine to have one heart with Jesus!...Having found this heart, both yours and mine, O most sweet Jesus, I will pray to you my God.”⁸

◆ Ludolph of Saxony, whose book *The Life of Jesus Christ* played a key role in the conversion of St. Ignatius Loyola, gives us these inspiring words from this very book regarding the Heart of Christ: “The Heart of Christ was wounded for us with the wound of love, that through the opening of His side we may in return enter His Heart by means of love, and there be able to unite all our love with His divine love into one love, as the glowing iron is one with the fire. Therefore for the sake of this wound which Christ received for him on the Cross, when the dart of unconquerable love pierced His Heart, man should bring all his will into conformity with the will of God. But to fashion himself into conformity with Christ’s sufferings, he should consider what surpassingly noble love our Lord has shown us in the opening of His side, since through it He has given us the wide open entrance into His Heart. Therefore, let man make haste to enter into the Heart of Christ: let him gather up all his love and unite it with the divine love.”⁹

Wisdom of the Saints

◆ St. Francis Xavier: “Every Christian should always be mindful of death and of the brevity of life, and of the exact accounting which he must render to God about his whole life past when he dies; and he should be mindful of the day of universal judgment, when we shall all arise in body and soul, and of the everlasting pains of hell, which will never end; and he should be mindful of the glory of paradise, for which we were created. If I think about these things each day, they will be a great help in disposing me to do now what I shall wish to have done at the hour of my death so that I may go to paradise.”¹⁰

◆ St. Claude de la Columbière. In a letter the Saint writes:

“If I were in your place, this is how I would console myself. I would say to God with confidence: ‘Lord, behold a soul who is in the world to exercise your admirable mercy, and to make it blaze out in the presence of heaven and earth. Others will glorify You in making visible the power of Your grace, by their fidelity and constancy, showing how sweet and generous You are to those who are faithful to You. For my part I will glorify You by making known how good You are to sinners, and that Your mercy is higher than all malice, that nothing can exhaust it, that no relapse, however shameful and guilty it may be, need cause a sinner to despair of pardon. I have grievously offended You, O my lovable Redeemer, but it would be worse still if I committed the horrible outrage against You of thinking that You were not kind enough to pardon.’”¹¹

◆ St. John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church: “Strive to preserve your heart in peace and let no event of this world disturb it. Reflect that all must come to an end.”¹²

“Take neither great nor little notice of who is with you or against you and try always to please God. Ask Him that His will be done in you. Love Him intensely, as He deserves to be loved.”¹³

“Let your speech be such that no one may be offended, and let it concern things which would not cause you regret were all to know of them.”¹⁴

◆ St. Therese of Lisieux: “This year, June 9, the feast of the Holy Trinity, I received the grace to understand more than ever before how much Jesus desires to be loved.”¹⁵

“I understand so well that it is only love which makes us acceptable to God, that this love is the only good I ambition. Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to this Divine Furnace, and this road is the surrender of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father’s arms.”¹⁶

“Oh!, if all weak and imperfect souls felt what the least of souls feels, that is, the soul of your little Therese, not one would despair of reaching the summit of the mount of love. Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simply surrender and gratitude.”¹⁷

“...He (Jesus) finds few hearts who surrender to Him without reservations, who understand the real tenderness of His infinite Love.”¹⁸

“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 springtime 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.”¹⁹

◆ St. Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church: “How miserable is the wisdom of mortals and uncertain their providence! May You through Your providence, Lord, provide the necessary means by which my soul may serve You at Your pleasure rather than at its own.”²⁰

◆ St. Bernard, Doctor of the Church: “The first point to consider is that God deserves exceeding love from us, a love that has no measure. That is the first thing you must understand. The reason is, as I have said before, that He

“...He finds
few hearts...
who understand the
real tenderness of His
infinite Love...”

was first to love; He, Who is so great, loves us so much; He loves us freely, little and poor as we are. That is why I said in the beginning that the measure of our love for God is that there should be none. For since love given to God is given to the Infinite and Measureless, what measure or what limit could it have? And, what is more, our love is not bestowed for nothing, as is His; we render it in payment of a debt. He the Unmeasured and Eternal God, He Who is Love beyond all human ken. Whose greatness knows no bounds, Whose wisdom has no end, loves. Shall we, then, set a limit to our love for Him? I will love Thee, O Lord my Strength, my Strong Rock and my Defense, my Savior, my one Desire and Love. My God, my Helper, I will love Thee with all the power Thou hast given me; not worthily, for that can never be, but to the full of my capacity. Do what I will, I never can discharge my debt to Thee, and I can love Thee only according to the power that Thou has given me. But I will love Thee more and more, as Thou seemest fit to give the further power; yet never, never, as Thou shouldst be loved. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; yet in Thy book are written all who do the best they can, though they can never pay their debt in full.”²¹

◆ St. Peter Julian Eymard: “Our Lord Jesus Christ is our inheritance. He wants to give Himself to everybody, but not everybody wants Him. There are some who would want Him, but they will not submit to the condition of good and pure living which He has laid down; and their malice has the power to render God’s bequest null and void.”²²

Augustine and Trinitarian Spirituality

All authentic articulations of Christian spirituality are Trinitarian. Indeed, we go to the Father, through and with Christ, in the Holy Spirit, with the assistance of Mary our Mother. However, certain spiritualities highlight the Trinitarian framework of Christian spirituality more than do others. One of these is the spirituality of St. Augustine. Sr. Mary T. Clark, R.S.C.J., in commenting on Augustinian spirituality, observes: “Christ is the perfect image of the Father, equally God. The human person is an imperfect image of the Trinity, not equal to God but having a capacity for communion with God. The journey to God is by way of becoming a more perfect image of the divine Trinity. The Father’s perfect image, his Son, is the only way to likeness with God. This likeness is best achieved through wisdom, the crowning gift of the Holy

Spirit. Wisdom is ‘the love and awareness of Him who is always present’ (*Exposition*, Ps 135.8). On it depends the soul’s loving intimacy with the divine Persons. It is the final fruit of a living faith that acts in love (see Gal 5:6). It presupposes an eager search for God, but its proper activity is contemplation, that is, the finding of God and rejoicing in Him.

“This indirect perception of God will become in heaven a direct face-to-face vision of God. The contemplation of God is the destiny of every Christian (*City of God*, 19.19). Here on earth wisdom expands into loving action. The Christian thereby acts out God’s love for all creatures, just as Christ in His actions manifested God’s love for them. The source of wisdom, the divine love poured into human hearts by the Spirit arouses in persons the acts of remembering, understanding, and loving God.

“Thus Augustine saw the essential process of the spiritual life to be the re-formation of the image of the Trinity in the human person by the grace of Christ freely accepted. Transformed into children of God, human persons enter into union with him not merely as creatures with Creator but as friends. The Father offers this grace of friendship to all through Christ, the universal way.

“So convinced was Augustine of the centrality of the Trinity in the living out of Christian faith that he wrote fifteen books on the Trinity...

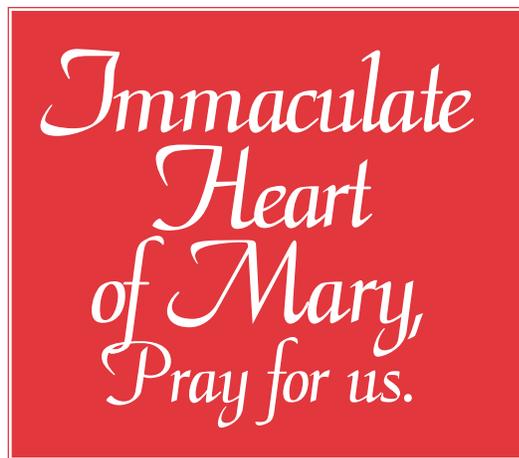
“We are certainly seeking a trinity, not any trinity at all, but that trinity which is God, the true, supreme, and only God...We are not yet speaking of heavenly things, not yet of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Rather we speak of this unequal image, an image nevertheless, which

is human being. For the mind’s weakness perhaps looks upon this image with more familiarity and facility...Let us attend as much as we can and call upon the heavenly light to illuminate our darkness so that we might see, as much as we are permitted, the image of God in us’ (*On the Trinity*, 9.1.1; 9.2.2). This human imaging of God is a call to authenticity, that is, to truth in word and action. The Son, the Word of God, was made flesh so that we might imitate Him in living rightly...”²³

The Church and the World

Fr. Robert Schwartz, a theologian and spiritual director at St. Paul’s Seminary in St. Paul, MN., offers us these meaningful words on the Church and the world: “The church exists in the world, yet claims, as integral to its mission, an ultimate goal lying beyond the sphere of historical growth and human evolution. It participates in the human enterprise and contributes to the well-being of society while seeking completion in a realm which surpasses human creativity. The ecclesial community witnesses to human values at the same time that it locates the foundation of these values in a God who transcends history and material reality.

“The church is by definition a pilgrim, for its source of life and its goal transcend visible reality. Linked to the material world by human nature and by the very words and signs which mediate its life, the church seeks its true



home in a kingdom which is yet to come. Although its members see temporal words and actions as important factors in attaining future beatitude, they do not propose themselves and their activity as the primary determinants of the kingdom nor earthly happiness as the fulfillment of human life.”²⁴

The Priest as Shepherd

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 oracle of Ezechiel 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.”²⁵

On Prayer

Christian prayer is rooted in the personal relationship that exists between the Christian and the triune God. Prayer is becoming conscious, in a special way, of the fact that the life of grace brings us into a deeply intimate union with the divine Persons, a union that is so intimate that Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually dwell within us in the most personal fashion.

During prayer we are especially aware of God’s presence to us and, reciprocally, of our presence to Him. This attitude of personal presence in love should dominate prayer. In prayer we are engaging in a love-dialogue with God who is so concerned with us. The personal presence of prayer should be rooted in our openness to God, in our willingness to listen to Him.

Being open to God in prayer, listening to Him, is based on the theological reality that God takes the initiative in the spiritual life. We never have

to fear that God will fail to take the initiative. The danger lies with us, with the possibility that we will be deaf to God’s call, that we will not listen properly, or that our openness to Him will be marred by our selfishness.

To be open to God in prayer means to listen to what He has to tell us about both Himself and ourselves. To be open to God in prayer means to be willing to allow God in His love to possess us more and more, to be willing to allow this love to direct our lives. To be open to God in prayer means a deepening desire to allow God’s will to possess us entirely in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

We can be tempted to tell ourselves that we are too busy to pray. We are speaking about set, formal periods of prayer. We are not speaking about prayer in action or that prayerful attitude which should permeate our daily activity. This contemplation in action, far from distracting us from the proper attention we must give to duty, allows us to bring a deeper Christian awareness to what we are doing and why we are doing it.

In reference to formal, set periods of prayer, extremely busy schedules can lead us to tell ourselves that we don’t have time for this kind of prayer—or at least not very often. If we say we don’t have time to pray, something is wrong.

We cannot tell ourselves that we are busier than Jesus was, that we have more important work to accomplish than He did. Yet Scripture tells us that Jesus consistently set aside special times for prayer: “His reputation continued to grow, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray.” (Lk 5:15-16). Many, many outstanding Christians of all states of life have likewise always found the time to pray. Moreover, they were more effective in their work precisely because they did pray.

Prayer helps us to be effective workers in various ways. Prayer helps us control worry and anxiety. Prayer has a significant contribution to offer in making us Christians who are basically permeated with the peace of Christ, who, because we realize what it means to be loved by Jesus, are in a position to control worry and anxiety. Prayer also aids us in our work and activity by giving us the motivation to do the right thing at the right time. Sometimes we can fail to do the work of the Lord precisely because we are not properly motivated. Prayer can also aid in making our work of a higher Christian quality—prayer can help permeate our work with a deeper faith, hope, and love. These are some of the ways prayer assists us to go about our work more efficiently. When we pause to analyze the situation, then, we have to admit that we are not too busy to pray. Indeed, we are too busy not to pray.

Thomas Merton tells us: “The contemplation of God in nature, which the Greek Fathers called *theoria physica*, has both a positive and a negative aspect. On the one hand, *theoria physica* is a positive recognition of God as he is manifested in the essences (*logoi*) of all things. It is not a speculative science of nature but rather a habit of religious awareness which endows the soul with a kind of intuitive perception of God as he is reflected in his creation. This instinctive religious view of things is not acquired by study so much as by ascetic detachment. And that implies that the positive and negative elements in this ‘contemplation of nature’ are really inseparable. The negative aspect of *theoria physica* is an equally instinctive realization of the vanity and illusion of all things as soon as they are considered apart from their right order and reference to God their Creator...

“If we say we don’t have time to pray, something is wrong.”

Does all this mean that the *theoria physica* of the Greek Fathers was a kind of perpetual dialectic between the two terms vision and illusion? No. In the Christian platonism of the Fathers, dialectic is no longer as important as it was in Plato and Plotinus. The Christian contemplation of nature does not consist in an intellectual tennis game between these two contrary aspects of nature. It consists rather in the ascetic gift of discernment which, in one penetrating glance, apprehends what creatures are, and what they are not. This is the intellectual counterpoise of detachment in the will. Discernment and detachment...are two characters of the mature Christian soul. They are not yet the mark of a mystic, but they bear witness that one is traveling the right way to mystical contemplation, and that the stage of beginners is passed."²⁶

Mary and the Priest

The *Directory of the Ministry and Life of Priests* tells us: "There is an 'essential rapport...between the Mother of Jesus and the priesthood of the ministry of the Son,' stemming from the existing one between the divine maternity of Mary and the priesthood of Christ.



"In light of such a rapport, Marian spirituality is rooted in every priest. Priestly spirituality could not be considered complete if it were to fail to include the message of Christ's words on

the Cross, in which He conferred his Mother to the beloved disciple, and, through him, to all priests called to continue his work of redemption.

"Like John at the foot of the Cross, every priest has been entrusted, in a special way, with Mary as Mother (cf. Jn 19:26-27).

"Priests, who are among the favored disciples of Jesus, crucified and risen, should welcome Mary as their Mother in their own life, bestowing her with constant attention and prayer. The Blessed Virgin then becomes the Mother who leads them to Christ, who makes them sincerely love the Church, who intercedes for them and who guides them toward the Kingdom of heaven...

"But they are not devout sons if they do not know how to imitate the virtues of Mary. The priest will look to Mary to be a humble, obedient and chaste minister and to give testimony of charity in the total surrender to God and the Church."²⁷

Act of Consecration

Lord Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, I consecrate my priestly life to Your Heart, pierced on Calvary for love of us. From Your pierced Heart the Church was born, the Church You have called me, as a priest, to serve in a most special way. You reveal Your Heart as symbol of Your love in all its aspects, including Your most special love for me, whom You have chosen as Your priest-companion. Help me always to pour out my life in love of God and neighbor. Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You!

Dear Blessed Virgin Mary, I consecrate myself to your maternal and Immaculate Heart, this Heart which is symbol of your life of love. You are the Mother of my Savior. You are also my Mother. You love me with the most special love as this unique priest-son. In a return of love I give myself entirely to your motherly love and protection. You followed Jesus perfectly. You are His first and perfect disciple. Teach me to imitate you in the putting on of Christ. Be my motherly intercessor so that, through your Immaculate Heart, I may be guided to an ever closer union with the pierced Heart of Jesus, Chief Shepherd of the Flock, Who leads me to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Letters

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

It gives me special pleasure to share the following letter. It comes from my doctoral dissertation director, Fr. Ernie Larkin, O. Carm. He is one of the leading experts on the spiritual teaching of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. He has also been one of my most influential teachers, and for this I am most grateful to him.—*Editor*

Dear Ed,

I am embarrassed not to have been one of the first to congratulate you on your obviously successful newsletter for priests. It is...solid, inspirational, and founded in the best of our tradition. I am very proud of you. May the Lord touch many of our hearts through this ministry. All the best to you!

Ernie Larkin, O Carm.
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Father Ed,

Prayer is truly the food of faith and faith is the foundation of our priestly lives. Through your Shepherds of Christ newsletter you remind us through your insights and prayers that emotion does indeed feed devotion and that we are all only a heartbeat away from the face-to-face presence of the Father through the Son in the Spirit!

Thanks for all your letter means to all of us.

Fraternally,
Msgr. Jeremiah F. Kenney
Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Father Ed,

The enclosed is a small way of thanking you for the articles in *Shepherds of Christ*.

The article "Thoughts on the Eucharist" (July-August) reminds me of the overwhelming love of Christ for me, fellow Catholics and the world. I pray in the vein of St. Peter Eymard that I might return my all and answer Christ with "this is me for you".

In Christ,
Fr. Joe Kenlon, O.F.M.Cap
New Paltz, New York

Dear Father Ed,

I must sincerely tell you how enjoyable your newsletter is. I find it spiritually uplifting. Many times in our earnestness to be of help we forget our own spiritual needs.

You are doing a great service to the American priesthood. May God bless you and sustain you in your endeavors. My prayers are with you, because I (and I am sure many other priests) feel enriched every time I read your newsletter.

Thanks.

In Jesus' love,
Rev. William Bonnici
Clinton Township, MI

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. Fr. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., *The True Vine and Its Branches*, P.J. Kenedy & Sons, pp. 221 and 228.
3. Fr. Jordan Aumann, O.P., *Spiritual Theology*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., pp. 262-263.
4. Blessed Faustina Kowalska, *The Divine Mercy, Message and Devotion*, Marian Helpers, p. 27.
5. St. Claude de la Columbière, *An Act of Confidence in God*, Apostleship of Prayer, Chicago Regional Office.
6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1348.
7. St. Peter Julian Eymard, "The Most Blessed Sacrament Is Not Loved!," as in *The Treasury of Catholic Wisdom*, Fr. John Hardon, S.J., ed., Ignatius Press, p.584.
8. St. Bonaventure, "The Mystical Vine," Ch. 3, "Opera Omnia," Vol. VIII, as in *Heart of the Redeemer*, Timothy O'Donnell, Trinity Communications, p. 101.
9. Ludolph of Saxony, "The Life of Jesus Christ," as in *Heart of the Redeemer*, op. cit., pp. 112-113.
10. St. Francis Xavier, *Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, Institute of Jesuit Sources, p. 207.
11. *Perfect Friend. Life of Claude de la Columbière*, B. Herder Book Company, p. 323.
12. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., Doubleday and Company, "Maxims and Counsels", No. 75, p. 679.
13. *Ibid.*, No. 76, p. 679.
14. *Ibid.*, No. 72, p. 679.
15. *Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, ICS Publications, p. 180.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
20. *St. Teresa of Avila, Collected Works*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., ICS Publications, Vol. 1, "Soliloquies", No. 17, p. 462.
21. St. Bernard, "On the Love of God", as in *The Treasury of Catholic Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 189.
22. St. Peter Julian Eymard, "The Testament of Jesus Christ" as in *The Treasury of Catholic Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 573.
23. Sr. Mary T. Clark, R.S.C.J., in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Michael Glazier, pp. 68-69.
24. Fr. Robert Schwartz, *Servant Leaders of the People of God*, Paulist Press, p. 91.
25. Fr. Jean Galot, S.J., *Theology of the Priesthood*, Ignatius Press, p. 144.
26. *The Ascent to the Truth*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., pp. 27-28.
27. "Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests," No. 68, as in *Inside the Vatican*, special supplement, November, 1994, p.25.

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