

shepherds of Christ⁺

A SPIRITUALITY NEWSLETTER FOR PRIESTS



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Chief Shepherd of the Flock

Incarnational Perspectives

"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 Son of God became man for our salvation. Yes, He became incarnate. He took to Himself a real human nature. Because Jesus possessed a real human nature, He could die for us. As the Good Shepherd, He has laid down His life for us, His sheep.

There are many thoughts which come to us when we reflect upon the truth that the Son of God took to Himself a human nature and dwelt among us. Some of these are as follows:

◆ **The Word Was Made Flesh.** St. John puts it very simply in his Gospel: "The Word was made flesh, he lived among us..." (Jn 1:14). Yes, John states it so succinctly, yet these few words contain a wealth of meaning and mystery. We should expect nothing else, since this brief statement of the fourth Gospel points out the central event of all human history. These words sum up God's creative and redemptive activity. They sum up God's process of Self-communication to us. Let us briefly examine some of the implications of the Son of God becoming man.

Adequately to explain the intimacy of the way of redemption which is the Incarnation is beyond the human powers of articulation. Jesus is

Emmanuel—God with us. How tremendously more approachable God is to us because we have Jesus. The more the mind dwells on the meaning of the Incarnation, the more one is stricken with wonder at this unfathomable mystery of love. And yet, for one reason or the other, we are tempted to allow the mystery of the Son becoming man to be a fact we take for granted. Our sense of appreciation becomes dulled, and our feeling of enthusiasm about Jesus becomes so tragically mediocre. If our enthusiasm concerning Jesus is less than it should be, what are the reasons? We are speaking of a deep-rooted penetrating kind of enthusiasm centered in our graced wills. Sometimes this enthusiasm has deep emotional overtones. If properly controlled, this enthusiasm involving the human emotions can be a tremendous asset in one's commitment

to Jesus. But we just do not have it within our power to turn the emotions on whenever we wish. The more fundamental enthusiasm for Jesus which is rooted in the human will can and should always be substantially with us.

◆ **Realizing Jesus' Love for Us.** One reason our commitment to Jesus can lose its ardor is that the realization of how much Jesus loves each of us becomes a kind of peripheral or notional assent. We intellectually assent to the fact that Jesus loves us, but at times such an assent does not have much more effect on our lives than admitting that Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

We are meant to assent with our entire being to the fact that Jesus loves each of us so uniquely, so intimately, so unreservedly. This truth of Jesus' love for us is supposed to transform our lives. It is supposed to so grip our imagination so that we can say in the spirit of St. Paul: "For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any

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created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rm 8:38-39)

Giving ourselves over to Jesus’ love does not remove pain and suffering from life. But, through the prism of Jesus’ love for us, suffering is seen in proper perspective. We see the pain and suffering as being able to lead to something greater, just as it did in Jesus’ life. His suffering led to resurrection. We realize that if we relate to suffering properly, we become persons with a deepened capacity to love God and man - persons sharing more fully in Jesus’ resurrection. With such an attitude, this pain dimension of life can at times become hardly noticeable because we are so taken up with Jesus and His cause.

◆ **The Cause of Christ.** What is this cause? Some two thousand years ago Jesus walked this earth preaching His Father’s message, healing the sick, forgiving sins, extending His kindness and mercy, training the apostles. In all His varied activity, Jesus was accomplishing the redemption. Today, Jesus still walks the earth. He teaches the Father’s truth. He is concerned with the sick and the ignorant. He administers the sacraments. He manifests the Father’s love in many different ways. But, unlike that time of two thousand years ago, Christ Himself is not visible. He is visible only through us, His members. He extends to us the great privilege—and responsibility—of assisting Him in the continuation of His redemptive work. The total Christian community and each individual Christian are, then, certain extensions and continuations of the Incarnation. So close is this union between the Christian and Christ that St. Paul speaks very strikingly that it is more Christ than Paul who now lives: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake.” (Ga 2:19-20)

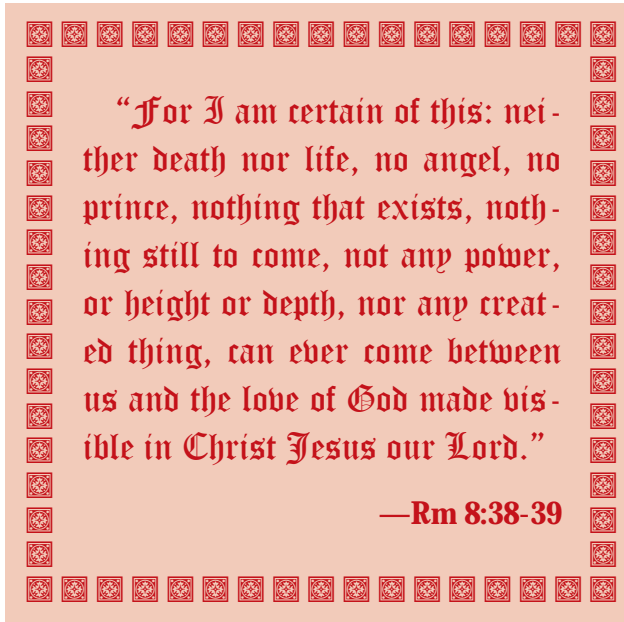
Each of us has the privilege of offering Jesus his or her own unique person, one’s own humanity, one’s own human existence. As with St. Paul we are asked to allow Jesus to live within us. Each Christian has the opportunity to allow Jesus to live through the uniqueness which is this particular Christian. To the extent the Christian does offer himself to Jesus in this manner, to that extent Jesus has a unique opportunity of continuing His

redemptive work. To the extent the Christian holds back and does not allow Jesus to live in oneself, to that degree Jesus loses this unrepeatable opportunity.

◆ **Historical and Cultural Awareness.** If we are to carry forth the salvific mission of Jesus properly, the People of God, individually and collectively, must be aware of the Incarnation’s principle of historical and cultural awareness. Jesus, through His enfleshment, became situated within an historical situation. He lived at a particular stage of history, in a particular geographical locale, amid a particular kind of culture. Jesus respected this historical conditioning. Without compromising His Father’s message, Jesus was

aware of His historical milieu. He lived like a good Jewish man of the time. He talked in language which respected the linguistic idiom and thought patterns of the then existent Jewish culture. He accepted the Jewish people as conditioned by a certain historical and cultural milieu, and dealt with them accordingly.

The members of the Christian community must follow the example of Jesus. In living and proclaiming the Gospel message, the People of God must be aware of the particular historical and cultural milieu in which they find themselves. But, also after the example of Jesus, they must strive for this awareness without com-



The Christian should grieve because all is not well with the temporal order. He or she should be duly disturbed that there is so much violence, murder, social injustice, lust for power, drug peddling, pursuit of hedonism, increasing Godlessness. These and other evils sadly mar the name and image of Jesus which He imprinted upon the universe through His life, death, and resurrection. The Christian should grieve because the face of Christ is thus so often covered by the sinful dust of the market place.

But the market place, the temporal order, is not all evil. Far from it. It is basically good with the creative goodness of God. It’s basic goodness and beauty have been deepened by the grandeur of Jesus’ redemptive effort. There is so

much good in so many human hearts. This goodness manifests itself in countless ways. There are so many ways that many allow us to see their love for neighbor. There are those who selflessly give of themselves for the good of others in the field of medicine and nursing, in the political arena, in education, in science and technology, in laboring for justice for the consumer, in striving for pollution control. The list only be extended indefinitely. Some of these services of so many for the good of neighbor command national attention. Many, many more services are so hidden, hardly noticed.

Each Christian, grieving at the world's evil, but rejoicing in its goodness and potential for greater good, must be inspired to action. He or she should deeply love the world because it belongs to Christ. He or she should deeply love the people who cover the face of this world, because they too belong to Christ. His blood has touched them and redeemed them. The love of the Christian for others must be an operative, an efficacious love. It must be willing to do, to accomplish, and, in rare cases, to die. Whatever one's state of life, be it activist or cloistered contemplative, this is the privilege and the responsibility of the Christian. He or she cannot be committed to Jesus in love without concomitantly being dedicated to the human family and the temporal order. Through the Incarnation, all this is interlinked.

If the Christian is to promote the good of the temporal order, one must be free in regards to it. One must be free, even to the extent that he or she is willing to renounce certain temporal values, good in themselves, for the service of others. The one who really loves the world is the person who is willing to forego its use at times. To love the world and to love the things of the world are not always one and the same. A person can love the things of the world- selfishly - and consequently, not love the world in itself. This selfishness is an obstacle to helping the temporal order to progress as it should.

◆ **The Human Condition.** As we continue a survey of some of the truths or perspectives connected with the Incarnation, we notice that Jesus has taught us that redemption occurs within the human condition. The Father could have redeemed us in a number of ways. He chose that setting which was the Incarnation of His Son. Jesus saved us by being fully man, a man who exercised His manhood perfectly in the self-libation which was His. Although His mission led Him to give up certain human values, He saved us through real human acts. He saved us by loving Mary and Joseph, by eating with friends, by teaching, by loving the little children, by thrilling to the beauty of nature, by bearing properly insult and abuse, and, of course, by dying and rising. Summarily, Jesus saved us by living that kind of human life which was in harmony with His Father's will.

Jesus did not rebel because He found the human condition less than perfect. He had come to change things, to give a new release to the goodness of man. He was a revolutionary in the best sense. His effort was to turn things around, to reorientate the human race toward God. But Jesus was by no means always the recipient of the goodness He had come to preach. Although He taught that one should love his or her neighbor, He himself was not always loved. He suffered, and He suffered mightily, because of the mean streak, the sinful streak in others. He Who had done nothing wrong, Who had showed His love for others in so many different ways, this man was the one they beat, insulted, scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cross.

Jesus redeemed us within the human condition. We receive His redemption, and help channel it to others, within that same human condition. We are redeemed by living the authentically human in the way indicated by the Father's will. Although we are led by that will to renounce various human values at various times in various ways, we are saved by living a human existence, or we are not saved at all. We have often heard that grace does not destroy nature. But, perhaps, we do not too often penetrate the depths of this theological truth. Perhaps we do not very often have a firm realization that grace elevates nature, gives it a deepened capacity for fulfillment, and that grace needs nature. Grace must work through nature if it is to save. Consequently, we are not saved and sanctified by becoming less human. We are saved and sanctified by being very human—by allowing grace to perfect the various dimensions of our human nature. Grace inspires us to the fullest exercise of our humanity. Grace inspires to a Spirit-directed way of living, of eating and drinking, of working and playing, of enjoying sense pleasure, of experiencing joy and suffering.

Participation in the human condition, then, offers us a marvelous opportunity of developing all our human capacities in the work of ongoing redemption. Yet the human condition is not by any means a completely pleasant situation. As Jesus before us suffered because of the human condition, so also must we. The human condition can be the occasion of suffering in so many different ways. For instance, a person can suffer because others treat him or her unjustly. One can suffer also precisely because someone loves him or her and he or she loves in return. This love makes one vulnerable to pain, not because the other intends it, but merely because to love within the human condition means a certain amount of inevitable suffering. We suffer also because we are to a certain extent pilgrims in exile. We have not yet arrived at our final destiny, a destiny which will be achieved only in eternity. Because we are still on the way, we are not yet completely alive, completely fulfilled. And because all this is so, we suffer, and sometimes deeply so. But, again looking to Jesus, we must learn how to encounter suffering properly. He encountered the human condition perfectly, whether it meant great joy or deep anguish. The Spirit asks us to live by the same attitude.

◆ **Bodily Values.** Another perspective very close to the heart of the Incarnation is the concept of bodily values. The connection is obvious. The Son of God assumed a human nature with its bodily dimensions. He has given a great new dignity to the human body. Any attitude which deprecates the body is consequently totally un-Christian. There have been numerous such attitudes which have influenced Christian thought and practice, unofficially, of course. There have been Manichaeism, Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, and Jansenism, to name some. Each of these has in one manner or other failed to see the beauty, dignity, and purpose of the human body.

The body, despite its basic goodness and grandeur, still has sinful tendencies, tendencies toward laziness, lust, unbridled pursuit of all kinds of sense pleasure. If the body is to achieve its purpose, it must obviously be properly disciplined. The one who loves his body the most is, quite obviously, not the one who gives to it all its desires. He or she is the one who takes the necessary means, however painful, to ensure that the body serves its wonderful and God-given purpose.

◆ **Incarnationalism and Transcendence.** In a quick survey of some of the important truths consequent upon the Son of God becoming man, certainly one to be mentioned is the fact that Incarnationalism leads to transcendence - to that which is invisible, to that which is above material limitation. At the offertory of the Mass, as the priest adds a drop of water to the wine to be offered, he says: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." The Son has come to draw us to God - to the ultimate Transcendent Reality.

Even though we would not have been given a supernatural destiny, we would have had a thrust toward the transcendent. Our graced nature has an even greater thrust toward transcendence. The ultimate Transcendent is God, and, as St. Augustine said long ago, our hearts will not rest until they rest in God.

Christ, in His human nature, points to that which is beyond His humanity and everything else created. Christ ultimately points to God alone. Through His enfleshment, the Son was marvelously immanent in this world. But this very immanence of God pointed to the otherness, the transcendence of God. Jesus taught us that there is something beyond the material, something beyond marriage, and riches, and culture, something beyond all earthly values.

Jesus told us to relate to these values in so far as they lead to God. He told us to renounce them in so far as this would be more conducive to union with God. Jesus told us something which we all have experienced - the created in itself cannot radically satisfy us. Only God can, and the created takes an ultimate meaning, and renders authentic satisfaction, only when it leads us to God. The Son became man to lead us to transcendence—indeed, to ultimate Transcendence, God Himself.

Scriptural Reflections

◆ **Life and Death.** "When this perishable nature has put on imperishability, and when this mortal nature has put on immortality, then the words of scripture will come true: Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor 15: 54-55)

Death is a certainty. It cannot be wished away. It cannot be avoided by pretending it is an event overtaking all people but oneself. It is a sign of maturity, then, that a Christian fully and meaningfully accepts the reality of his or her own death, and lives with this realization holding proper perspective in one's consciousness.

God does not intend that a morbid fear of death poison the beauty of our days. He does not intend that the thought of death diminish our enthusiasm to be and to accomplish. He does not intend that the prospect of death become an obstacle to our fulfilling our potential here below. God rather intends that we see the profound union which is meant to harmonize the reality of life with the reality of death.

If we have the proper attitude toward life, we will have the proper attitude toward death. If we live the life-event properly, we will be prepared to live the death-event properly. Death is the final event of our earthly sojourn. If we live life generously, we shall be oriented to live death generously. If we have tried lovingly to conform ourselves to God's will throughout the course of life, we will be disposed to accept His will in meeting death.

The attitudes and virtues which comprise a good Christian life are, then, the same attitudes and virtues which will assure a good Christian death. The best preparation for a successful Christian death is a successful Christian life. To live each day as it comes with a deep love of God and neighbor is simultaneously to prepare properly for the inevitable event of dying. To live each day according to God's designs is to enable one to say, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?"

◆ **Idols Which Should Not Be.**

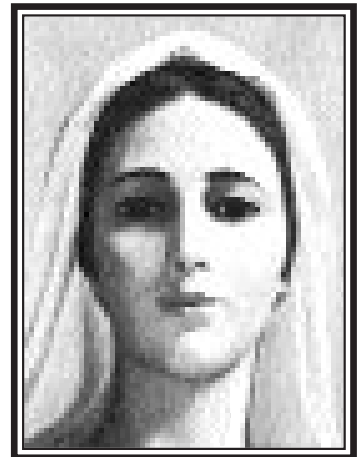
"When Israel was a child I loved him,
and I called my son out of Egypt.
But the more I called to them, the further they went from me;
they have offered sacrifice to the Baals
and set their offerings smoking before the idols.
I myself taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in my arms;
yet they have not understood that I was the one looking after them.
I led them with reins of kindness,
with leading-strings of love." (Hos 11:1-4)

God loves us tenderly, mightily. He watches us grow, guiding our steps with a loving concern so deep that we can never fully fathom it. He constantly showers us with his varied gifts, all signs of His love. Reflecting upon how much God loves us and how tenderly He cares for us, we wonder how we could ever wander very far from His loving truth. But we know there are numerous idols which can usurp His place in our lives if we fail to resist their specious attractiveness.

Selfishness, greed, pride, laziness, gluttony, manipulation of others for personal gain, a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, abuse of power and authority—these are some of the idols we can focus on rather than God Himself. It is amazing that the false glitter of such idols, which but thinly covers layers of ugliness, can tempt us to reject in varying degrees the loveliness of our God, our God who, infinite in all perfections, has consistently and overwhelmingly, and so mercifully, shown how much He loves us.

Pursuing false idols will eventually leave us feeling empty, frustrated, disgusted. How would it be otherwise? For to pursue false idols in the place of God is to expect fulfillment and happiness from that which lacks the capability to satisfy the human nature God has created. God makes us for Himself. He alone can fulfill the fundamental longing we have for complete happiness. He made our hearts to seek Him, and in Him alone do they find the love, the peace, and the security they so deeply desire.

◆ **The Way We Talk.** Jesus tells us: "Make a tree sound and its fruit will be sound; make a tree rotten and its fruit will be rotten. For the tree can be told by



its fruit. Brood of vipers, how can your speech be good when you are evil? For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart. A good man draws good things from his store of goodness; a bad man draws bad things from his store of badness. So I tell you this, that for every unfounded word men utter they will answer on Judgment day, since it is by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words condemned." (Mt 12:33-37)

The above scriptural passage tells us that the faculty of speech is indeed a mighty one. It can accomplish much good. It can produce much that is evil. Consequently, to use speech in a Christlike manner is a sign that grace has taken deep hold of a person. On the other hand, a noticeably un-Christlike mode of speech is a sign that the way of Christ has not yet deeply penetrated the heart.

Our speech is laden with numerous and varied possibilities for good. There is the sympathetic word. Words which convey a sense of "I understand and I care", can be a soothing balm to the troubled heart. As insignificant as such words may seem at times to the one offering sympathy and understanding, to the recipient they can be one of the most precious gifts possible. Especially is this true at moments of deep anguish. Only one who has been spoken to with sincere sympathy at such a time can fully appreciate the healing power of the kind and understanding word.

We should also highly value our words of affirmation and encouragement. These can contribute significantly to the development of a person's potential. One person needs more affirmation and encouragement than another, but we all need some. Actually, we can be overcome with awe as we reflect on the powerful role words of affirmation can assume in helping a person to be and to become. To help a person to be and to become what God destines him or her to be—what a privilege this is—and yet we have numerous, even daily opportunities to be such a catalyst. The right word at the proper time can help change the orientation of a person's life. On a more moderate scale, words of affirmation can be a sustaining force in a person's quest for continuing growth.

We have discussed a few ways in which our words can be a very positive force. However, the faculty of speech which can be a source of constructive good, can also be the source of destructive evil. There is the uncalled-for word which is so unkindly cutting. Always uncharitable, it is especially so when it tends to crush the already bruised reed—the heart already burdened with paralyzing sadness, or discouragement, or grief.

There is also the unjust word which can so suddenly and so decisively ruin a reputation. There is the word which spreads unjust criticism concerning a person who perhaps is performing marvelously in an almost impossible situation. There can also be the word which needlessly divides people. The different forms of community we must often build rather slowly, and with much effort, pain and selflessness. Then comes the divisive word which need not be.

We can so often be tempted to look for the more grandiose opportunities to promote the cause of Christ. Such times, however, occur for most of us only at rather rare intervals. It is the more ordinary setting for accomplishing good that is usually ours. But the ordinariness of our opportunities does not detract from their inherent greatness. One of those ordinary possibilities for good, one which is constantly present, is the proper use of our God-given power of speech.

♦ **To Pay the Price.** "All the runners at the stadium are trying to win, but only one of them gets the prize. You must run in the same way, meaning to win. All the fighters at the games go into strict training; they do this just to win a wreath that will wither away, but we do it for a wreath that will never wither. That is how I run, intent on winning; that is how I fight, not beating the air. I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for, having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified." (1 Cor 9:24-27)

Long hours of practice, the physical weariness, the mental pressure of competitiveness, the at-least-occasional sting of defeat, the discipline of regular hours and diet—these are some of the factors involved in the striving for athletic success. Some never do succeed; they never make the team. Some achieve only moderate success. A few achieve top glory. However, there are always numberless individuals who keep trying. Win or lose, the price must be paid even to have the chance at victory and success. The athlete knows unequivocally that to achieve a cherished goal one must be willing to extend the necessary effort—one must be willing to pay the price.

Obviously, it is not only the athlete who must pay the price for achievement. Any worthwhile human endeavor demands effort and a type of discipline commensurate with the envisioned goal.

The medical student, for example, must endure long years of demanding and competitive study. His or her friends, engaged in less demanding academic programs, have many more leisure hours for social events and other interests. The medical student is tempted at times to wonder if the demanded price is not too great, as one watches one's peers travel considerably easier paths. The overriding desire to be a doctor, however, is etched deep within the spirit. It resides there constantly, sometimes as a quiet glow, sometimes as a burning flame, always, however, as a persistent force thrusting the young man or woman onward toward a medical career.

Our goal as followers of Jesus is to be committed Christians. If we are committed Christians, Jesus is the center of our existence. Jesus sums up all for us. In Him, and through Him, and with Him, we, as committed Christians, try to relate properly to all reality—to God, our fellow human beings, the temporal order, and all else. In order to be committed Christians, however, we have to be willing to pay the price—just as the athlete and the medical student.

Sometimes, as we so well know from our past experience, we aren't willing to pay the price. We turn a deaf ear to the voice of Jesus, which quietly but persistently calls us to higher things, to a more mature living of the Christian life. Sometimes we refuse Him because of fear, sometimes because of laziness, sometimes because we simply don't take the time to listen. There are other reasons too, but whatever the cause, we are poorer because of our refusal. In the moments of honesty we admit this to ourselves. We know that to refuse Jesus is to refuse growth. It is to refuse more vital living. It is to refuse greater happiness. It is to refuse a greater capacity to love our neighbor. It is to refuse a greater love-union with Jesus himself.

See *Scriptural Reflections*, page 6



Scriptural Reflections, continued from page 5

At other times, we respond to the voice of Jesus. Whatever the inconvenience involved, we are not deaf to His whisperings. Whatever the pain involved, we tell ourselves that He suffered much, much more for us. Whatever the fear involved, we are thoroughly convinced that Jesus will never fail us. We are open to the way He is leading. We pay the price—and how happy we are that we do. Jesus draws us closer to Himself. We feel more intimately the warmth and security of His loving touch. In these moments we wonder how and why we ever refuse His voice. We wonder how and why we ever refuse to pay the price.

The Priest and the Universal Church

The *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* tells us: “The command of the Lord: go to all the nations (Mt 28:18-20) definitively expresses the place of the priest in front of the Church. Sent—missus—by the Father by means of Christ, the priest pertains ‘in an immediate’ way to the universal Church, which has the mission to announce the Good news unto the ‘ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

“The spiritual gift received by priests in Ordination prepares them for a wide and universal mission of salvation. In fact, through Orders and the ministry received, all priests are associated with the Episcopal Body and, in hierarchical communion with it, according to their vocation and grace, they serve the good of the entire Church. Therefore, the membership to a particular church, through incardination, must not enclose the priest in a restricted and particularistic mentality, but rather should open him to the service of other churches, because each church is the particular realization of the only Church of Jesus Christ, such that the universal Church lives and fulfills her mission in and from the particular churches in effective communion with her. Thus, all the priests, must have a missionary heart and mind and be open to the needs of the Church and the world.”²

The Priest and the Eucharist

The *Directory* now speaks to us concerning the priest and his relationship with the Eucharist:

“If the services of the Word is the foundational element of the priestly ministry, the heart and the

vital center of it is constituted, without a doubt, in the Eucharist, which is, above all, the real presence in time of the unique and eternal sacrifice of Christ.

“The sacramental memorial of the death and Resurrection of Christ, the true and efficacious representation of the singular redemptive Sacrifice, source and apex of Christian life in the whole of evangelization, the Eucharist is the beginning, means, and end of the priestly ministry, since ‘all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it.’ Consecrated in order to perpetuate the Holy Sacrifice, the priest thus manifests, in the most evident manner, his identity.

“There exists, in fact, an intimate rapport between the centrality of the Eucharist, pastoral charity, and the unity of life of the priest, who finds in this rapport the decisive indications for the way to the holiness to which he has been specifically called.

“If the priest lends to Christ, Most Eternal High Priest, his intelligence, will, voice and hands so as to offer, through his very ministry, the sacramental sacrifice of redemption to the Father, he should make his own the dispositions of the Master and, like him, live those gifts for his brothers in faith. He must therefore learn to unite himself intimately to the offering, placing his entire life upon the altar of sacrifice as a revealing sign of the gratuitous and anticipatory love of God.”³

The Heart of Christ, the Heart of Mary

Pope John Paul II speaks to us movingly concerning the Heart of Christ: “The Heart of the Redeemer enlivens the whole Church and draws men who have opened their hearts ‘to the inscrutable wealth’ of this unique Heart...”

“I desire in a special way to join spiritually with all those who inspire their human hearts from this Divine Heart. It is a numerous family. Not a few congregations, associations and communities live and develop in the Church, taking their vital energy in a programmed way

from the Heart of Christ. This spiritual bond always leads to a great reawakening of apostolic zeal. Adorers of the Divine Heart become people with sensitive consciences. And when it is given to them to have a relationship with the Heart of our Lord and Master, then need also reawakens in them to do reparation for the sins of the world, for the indifference of so many hearts, for their negligence.

“How necessary these ranks of vigilant hearts are in the Church, so that the love of the Divine Heart shall not remain isolated and without response! In these ranks, special mention deserves to be made of all those who offer up their sufferings as living victims in union with the Heart of Christ pierced on the cross. Transformed in that way by love, human suffering becomes a particular leaven of Christ’s saving work in the Church...”

“The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us, above all, of those moments when this Heart was ‘pierced by the lance,’ and, thereby, opened in a visible manner to man and the world. By reciting the litany and venerating the Divine Heart in general, we learn the mystery of the Redemption in all its divine and human profundity.”

And the Pope also speaks to us about the heart of Mary: “The Immaculate Heart of Mary was open to the word, ‘Woman, there is your son.’ It went to meet spiritually the Heart of the Son opened by the soldier’s lance. The heart of Mary was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ

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

loved man and the world, offering up himself on the cross, even to that lance stroke from the soldier.

“Consecrating the world to the Immaculate heart of Mary means approaching the same Source of Life, through the Mother’s Intercession, that life which flowed forth from Golgatha, the source which gushes out ceaselessly with redemption and grace. Reparation for the sins of the world is continually being accomplished in it. It is ceaselessly the font of new life and holiness.

“Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning under the Cross of the Son. More: it means consecration of this world to the pierced Heart of the Savior, by bringing the world back to the very source of its Redemption. Redemption is always greater than man’s sin and ‘the sin of the world.’ The power of Redemption infinitely surpasses the whole range of evil in man and in the world.

“The Heart of the Mother is aware of it, more than anyone in the whole cosmos, visible and invisible. This is why she calls. She does not call only to conversion; she also calls upon us to let ourselves be helped by her, the Mother, to return to the source of the Redemption.”⁴

Thoughts on Prayer

◆ Archbishop Joseph M. Raya of the Byzantine rite, speaks to us about prayer: “The Fathers can tell us how to fast and abstain, or how to recite and sing psalms. They can give some guidelines to the soul reaching out to touch the Lord. But they know that prayer is essentially an experience of a person-to-person relationship, a realization where mere information becomes life, where the soul reaches out to touch a deeper life. They know that it is ultimately God, and God alone, who teaches one how to pray. The cry of the apostles - ‘Lord, teach us how to pray’—is not the expression of a desire for a new method. Rather, it is man’s basic longing for a personal relationship and encounter with God.”⁵

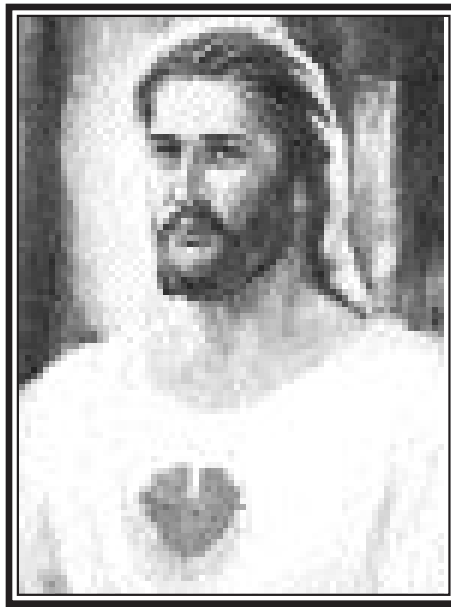
◆ A well-known spiritual writer of our times, Don Humbert van Zeller, reminds us that prayer is meant to unite us, not only with God, but also with each other: “Not only is there a law in our members which wars against the spirit and tempts to sin, but there is a law too which appears to be on the side of the spirit but which in fact wars against it. This is the law in us which tempts to personal autonomy. Pleading detachment from human affection and the avoidance of distraction, this spurious law is the enemy of the one thing, namely individual wholeness, which it claims to be preserving. We are whole only when we are one with everyone else. This unity of outlook has to be universal in application, because by being selective it fails in an essential quality.

“Christ died for all, and not merely for an elect percentage...”

“So we must be on our guard against the temptation which disguises itself as a grace: the instinct which shrinks from closeness to our fellow human beings. Psychologists have one name for it, theologians another. By refusing to break down the barriers and by clinging to our independence, we are not only being proud and uncharitable, but are also defying the law of our nature—and a good law this time, not the kind of fallen law which tempts. Whatever the call to contemplation, it can never be the call...to contract out from mankind and live on a lonely peak.

“Somehow an exchange must be assured which means more than mutual toleration. It means welcome, consideration, the crossing over from self to another self. This is why Christianity, the law of love, alone brings completeness...”⁶

◆ A modern master of prayer, Thomas Merton, tells us: “In the ‘prayer of the heart’ we seek first of all the deepest ground of our identity in God. We do not reason about dogmas or faith or ‘the mysteries’. We seek rather to gain a direct existential grasp, a personal experience of the deepest truths of life and faith, finding ourselves in God’s truth. Inner certainty depends on purification. The dark night rectifies our deepest intentions. In the silence of this ‘night of faith’ we return to simplicity and sincerity of heart. We learn recollection which consists in listening for God’s will, in direct and simple attention to reality. Recollection is awareness of the unconditional. Prayer then means yearning for the simple presence of God, for a personal understanding of his word, for knowledge of his will and for capacity to hear and obey him.”⁷



The Hidden Pain

There formerly was a popular song that talked about smiling on the outside, crying on the inside. The song touched upon a very real human experience. During the journey of life all of us come to turns in the road where heartache awaits us. It is impossible, given the human condition, to avoid all such turns. There are no detours available. For the most part, we have to bear the pain within the confines of our inner selves. There may be another, or a few others, who know about the pain. It can help some to talk to them about the suffering. But this by no means takes away all the pain. The greater part of the suffering remains there, lodged firmly in the center of the heart. And we wonder if it will ever leave. Obviously, we have to go on living, but the heaviness of the days caused by the heaviness of the heart, makes us feel as if we have lived, oh, such a long time, since the heartache began. We try to put up a cheerful front, and with God’s help we even surprise ourselves at the degree of success we achieve with this smiling on the outside. But the few who know us well, and who may know of the pain, realize the price we are paying to appear the way we do.

During times of hidden pain, there is present a unique opportunity for spiritual growth. We have to ask Jesus to allow us to see the pain in proper perspective. We have to ask Him to help us grow through the experience—grow into persons who increasingly project Christ to the world. We have to be aware that Jesus is with us in His tender and consoling love, this love which soothes the hidden pain within, this love which allows us to be in basic peace.



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MAY/JUNE 1997 ISSUE

shepherds of Christ

Shepherds of Christ Ministries
P.O. Box 193
Morrow, Ohio 45152-0193

**Non-Profit
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U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Cincinnati, OH
Permit 4251

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. 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, telephone toll free 1-888-211-3041, fax 513-932-6791.

The Trinity in Our Lives

St. Athanasius tells us: "Even the gifts that the Spirit dispenses to individuals are given by the Father through the Word. . . and so the graces given by the Son in the Spirit are true gifts of the Father. Similarly, when the Spirit dwells in us, the Word who bestows the Spirit is in us too, and the Father is present in the Word."⁸

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 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.

*Immaculate
Heart
of Mary,
Pray for us.*

NOTES:

1. Scriptural quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co.
2. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, as in special supplement, *Inside the Vatican*, No. 15.
3. *Ibid.*, No. 48.
4. Pope John Paul II. *Prayers and Devotions*, edited by Bishop Peter Canuis Johannes Van Lierde, Viking, pp. 449-451.
5. Archbishop John M. Raya, *The Face of God: An Introduction to Eastern Spirituality*, God With Us Publications, p. 199.
6. Don Hubert van Zeller, *More Ideas for Prayer*, Templegate, pp. 119-120.
7. Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, Doubleday Image Book, p. 67.
8. St. Athanasius, as in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., Vol. III, pp. 584-585.