

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 13 January, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Welcome back.

Hope the Break was a good one for all of you and that you got the chance to get some much-needed R&R.

I saw this prayer and liked it...so I thought I'd share it with you.

It was written by the Franciscan priest Fr. Mychal Judge, who died in the World Trade Center while giving Last Rites to a victim. Fr. Judge was Chaplain to the FDNY, and the firemen call it "Mychal's Prayer".

It goes like this:

Lord, take me where you want me to go.  
Let me meet who you want me to meet.  
Tell me what you want me to say, and  
Keep me out of your way.

Best wishes for a good Intersession and for a great New Year

## THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

### WINTER RETREAT

Fr. Jerry and I will be offering a

### CADET WINTER RETREAT

over the weekend of 1-2-3 February. It'll be a chance for any cadet to get away for some prayer and also some relaxation. The RETREAT will be held at Presentation Center Retreat House in New Windsor. Donation of \$25. will cover private room, meals, pizzas, etc.

Watch for more information soon through your Company Catholic Rep.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### THE THREE KINGS:

Well, we're about to finish the Christmas Season in the Church calendar (this coming Sunday is the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, and it's the formal end of the Christmas time).

This past Sunday, the Church celebrated the Feast of EPIPHANY, which is also sometimes called the "Feast of the Three Kings".

You know the story from Matthew's Gospel (2:1-12), and this particular story has contributed much to our folklore and imagery of CHRISTMAS.

The only trouble is, if you read the story, you discover that Matthew never mentioned "kings"...nor did he mention the number "three".

All he said was that "magi" (astrologers...we get our word "magic" from "magi") discovered a newly-rising star and journeyed to Jerusalem to find the Messiah. The Jewish scribes directed them to Bethlehem, where they found Jesus and presented him with three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Then they left, and you never hear about them again.

And why is this particular Feast celebrated on or around 6 January (sometimes called "Little Christmas")?

Here's the history:

No one knows exactly why 6 January emerged as the day of this particular Feast, but there's some evidence that in Egypt, the first days of January were kept as a kind of pagan "Winter Festival", commemorating the appearance of "Aion" (god of time and eternity).

The early Egyptian Christians decided to celebrate Christ's birth as a way of attracting attention to their belief in Jesus. Evidence of this can be found as early as the 3rd century.

Eventually, their celebration found its way into Gaul (France) and came up against 25 December...which was already being celebrated as "Christmas" in Rome.

So the Church adopted both Feasts, making 25 December a commemoration of Christ revealing himself to the Jewish people(as personified by the shepherds who came to the manger)...and 6 January a commemoration of Christ revealing himself to non-Jews (the magi).

From that point on, EPIPHANY (the word is Greek, and it means "an appearance" or "a showing") grew in popularity.

A 3rd-century Christian writer - Origen - decided that since there were three gifts, there must have been three magi.

By the 6th century, the belief grew that these guys were actually "kings" (that idea came from a literal interpretation of Psalm 70:10, which reads:

The **KINGS** of Tarshish and the Isles  
shall offer gifts;  
the **KINGS** of Arabia and Seba  
shall bring tribute...)

And by the 8th century, Bede the Venerable (an English Catholic monk-historian) was repeating the legend that the three "kings" had names and specific racial characteristics: Melchior was supposed an old white man with a long white beard, and he bore the gift of **GOLD**; Caspar was a young man of darker coloring, and he brought the **INCENSE**; and Balthasar was a black man, who brought the gift of **MYRRH**.

So these "kings" came to represent the three major races of humanity (according to 8th century interpretation).

And the gifts themselves were given a symbolism too: **GOLD** represented Jesus as a king; **INCENSE** represented Jesus as a divine personage; and **MYRRH** (which was used as a burial spice) represented Jesus as someone who was destined to die.

In 1164, the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa dug up three graves in the Cathedral of Milan - graves which had been venerated as the graves of some early

Christian martyrs - and he moved the remains to the Cathedral at Cologne. Popular belief claimed that these bodies were the bodies of the "Three Kings", and people still make pilgrimages there. If you went there (Cologne) today, you could still see the monument in the Cathedral.

By the High Middle Ages, the Feast of EPIPHANY was being celebrated with much of the same intensity as CHRISTMAS. Gifts were exchanged, and feasting was held.

The Germans had a special cake called "dreikoenigskuchen" (literally, "three kings cooking"), and the French had "les gateaux des rois" ("cakes of the kings"). These were cakes into which a valuable ring was inserted. The one who got the piece of cake containing the ring was "king" for the day and got to keep the ring.

On EPIPHANY, there were plays and dramas at the cathedrals. These plays told the story of the "Three Kings" and became a part of the Mass for the day. They were discontinued when they became too boisterous: the characters playing King Herod went to great lengths to depict the evil king as demented, and there were stories of sanctuary-furniture being broken up and spectators being attacked by these characters. The dramas were later moved outside the main doors of the cathedrals.

So the Feast of EPIPHANY has had a long and colorful history in Catholicism, but essentially, it's supposed to commemorate a sense of "revelation": Christ revealing himself to the Gentiles, with the underlying message that "Christ is not just for a particular group of human beings: Christ is for EVERYONE".

It's basically the message of CHRISTMAS itself.

#### PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the mother of a cadet ('02), who was killed in an automobile accident over Break.

Please remember her and the whole family.

...the father of a cadet ('04), who died yesterday. Please remember him and the family.

...all our military brothers and sisters and their families throughout the world, especially those who have recently lost their lives.

#### GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, what is Purgatory and why do we need it? A Protestant friend of mine asked me about it, and this is what I told him: Purgatory is the place you go to complete all of your unfinished business in this mortal life. If you have God in your life but have not reached the level of spiritual maturity in your life required for heaven, you go to Purgatory until you're ready to enter the gates of heaven. But if Jesus died for our sins, why do we still need Purgatory? Shouldn't that have taken care of all of our unfinished business?

A: Good question.

And your answer was good, too.

But let me expand a bit on it.

Yes, we believe that Jesus died for our sins and reconciled the universe. St. Paul said it pretty directly:

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself...

2 Corinthians 5:19.

But Paul also said:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...

Philippians 2:12.

So Paul seemed to be saying that "Yes, Jesus reconciled the world to God...but each person who comes to faith also has a part to play in the process".

In another place, he said:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and  
in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the sufferings  
of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church...

Colossians 1:24.

In understanding this, Catholic theology has always made a distinction between REDEMPTION and SALVATION.

REDEMPTION is what Jesus did once and for all.

SALVATION is how each of us accepts the REDEMPTION that Christ offers.

We don't believe that human beings are merely passive recipients.

We believe that each human being has an active part to play in the process. To make Christ our personal Savior means that we have to cooperate with God to change our lives.

Again, to quote St. Paul:

You were taught to put away your former way of life,  
your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be  
renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves  
with the new self, created according to the likeness of God  
in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24.

So for us Catholics, SALVATION is a process that takes a lifetime, a lifetime of accepting the grace of God and making it a part of our lives, allowing that grace to eradicate sin and its effects from our wounded human nature.

The goal is FULL DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE IN CHRIST.

So where does "Purgatory" fit in?

Well, the word "Purgatory" means "purification"...so it fits in at every stage of life.

If we try to live the life of Christ each day, then we are already undergoing the process of "purification"...and if, at the end of our mortal life, that process is not complete, then we believe that it continues after death until we are completely cleansed not only of guilt but also of the sinful tendencies which inhabit our human nature..

And this is what "Purgatory" is. It's not a "place"; it's a "condition of being".

It's "God's cleansing process".

The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" puts it this way:

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still  
imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal  
salvation; but after death, they undergo purification,  
so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

#1030

And that's our belief.

It's been a source of friction between Catholics and Protestants over the years for a number of reasons. Protestants see it as somehow lessening the role of Jesus as Redeemer, but we don't believe that this is the case. For us, Jesus is the Redeemer and the source of life; we humans accept him into our lives and thus begin the life-long process of eradicating sin and its effects in our lives...but only with the grace provided by God through Jesus.

And some would say that a belief in Purgatory puts more emphasis on our "works" than on our "faith"...but that's not true either. After all, God is the one doing the "purifying"; all we humans do is cooperate with God's grace.

Others would see "Purgatory" as a "second chance" that helps people to avoid making a decisive choice for Jesus in this life...but that's not true either. Purgatory is the continuation after death of a process that's already begun in this life. It's not a "sudden reversal" after death.

And finally, many would object to the belief because it's not explicitly mentioned in Scripture...and that's true enough. It's not.

But we believe that there are places in the Scripture where the possibility of a "purification after death" is implied. For example, Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians, speaking about "the Day (of Judgement)":

The work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

Paul is not speaking about Purgatory as such here, but Catholic tradition has always interpreted the passage as implying the possibility of purification after death.

So that's the big picture of our belief about Purgatory.

And the bottom line is simply this: for Catholics, Purgatory is an expression of God's mercy and love for us; it's a process of healing by God that applies the REDEMPTION of Christ to every human being who opens himself or herself up to the saving power of grace.

## THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

### THE CROSS:

The figure of the CROSS has become the main symbol of Christian belief, and it has a long and colorful history.

The earliest Christians avoided using the symbol because it was distasteful to them as a symbol of execution (it would be like us using the electric chair as a symbol of belief), and during the Roman persecutions (AD 66 to 313, off and on), it was dangerous for them to openly use any recognizable symbol anyway.

But often, they would disguise the symbolism: sometimes, they would use an anchor (which, in Church art, eventually became a symbol of HOPE), and sometimes, they would use combinations of Greek letters for the name "Jesus" or the title "Christ". For example,

you would often see the two letters "chi" (X) and "rho" (P) intertwined; these were the first two letters in the Greek word for "Christ".

After Constantine made Christianity legal in AD 313, the CROSS was used publicly, and it was often made of precious jewels to symbolize Jesus' triumphant resurrection from death. This was called the "crux gemmata" in Latin ("the jeweled cross"), and it reflected the belief that what once had been a symbol of shame had become a sign of victory and triumph.

Later in Church history (the so-called "Dark Ages"), theology began to emphasize the sacrifice of Christ rather than the symbol itself, and Christian art began to depict the body of Jesus on the CROSS. By the year 692, the Council of Constantinople ordered the use of crucifixes instead of ornamental CROSSES. At first, Jesus was not depicted as suffering but as standing upright, arms outstretched, dressed in imperial robes. The large crucifix hanging from the ceiling at Most Holy Trinity Chapel preserves this image.

As the year 1000 approached, people began to prefer "realism" in the depiction of Christ, and the figure of "Jesus Suffering" became widespread. Artistically, there were two types of this approach: the "Agonized Christ" (where the depiction often reached the extremes of agony and suffering) and the "Tranquil Christ" (where Jesus is shown in death, tranquil and at peace).

The Protestant Reformation (1500s) represented a new type of interpretation, as the Reformers tried to purge the Church of any "Catholic" influence for various reasons: some saw the use of any "images" as offensive to their interpretation of religious faith; others didn't believe that Christ's sacrifice could be adequately depicted. And from this time on, the plain CROSS was associated with Protestants, while the CROSS with the body of Jesus was thought of as specifically "Catholic".

However, this is not totally correct.

Roman Catholic art is not the only religious art that depicts the body of Jesus on the CROSS. The Orthodox tradition does it, and so do the Episcopalian and Lutheran traditions.

However, it is true to say that the strictly Protestant tradition has tended not to use the image of Jesus' body on the CROSS, while the Catholic tradition has preserved the older custom.

People who are interested in "division" have focused on the difference, but for me, both customs proclaim the same faith in Christ's death and resurrection.

#### UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"You cannot play with the animal in you  
without becoming wholly animal,  
play with falsehood  
without forfeiting your right to truth,  
play with cruelty  
without losing your sensitivity of mind.  
He who wants to keep his garden tidy  
doesn't reserve a plot for weeds."

Dag Hammarskjöld

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Hope Intersession is going well for everyone.  
Remember that you're always in our prayers.

Woodie