

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 17 February, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Impending "Three-Day Weekends" are nice, but to be honest, I need "Spring Break".

Can't quite put my finger on why, but the need is there, and it's definite.

Of course, it's over a month away.

Rats!!

Oh well, guess I should return my wandering mind to the present and stop wishing my life away.

Guess I should listen to my own preaching and understand that more than a Spring Break (which is temporary), I need strength in the heart and the kind of daily comfort that only God can provide, especially since we're in the Season of Lent.

So I turn to God:

Patient God,

this day teeters on the edge of waiting,

and things seem to slip away from me -

as though everything were only memory,

and memory is capricious.

Help me not let my life slip away from me.

O God, I hold up my life to You now,

as much as I can,

as high as I can

in this mysterious reach called "prayer".

Come close, lest I wobble and fall short.

It is not days or years I seek from You,

not infinity or enormity...

but small things and moments and awareness,

awareness that You are in what I am

and in what I have been indifferent to.

It is not new time,

but new eyes and new heart I seek...

and You.

May God keep all of you safe over the long weekend.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

NO WH5300 MASS

Because of the holiday weekend, there will be NO 1715 in WH5300 on Sunday afternoon.

NO 0630 MASS ON MONDAY

Because of the holiday weekend, there will be NO 0630 Mass on Monday morning in the Chaplain's Office.

DAILY MASS

Mass is offered daily (except Saturdays and holidays) in the Catholic Chaplain's Office at 0630.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Every Friday of LENT at 1800, there will be the STATIONS OF THE CROSS at the Chapel. The ceremony will be followed each week by a simple supper of soup to keep the spirit of FASTING.

LENTEN LECTURE SERIES

Every Tuesday evening of LENT at 1900 at the Chapel, there will be a Lecture Series, given by Fr. Don Timone of Mt. St. Mary's College. Everyone is welcome.

LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE

As a sign of seriousness, Catholics are asked to FAST during LENT and to abstain from meat at certain times.

FASTING means "one full meal and two small ones", at a minimum.

ABSTINENCE means "no meat or poultry".

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of both FASTING and ABSTINENCE.

Every Friday of LENT is a day of ABSTINENCE (in memory of the Lord's passion and death).

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

The NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST for West Point will be held at the West Point Club on Friday, 22 February, at 0600. Donation is \$5.00, and you must have a ticket. Tickets are available in the Chaplain's Office.

DID YOU KNOW?

VALENTINE'S DAY:

14 February is VALENTINE'S DAY every year.

And yet-again, Catholic religious tradition has become a concrete part of popular Western culture. It's amazing how we Catholics get around.

And yet-again, we have that long-standing, always au-courant, lively and therapeutic festival that celebrates the only thing in life that makes sense without making any sense: HUMAN LOVE.

There were at least two VALENTINES in the Church history, and they both gave up their lives for the Faith.

The one celebrated on 14 February every year was probably a priest and was killed on 14 February, AD 270, during a persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Claudius II. In Rome, a basilica was dedicated to his memory in AD 350, and it wasn't too long before his "death-day" was associated with men and women exchanging a promise of love.

This was done in different ways over the centuries, but the custom of exchanging "valentines", gifts and other expressions of love and affection soon evolved.

The legend says that VALENTINE was in jail, awaiting execution for his Faith, and he sneaked a note to the daughter of the jailer, signing it with the words "from your Valentine".

Another legend says that he cured the jailer's daughter of blindness, and another set of stories describes him as the friend of children, who tossed notes of affection into his cell.

Non-Christian legends claim that the custom comes from the "Lupercalia" - a Roman pastoral celebration of the pagan god Lupercus ("Pan", in Greek mythology). This celebration came under the patronage of Juno, goddess of marriage, and it was a time on or around 14 February when young Romans chose partners, proposed marriage or became engaged. When the Roman Empire became Christian (according to this version), Valentine replaced Juno as patron of the custom.

Some people claim that in early England, there was the belief that birds chose their mates on this day. Chaucer mentioned this fact, and he also observed that "notes of love" were exchanged on Valentine's Day.

Others hold the belief that this "Valentine" tradition was more or less an accident. They claim that it was accidentally associated with St. Valentine's feast because it always falls at the time of nature's transition to Spring, the season of lovers.

Whatever the background, 14 February is as good a time as any to let those who are special to you know that you love them...

HOPE YOU SENT YOUR MOTHER A VALENTINE!!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the grandmother of a cadet ('03), who is ill.

...the best friend of a cadet ('05), who was killed in an accident earlier this week.

...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world, especially those in areas of risk.

...all our recent casualties in Asia...and their families.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I've been talking lately with a friend about the role of the Pope in the Catholic Church. My friend basically believes that the Catholic Church is a political organization and should not be one...and he also said that the Church should not believe everything the Pope says about how to worship God. It seems to me that these views are Protestant. I guess I was really wondering about the concept of papal infallibility. Could you please address these issues in your next CHURCH STUFF? I would really appreciate it.

A: Your friend seems to be echoing the classic Protestant objections to the idea of the Catholic phenomenon of "Pope". He also broaches an interesting topic in his statement about the Church being a "political" organization, and that's another question altogether. I'll address that separately below.

On the topic of the Pope:

The Pope (whoever it happens to be) is the Bishop of Rome, and as such, he is the successor of St. Peter, who was the first "bishop" of the Roman Christians in the earliest days of the Church.

In the Catholic interpretation of the Scriptures, St. Peter was singled out by Jesus to be the head of the Apostles. There are three main Scriptural stories (and several minor ones) where this seems to be the case.

The first is Matthew 16:17-19, where Jesus says to Peter:

You are Peter, and upon this rock ("petros", in Greek),
I will build my church...

The second is John 21:15-17, where Jesus says to Peter:

Feed my lambs...look after my sheep...

And the third is Luke 22:32, where Jesus says to Peter:

Strengthen your brothers...

There are other passages which indicate that Peter played a foremost role among the Apostles...like the fact that he was the first one to be called by Jesus...and the first one named whenever there's a list of the Twelve Apostles...and the first to witness the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).

And finally, Peter was martyred and buried at Rome.

So the Catholic Church has always looked to the Bishop of Rome - as the spiritual heir of Peter - as the guardian of the Faith and the guarantor of the true interpretation of Christ's message over the centuries.

Writing in or around AD 110, St. Ignatius of Antioch referred to the Church at Rome as "presiding in love", and by AD 180, St. Irenaeus called the Roman Church the church "with the more imposing foundation".

For the first 300 years of the Church's existence in the Roman Empire, the Church was not as "organized" as it is now, but with the end of the persecutions and the legalization of the Church in AD 313, the organizational side of the Church began to develop fairly quickly...and this continued over the centuries.

And in all the development, the role of the Pope became more necessary to the Church. He was the final word in settling disputes AND the concrete expression of unity of all the Catholic communities throughout the world. His responsibility includes

four main areas of Catholic Church life: faith, morals, Church discipline and government.

And it's all because he inherits the responsibility that Jesus placed on Peter in the beginning: "You are the rock"... "look after my sheep"... "strengthen your brothers...".

This is where belief in "infallibility" comes in...and it's a belief that has been poorly understood in history.

First of all, the only one who is totally "immune from error" is God.

Catholics don't say (or they "shouldn't" say) that "the pope IS infallible"...because it gives the wrong impression.

The proper phrasing is that "the pope is empowered with infallibility" when he's acting as the "universal teacher". This means that when he is acting in conjunction with the bishops of the Church in expressing the interpretation of the Faith, he is expressing the TRUTH...because Christ promised to "be with the Church until the end of time"...and we interpret this to mean that the Church, as a CORPORATE BODY, scattered throughout time and space, will never teach or believe anything false about God, Christ, the Spirit and the Kingdom.

This doesn't come from any human power; it comes from the presence of Christ in the Church, working through the Pope and the bishops as guardians of the message.

It doesn't mean that the Pope can't make ordinary mistakes; that would be silly.

But it does mean that when the Pope and the bishops are called on to judge the validity of this or that interpretation of Christ's message, they are preserved from error by the Holy Spirit in drawing their conclusions.

There's a lot more that could be said about the history of the "infallibility" question, but I've given you the basic understanding.

It's not "magic"...nor does it make the Pope into a kind of "superman".

It's simply a basic faith in Jesus' presence in and with the Church...and the responsibility of the Church to reflect the TRUTH to the world.

Now, about your friend's statement that the Pope (and the Catholic Church) are "political" institutions.

I would agree...but not in the way he seems to mean it.

As early as Plato and Aristotle, "politics" is defined as "the art of ensuring harmonious living within the State". Who could argue with this?

And as long as the Church is made up of human beings, there will need to be some type of leadership that relies on "the art of harmonious living"...or, to put it plainly, "politics" (in the best sense of the word).

I would suspect, however, that your friend simply used the word "political" to imply "corruption" and all of the seedy characteristics with which our current "political" system seems to be endued.

As a Church historian, I would agree that there have always been and probably always will be "seedy" sides to any human organization (churches included). I would not agree that this "seedy" side expresses the ideals toward which honest men and women are constantly striving. After all, if there were no sin, there would be no need for churches...so we have to live in an imperfect world with imperfect people.

Which means that "politics" is not automatically a bad thing. It's simply the art of helping a large organization to achieve its mission harmoniously. Any human

group needs "politics", in the best sense, and so does the Church.

This has been very long, but I hope it gives you a sense of the HUGE history of the papacy in the Catholic Church and the IDEALS that are its foundation.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

SABBATH:

It's a word which ultimately means "to rest" ...and of course, it's used to denote the day when God rested after the six days of creation (Genesis 2:1-3). The actual word "Sabbath" didn't appear in the Bible until after the Jewish people had left Egypt (Exodus 16), but the idea remains the same: they rested on every seventh day in imitation of God and in order to worship.

And so it appears in the Ten Commandments, both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your manservant or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and on the seventh day, he rested. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11

The sacred nature of the Sabbath is attested to elsewhere in Exodus:

The seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord.

Exodus 31:15

And Scripture also reveals the Sabbath to be a memorial of Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt:

You shall remember that you were servants in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:15

God entrusted the Sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant:

So shall the Israelites observe the Sabbath, keeping it through their generations as a perpetual covenant.

Exodus 31:16

Finally, humans keep a "sabbath" because in the very first chapters of the Old

Testament, God did it. Everyone - especially the poor - should have the opportunity to be refreshed:

For six days you may do your work,
but on the seventh day, you must rest,
so that your ox and your ass may also
have rest, and that the son of your
maidservant and the alien may be
refreshed.

Exodus 23:12

So, the purpose of the Sabbath among the Jewish people was a combination of respect for the Creator, a remembrance of liberation, a sign of the bond between them and God, and also a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money.

And Jesus kept the Sabbath and respected the holiness of the day, although he often offended the legalists in his audience, who resented his healings on the Sabbath:

If a man can receive circumcision
on the Sabbath...are you angry with me
because I made a whole person well
on the Sabbath?

John 7:23

Jesus understood that

...the Sabbath was made for man,
not man for the Sabbath. That is
why the Son of Man is lord even
of the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27-8

Understanding all this development, the early Christians also understood that their belief was different from the old Jewish observance. One of the early Christian writers put it this way:

Those who lived according to the
OLD order of things have come to
a NEW hope, no longer keeping
the Sabbath, but the Lord's Day,
in which our life is blessed by him
and his death.

St. Ignatius of Antioch
Epistula ad Magnesios 9,1

And another one put it this way:

We gather on the day of the sun,
for it is the first day (after the Jewish
Sabbath, but also the first day) when God,
separating matter from darkness, made
the world; and on this same day,
Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from
the dead.

St. Justin

I Apologia 67

So then, the early Christians changed the day itself and added a new dimension to the significance. They kept the Jewish ideal: respect for the Creator, sense of liberation and covenant as well as a protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money. And they added the immense reality of the resurrection of Jesus to this picture.

And they celebrated it by gathering as a body to celebrate the Resurrection:

You cannot pray at home as at church,
where there is a great multitude, where
exclamations are cried out to God as from
one great heart, and where there is something
more: the union of minds, the accord of
souls, the bond of charity, the prayers
of the priests.

St. John Chrysostom

De incomprehensibile 3,6

With all this tradition, the Catholic interpretation of the old idea of "Sabbath" has emphasized the following:

- a) the need to worship God on Sunday together with fellow-believers (in Catholic tradition, this community of believers is the local parish); Sunday is the foremost holyday of obligation;
- b) in keeping with the tradition of the apostolic Christians, this "worship" always takes the form of Holy Mass;
- c) missing Mass on Sundays for no good reason is regarded as a serious omission from one's spiritual life AND a lessening of the vitality of the spiritual life of the local community (parish);
- d) on Sundays, Catholics are bound to abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy which is proper to the Lord's Day, or the proper relaxation of the body;
- e) the institution of Sunday helps all to be allowed sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social and religious lives;
- f) every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord's Day.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"It is no great thing to be humble
when you are brought low;
but to be humble when you are praised
is a great and rare attainment."

St. Bernard

(d. 1153)

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!!

Have a great LONG WEEKEND,
and be safe.

You're all in my prayers...always.

Woodie