

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 24 February, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

LENT always brings up the question: what can I do to make this a good LENT.

May I suggest that you consider paying some attention to your power of SPEECH.

In the New Testament, St. James says:

Among all the parts of the body,
the tongue is a whole wicked world in itself...
We use it to bless the Lord and Father,
but we also use it to curse people
who are made in God's image.
The blessing and the curse come out of the same mouth.
James 3:6 and 9

Who among us is totally perfect in the use of SPEECH?

No one is.

And that's my point.

Wouldn't it be great if we each could follow the advice of Sirach in the Old Testament:

Never repeat what you are told...
Whether to friend or foe, do not talk about it...
Have you heard something? Let it die with you...
A wise man will keep quiet until the right moment...
The man who talks too much will get himself disliked.
Sirach, portions of Chapters 19 and 20.

So my wish for you is that you have a GREAT Lent!

Better than that, though...may you have a QUIET Lent!

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

DAILY MASS

Mass is offered every weekday (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 STATION OF THE CROSS at the Chapel.
Each week, the Ceremony will be followed by a simple supper of soup to keep the spirit of FASTING.

QUIET PRAYER

Each Wednesday of LENT, the Blessed Sacrament is present in the Chaplain's Office from 1830 to 1930.

Anyone who wants to stop in for quiet prayer is welcome.

LENTEN LECTURE SERIES

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

DID YOU KNOW:

LENTEN TRIVIA:

LENT: The word "Lent" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "lencten", which means "to lengthen". This is a reference to the lengthening of daylight hours as Springtime approaches. Symbolically, it also connotes the coming of light of Christ's Resurrection after the darkness of Christ's death.

MARDI GRAS: "Mardi Gras" means "Fat Tuesday", as you probably know. Even though we associate the day with "party hearty", it didn't really begin like that. Since the fasting in Lent used to be so strict (no meat, alcohol, eggs, butter, milk), people used to use the day before Ash Wednesday to get rid of the perishables in the house. The Eastern Church used to have "Clean Monday" when they would scrub all their pots and pans, getting rid of even the traces of fat. So, "Fat Tuesday" doesn't just mean getting rid of the perishables in the house; it also refers to practical preparation for the GREAT FAST of Lent.

QUARANTINE: Our English word (which has a medical connotation) actually comes from the Latin word "forty", and it originally referred to the forty days of Lent - when public sinners who sought re-admission to the Church were asked to live apart from their families and friends as a part of their penance. Hence, a "quarantine" separates people or groups of people from associating with the rest of humanity for some reason.

PRETZELS: Because fat, eggs and milk were forbidden in Lent in earlier times, little breads (which we call "pretzels") were made as a substitute. They're made only of flour, water and salt. They were deliberately formed in the shape of two arms crossed in prayer, and you can find a picture of a pretzel depicted in a Vatican manuscript from the 5th century. In Latin, these breads were called "bracellae". That went into German as "bretzel" and became "pretzel" in English.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...several cadets who lost family members during the last week. Please remember them and their families.

...several cadets who are ill, either at Keller or at Walter Reed.

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

...all our casualties in Asia over the past several weeks...and their families.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I've heard some Protestant friends talk about something called "The Rapture".

Can you tell me what it refers to?

A: Sure.

As a theological term (and also one which you see a lot on bumper-stickers), "The Rapture" refers to an event which some Christians think will occur when Jesus returns to raise the dead. At that time, those believers who are still alive will be "changed" and "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" And so, in St. Paul's words, "we shall always be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

People who talk about "The Rapture" (being caught up in the clouds) speak of it as an event of great happiness, bliss and peace - because they believe they will be "heaven-bound" as a result...and will escape the final tribulations on the earth.

Scripture scholars interpret all these references to the end of the world in different ways, and as you may expect, fundamentalist Christians are pretty literal about their own interpretation. Many fundamentalists are convinced that the "End of the World" is close, and consequently, they're preparing themselves to be a part of this "Rapture", when it comes.

In the Roman Catholic view of the Scriptures,, the details of "The Last Days" are pretty much considered a mystery. You have to understand that the earliest Christians believed that Jesus was going to return immediately. So their view made it sound as if it were "just around the corner", and even the early letters of Paul made it sound as if he had a precise timetable.

However, Paul's later letters reflect a more mature view that rather than worrying so much about "The Second Coming of Christ", believers ought to be concerned more about "right living" and "acting in the spirit of Christ" at every moment.

Obviously, Jesus didn't return...and he still hasn't.

Catholics worry that perhaps the more fundamentalistic approach has forgotten Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel, when he was talking about his Second Coming (24:36):

But of that day and hour,
no one knows,
neither the angels of heaven,
nor the Son,
but only the Father.

And further, Catholic tradition objects to the view of "The Last Days" that paints the picture of the world on the verge of collapse, out of which Christians are "raptured away". This essentially amounts to "scare tactics" and doesn't seem to embody the

spirit of Jesus' teaching.

In addition, why should believers escape whatever "tribulations" are a part of "The Last Days" of the world? After all, thousands of Christian martyrs were not spared suffering over the centuries, nor was Jesus himself. Why should a particular generation of Christians feel that they'll get "special treatment"?

In Catholic views, "The Last Days" are essentially a mystery, and spending a lot of time trying to figure out the "what, where, how and when" of some speculative timetable can easily blind us to the real needs of our neighbors, here and now.

This is why "The Rapture" is rarely a part of Catholic discussion about "The End of the World".

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

Since I mentioned HUMAN SPEECH at the beginning of this newsletter, let's continue the theme and take a look at the SECOND COMMANDMENT (which is one of two that deal with SPEECH...the other is the Eighth Commandment - "Thou shalt not bear false witness...").

Anyway, the SECOND COMMANDMENT is as follows:

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Exodus 20:7

Deuteronomy 5:11

So, the SECOND COMMANDMENT prescribes RESPECT for the Lord's Name...and it governs our USE OF SPEECH IN SACRED MATTERS.

Here's how the Catholic tradition has always interpreted it:

In our understanding, it involves five areas of HUMAN SPEECH:

- a) the ABUSE of God's Name;
- b) PROMISES made to others, using God's Name;
- c) BLASPHEMY;
- d) OATHS;
- e) FALSE OATHS and PERJURY.

Let's expand a bit:

- a) the ABUSE of God's Name:

Among all the words of Revelation in Scripture, there is one which is unique: the revealed Name of God. God confides His Name to those who believe in Him; He reveals Himself to them in His personal mystery.

The gift of a NAME belongs to the order of trust and mystery...For this reason, we should not abuse God's Name. We must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. WE WILL NOT INTRODUCE IT INTO OUR OWN SPEECH except to bless, praise and glorify God...Respect for God's Name is an expression owed to the mystery of God Himself and to the whole sacred reality it evokes.

- b) PROMISES made to others, using God's Name:

Promises made to others in God's Name...must be respected in justice.

To be unfaithful to them is to MISUSE God's Name and in some way make God out to be a liar.

c) **BLASPHEMY:**

Blasphemy...consists in uttering against God - inwardly or outwardly - words of hatred, reproach or defiance, in speaking ill of God...It is also blasphemous to make use of God's Name to COVER UP criminal practices, to REDUCE people to servitude, to TORTURE persons or to PUT THEM TO DEATH. The misuse of God's Name to COMMIT A CRIME can provoke others to repudiate religion.

d) **OATHS:**

The Second Commandment also forbids OATHS which misuse God's Name and which show lack of respect for the Lord. Also forbidden is the MAGICAL use of God's Name (using God's Name in magic rituals).

e) **FALSE OATHS and PERJURY:**

When truthful and legitimate, an OATH highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth. A FALSE OATH calls on God to be witness to a lie. Further, a person commits PERJURY when he or she makes a promise under oath with no intention of keeping it, or when, after promising on oath, he or she does not, in fact, keep it. It is an offense to God Who is the author of speech. Also, pledging oneself by oath to commit an evil deed is contrary to the holiness of God's Name.

In sum, the holiness of the divine Name demands that we neither use it for trivial matters nor compromise its holiness by misuse of any type, especially by using it to deceive others and accomplish evil.

As "The Catechism of the Catholic Church" says:

Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the DIGNITY of the one who bears it."

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UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"Despite all our attempts to "domestic" Him,
God deals in SURPRISES...
a fact that most of us don't really like."

Margaret Guenther

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!!

Best wishes for LENT!

And may you remember the mission:
to become an IMAGE of Christ.

That's all that matters.

Woodie