

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 21 April, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

All around me I can hear the pressure building.

Tests, papers, projects...one after another...sometimes all at once.

Don't lose the sense of God's nearness.

Pray often!

Even briefly...

Something like this:

O God,
gather me now to be with you,
as You are with me.

Soothe my tiredness,
quiet my fretfulness,
curb my aimlessness,
relieve my compulsiveness.
Let me be easy for a moment.

Grant me glee in my blood,
prayer in my heart,,
trust at my core,
songs for my journey
and a sense of Your Kingdom.

O God,
gather me now to be with You,
as You are with me.

May God be with all of you this coming week, and my His Presence be obvious in the kinds of lives you live.

Hang in there...and may His peace be with you all.

AN EASTER THOUGHT:

What happened when Jesus was raised from the dead?

It's noteworthy that none of the Gospels attempts to describe the Resurrection.

They do describe the Crucifixion,

for that is something that humans did to Jesus,
and as such, it's part of human history

and therefore capable of being verified empirically.
On the other hand, the Resurrection is something that God did
and therefore not a part of human history in the same sense.
It is something that truly happened,
but it is a trans-historical event...
that is, a divine intervention into human history,
and therefore, an event that the historian - as historian -
can neither prove nor disprove.
God's actions are not the subject of an historian's study.
Historians can study only what humans do,
not what God does.
They may believe or disbelieve the Resurrection.
But when they make that choice,
they have moved out of their field of experience.
They have left the discipline of history..
For "resurrection" is not a "returning from the dead".
It's a leap beyond death to an entirely different kind of existence.
Such a leap cannot be empirically verified...
It was indeed a "New Creation", immeasurable by time,
because it was not a "coming back" from the dead.
It was not a "coming back" to mortal existence...
It was nothing less than Jesus' entrance into the life of God.
The Risen One can never die...
Life was born out of the grave.

DID YOU KNOW?

ST. GEORGE:

April contains the Feast of St. George (23rd), and since he's been a big military patron over the centuries, I thought it'd be nice to examine what's known about him.

And so, here's the poop on the lad.

In the Canon of Pope Gelasius (who died in 496), St. George is mentioned in a list of "those who are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God".

And actually, the only reliable stuff known about St. George was that he was a **MARTYR** for the Faith.

The rest is tradition, and it goes like this:

Supposedly, he was from Lydda in Palestine (not too far from present-day Tel-Aviv in Israel), and after his death, his remains were brought back there. A certain deacon Theodosius (530 AD) mentioned George's tomb in Lydda.

Eusebius of Caesarea (who was an early Christian historian around 322 AD) wrote about a noble soldier who confessed his Faith before the Emperor Diocletian and was put to death as a result. He gave no name to the soldier, but popular tradition gave the soldier the name "George".

Other stories about him include traditions that he rapidly rose to a high military rank, that he organized the Christian community in Urmiah (modern-day Iran) and that he

visited Britain on an imperial expedition (which is why he is one of Britain's patron saints).

He was also supposed to have fought a dragon and to have saved a virgin in the process. This tradition can be found as early as the 6th century, but it probably arose from confusion with the Greek mythical hero Perseus who slew a sea-monster at Jaffa (near Lydda) to save the virgin Andromeda.

St. George was popular in the Middle East, and his popularity caused the crusaders of the 1100s and 1200s to "import" his popularity to Europe.

King Edward III of England declared George to be the patron of that country, and he has also been the patron saint of Aragon, Portugal, Catalonia, Georgia and Lithuania.

Until recently, he played a most important role in popular feasts, and the date of his festival was connected with the arrival of Spring.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, my roommate and I were having a discussion about being Roman Catholic. He argued that it is useless to call oneself a "Catholic" because you are "Christian" anyway, with or without the Church. My question is this: what does it mean to be a Catholic as opposed to just "Christian"? Is there a distinction?

A: Basically, you (and he) are asking: Why be bothered with denominational identities.

Obviously, I wouldn't agree with your roommate. I think he hasn't taken human history into consideration.

I approach the idea from this direction: the historical development of the message of Jesus has produced different interpretations of that message. Right from the beginning, Christians were arguing about the exact meaning of the message of Jesus, and it seems to me that this is inevitable in any age.

It's inevitable because human beings have a "thought process", and they're always concerned with "Truth" and how to find it. Consequently, the different interpretations of Jesus' message resulted from this need to find what exactly is the full "Truth".

I believe that the different interpretations are important because they offer each other a criterion by which a person can get closer and closer to the "Truth" of Jesus' message: what did he REALLY say, and what did he mean by it.

My Presbyterian father and my Catholic mother were both "Christians", but they looked at the great questions of "faith" and "religion" quite differently. I personally had to make a choice at some point about which approach I preferred, and I made that choice on the basis of whether I believed that the Presbyterian or the Catholic traditions of Christianity possessed the most "Truth" about Jesus' teachings.

I chose to adopt the Catholic interpretation.

It didn't mean that I thought my father was "dead wrong"; it simply meant that I thought that the Catholic interpretation was more "complete" and offered me more options in making my personality more like that of Jesus. I felt it was a question of accuracy in interpreting God's revelation through Jesus.

That's the reason I'm not a Methodist Christian or an Episcopalian Christian or a Christian Scientist or any of the other interpretations. I simply came to the conclusion that however much "Truth" the other interpretations might have, the Catholic tradition

expresses the fulness of Jesus' message in the most complete way I've found.

This means that each person has to take the time to do some thinking and some research about how the different traditions of Christianity have developed...and why they developed.

In the end, what one calls oneself IS important because it reflects the level of one's understanding about God's revelation in Jesus.

And I don't think that "Christian" is enough these days...because all kinds of people call themselves "Christian" - and in many cases, their interpretation of Jesus and his message is radically different from mine or yours or your roommate's.

I think that accuracy and authenticity are important, and my job as a human believer is to find the most accurate and most authentic interpretation of Jesus that there is.

For me, it's the Catholic Tradition.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

RESURRECTION:

The idea of a "personal resurrection" is not present in the Old Testament in any real specific way, although there are hints of it here and there.

The Old Testament contains the idea of "Sheol" - the permanent abode of the shades of all the departed - but it isn't until the later Book of Daniel that there is specific reference to "resurrection" (Daniel 12:2):

Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth,
many will awake,
some to everlasting life,
some to shame and everlasting disgrace.

The idea also makes an appearance in the Books of Maccabees, but even there, it's a sketchy idea.

There's a lot of mention of "resurrection" in the "intertestamental" literature (Jewish books written in the period right before the coming of Christ, but not included in the Bible), but the ideas in these books are sometimes confused and varied: you can find the word "resurrection" referring to any and all of the following:

- a) only righteous Israelites;
- b) both unrighteous and righteous Israelites;
- c) all men and women;
- d) resurrection on this earth;
- e) resurrection on a transformed earth;
- f) resurrection of the spirit only;
- g) resurrection of the body and the spirit;
- h) resurrection to a "paradise" type of existence.

So the idea remained a shadowy thing.

It remained for the Resurrection of Jesus to give a real "body" (sorry for the pun!) to the whole idea, so much so that his resurrection became the focus and center of the Christian faith and provided the final idea about the reality.

The concept played little part in the actual teaching of Jesus, although the Beatitudes, his parables, his promises and the constant theme of "the coming of the Kingdom" all point to the conclusion that life would be incomplete without some type of resurrection.

Then he was raised from the dead, and all of a sudden, the idea had new and exciting possibilities.

As a historical event, Jesus' Resurrection was unobservable and indescribable. Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 28) comes closest to giving any real characteristics about it (an earthquake, bright and shining light, an angel descending from heaven, manifestations of power).

The reader is left without any specifics about the event itself, although the empty tomb and the subsequent appearances of the Risen Lord show the results of the act.

So we don't know the "how" of the event, but we do know the "what": it was an unparalleled insertion of divine power into time and space. The Risen Jesus appeared and disappeared at will, he was not constrained by time and space, and at times, he was not recognized by the Apostles.

This condition was temporary because the relationship of the Christian is not dependent on such manifestations of power but on personal faith. Nevertheless, for forty days, Jesus came and went, strengthening his followers, reassuring them, teaching them.

He had not just survived death; he overcame it and pioneered a way into the unexpected.

This is why his Resurrection constitutes the focus of our faith: it is the blueprint by which his followers understand the ultimate destiny of the whole of humanity.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"A God
who would let us prove his existence
would be an idol."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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!!

As it gets busier and busier,
take some time to pray.

It helps.

Have a great weekend.

Woodie