

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 22 September, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps!

I took a week's worth of Leave last week, and that's why there was no CHURCH STUFF. It was good to get away.

And I came back to hear some of you already talking about "Thayer Weeks" and "being swamped with academics". Nothing changes, and the pressure mounts.

Don't forget to "touch base" with the "quiet spot inside" where God is.

HOLY ONE!

There is something I want to tell You,
but there have been errands to run,
people to please,
bills to pay,
meetings to attend,
and arrangements to make...
and I forget what it is I want to say.

HOLY ONE!

My mind races with worrying and watching,
with weighing and planning,
with broken dreams and pothole grievances,
and I forget what it is I wanted to say.

HOLY ONE!

I am preoccupied with my loneliness,
my doubts and my fears,
my loves and my dislikes,
and I forget what it is I wanted to say.

HOLY ONE!

I stumble along day to day,
afraid that no one will love me,
afraid that I will never know who I really am,
afraid of loneliness,
and I forget what it is I wanted to say.

O God!

Don't forget me, please,
for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Have mercy!!

May God, the HOLY ONE, send all of you His peace.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

RING BLESSING

Class Rings will be blessed at all the Masses this weekend (including the WH5300 Mass on Sunday at 1715). Firsties can also stop by the Chaplain's Office for the blessing.

ROSARIES

A note from CDT Julie Jorgensen of E1 tells me that she's been in touch with a group that makes camouflage Rosaries for members of the Armed Forces. Julie has twenty or so. Please contact her if you're interested in having one...or are interested in contacting the group on your own.

DAILY 0630 MASS

is held each day (except Saturday) in the Catholic Chaplain's Office. Everyone is welcome.

DID YOU KNOW?

NUMBERS!!

Struggling through all types of math was, for me, a painful experience, but I was delighted at some point to discover that NUMBERS, beside serving as my own special tormentors, have always had a very symbolic function in religious belief.

Both the Bible and religious tradition (not to mention all types of art) contain an inexhaustible amount of deeply symbolic statements, and much of the time NUMBERS are used to express the symbolism.

Here are some examples:

- the number 1 is the number of God, because there's only ONE God.
And when you think about it, 1 really isn't a number; it doesn't multiply, isn't generally divided and cannot change. It just IS. So, it's appropriate for God - the ONE WHO IS. Revelation (Chapter 4) offers a vision of heaven: "...upon the throne ONE was sitting..." The number 1 almost becomes a proper name.
- the number 2 sets up a kind of tension, because it contains a double unity.
Both in art and in Scripture, opposites run in pairs: day and night, sun and moon, good and evil.
- and 3 stands for everything that is PERFECT. In Hebrew, Greek and Christian

thought, the third unit unites the halves of 2 and reconciles any tension implied; it brings things to a finish, to completion, to perfection. For example, we say "Holy, Holy, Holy" to describe God, there are 3 Wise Men in the Christmas manger scenes (although the Gospels say nothing about the actual number of them), Christ was in the tomb for 3 days, there are 3 theological virtues (faith, hope, charity), God is thought of as "threeness" (Trinity), etc. It's a number of completeness.

- another number of completeness is 4, but it carries the image of more STABILITY. There are 4 seasons in the year, 4 elements that make up the material universe in classical thought (fire, water, air, earth), 4 evangelists tell the whole story of Christ and everything we need to know for our salvation, Advent is divided into 4 weeks, symbolized by 4 candles, because with the coming of Christ, the ages are brought to COMPLETION.
- there aren't many references to the number 5 in Scripture or in art because it's a naughty number. We have 5 senses that lead us into temptation, for example. Writing in the 12th century, Hugh of St. Victor said: "...the number 5 represents natural men who pursue and love things of their outward senses, since they do not know what spiritual delight means".
- the number 6 is another PERFECT number - twice as perfect as 3. Furthermore, 6 can be divided by 1, 2 and 3, and the sum of these divisors is 6. In the Middle Ages, everyone admired the perfection of 6, its symmetry within itself. In Chapter 1 of Genesis, the story speaks of creation being accomplished in 6 days - time enough to bring the work to perfection. This is also seen in Christian art: for most of the Middle Ages, chalices were made with 6 sides - to reflect the perfection of the Sacrament within. And the little canopy over Christ's tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem stands on 6 marble columns...a visual commentary on Christian belief that Christ's Resurrection brought his life on earth to its perfection.
- 7 of anything makes a complete series: 7 days in a week, 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, 7 sacraments, 7 deadly sins, 7 petitions in the Lord's Prayer, 7 liberal arts (in classical education), 7 known planets (in ancient times), 7 colors in the spectrum. According to the biblical book of Sirach, "the just man stumbles 7 times a day" (that means being tempted in EVERY way possible). There were 7 "wonders of the world", and even in civil law, you can be declared dead if no one has seen you or heard from you for 7 years.
- the number 8 (7+1) represents the beginning of a NEW series or phase. The moon's phases last 7 days, and a new one begins on the 8th day. Jewish babies are named on the 8th day after their birth (to begin their new identity), and customarily, there are 8 sides to a baptismal font - to refer to the new life we receive in Baptism.
- the number 9 is 3x3; that is, perfection multiplied by perfection. You don't find 9 used too much in the Scripture or in the arts, but for hundreds of years, astrologers took it for granted that there were 9 crystalline spheres above the sky

that made up the universe: one for each of the 7 planets, one for the stars, and the last and largest spun around by angels to keep the others moving.

- Outside of the 10 Commandments, the number 10 doesn't get much use in the Scriptures, nor does the number 11.
- on the other hand, the number 12 is used a lot to represent a complete CYCLE (as opposed to a complete series - see number 7). 12 doubles the perfection of 6, and it occurs importantly in nature. The 12 signs of the Zodiac mark the 12 months of the year, the 12 moons that make the solar year, Israel was composed of 12 tribes, Solomon appointed 12 governors over his empire, and Christ sent out 12 apostles over the whole earth.
- finally, the number 40 played a large part in Scriptural and artistic symbolism: It signified ETERNITY or everlasting time. Moses was on the mountain with God for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus went through his temptations on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, 40 days were enough to flood the earth in the Noah story. The Jews reckoned that if you fast 40 days, you've fasted long enough to atone for your sins, and so Christians have 40 days of Lent. The number 40 carries the connotation of "forever", of permanence, of completeness. If Christ had been in the tomb for 40 days, it would have meant that he was gone until all possible time was gone - but staying dead for 3 days was long enough - the fact that he remained for 40 days with the apostles after the Resurrection meant that he'd be with us forever. Many churches in the East have 40 little windows in the circumference of their domes to show that the domes represent the circumference of the everlasting heavens.

So, for the ancients, numbers were important, not so much because they were meant to be taken literally but because numbers helped them to take intellectual hold of the world and to break it down into patterns. The numbers themselves were not as important as the images behind them, whether they were scientifically correct or not.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

- ...anyone who will be traveling this weekend.
- ...all the sports team who will be competing this weekend, that they may be safe.
- ...anyone in the Corps who is carrying a heavy burden these days.
- ...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world, especially those in areas of risk.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I was explaining the Rosary to a "Christian non-denominational" friend of mine, and he asked how come Catholics worship Mary. I explained that we only ask Mary to pray for us. He also disagreed with the whole idea of praying to a saint, like Christopher or Anthony, as I do in certain situations. What is the Church's official stance on praying to the saints, to Mary and to the dead (like deceased relatives)?

A: First of all, Catholics don't worship Mary or the saints or or anyone but God.

You know this already, but I thought I'd say it up front because, like you, I sometimes get weary of listening to non-Catholics telling me what I do and don't do...and what I believe and don't believe, as if I didn't already know.

I don't believe in worshipping anything or anybody - only God.

But I DO believe in what the Christian tradition has always called the "Communion of Saints". And this is what that means (I'm quoting a beautiful passage from a Church document):

So it is that the union of the wayfarers
with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ
is in no way interrupted, but on the contrary,
according to the constant faith of the Church,
this union is reinforced by an exchange of
spiritual goods.

The important part is "the exchange of spiritual goods".

What that means to me is that if I'm in difficulty, and I ask you to pray for me, and you do - then the Church believes that that prayer has an effect in the eyes of God. We can affect each other by the spiritual realities that we all participate in.

How often do we ask each other to pray for us?

Lots of times, I think.

So why should we treat those who have gone before us - "who sleep in the peace of Christ" - any differently?

That means that I have no trouble establishing spiritual communion with the saints, with Mary and even with my relatives who have gone before me. I believe that their prayer for me is just as effective as asking another living person to pray for me.

Maybe moreso.

Same is true for the Catholic practice of having statues and crucifixes (which some non-Catholics object to).

If I keep a pictures of my friends and relatives on my desk, why shouldn't I keep a reminder of a saint or of Jesus or Mary?

It all makes sense to me because we're all connected in the "Communion of Saints".

So that's why it's hard for me to have patience with people who claim that Catholics worship the saints or Mary. That's just not true.

In honoring those who have gone before us and asking for their prayers, all we're doing is realizing the bond that unites us all - even beyond the grave.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

(Note: over the next several weeks, this space will be devoted to a discussion of one of the Ten Commandments)

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT: "You shall not take the name of the Lord

your God in vain."

Exodus 20:7

Deuteronomy 5:11

The Second Commandment prescribes RESPECT for the Lord's name. Like the First Commandment, it belongs to the virtue of religion, and more particularly, it governs our USE OF SPEECH in sacred matters.

Besides forbidding every improper use of God's name, the Second Commandment also applies to the following areas of human life:

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

Let's take a brief look-see at each category:

- a) the ABUSE of God's name:

Among all the words of Revelation, 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. 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 praise, bless 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 to 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 use 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 magical 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:

"My brother used to ask the birds to forgive him.
That sounds senseless, but it is right.
For all is like the ocean, all things flow
And touch each other; a disturbance
in this place is felt at the other end of the world.
It may be folly to beg forgiveness of the birds,
but the birds would be happier at your side -
a little happier anyway - and children and animals too,
if you were nobler than you are."

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

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!!

Know that God loves you.
Know that your value is immeasurable.
Know that your life is unconquerable.
All best wishes!

Woodie