

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 10 November, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

I was on Leave last week...hence, no CHURCH STUFF...

But I'm back, and we're in November.

And for Catholics, NOVEMBER is the month when we remember our BELOVED DEAD in a special way.

So now that the month has begun, I'd like to devote our opening thought to a sense of REMEMBRANCE.

The following poem (which I've used before) - from the Irish poet John Boyle O'Reilly - sets the stage for such thoughts. It's titled FOREVER.

Those we love truly never die,
Though year by year, the sad memorial wreath,
A ring and flowers, types of life and death,
Are laid upon their graves.

For death the pure life saves,
For life all pure is love; and love can reach
From heaven to earth, and nobler lessons teach
Than those by mortals read.

Well blest is he who has a dear one dead:
A friend he has whose face will never change;
A dear communion that will not grow strange;
The anchor of a love is death.

The blessed sweetness of a loving breath
Will reach our cheek all fresh through weary years.
For her who died long since, ah! waste not tears,
She's thine until the end.

Thank God for one dear friend,
With face still radiant with the light of truth,
Whose love comes laden with the scent of youth,
Through twenty years of death.

May our BELOVED DEAD rest in the sleep of God.

And may we keep them very close to our hearts as we wait to see them again.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST
The Fall CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER
BREAKFAST will be held at The West Point Club
on Wednesday, 20 November, starting at 0615.
We'll have a brief Communion Service and then share
breakfast together.

NO SUNDAY 1715 MASS
on Sunday (10 Nov) in WH5300 because of the
holiday weekend. All other Masses at the Chapel
are as follows:

Saturday - 1930 (not 1715, because of the
later Football Game)

Sunday - 0900 and 1100

NO MONDAY 0630 MASS
in the Chaplain's Office because of the day-off. The
0630 Mass will resume on Tuesday.

TO REMEMBER YOUR BELOVED DEAD
Just stop in at our Washington Hall office, and add
their names to the Book of Remembrance...or e-mail
me with the names, and I'll add them. They'll be
remembered each day of November at the 0630 Mass.

EXTRA STUFF:

If you have a thought that you might like to be a priest-military chaplain someday,
the Archdiocese for the Military Services is hosting a "Discernment Retreat"
over 6-8 February for men from the different Military Academies and from the
Armed Forces in general who are considering priesthood. If you'd like more
information, please let me know.

AND ALSO (from CDT Pat Bentley):

There's a new website for Catholics in the military.

Check out the following:

www.catholicmil.org

DID YOU KNOW?

READ THIS IF YOU'RE AN INFANTRY TYPE:

11 November is St. Martin's Day.

He has long been considered the patron-saint of soldiers in general and of INFANTRY in particular.

Here's his story (taken from THE BIRTH OF FRANCE, by Catherine Scherman).

Martin was born in or around AD 316 in Pannonia (present-day Hungary), to solidly middle-class heathen parents. His father was a military tribune who, aiming to quench his son's aberrant longing for "the holy life", designed the boy to follow a military career.

But Martin would not be deflected.

When only ten, he begged the local priest to give him religious instruction.

At twelve, he tried to enter one of the unregulated orders of hermits that were abundant in Europe in those days, but they turned him down because he was so young.

Martin's predilection for holiness annoyed his father so positively that when the boy turned fifteen and became eligible for military service, he reported his son to the authorities.

Martin was seized, put in chains and forced to take the military oath.

Though never cowardly, he was an atypical soldier of the times, forgoing the customary army vices, kind and humble with his companions. He even treated his servant as master, cleaning his boots and waiting on him at meals.

Military duties took him to northern Gaul (France) under the command of the Emperor Julian, who was fighting the Franks in the area of Amiens. There it was that Martin got his heavenly call. It was an inclement midwinter day when the young soldier, now twenty years old, met a poor man with little clothing who was begging the passersby at the town gates to have pity on him. Martin had no warm clothing left except for his cloak, having already given away everything else. He rent the cloak in half with his sword and gave half to the beggar.

That night, a vision came to him in his sleep, of Christ with the face of the beggar, clad in the half-cloak. Martin saw the divine apparition as a manifest signal of his true calling and went at once to be baptized.

When Julian called his army together to brief them for the battle with the barbarians, Martin announced that he would no longer serve: he had become a soldier of Christ, he said, and it was no longer lawful for him to fight. His words, in part, were:

I have served you as a soldier;
now let me serve Christ...

The emperor accused him of cowardice, and Martin answered by volunteering to stand unarmed between the battle lines; then, protected only by the sign of the cross, he would walk untouched through the enemy ranks. Julian prepared to accommodate him by throwing him into prison until the battle should commence, when he would be taken at his word.

But the young hero did not have to redeem his pledge because the enemy unexpectedly sued for peace...

(Scherman, pp. 84-5)

Martin was eventually discharged at Worms and became a monk, gathering some followers around him at Poitiers (France) in the AD 360s.

He later became bishop of Tours (AD 371) and remained in that position until his death in AD 397.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

- ...a cadet ('03), whose brother was killed in an accident a couple of weeks ago. Please remember him and his family.
- ...the uncle of a member of the West Point community who committed suicide.
- ...a gentleman whom I met at Mass last Sunday who has a terminal illness.
- ...since this is November, when we remember our dead in a special way, let's take time to remember our beloved departed.
- ...any cadet who is ill or injured or in the hospital.
- ...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world, especially those in areas of risk.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father what does the Church think about ouija boards and tarot cards and fortune-telling?

A: In the beginning, the Church found itself in the midst of the Roman Empire, where all types of fortune-telling and divination were very popular. As the Church began converting the Germanic tribes of Europe in the 400s and 500s, it constantly came up against new forms of divination, and the desire to "know the future" is still a big part of our culture.

Every newspaper has its "horoscope" section, TV stations feature programs of psychics advising their clients, and many people have used a ouija board at high school or college parties.

Some people even believe (as they did in the Middle Ages) that in order to know God's will, they only need to close their eyes, open a Bible, let their finger fall upon a page and then read the verse that the finger is next to. This then becomes "God's special message" to him or her.

The Catholic Church is opposed to all this stuff because it feels that people who take these processes seriously are allowing superstition and fatalism to run their lives.

In a religious sense, Christianity has always preached the concept of FREE WILL. This means that each human being has a pretty strong shot at building his or her future under the guidance of God's providence. As humans, we are not ruled by impersonal powers that have complete control of our lives. This has always been a liberating realization.

The whole idea of "karma" (fate, destiny) has been rejected by the Catholic Church from the beginning. "Karma" denies the existence of a personal and loving God and the free participation of each human being in his or her role as a "free agent living under grace".

In a "mental health" sense, psychiatrists have found that a serious belief in divination can produce harmful effects in the lives of very suggestible people. These effects could include emotional and psychic trauma or the inability to make rational decisions. People have been known to become ill or rationally disordered by a deep belief in

divination.

Credulous people can also be easily exploited in these circumstances.

So while the use of tarot cards and ouija boards at a party might be a one-time source of harmless enjoyment, the whole underlying idea contains some implications that are totally incompatible with Catholic belief and with healthy psychological practices.

Basically, no one should ever stake his or her life on the turn of a card.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

THE VIRGIN MARY:

Any complete theological examination of Roman Catholic ideas about the Virgin Mary would take volumes, but the following is part of an article from a Catholic periodical ("America", 18 October, 1997).

It provides a pretty good "thumbnail" sketch of the "what" and "why" regarding Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the whole Catholic tradition. This is a precis of the article:

In a year I've spent talking about MARY with many different groups...

I have observed something the media did not report in its rush for headlines over a non-event: that the life and witness of the mother of Jesus are undergoing serious examination by very different people today...

It is MARY'S very humanity that those who seek her today find most meaningful.

In the Gospels of Luke and John, they encounter an adventurous adolescent, brave enough to accept a divine invitation without the approval of anyone but the Spirit. Mary questions the angel before accepting the proposal then rushes to share the incredible news with her older cousin Elizabeth. In the prophetic prayer of praise she pours forth in response to her cousin's greeting, Mary reveals a God of compassion and unbelievable generosity present among us, one who shuns the rich and mighty in order to live with the beloved poor and powerless, among whom she counts herself.

And this is just the beginning of Mary's ordinary-extraordinary story. She was the subject of scandal to friends and family, at times a refugee, but she seems to have educated Jesus well...Never quite understanding her son - what parents do? - she pondered their exchanges in her heart, sometimes disagreed with him and slowly grew to understand the true significance of the life to which she had committed herself.

When he was dying in disgrace, she stood as a witness beneath the cross, despite the Sanhedrin and the Roman soldiers and later joined his frightened friends praying in the Upper Room.

MARY faced the life-crises we all face. She became a wise woman, strong despite her vulnerability because of her attachment to others similarly vulnerable. She, too, loved the lowly in deed as in word and was fittingly designated by her son shortly before his death (along with the beloved disciple) as his representative and ours.

Reading the Gospels of Luke and John today, contemporary seekers...are encouraged to meet a woman who suffered the joys and sorrows all people face in an ordinary life that was extraordinary only in its faithfulness and revelatory significance. MARY can still bring the human reality of her son to life for us in all its wonder and promise, elevating physical reality and human purpose at the same time.

As St. Ephrem the Syrian put it in a Nativity homily in the 4th century:

In her, the exalted Godhead has descended and dwelt;
it has grown small to make us great...

What extraordinary good news for humanity, that God wished to be contained and enfleshed in a human creation out of an unbelievably generous desire to share divine love with all creation...

What we find (in MARY), according to artist Frederick Frank, whose stunning metal sculpture of MARY without facial features enfolds the face of Christ within her cloak, is a PERSONAL CHALLENGE...he says

Her own face is blank because she is potentially
every woman, every man.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"We are all meant to be mothers of God.
God is always waiting to be born in us."

Meister Eckhart
d. 1327

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 good day-off on Monday.
Chill; hang out; sleep...
but don't forget God.
See ya!

Woodie