

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 19 January, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

I recently saw this prayer and was moved deeply by it.

It was written by someone who lost a child to death.

I came upon it as I was just getting over the loss of a close friend, and it touched me in all the right places of my soul.

But it speaks not just of death; it speaks also about facing those times in life which are painful and have no obvious explanation.

It speaks of the only phenomenon that can get us through the hard times, whatever they may be...and that phenomenon is simply: TRUST in God.

I thought I'd share it with you:

Lord of my aching heart!  
He was so young, so very young,  
With all of life before him...  
Exuberant, vital, full of promise,  
Of breathless wonder...  
Gifted, intelligent, sensitive,  
Always inquisitive...  
Eager to learn, to know, to do...  
A dreamer, a schemer, eyes full of merriment,  
Heart full of laughter, adventure in his blood,  
Mischievous in his fingers, challenge in his thoughts;  
So many plans, so many hopes,  
Admired by his community,  
Extolled by his friends,  
Loved, so dearly loved...  
Lord,  
No longer do I beat my fists upon the walls of Heaven.  
I am too weary, too sorrow-consumed.  
I know now that ten thousand "whys"  
will never bring him back.  
In pitch-darkness I have shouted my "whys".  
My reward?  
A sea of shattered silence.  
What is left?  
What more shall I ask?  
Just this, dear God:  
**THINK THROUGH ME YOUR THOUGHTS!**  
**CREATE WITHIN ME YOUR PEACE!**

Until there is born in my aching heart  
The TRUST OF THE UNEXPLAINED.

#### THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

##### CANDLEMAS DINNER

Fr. Jerry and I want to invite you to dinner...free.  
On Monday, 3 February, we're throwing an informal  
dinner in the Cadet Restaurant for any cadet who  
wants to come. We do this every year. Everyone is  
welcome (including non-Catholics), and as we get  
closer, we'll begin sign-ups.

##### DID YOU GET ENGAGED?

If Catholic marriage is in your near future, then  
please keep in mind the Spring "Pre-Cana"  
(marriage preparation weekend). "Pre-Cana" is  
a requirement for Catholics who marry. It will be held  
over the weekend of 5-6 April. For more info, please  
contact the Chaplain's Office.

##### NO 1715 MASS

in Washington Hall on this coming Sunday (19<sup>th</sup>)  
because of the long weekend.

##### NO 0630 MASS

in the Chaplain's Office on Monday because of the  
holiday. Mass will resume on Tuesday morning.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

...that a prostitute once saved a pope who was a former slave and a convicted embezzler?  
Strange times breed strange stories.

Her name was Marcia, and according to St. Hippolytus (a Church writer from the early  
200s AD), she was the concubine of the Roman Emperor Commodus, the oddball son of the  
great Marcus Aurelius (the actor Joaquin Phoenix played Commodus in the movie "Gladiator").

The pope was St. Callistus I, who was pope from AD 217 to 223.

Callistus was supposedly an imperial household slave in Rome, who engaged in banking and  
was accused and convicted of embezzling money (there's no evidence that the charge was true).

He was sent to the mines in Sardinia around AD 186 by the Roman authorities.

Marcia was one of Commodus' concubines, and she was a Christian or at least had  
Christian sympathies.

She used her influence with the Emperor to get some Christians released from their servitude in the Sardinian mines.

Callistus was one of the lucky ones and was released around AD 189.

He was eventually elected pope around AD 217 and spent his five years in office expanding the idea of “forgiveness” (the Early Church was very strict and believed that ANY serious sins committed after Baptism couldn’t be forgiven – Callistus was the one who got the Church thinking that this was too strict an interpretation).

He also recognized the marriages between free women and slaves in the Church, and he ruled that people who had given up their faith during the times of persecution – and who had repented and asked forgiveness – should be readmitted to the Church.

Callistus was martyred in AD 222 and was buried in a cemetery named after him (if you visit Rome, you can still tour the Catacomb of San Callisto).

His feast-day in the Church is 14 October.

As for Marcia, she was executed in AD 193 for playing a part in the assassination of her lover and patron, the Emperor Commodus.

Strange times breed strange stories.

AND ALSO...

Monday (20 January) is the Feast of St. Sebastian.

Since he’s the Patron Saint of ORDNANCE (and, along with St. Martin of Tours, has been considered one of the Patron Saints of soldiers in general), I thought I’d offer a sketch about him.

According to traditions, he was a Roman soldier who became a Christian and was killed for his faith.

References to him can be found in Church documents (“Depositio martyrum” – “The Burial of the Martyrs”) as early as AD 350. This particular document mentions that he was buried in the catacombs under the Church of St. Sebastian on the Appian Way in Rome.

Devotion to him spread quickly, and he was soon mentioned in other lists of Early Church martyrs. St. Ambrose, who died in AD 397, claimed that he was a native of Milan and suffered during the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian (around AD 300).

There’s a written work from somewhere around AD 450 called “Passio Sancti Sebastiani” (“The Suffering of St. Sebastian”), probably the work of a monk from a monastery located near those catacombs where Sebastian is supposedly buried.

According to this “Passio”, Sebastian was an Army officer who was condemned to death for being a Christian. His punishment was to be shot to death with arrows by his fellow-soldiers. He was then buried in the catacombs “near the remains of the Apostles”.

In Renaissance times, he was portrayed as an older soldier, then as a young man with prominent muscles, then as a heroic figure standing before the archers. In earliest representations, he is shown as a bearded Roman warrior, then as a clean-shaven young man.

There’s even a legend that he recovered from his intended execution and was later beaten to death.

Scholars seem to feel that there was indeed a Christian soldier-martyr named Sebastian, who suffered death under Diocletian...but they're not sure about the details of his death.

Anyway, that's what the traditions say. As I mentioned, he's the patron of ORDNANCE and is also the patron of the National Catholic War Veterans.

Next time you're up at the chapel, check out his stained-glass window.

#### PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...a cadet ('04), who is currently in a hospital in Texas, recovering from an accident over Christmas Break.

...a cadet ('06) whose mother just died. Please remember him, his Mom and their family.

...all those who have been recently deployed...and their families.

...all of our soldiers throughout the world...and their families.

#### GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I recently noticed some discussion on Biblical and Church views about women. I wanted to know what you thought of the difficult passage by St. Paul: "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man" (I Timothy 2:12). Thanks you for all your interesting and enlightening e-mails.

A: Thanks for the question, and you're right: it's a difficult passage for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It wasn't so difficult at the time Paul was writing, however, because the social patterns of that time really limited the participation of women in public affairs. This passage specifically deals with the participation of women during worship, and it's very similar to another passage from Paul (I Corinthians 14:34): "Let the women be silent in the assemblies, for they are not permitted to speak. Let them be submissive, as the Law itself says".

For me, the big question doesn't revolve around Paul saying things like this, because he was basically a child of his times. Instead, my difficulty comes from the fact that in other letters, Paul claims that men and women are basically equal, and this was a revolutionary sentiment. Look at Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free person; there is not male and female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus".

Or look at I Corinthians 11:1-13, where it's pretty obvious that both men and women functioned as "prophets" in the Christian community.

Or look at Romans 16:1, where a woman named Phoebe is mentioned as a "minister" of the Church.

So the question for me is: which attitude is really Paul's.

And I have never found any Scripture scholar who has ever admitted knowing why Paul seemed to be operating with two opposing attitudes. Why, on the one hand, did he openly claim equality between men and women? And why, on the other hand, did

he embrace a much more restrictive attitude for women in the worship-setting in the passage that you mentioned above?

Some scholars look at II Timothy 3:6 and other similar passages as a partial explanation. In this passage, Paul describes false teachers who “slip into homes and make captives of women weighed down by various sins, led by various desires.” So these scholars feel that Paul was trying to deal with a particular problem that was beginning to emerge in the Christian communities: namely, false teachers were beginning to have an effect, and women seemed to be especially preyed on by these people and, as a result, were causing uproars in the different groups with which Paul maintained contact.

And in a way, the controversy still goes on within the Christian communities. Many Christian traditions will not ordain women to function as ministers; other Christian traditions do.

So, 2000 years later, the question is still alive.

Was Paul speaking of particular circumstances which required a restrictive attitude, or did he really believe his more radical observation in Galatians 3:28: “...there is no male or female; all are one in Christ Jesus”?

Or can both attitudes exist side-by-side in the Church.

My guess is that Paul, like everyone else, was struggling to understand the ramifications of the Gospel. If the Gospels portray Jesus saying things like “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32), then what exactly does it mean to be free? Does it apply to society as well as individuals?

It took time for the Early Church to work out the ramifications of the Gospel message; they didn’t have every answer all at once.

For example, look at the social institution of slavery. To us, it’s a reprehensible concept. But Paul accepted it as a characteristic of the society of his day and didn’t lead any social revolution about it.

Perhaps we should look at his writings as indicative of the struggle of learning the ramifications of this “new message” and not expect too much that he will behave as if he already had everything worked out.

I know that this doesn’t answer your question in “black-and-white” terms, but in order to do that, we’d have to ask Paul personally.

At the very least, I hope I’ve given you something to think about in interpreting the Scriptures.

Thanks for writing me.

## THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

### AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY:

This term doesn’t refer to specific “religions” in Africa.

Instead, it refers to the BASIC concepts that have always been the foundation of life in the African continent. They can be found in just about every area of black African society.

There are seven basic concepts:

- 1) the ACTIVE presence of the Creator-God in the world:  
God is considered Father and Mother, present, alive, active and in direct communication and collaboration with creation. God is the beginning without an end. Human beings reflect God's Presence in a special and unique way.
- 2) A UNIFIED sense of reality:  
For the African, divinity and humanity are not isolated from each other. The visible and invisible interact. The world of the spirits participates in the human world. All the beings in the Universe and beyond exercise influence over one another.
- 3) Life as the ULTIMATE gift:  
Life is the prime gift of the Creator to the creature. It is to be received gratefully, sustained, enhanced and safeguarded. Rituals of birth and burial are very sophisticated, and between birth and death, rituals of healing fulfill a most important role in the African village.
- 4) The FAMILY and the COMMUNITY as the place to be born, live and die.  
A vital link exists between an individual and members of the same family, clan and community. Being born into a family inserts a person into a "current" which determines one's existence and survival. An African is incomplete when alone.
- 5) The ACTIVE role of ancestors:  
Ancestors are sometimes called "the living dead". They are seen as having left a great heritage to their families, and they continue to influence those families from beyond the visible world. They are intermediaries between God and the people.  
Also, elderly people are accorded special respect in African society. They are believed to be in special communion because they lived and worked with them earlier in their lives.
- 6) The sense of ORAL tradition:  
The "spoken word" has great power in African spirituality for three reasons:
  - a) the spoken word derives from the DIVINE PRESENCE in the world;
  - b) the spoken word comes from human beings (the most privileged part of creation);
  - c) the spoken word makes history real. Music, song, dance, poetry, proverbs, story-telling, art and ritual are immensely important, and when an African prays, he or she uses all those forms of expression.
- 7) The SACREDNESS of nature and the environment:  
Africans see the presence of the DIVINE in all creation. Everything carries a message of God's presence. All space is sacred

and to be respected.

These seven concepts are the core of the African worldview and African spirituality. They may be expressed differently in different parts of Africa, but they are universal “operating procedures” in African religion.

In coming to Africa, both Christianity and Islam were and continue to be influenced by these values. For example, basic Christian communities are powerful because because of the native African belief in the sacredness of the family and the community, and the liberation movements in parts of Africa flow from the traditional belief in the sacredness of the human being.

#### UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“Our mission is to be a faucet of God in the world”

(Nobody famous said this.

I used it at Mass on Tuesday.

It just came to me out of the blue,

and I like it. Thought I’d pass it on.)

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!!

Hope you get some free time over the weekend.

Remember that you’re always in my prayers.

God bless...

Woodie