

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 26 January, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

January can be a dull month.

Christmas is over.

Things have returned to what some people call “normal”.

The weather is a pain.

In the midst of it all, it doesn't hurt to pray (you knew I'd be saying that sooner or later...):

O God of all seasons and senses!

Grant me your sense of timing...

to submit GRACEFULLY

and rejoice QUIETLY

in the turn of the seasons.

And in this gray season of short days and long nights,

of gray and white and cold,

teach me the lessons of WAITING,

the lessons of snow

joining the mystery of the hunkered-down seeds

growing in their sleep,

watched over by gnarled-limbed grandparent-trees,

resting from autumn's staggering energy.

O God, grant me Your sense of TIMING.

May the silence of the cold and the snow somehow bring you to God.

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 (you don't have to be Catholic), and

we'll begin sign-ups next week.

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 to marry in the Church. It will be held over the weekend of 5-6 April. For more info, please contact the Chaplain’s Office.

DID YOU KNOW?

POSTURES AND GESTURES:

What position do you adopt when you pray in public?

The early Christians prayed with their HANDS UPRAISED, like the priest at Mass.

They would stand and face east, because the sun – a symbol of Christ – rose in the east. As a matter of fact, early churches were so constructed that the congregation would always stand facing east.

They stood erect when they prayed because they believed that STANDING was a natural position of respect, reverence and readiness.

In ancient times, most religions used the STANDING position when they worshipped; they only KNELT when they were adoring the gods of the underworld.

For Christians, STANDING at prayer was the norm for hundreds of years, and in Canon 20 of its decrees, the 1st Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (AD 325) actually forbade Christians to kneel at Mass on Sundays and the days of Pentecost, feeling that STANDING was the posture that more dramatically expressed the dignity of redeemed people.

KNEELING at prayer was present in the Early Church from the beginning, too (though not nearly as prominent as standing). The Apostle Paul was described as KNEELING in prayer with the Christians in Miletus (Acts 20:36).

KNEELING was gradually introduced into public worship as a sign of penance, supplication and adoration.. It also laid an emphasis on the divinity of Christ and the unworthiness of people in his presence.

By the middle of the AD 900s, records of the Synod of Tours indicate that KNEELING had become the common posture of people at Mass (an exception was made for the reading of the Gospel, when the more ancient practice of STANDING was preserved).

FOLDING ONE’S HANDS is also a part of many people’s prayer-posture.

It came from the Germanic peoples of Europe during the age of feudalism. When people took an oath of allegiance to the local noble, they placed their folded hands between the hands of the lord as sign of submission and subjection. This gesture was seen as a fitting way for Christians to approach the Lord of heaven and earth and has remained a pretty popular way to express the feelings of prayer.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the uncle of a cadet (’04), who died recently.

...as I continue to hear from graduates who are in the process of being deployed, please increase your prayers for all our deployed personnel and their families... and for PEACE.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, do Catholics believe that truly moral people who try to do the right thing will go to heaven even if they've heard the word of God but do not believe, although they have struggled with the issue? Since one of God's greatest gifts to humans is the ability to reason, how can he punish those who have used reason to evaluate the evidence and resolve that there simply is not enough evidence to believe in Christianity?

Q: Father, if you have to believe in Jesus to be saved, what happens to the people who have never even heard the name Jesus spoken?

A: I've put these two questions together because they deal with the same phenomenon: the PROCESS of belief.

It's true that there are Christians who will tell you that only those people who publicly profess belief in Jesus Christ will enter heaven. They claim that unless a person is a believing Christian, there is no hope for salvation for them.

This is not the Roman Catholic position.

Let me quote a statement from the 2nd Vatican Council (mid-1960s) on the matter:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation
who THROUGH NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN
do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church,
yet sincerely seek God and, moved by his grace,
strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known
to them through the dictates of conscience.

De Ecclesia II:16

(21 Nov '64)

And that's the Catholic belief: that if, through no fault of their own, people do not know the truth of the Christian message – or even do not accept it – and yet at the same time, they SINCERELY follow their own beliefs and their own consciences in their search for God, they can enter heaven after death.

This may seem strange at first. After all, John 14:6 has Jesus making the following statement:

I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one can come to the Father except through me.

That seems to be pretty specific and to eliminate lots of people from the picture.

Yet at the same time, Scripture contains other statements, like the one in

I Timothy 2:4, where Paul describes God as wanting

...all people to be saved and to come to a
full knowledge of the truth.

I believe that the Catholic interpretation contains the fullness of the Scripture's intent.

The Catholic position is that men and women were given "human reason" in order to come to God AND that if followed sincerely, one's reason will enable one to do

precisely that. Of course, “human reason” is only part of the picture. We also believe that God’s grace (in other words, God’s “fulness of life”) enters into the picture as well.

The two – reason AND grace – involve each of us in a drama or a journey that may take a lifetime.

True, Jesus Christ is the WAY to God...and has already redeemed each and every human being. And he is the source of salvation for everyone.

But who is to determine the manner in which each person comes to believe in Jesus Christ? And how is one’s conversion to Christ to be measured?

By other human beings?

Other human beings can’t do it because what goes on in the mystery of “reason and grace” is a mysterious movement in the heart and soul of each human being.

So the Catholic view is to leave it to God and not to try and dissect the process of belief. For some people, “conversion to Christ” may be an obvious and discernible phenomenon; for others, the journey may take a lifetime and never happen in an observable way. God may use the moment of death as a way to present the fullness of Christ.

Only God can make the judgment, but the overwhelming reality is as Paul said:

God wants all people to be saved and to come
to a full knowledge of the truth.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

KINGDOM OF GOD:

This is an expression that Jesus used very often in his preaching.

The phrase “Kingdom of God” occurs over 150 times in the New Testament alone, mostly in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In these occurrences, it serves as a symbol, and you can grasp the depths of the meaning by listening to what Jesus said in his teachings, especially in the parables he told.

Some characteristics are as follows:

a) The expression is better translated as REIGN rather than KINGDOM.

In Jesus’ mind, it’s not so much a PLACE as an EVENT. It means that God is exercising his SAVING POWER among humans in a new way.

b) God’s reign is both PRESENT and FUTURE: PRESENT in Jesus’ preaching and parables, his miracles and exorcisms, his proclamation of the forgiveness of sin and in his practice of table-fellowship (the meals that Jesus shared both with his friends and with sinners show that no one is excluded from God’s reign – eg, Mark 2:16-17).

But the reign is also FUTURE. The disciples learn to pray by saying “Thy Kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10); Jesus speaks of “the Son of Man coming in judgment” (Luke 12:8-9). Many of his parables that deal with “growth” imply this FUTURE identity of the REIGN (see Matthew 13:1-53 for examples of these parables).

c) There is a connection between the COMING REIGN and ONE'S PERSONAL RESPONSE. To enter the Kingdom, one must become like a little child (Mark 10:15) and to DISCIPLESHIP in the service of the Kingdom. Jesus taught the disciples to LOVE OTHERS with an inclusive and self-sacrificial love (Matthew 5:38-48). He frequently warned against the DANGERS OF WEALTH (Mark 10:24-5 and Luke 12:16-21).

And in his parable on the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), Matthew shows Jesus making ONE'S CONDUCT TOWARD OTHERS (especially the poor and unfortunate) the determining factor in entering the Kingdom.

John's Gospel uses the expression only twice (John 3:3 and 5); his favorite designation is ETERNAL LIFE (this expression occurs many times in his Gospel).

Paul uses the expression KINGDOM OF GOD 10 times, usually with a strong FUTURE connotation (those who are unjust will not inherit the Kingdom – see I Corinthians 6:9 and 10...and then 15:50; also, Galatians 5:21).

In I Corinthians 15:24, Paul depicts a scenario in which Christ "hands over the Kingdom of God to the Father after having destroyed every rule and authority and power", so Paul definitely has a FUTURE element in his vision of the Kingdom.

But he also thinks of it in the PRESENT: "But the Kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink but of righteousness, peace and the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

Of course, the Book of Revelation depicts the Kingdom in terms of the Lordship of the Risen Christ DESTROYING the dehumanizing and demonic rule of the Roman Empire, which results in a "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21) – very obviously a FUTURE setting.

So the symbol of the KINGDOM has many facets, and it's necessary to keep all of them in mind when hearing the words of Jesus: for him, the KINGDOM is

- a) a metaphor expressing the impact of God's GRACIOUS and DECISIVE act of salvation;
- b) a definition of what human existence SHOULD BE, modelled on the person and life of Jesus;
- c) a corporate experience which will be fully revealed at the END of human history and yet impinges on human action and human institutions in the PRESENT.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"Faith is our response to God,
who reveals himself and gives himself to us,
at the same time bringing us a superabundant light
as we search for the ultimate meaning of his life."

Catechism of the Catholic Church

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!!

Stay warm this weekend...
Remember God in your life.
Pray often.

Woodie