

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 2 February, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Here's a neat prayer for you.

It's called "Learning Christ".

Hope it gives you something to think about.

Teach me, O Lord, to be gentle in all the events of life:
in disappointments, in the thoughtlessness of others,
in the insincerity of those I trusted,
in the unfaithfulness of those on whom I relied.

Let me put myself aside,
to think of the happiness of others,
to hide my pains and heartaches,
so that I may be the only one to suffer from them.

Teach me to profit from the suffering
that comes across my path.

Let me so use my suffering so that it may mellow me,
not harden or embitter me;
that it may make me patient, not irritable;
that it may make me broad in my forgiveness,
not narrow, haughty or overbearing.

May no one be less good
for having come within my influence;
no one less pure, less true, less kind,
less noble for having been a fellow-traveler
in our journey toward eternal life.

As I go through my rounds from one distraction to another,
let me whisper, from time to time,
a word of love to you.

May my life be lived in the supernatural,
full of power for good,
and strong in its purpose of sanctity.

May we all become Christ to one another!

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

BLESSING OF THROATS

In honor of the Feast of St. Blaise (3 February), the BLESSING OF THROATS will take place after all the Masses on Sunday, including the WH 1715 Mass.

CANDLEMAS DINNER

will be on Monday night at Ike Hall (Cadet Restuarant) at 1800. If you want to come, let your Company Catholic Rep know...it's free... uniform is sweats or running suits.

APOLOGETICS COURSE

“Apologetics” is the art of “explaining one’s Faith”. MAJ Tom Bell and his wife Elisa are offering a course in Apologetics each Sunday afternoon in the Chaplain’s Office at 1500. The course will last about two months. Everyone is welcome.

AND FOR THE LATINISTS AMONG YOU...

Sunday (2 February) is “Groundhog Day”, and you probably already know the alleged role of the little rodent in interpreting the weather.

For you groundhog watchers (and you Latin scholars), the following couplet from the Middle Ages presents another method of forecasting:

*Si sol splendescat Maria purificante,
Maius erit frigus post festum quam fuit ante.*

If the sun should shine on the feast of Mary’s Purification,
It will be colder after the feast than before.

The feast of Mary’s Purification (when she went up to the Temple in Jerusalem after the birth of Jesus for the Jewish purification ritual) is on 2 February each year. It’s also called “The Presentation of Jesus”, because at the same time that Mary was being ritually purified, she and Joseph were “presenting” the infant Jesus to God in the Temple, in accordance with Jewish law. This happened 40 days after his birth.

The feast is also sometimes called “Candlemas” because in ancient times, the feast was celebrated in Rome with a candle-light procession around the walls of Rome, probably mimicking an earlier pagan celebration of atonement that also used candles.

In Christian times, candles were blessed and distributed on this day to anyone who wanted them, and in the Gospel, Jesus is referred to as “the revealing light of the Gentiles...”

Why should a groundhog get all the limelight?

DID YOU KNOW:

BLESSING OF THROATS:

Each year, on the Feast of St. Blaise (or close to it), Catholics come to church to have their throats blessed.

The custom is an old one.

According to tradition, Blaise was the Catholic bishop of Sebaste (in Armenia), who was tortured and beheaded by the Roman governor Agricolaus (of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia) for his Faith in the early 300s. Legend says that he was a physician and that, while in prison, he cured a young boy who was choking from a fishbone that had lodged in his throat.

Blaise was patron of the throat as early as the 6th century in the Eastern Church and by the 9th century in the Western Church.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the grandmother of a cadet ('06), who died last week.

...the father of a cadet ('06), who will undergo serious neck surgery on 10 February.

...the grandfather of a graduate (01), whose died earlier this week.

...all our military brothers and sisters throughout the world, especially those who are deploying for the first time...and all their families.

...the intention of “peace in the world”.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I'm writing to ask a rather sensitive question...My friends and I have been having a debate concerning masturbation and pornography. Are these things illegal in the Catholic faith? Does it center around intent, or is merely looking at pornographic pictures a sin in itself? I know the Catholic Church has made some adaptations as the years have gone by and am wondering what the current ruling is.

A: It's all a very delicate topic, especially in print...but at the same time, the topic is one which is part of everyday life for lots of people...and it certainly has a moral side...so it's good to examine exactly what's involved.

I'll start the answer by giving you the Catholic Church's moral judgment on both, as it's stated in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (CCC).

First, pornography:

Pornography consists in removing real or simulated

sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the marriage act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other.

It does grave injury to the dignity of the participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others.

It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world.

It is a grave offense.

CCC, #2354

Now masturbation:

By masturbation is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. Both Church teaching and the moral sense have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action...

The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.

CCC, #2352

So, both pornography and masturbation are seen by the Catholic tradition as gravely “disordered”.

Here’s the reason.

Quoting the “Catechism” again:

Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

CCC, #2351

In plain English, the Church’s view is that sex is a gift from God to be used for continuing the human race by bringing children into the world AND to develop the love and devotion of a man and a woman who have made a lifelong commitment to each other. The first is the PROCREATIVE purpose; the second is the UNITIVE purpose.

So, it’s meant to be used for continuing life AND for creating a wonderful, loving and nurturing bond between a man and a woman within the commitment of marriage.

The Church believes that any other use of sex is “disordered”...mainly because any other use of sex defeats God’s purpose. Catholic morality would see masturbation and pornography as “selfish” acts, where the sacredness and dignity of sex are basically debased in order to bring a self-centered pleasure to individuals.

In your question, you asked the following:

Does it center around intent, or is merely looking at pornographic pictures a sin in itself?

Certainly, “intent” plays a part in any moral act, but it doesn’t change the nature of the act itself. For example, looking at pornography may not produce sexual arousal all

the time, but it certainly creates an atmosphere where human dignity is lessened and where the viewer contributes to the cheapening of the sacredness of sex in the design of God.

This is called an “occasion of sin” – an atmosphere which can easily lead someone to commit sin...and to knowingly put oneself (or someone else) in an “occasion of sin” is itself a sinful act.

It makes the viewer an accomplice in doing what is wrong.

The Catholic “bottom line” in this whole topic is this: sex has to be used in the service of LIFE and LOVE according to the design of God.

And anything that deliberately frustrates the “design” of God is wrong.

That’s Catholic tradition.

Hope that answers your question.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

SALVATION:

It’s a big topic...and one which has contributed to lots of misunderstanding between Catholics and some other Christians over the years.

Some Christians believe that by a simple profession of faith – “I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior”, two things are accomplished: their SALVATION is assured AND they will go to heaven.

This isn’t exactly the Catholic view on the matter...mainly because the Catholic tradition believes that SALVATION is too rich a biblical concept to be limited to a three-second statement.

Catholics believe that SALVATION is a PROCESS. It’s a “past-present-future” reality, all at the same time.

And it can always be rejected by us humans.

So, if a Catholic is asked the question: “Have you been saved?”, the best answer is this:

Yes, I’ve been saved, and I’m currently working out my salvation in fear and trembling; and I joyfully anticipate and hope for the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time. Only on that day will my salvation be complete.

This echoes St. Paul (Philippians 2:12), who said:

...Work out your salvation in fear and trembling.

You can boil down the Catholic view about SALVATION in this way:

God chose us; we did not choose God.
God’s grace (which means “God’s life”) is freely offered to everyone. His grace comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we need to be connected

to that death and resurrection.

This “connection” is made by the preaching and hearing of God’s word and by our acceptance through Baptism, which frees us of sin and begins that “connection” between us and God.

So far, so good.

Then what?

Once baptized by water and the Spirit, we begin what Paul called “working out our salvation...” We do this by submitting ourselves to the will of God in everything...for all our lives. We also do it by immersing ourselves in the Holy Eucharist, in which we experience the “self-giving” of Jesus and learn how to make “self-giving” a constant characteristic in our own lives.

So, Catholics do not think in terms of “assurance” (being “sure” of our SALVATION at any given time). But at the same time, we are “sure” of the one central fact: the world has been “saved” by Christ.

Then we think in terms of “co-operating” with that reality of SALVATION, making it so much a part of our lives that we’re transformed by it.

Without the willingness to be transformed, the offer of SALVATION runs into a brick wall in the heart of the person.

So for Catholics, SALVATION has two aspects: God’s sure offer AND our willingness to be transformed by that offer over a lifetime.

And that “transformation” is a life-long process by which we allow God’s life (grace) to permeate every level of our personalities and change us at the very center of our beings, gradually lifting us out of ourselves and into God (note that we do NOT believe that we can “earn” SALVATION; the whole process is God’s work, not ours).

And the process can go on even after death, in our belief. This is what the idea is behind “purgatory” – which is not a place but a part of the PROCESS of transformation.

Then, when the COSMIC process is complete...

But let’s let St. Paul say it in his own words:

For just as in Adam all die,
so too in Christ all shall be brought to life,
but each one in proper order:
Christ, the firstfruits; then, at his coming,
those who belong to Christ.
Then comes the end, when Christ hands over
the Kingdom to his God and Father...
When everything is subjected to Christ,
then the Son himself will be subjected
to the One who subjected everything to him...
so that God will be all in all.

I Corinthians 15:22-28

And that, in a very brief form, is our belief.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“We do not see things as THEY are;
we see things as WE are.”

The Talmud

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!!

Best wishes for the weekend,
especially to the Yearlings.

Stay well, stay safe...
and stay focused on the God who made you.

Woodie