CHURCH STUFF
(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)
Week of 16 February, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Sometimes, it helps to stop and put everything in perspective.

That's why we pray...to recover the "big picture" about God, about self and about life...

This prayer attempts to do that, so why not take a couple of minutes of silent-time and enter into the soul's "quiet place"...

Lord, Jesus,
I thank you for bestowing on me the gift of life.
You know everything that has affected me emotionally,
physically, spiritually...
all the inner experiences of my mind and heart,
all that has formed me into the person I am today.
Forgive me, Lord, for the many times
that I have failed you, myself or others.
I forgive anyone who has ever failed or hurt me.
Help me to see that my difficulties have an important part to play
in bringing me to the full person
that you have called me to be.
Don't let me lose or miss anything that you want to do in me
through this struggle to complete my life here on earth
and to make me ready for an eternal life with you.
I renounce any rebellion or fear.
And while I may not understand your way of
directing my life right now,
I wish to let go of any possessiveness over my life.
I surrender all the details of my present struggle into your loving care.
And since I cannot always pray as I would wish.
I ask you to accept instead each breath I draw
as an act of love and trust in your loving presence.
You are my Savior:
I know that you will not forsake me.
Grant that I may love you always...
and then do with me what you will.
Amen.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

WINTER RETREAT

If you're looking to get some quiet time for yourself, think about making a quiet RETREAT. Fr. Jerry and I will be offering a Retreat for Underclasses over 100th Night Weekend (28 Feb to 2 Mar). More details to follow.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

The "Couple to Couple League" will be presenting a series of classes on Natural Family Planning. The first class will be held on Sunday, 23 February, at 1300 in Room 308, Thayer Hall. for more information, contact LTC Tom Strunck (Law) at the following e-mail: strunckt f@yahoo. com

DID YOU KNOW?

MILITARY RELIGIOUS ORDERS:

By today's standards, I guess they were curious institutions...and they don't exist any more, at least not in their original form.

But during the Crusades, much attention was paid to the idea of having groups of men who considered themselves to be "knights of God", ready to serve Christ in arms and, if need be, to lay down their lives for him.

At the same time, they would be true monks, bound by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They lived in a monastic setting in the Holy Land, practiced asceticism, chanted the Divine Office (just like monks), but they also pledged to defend Christendom against "the infidels".

They were known as "The Military Orders", and as I said, they got started in the period of the crusades (roughly 1100s).

There were two main groups:

a) The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (sometimes called "The Knights Templar):

They were founded in 1118 by Hugh de Payen and were so called because they established their headquarters in the El Aqsa Mosque on the supposed site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Their original purpose was to protect and defend pilgrims in the Holy Land. They consisted of chaplains, knights (all of noble blood) and servants (sergeants-commoners). They wore a voluminous white cloak (derived from a monastic habit) adorned with a large red cross. They organized a religious community and promised to protect all public routes in the Holy Land.

b) The Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem (called simply "The Hospitallers"):

This Order was originally founded some years before the First Crusade

as a charitable Order devoted to the care of pilgrims, but in 1120, Raymond de Puy transformed it into a Military Order. He entrusted these knights with the care of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Their religious garb was a black cloak with a large red cross, worn over their armor. After the final fall of Jerusalem, the Hospitallers transformed themselves into a martime police force to combat Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean.

These two Orders supplied the Holy Land with a permanent Christian army known for a long time for heroism and self-sacrifice. The ruins of their huge castles can still be seen in the Holy Land.

Unfortunately, it wasn't too long before they engaged in rivalry between themselves, and the rivalry soon turned into bitter jealousy. They became rich and proud and were later known for their arrogance. In some cases, they preferred money to the welfare of Christendom, and King Louis IX of France (later canonized by the Church as Saint Louis) was later forced to inflict public humiliation for their treachery.

The Templars were later wiped out in the 1300s by King Philip IV of France, who was jealous of their wealth and influence, and any who were left were eventually absorbed into the Hospitallers, who survive today as "The Knights of Malta" – an active charitable institute within the Catholic Church (and they still wear their voluminous white cloaks with the large red cross, although they no longer live as monks).

Not too long after the founding of the Templars and the Hospitallers, there were several Military Orders founded in Spain to aid the Spanish kings in pushing the Muslims out of Spain and in re-establishing Christian kingdoms there.

The first of these was the Order of Calatrava, founded by King Sancho III of Castile. It was modeled after the Cistercians (one of the strict branches of the Benedictine Order), and the members wore the white Cistercian habit. Besides the monastic vows, they promised "to defend against the pagans, the enemies of the cross of Christ".

Other Spanish Orders were:

a) The Knights of San Julian del Pereiro (known as "The Knights of Alcantara"): they were founded to fight the Moors in the Kingdom of Leon by King Fernando II of Leon in 1176. They also followed the Benedictine Rule.
b) The Knights of Montesa: they were established by Pope John XXII in 1317 at the request of King James II of Aragon and were affiliated with the Cistercians.
c) The Order of Aviz: this was originally known as "The Order of Evora" (the center of their operations in Portugal). It was also affiliated with the Cistercians, and members wore the white habit.
d) The Order of Christ: another Portunguese Order, it was established in 1319 by Pope John XXII at the request of King Diniz of Portugal. One of the more famous Grand masters of this Order was Prince Henry the Navigator, who first explored the African coast. The Order of Christ was also affiliated with the Cistercians.
e) The Order of St. James: founded in 1170 and chartered by King Fernando II of Leon.

All the Spanish and Portuguese Orders were suppressed in the 19th century, and they exist today only as honorary societies of Spanish and Portuguese noblemen.

Two other Military Orders came out of this period of European history: the Teutonic Knights and The Knights of the Sword.

The Teutonic Order (officially known as "The Knights of St. Mary of the Germans in Jerusalem") has a tremendously long history, due to its eventually becoming a political power in the German States, and there isn't space enough to do justice to it here. But in its earliest history (AD 1190), it emerged from a field-hospital in Acre in the Holy Land. By 1198, it was converted into a religious Order of Knighthood, dedicated to the care of German pilgrims in the Holy Land.

Finally, the Knights of the Sword (also known as "Brothers of the Sword") and "The Livonian Knights") were founded in 1201 in Riga (Latvia). Their habit was a white mantle with a red cross and a red sword behind it pointing up. Their purpose was to convert the Eths and the Livs, pagan tribes in the region of the modern Baltic States. They eventually merged with the Teutonic Knights.

There were several other lesser-known Military Orders, but they disappeared almost as quickly as they appeared. Those I mentioned above were the main ones from this period of Catholic history, and even though they were eventually sucked into the politics and emerging nationalism of the 1300s and 1400s, their original ideals were inspiring for those times: to be knights of God, to serve Christ in arms and, if necessary, to lay down their lives for the Christian Faith.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the mother of a cadet ('05), who died last week. Please remember her and her family.

...MAJ Tom Bell (KACH), who had a skiing accident on Thursday...and for his family.

...the sister of Father Joseph Frawley, the Orthodox priest who ministers to the Orthodox community here at West Point. She died at the end of last week.

...all our military brothers and sisters...and their families...throughout the world.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, my sister wants me to be the godfather of her first child, due in March. What are the duties/responsibilities of being a godparent, and how did the tradition get started?

A: The Church's "Canon Law" devotes three sections to the idea of godparents (or "sponsors", as they're also called). The most descriptive of these sections goes as follows:

> In so far as possible, a person being baptized is to be assigned a sponsor. In the case of an adult baptism, the sponsor's role is to assist the person in Christian initiation. In the case of an infant baptism,

the role is – together with the parents – to present the child
for baptism, to help the child live a Christian life
befitting the baptized, and to fulfill faithfully
the duties inherent in baptism.

Canon 872

The tradition started in ancient times when large numbers of adults were baptized. In those days, the Church required anyone who wanted baptism to have someone already baptized speak on his or her behalf. Such a "sponsor" would testify to the person's seriousness, his or her motivation...and the sponsor would also promise to "look after" the newly-baptized and to make sure that religious education was constant and complete.

When infant-baptism became the rule, this custom was kept, and in the Baptism ceremony, both parents and godparents are asked to take an active part in the religious education of the child. They are reminded that they have to answer before God for the child, and they are expected to "be there" for the child in the area of learning about the Faith.

Hope that gives you some idea on which you can build your spiritual relationship with your godchild-to-be.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

ANTICHRIST:

The term "antichrist" comes from references in two letters of St. John in the New Testament:

Children, it is the last hour;
and just as you have heard that the antichrist was coming,
so now, many antichrists have appeared.

I John 2:18

Whoever denies the Father and the Son,
this is the antichrist.

I John 2:22

...and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus
does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the
antichrist that, as you heard, is to come
but in fact is already in the world.

I John 4:3

Many deceivers have gone out into the world,
those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ
as coming in the flesh; such is the antichrist.

II John, verse 7

These are the only references to the word “antichrist” in the New Testament, and it might be helpful to take a look at what is meant by the word.

Traditionally, the word has come to mean this: a totally evil human being who will appear right before the end of the world. This human being will persecute the good people of the earth and will eventually be defeated by Jesus Christ.

But as we saw above, Scripture doesn’t mention any of this.

As a matter of fact, St. John seems to be saying that one can think of many “antichrists”. In fact, that’s what he says: “Many antichrists have appeared...”.

A lot of people think that the image of the antichrist is spoken of in the Book of Revelation, but this isn’t the case either. The word isn’t used there.

To understand why we’ve heard so many things about an antichrist, it’s necessary to examine how the belief has been developed.

Before the time of Christ, many Jews believed that there would be a totally evil human being who would arise to frustrate the coming Messiah. From about 500 BC until the time of Christ, Jewish writings speak of this person (or even of groups), and you can find all types of symbolic descriptions about them (read Daniel 7 in the Old Testament, if you want to see an example). Sometimes, this power is spoken of as a single human being; sometimes, it’s a whole nation, like the Persians or the Greeks.

By the time of Christ, the belief was very strong, and it’s only natural for John to write about such a power. He calls it “antichrist”, although he’s not too clear about whether he thinks of “antichrist” as a single human being or as a group.

Over the centuries since John’s time, the belief has grown, and the term has often been used for one person (like Nero, Muhammad, Pope John XXII, Peter the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Ronald Wilson Reagan - whose name adds up to 666, Henry Kissinger or Mikhail Gorbachev) – or groups of people (like the Muslims, the Jews, heretics, etc.).

One of the more colorful interpretations came from Pope Gregory the Great (AD 600), who said: “How many have not seen the antichrist and yet function as his testicles because they corrupt the hearts of the innocent by the example of their actions” (Moralia in Job 40:12). Gregory also said: “Antichrist’s work is done daily among the wicked”.

The belief also appears in the Muslim faith, although they don’t use the term “antichrist” (they use the name “Dajjal”) and also in medieval Judaism (they use the name “Armillus”). Both of these traditions see these figures pretty much the same way as the Christian tradition has always seen its “antichrist” – a power of total evil which will oppose the final victory of God.

The tradition is a very long one, but as we saw, the Scripture has very little to say about it.

However, in every age, constant speculation seems to center around the same questions: will “antichrist” be one or many? Jew or Gentile? Fully human or part demon? False teacher or political persecutor? If it’s a single individual, what will be the signs of his coming? How will he be destroyed? Will his death mark the end of the world?

Modern Catholic belief tends to go along with St. Augustine’s interpretation in one of his “Homilies on John” He simply said this: “There you have ‘antichrist’: everyone who by his works denies Christ.”

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"This is what we love in our friends:
to talk and laugh together,
to do favors for one another,
to read pleasant books together,
to joke and to be serious with each other,
to disagree but without bitterness,
as a person might disagree with himself,
to have most conversations without any disagreement,
to teach one another or to learn from one another,
to long with impatience for those who are absent,
to welcome with joy those who return...

St. Augustine,
"Confessions" IV:8-9

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 can get some R&R this weekend.
Whatever you do, stay safe...and don't forget God.
Best wishes!!

Woodie