

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 9 March, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

A "Good Lent" to all of you.

I hope that just because the ashes of Ash Wednesday have been washed away from your foreheads, it doesn't mean that their significance has been washed away from your hearts.

Lent should be a way of life...as it says in the following prayer:

Catch me in my anxious scurrying, Lord,
and hold me in this Lenten season.
Hold my feet to the fire of your grace
and make me attentive to my mortality
that I may begin to die now to those things
that keep me from living with You...
that I die to grudges and indifference,
to certainties that smother possibilities,
to my fascination with false securities,
to my addiction to sweatless dreams,
to my arrogant insistence on how it has to be...
that I die to my corrosive fear of someday dying,
which eats away the wonder of living this day
and the adventure of losing my life
in order to find it in You.

Catch me in my anxious scurrying, Lord,
and hold me in this Lenten season.

Make of me
something new,
something saving,
something true.

My hope, of course, is that this LENT will be the best in your life.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST
The Spring CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER
BREAKFAST will be held next Wednesday,
12 March, at The West Point Club at 0615.
We'll share Holy Communion and follow it

with breakfast. Donation at the door is \$2.00. Sign up with your Company Catholic Rep.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Every Friday of Lent at 1800, there will be STATIONS OF THE CROSS at the Chapel. Each week, the Ceremony will be followed by a simple supper of soup to keep the spirit of fasting.

DAILY MASS

Mass is offered every weekday (except Saturdays and holidays) in the Catholic Chaplain's Office at 0630. Everyone is welcome.

LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Just for your reference during Lent...

Catholics are asked to ABSTAIN from meat on Ash Wednesday and on all the Fridays of Lent (including Good Friday).

Catholics are also asked to FAST on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday only (one full meal, two lesser ones). ABSTINENCE is asked of all those between the ages of 14 and 59.

FASTING is for those between 18 and 59.

DID YOU KNOW?

TRIVIA OF LENT:

LENT – The word comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten”, which means “to lengthen”...reference to the “lengthening” of daylight as Spring approaches.

MARDI GRAS – means “Fat Tuesday”. Even though we associate the day with “party hearty”, it really didn't begin like that. Since the early Church fast in Lent was so strict (no meat, alcohol, eggs, butter, milk), people used to use this particular day to get rid of the perishables in the house. The Eastern Church used to have “Clean Monday”, when they would scrub all their pots and pans, getting rid of even traces of fat. So, “Fat Tuesday” has nothing to do with gaining weight; it's the practical preparation for the Great Fast of Lent.

QUARANTINE – Our English word (which has a medical connotation) actually

comes from the Latin word “forty”, and it originally referred to the forty days of Lent – when public sinners who sought readmission to the Church were asked to live apart from their families and friends as part of their penance. Hence, a “quarantine” separates people or groups of people from associating with the rest of humanity.

PRETZELS – Because fat, eggs and milk were forbidden in Lent in earlier times, these “little breads” were made as substitutes. They’re made only of flour, water and salt. They were deliberately formed in the shape of two arms crossed in prayer, and you can find a picture of a pretzel depicted in a Vatican manuscript from the 5th century. In Latin, these breads were called “bracellae”. That went into German as “bretzel” and became “pretzel” in English.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...a family friend of a cadet ('04), who is fighting cancer. Please remember her and her family.

...Michael Kwinn, son of LTCs Mike and Bridget Kwinn (SE), who is fighting cancer.

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

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I know you’ve answered this before, but could you please repeat your explanation about how we Catholics reconcile our beliefs with killing and our profession in the military?

A: Sure...no problem.

The answer is lengthy, but here’s how it goes...and it reflects the Catholic tradition’s answer to the whole topic of killing, self-defense, country-defense, etc.

The basic foundation can be found in both versions of the Ten Commandments as you read them in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17), and it boils down to four simple words, as you know:

Thou shalt not kill.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus intensified the idea (5:21-22):

You have heard it said to the men of old:

‘Thou shalt not kill’ ...and ‘Whoever kills shall be liable to the judgment’.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment.

So we know the standard to which we, as believers, are held, and there’s no getting around the fact that it’s a difficult standard (notice that it doesn’t just forbid “killing of

people”; it forbids “killing”, period).

The Catholic Church has always interpreted this standard as God’s call to us to look at ALL life – in ALL its forms – as something sacred. Note how it’s stated in the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” (CCC):

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative act of God, and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one – under any circumstances – can claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.

CCC, #2258

So the Church presents Christ’s IDEAL for anyone who wants to accept and practice it, and of course, the Church hopes that everyone will embrace it in one way or another.

But being realistic, the Catholic moral tradition has always tried to consider the complications that each individual faces in the course of daily life...and how it’s not always possible to do what is IDEAL.

One of those complications is the fact that from time to time, human beings may have to defend themselves and others against other human beings. There’s no escaping it.

And so, within that section of the Catechism in which the 5th Commandment (“Thou shalt not kill”) is discussed, the Church includes a discussion of SELF-DEFENSE:

Love towards oneself remains a fundamental principal of morality. Therefore, it is legitimate to insist on respect for one’s own right to life. Someone who defends his life is NOT guilty of murder, even if he is forced to deal his aggressor a lethal blow.

CCC,#2264

Quoting the 13th-century Catholic philosopher Thomas Aquinas, the Catechism continues:

The act of self-defense can have a double effect: the preservation of one’s life, and the killing of the aggressor...one is intended, the other is not.

Summa Theologiae

II-II,64,7

Self-defense, then, can put a person into a difficult situation, but the Church believes that one has the right to defend oneself, even if it should unfortunately result in taking a life.

And “self-defense” doesn’t simply apply to oneself; it also applies to society:

Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another’s life, the common good of the family or the state.

And further:

Preserving the common good of society requires rendering the aggressor unable to inflict harm...(and those holding authority have the right to repel by armed force aggressors against the community in their charge...

But

If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.

CCC,#2266 and 2267

So how does this apply to a soldier?

Simply in the sense that Catholic tradition has always upheld the right of SELF-DEFENSE, not only of individuals but also of societies...and in defending a society, a soldier is doing for the “human group” what each person has the right to do for the “human self”: namely, to defend the right to life.

It’s necessary to understand that this does not make “killing” a good thing. As Thomas Aquinas pointed out, the intent of SELF-DEFENSE is not primarily to KILL the aggressor; it is primarily to DEFEND oneself and others. The killing is often unavoidable, but it can never be the PRIMARY intention.

This is particularly applicable in WAR, and indeed, the whole Catholic tradition of “Just War” is based on the concept of the inalienable right of a society to defend and protect itself...but only with PROPORTIONATE means.

And the Catholic “rules” about SELF-DEFENSE apply just as much to societies and they do to individuals. I’ll list them for your consideration:

- 1) The motive must be to defend oneself.
To repel an attacker out of hatred, or other evil motive, would be sinful.
- 2) Force may be used only at the time of the attack.
To use force before the attack has, morally speaking, begun would itself be aggression; to use force after the attack is over would be revenge.
- 3) Use of force must be the only option to repel the attack.
If one could escape the attack, or have effective recourse to the police, the use of force would not be permitted.
- 4) Only such force may be used as is necessary to avert the actual attack. If wounding or rendering the assailant unconscious would suffice, then the use of greater force would be illicit.

So the Church tries to establish a BALANCE in a difficult human situation, and as in

all human activity, the MOTIVE is the primary area to look at to try and figure out the morality of a situation.

In summary, then, the following points apply, in the Catholic tradition:

- 1) “murder” and “killing” are not always the same; “murder” is an evil to be avoided, but “killing” (in self-defense) may sometimes be necessary (but tragic);
- 2) SELF-DEFENSE is an inalienable right, both of individuals and of societies;
- 3) if “killing” is the result of SELF-DEFENSE, it is justifiable (although tragic), but it can never be the PRIMARY motive of the act.
- 4) the conscience of each individual is the setting where motivation is judged.

Thus, the Catholic soldier has to make judgments, as does every other Catholic, and these judgments call upon him or her to understand the difficult nature of human acts.

In a larger sense, however, it should be remembered that killing is not the main work of soldiers. The Church has always believed that their larger work is to establish and preserve PEACE, to establish at least a minimum of security for the world and to hope that the world will be able to build on that minimum.

Frankly, I think that anyone who would become a soldier in order to kill other people would be terribly warped and definitely immoral.

At the same time, the Church has always recognized the nobility of someone being willing to give up his or her life for others. As Jesus said: “No one has greater love than the one who gives up his life for his friend” (John 15:13).

So a soldier, like any other Catholic, understands that he or she is obligated to live the life of Jesus and to strive for the perfect realization of the Father’s will for the world. He or she sacrifices part of the comfort of life in order to fulfill a higher goal: to provide the defenseless people of the world with a condition of peace.

And this is done with the knowledge that the time may come when it’s necessary to take a human life. This is not considered as IDEAL, nor is it a condition that anyone looks forward to, and it’s definitely NOT a situation that any right-minded person desires.

Nevertheless, it does happen...and one has to meet it with the same attitude that one would have in any SELF-DEFENSE situation: namely, that when one is defending what is RIGHT, one doesn’t always have IDEAL situations to work in.

One simply does one’s best.

So the Catholic tradition doesn’t try to justify “killing” as such.

The Catholic tradition simply accepts the possibility that in certain inescapable circumstances, a Catholic man or woman may have to take a life in order to prevent a greater evil from happening.

Which is why SOLDIERING is such a rough job.

But personally, I’d rather have a strong Catholic doing the job than someone with no

sense of God's Spirit.

Here's how Pope Paul VI (d. 1978) put it in an address to Belgian soldiers:

Military service is by definition
a VOCATION OF SERVICE...
and the soldier in the Gospel (Matthew 8:5)
proves that there is NO incompatibility
between the requirements of military discipline
and those of the Faith,
between the ideal of the SOLDIER
and that of the BELIEVER.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

EPIKEIA:

It's pronounced "eh-pi-kay-ya" – accent on the 3rd syllable.

And it's a Greek word which means "reasonableness".

You can find it used in philosophy (eg, Aristotle) and in theology.

Obviously, we're concerned about the theology use.

In the Bible (Old Testament), it's used in 2 Maccabees 9:27 to describe a ruler who does not insist on his rights but instead shows a fatherly indulgence toward his subjects, treating them with kindness, pardoning offenses. It's also found in other places in the Old Testament.

When it's used to describe God (Baruch 2:27), it describes God's willingness to be merciful and kind:

But with us, O Lord our God,
you have dealt in all your clemency ("epikeia")
and in all your great mercy.

In the New Testament, the word is used about Jesus by St. Paul (2 Corinthians 10:1):

Now I myself – Paul –
urge you through the gentleness and clemency ("epikeia")
of Christ...

So, the sense is this: "epikeia" refers to that Christian attitude which prefers to be merciful even though one might have the right to be stern and demanding. In other words, one gives up one's rights and does not haggle about them.

Rather, the Christian believes in cultivating a generous spirit, must not argue about "what is due to him or her" and must imitate the selflessness of Jesus (who never insisted on his "rights and privileges").

The highest example of "epikeia", of course, is Jesus himself. He was willing to set aside his dignity, to embrace the condition of a slave and to suffer the death of the cross. He did not jealously guard his "rights" as God but instead gave up those "rights" for the good of all.

In Philippians 2:5-8, St. Paul speaks of Jesus in this way:

...who, though he was in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God something
to be grasped at, but emptied himself...

The Christian does not see Jesus as being a weakling but as exhibiting the highest form of divine glory in his personality. The vocation of the Christian believer is to act in the same way.

The idea of “epikeia” found its way into “moral theology” (the religious art of judging right from wrong) as well.

When you judge what is right or wrong, you usually refer to the “laws” that are in force, both in civil society and in the Church.

And your judgement is made on the basis of the “law” that’s in force.

In moral terms, “epikeia” is when you judge a circumstance not so much by the “letter” of the law but by the intent (or “spirit”) of the law.

For example, suppose a starving person who had no other way to feed his or her child steals a loaf of bread.

True, stealing is considered a moral wrong, and the person who steals is considered to have broken one of the basic “laws” of God and would normally be judged according to that “law”.

But shouldn’t the circumstance of the starving person be taken into account?

And if it is a factor, couldn’t it be argued that in this circumstance, the “law” against stealing needs to “take second place” to the more universal intent of God’s mercy?

Catholic moral tradition would say “yes”.

So in this case, the moral responsibility of the person not to steal is lessened in favor of what we understand to be God’s intent: namely, that no one should starve.

Lots of people don’t care for this approach because they think that things should be black and white all the time...with no exceptions.

But the moral tradition of the Church feels that even though “law” is a good thing, there is a greater “law”: the “law” of the Spirit...and sometimes the “law of the Spirit” will contradict the commonly understood “law of everyday life”.

Some would argue that this approach would make the “law of everyday life” pretty ineffective.

But the Church understands that the “laws of everyday life” cannot envision every possible situation and circumstance and that, sometimes, for the basic good of people, the “law of the spirit of Christ” must contradict the normally-accepted practices and interpretations.

Sure, this can be abused, but that doesn’t mean that the idea of “epikeia” is therefore a bad thing. It only means that Christians must be constantly aware of the voice of God’s Spirit and use his voice to judge rightly the moral implications of life as Jesus would judge them.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“Every Christian needs a half-hour of prayer every day,
except when he or she is busy...
then, an hour is needed.”

St. Francis de Sales
(d. 1622)

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!!

May the weekend give you some time to

CATCH UP!

And may God's presence make all the difference.

Woodie