

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 27 April, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Well, EASTER has come and gone...but hopefully, the EASTER spirit is still alive and well.

As the Opening Prayer this week, I've included a poem, written at the time of the very ugly Spanish Civil War (1930s), when Catholics were being massacred throughout that country. It speaks of the hope that Christians should have, even in the midst of the cruelty and bloodiness of that war...or any war.

Kind of appropriate for the times we live in, I thought.

A good reminder of the kind of hope and determination that EASTER guarantees.

SPANISH ALLELUIA

Sweet Risen Christ! They shall not gag our song,
They shall not, though their rifles crackle halt
In every cloister yard – though every vault
Be charred with smoldering altars, still our song
Shall gaily rise above each strident wrong
Poising triumphant over their vilest fault.

Nor shall we blench before their foul assault
For Thou art with us – dying with our throng.

Lord, though our squares with bleeding rivers flow
Choicer than casks of Spain's ancestral wine,
Sweet Christ, since here thy wounds so fiercely glow,
Somewhere thy mystic limbs must whiter shine.
In far Wyoming, tulips shall untwine,
And drifts of daisies stir in Tokyo.

JJ Galvin, CSsR

May the unconquerable Christ stir your hearts today!!

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

PARISH PICNIC

The Spring PARISH PICNIC will be held on
Sunday, 4 May, at Camp Buckner. Buses for cadets
will leave the Supe's Box starting at 1100 and will
begin returning from Buckner at 1330.

AN EASTER THOUGHT:

I recall the legend of two brothers,
one of whom was very good,
while the other became very wicked.
One day, the wicked brother ran home,
and the robe that he wore was spotted with blood.
He said: "I've just killed a man."
And his brother said: "I will take your robe,
And you take mine.
You leave."
As the guilty brother left, the police came in,
arrested the one who wore the bloody robe,
and he was condemned to death.
When he was dying, he sent a message to his brother.
He said: "I'm sending you a white robe.
Remember that I die to save you."
And that's precisely what Our Lord did for us.
He wore our robe of sin.

As the good brother took upon himself
the fate of the wicked brother,
so the Lord took upon himself
all the discord and disharmonies,
all the sins and guilt of men and women
as if he himself were guilty.
As gold is sucked into the furnace
to have its dross burned away,
so God takes human nature
and plunges it into Calvary
to have our sins burned away.

Or to change the figure:
Since sin is in the blood,
Jesus poured out his blood for redemption,
for without the shedding of blood,
there is no remission of sins.
And then on Easter Sunday,
he rose...with his glorified, sinless human nature.

And this becomes the first note of the new creation,
the beginning of the new symphony
which will be played again and again
by the Divine Conductor.
How are the notes added?

We are the other notes,
if – like Mary – we consent to be added to that first note.
How do we become added?
We become added by Baptism,
by which each of us dies with the Old Adam
and are thus incorporated to the New Adam, Christ.
All these notes that are added to the first note
constitute the new body of Christ –
that which is known as his “Mystical Body” – the Church.
This is what it means to be a Christian.
Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

DID YOU KNOW?

For those of you who are bound for the MPs as a Branch...

4 May is the feast of St. Florian, the patron of MPs.

Florian was an officer of the Roman army in Noricum (Austria). He surrendered himself to the Roman governor Aquilinus at Lorsch when Aquilinus’ troops were hunting Christians during the persecution of Diocletian (early-300s).

He was scourged and thrown into the River Enns with a rock around his neck.

Not much more is known about him.

But if you ever visit the Swiss Alps, look up the village of St. Maurice and the old abbey there, also called St. Maurice.

It was built to house the remains of another soldier-saint who was also in the Roman army.

The whole story happened during the reign of the Roman Emperor Maximian, and in those days (AD 285 or so), the town was called “Agaunum”. The majority of the town was pagan, but there was a handful of Christians who also lived there.

German barbarians harassed the town regularly, and finally, the Emperor called a Roman legion out of the Egyptian city of Thebes and ordered them to Agaunum to drive back the Germans. Maurice was the CO of the legion. In those days, there were lots of Christians in Egypt, and many of the soldiers in the legion were Christian.

Arriving at Agaunum, the soldiers were ordered to give up their Christianity, to re-dedicate themselves to the Emperor and to force the Christians in Agaunum to do the same.

Maurice spoke for his men, and his speech has been preserved:

We are your soldiers, O Emperor,
but we freely acknowledge that we are also
the servants of God...To you is due
military obedience, but to God is due justice...
We cannot take up arms to strike pious men, civilians...
Christians we declare ourselves to be;
We cannot persecute Christians.

Maurice and the Christian soldiers were tortured and beheaded, and the Christians of Agaunum were secretly relieved and preserved their bodies and recorded their deeds.

A century later, the local bishop gathered the bones of these martyrs together, and by 515, King Sigismund of Burgundy built an abbey and a church over them. Sigismund was the one who changed the name of the town to “St. Maurice”.

Since that time, all kinds of famous people have honored Maurice and his compatriots, and if you were to visit the “treasure room” of the abbey, you could see an 800-year old gold-lined coffer which was made in the 1200s to contain Maurice’s remains, or you could see vases and chalices given by Charlemagne; or you could see a 2100-year old Alexandrian vase which was transformed into a Christian vessel in the 7th century.

From the 6th or 7th century, you could see another casket, inlaid with gold, with the inscription: “Teuderic the priest ordered this to be made in honor off St. Maurice”; or you could see a relic-case given to the abbey in 1261 (it was thought to contain pieces of thorn from Christ’s crown of thorns and was given by St. Louis IX, King of France and another soldier-saint).

So for centuries, the abbey and the town of St. Maurice have attracted Christian pilgrims (they generally get 12,000 visitors each year).

Today, 86 priests live in the abbey, and they run a very successful Prep School.

But overshadowing all the success and the treasures of the centuries, there remains the simple witness of the martyrdom of Maurice and his companions. Their example is a timeless lesson of the courageous fidelity of men who were soldiers of God.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...all our graduates and relatives serving in Iraq (and other places, too)...and their families.

...all our military brothers and sisters in harm’s way...and their families.

...the wounded and maimed on both sides...and their families.

...the dead on both sides...and their families.

...the innocent non-combatant victims...and their families.

...the intention of peace and the building of a just society in Iraq.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Why do Catholics think that “traditions” of the Church are important? Isn’t it enough to rely on the Bible?

A: First of all, I would argue gently with your use of the word “traditions”.

The Catholic Church believes in its Tradition (the Bible as we have it comes from that Tradition). We spell the word with a capital “T” for a reason.

If you simply use the word “tradition” (small “t”), you’re talking about something else. More on that later.

The Tradition of the Catholic Church is nothing more than the way in which it has preserved and communicated the revelation of God throughout the ages. After all, the Apostles eventually died, and with their deaths, the Church began to worry about how best to continue their preaching without losing anything of the teaching of Jesus.

So, over a couple of centuries, the Church compiled the collection of sacred writings that we now call the “Bible”. In doing this, the Church believed that it was guided by

the Holy Spirit and that it was preserving the message of revelation intact and also was learning how to apply that message in every age.

Jesus promised that he would remain with the Church in its mission, so by acting as a “church” – as a world-wide sign of Christ’s presence – the Catholic Church believes that it has indeed preserved the message of Christ over the centuries and that the presence of Christ in his Holy Spirit preserves the Church from errors of belief.

Unfortunately, the word “Tradition” has become a “dirty word” for some people. They seem to think that “Tradition” somehow contradicts the message of God’s revelation...whereas we believe that it actually preserves and interprets God’s intent... in the Bible, certainly, but also in the corporate memory of the Church from the beginning.

So for Catholics, “Tradition” is a sacred process by which God aids the Church in understanding and communicating revelation...through the Bible but also through the teaching of the Church as it applies the Bible to the needs of every age. We see it as a constant moving of the Holy Spirit behind the scenes, keeping the Church faithful to the message and to the development of belief which began with the Apostles.

And when Catholics put their belief in something that has been taught by the Church from the beginning, they believe that the Church is preserved from error by the power of Jesus’ Spirit. This is called the “infallibility” of the Church.

Examples of the Church’s “Tradition” would be the Bible itself, the Apostles’ Creed, Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments.

So “Tradition” is not only the Bible; it’s also the memory of the Church, keeping alive the teaching and practices of the Apostles who knew Jesus.

On the other hand, “traditions” (with a small-case “t”) are another matter. They are basically local customs or private practices which help people in the practice of their religious life. An example would be the Rosary. It is simply a form of personal prayer, and while the Scriptures urge us to “pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17), there is no obligation to use the Rosary as the only form of that prayer. It works well for some, but not for everyone.

So it’s critical to understand the difference between the two words “Tradition” and “traditions”. They’re not interchangeable.

Basically, the Catholic Church doesn’t believe that it has “invented” anything, but in its Tradition, it preserves and applies the revelation of Christ throughout every age.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

POLITICAL THEOLOGY:

Bring this topic up in some circles, and you’ll have a fight on your hands. It’s a topic that raises lots of emotions.

The term has been used since the 1960s, and it can be defined in this way:

An effort to apply the values of the Scriptures
to political realities and societies.

The trouble begins when you look at the abuses throughout the centuries, and these abuses begin when either politics or theology attempts to use the other for its own purposes.

A good example would be the “Imperial Cult” in ancient Rome. In that setting, different oaths were required of different levels of the society, but everyone had to make formal sacrifice to the “genius” (the word means the “spiritual element”) of Caesar. This wasn’t a real religion but an attempt to test political loyalty. The early Christians were suspect not so much because they practiced a different religion (indeed, many different religions were tolerated by the Roman government) but because they were suspect of treason when they refused to worship the Emperor.

Again, in the 4th century, Constantine made Christianity legal (AD 313), and Theodosius made it the “state” religion (AD 380 or so). Once again, they didn’t make these decisions so much because of religious conviction but because they figured that such moves would bring unity to the Empire.

Again too, the Nazis presented Hitler not simply as a political figure but more as a “messianic” figure. Prayers in schools were not “for” Hitler; they were directed “to” Hitler. This “devotion” was required in support of the political process.

So, POLITICAL THEOLOGY has not had a particularly appealing history: either religion has used politics for its own ends, or politics has made religion into a tool to achieve political goals. Nowadays, people are uncomfortable with the “Religious/Political Right” in the USA, which many view as a religious movement that uses politics for its own ends.

But the question remains: should religion and politics mix?

Before you can give an answer, you have to remember two thoughts:

- a) If religion withdraws from the political process, then politics has one less critic. This would mean that religion would be expected to agree with everything about the political process. In effect, religion would be expected to “keep its mouth shut”.
- b) If religion becomes simply a “personal” or “private” entity in people’s lives, then what does this mean about “social” relationships and responsibilities...like racial issues, sexual issues, etc.?
Doesn’t the Scripture urge us to champion justice and mercy, not only privately but as a society? And doesn’t religion have a role in this process?

So, it’s a complicated question, and the answers aren’t easy to arrive at.

Today, POLITICAL THEOLOGY needs to avoid the mistakes of the past and at the same time remain faithful to the biblical injunction to build a world of justice and mercy for all people WITHOUT sinking into the extreme practices of extreme people.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“God has called us to illuminate men and women
not to confound or enforce them;
God has called us to speak
with the simplicity of the Apostles’ Creed,
not to complicate things
or to flatter the audience;
God has called us to heal,

not to terrorize...”

Pope John XXIII
(d. 1963)

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!

As always, all best wishes...
and the promise of my prayers
for you and yours.
Have a good weekend!!

Woodie