



1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION NEWSLETTER

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March 2013

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REPENTANCE AFTER CONFESSION FILLING THE EMPTINESS

by Sam Williamson

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I once felt betrayed by a friend; it was not a simple sense of betrayal but a deep visceral sense of treachery. I felt hurt and angry and I thought ill of my friend; I wanted justice. Of course I've read not to let a "root of bitterness grow" in my heart (Hebrews 12:15), but I continued to experience bad thoughts about my friend. I would repent for those bad thoughts; I'd resolve to stop thinking them; and I'd confess such thoughts to God and close friends. And yet they kept popping up, no matter how hard I tried to stop.

And I am not alone. I have friends who also have patterns of behavior they wish to change. They too confess and resolve to stop, but more often than not, the conduct rears its ugly head again (and again). No matter how hard the effort.

When most of us think of repentance, we think of a change in behavior, turning from bad things and resolving to live a good life. We tend to focus on external actions; we'll stop doing this and start doing that. Unfortunately, most of us find that our resolutions to repent, like short-lived fireworks, fade away after that brief flash of inspiration. In a few weeks or months – perhaps only a few days – our resolve has crumbled and our previous behavior is back. Sometimes with renewed vigor.

Our resolve to change seems powerless; we need an interior motivation. We need a change of heart and mind. In fact the Greek word for repentance (metanoia) can be translated as a "change of mind or heart." It means more than changed behavior; it means a change in motivations of the heart.

We think of conceit as a pride or cockiness. But the English translation for Paul's exhortation to "do nothing from conceit" falls short of the mark. The old King James translation was better when it said do nothing from "vain glory." The Greek word (kenodoxia) actually means "empty glory." Paul teaches that many of the actions we dislike in others (and ourselves!) arise from an emptiness of glory. He says, "do nothing fueled by that emptiness."

As I struggled with my friend's betrayal, God led me to Philippians 2:3, where Paul asks us to, "do nothing from rivalry or conceit." Paul pursues why we act. He is not only addressing what we do but why we do it. He is asking, "What fuels our behavior?"

Acting from our empty glory is the root of many of our harmful actions. When repentance merely consists of commitment to modify behavior, it misses our core motives. It's like taking cough syrup for lung cancer; it may momentarily quiet the symptoms, but it doesn't address the disease.

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OVERVIEW FOR THE MONTH

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The month of March is dedicated to St. Joseph. The entire month of March falls during the liturgical season known as Lent which is represented by the liturgical color purple — a symbol of penance, mortification and the sorrow of a contrite heart. The last day of the month is the beginning of the Easter season. The liturgical color is white — the color of light, a symbol of joy, purity and innocence (absolute or restored).

During this month we will continue our journey to the cross with our acts of penitence. We will reflect on our mortality ("Remember man thou art dust") and the shortness of life ("and to dust thou shall return"). We will heed the call, "Now is the acceptable time, now is "the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2)." Just like Our Lord's earthly life every moment of our lives is leading up to the last moment — when for eternity we will either

go to God or suffer the fires of hell. The Solemnity of the Annunciation bravely appears in the second week of Lent; a pure white flower in the purple Lenten landscape. It seems to be, at first glance, a Christmas feast, but upon reflection we grasp that the feast is intimately linked to the Paschal mystery. For what Christ inaugurated at His incarnation in accepting to offer himself for the human race, he will complete in his sacrifice on the cross.

As the weeks of Lent progress let us not tire of doing our good works and penance, but continue with the enthusiasm of the catechumens on their way to Easter and Baptism. May our Lenten observance be a joyful journey — and not a forced march.

FEASTS FOR MARCH

The feasts on the General Roman Calendar celebrated during the month of March are:

- 3 Third Sunday of Lent, Sunday
- 4 Casimir of Poland, Opt. Mem.
- 7 Perpetua and Felicity, Memorial
- 8 John of God, Opt. Mem.
- 9 Frances of Rome; St. John Ogilvie (Scotland), Opt. Mem.
- 18 Cyril of Jerusalem, Opt. Mem.
- 19 Joseph, husband of Mary, Solemnity
- 23 Turibio de Mogrovejo, Opt. Mem.
- 24 Palm Sunday, Sunday
- 28 Holy Thursday, Triduum
- 29 Good Friday, Triduum
- 30 Holy Saturday, Triduum
- 31 Easter Sunday, Solemnity

The feasts of St. Katharine Drexel (March 3) and St. Patrick (March 17), are superseded by the Sunday liturgy. The feast of the Annunciation is transferred from March 25 to April 8 because it falls during Easter Week. □

OUR CENACLE CORNER

*Seeking a deeper relationship with
God through meditation of passages
from Holy Scriptures*

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS*

1. "Father forgive them for they do not know what they do."
(Luke 23:34)
2. "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."
(Luke 23:43).
3. "Woman behold your son, son behold your mother."
(John 19:26)
4. "My God, My God why have you abandoned me." (Mark 15:34)
5. "I thirst." (John 19:28)
6. "It is finished." (John 19:30)
7. "Father into thy Hands I commend My Spirit."
(Luke 23:46)

**Some discussions were inspired by
Roberts Ministry.*

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

THE CROSS – THE ONE TRUE GLORIFICATION OF GOD

By Pope Benedict XVI

www.swordofthespirit.net

According to the account of the evangelists, Jesus died, praying, at the ninth hour, that is to say, around 3:00 P.M. Luke gives his final prayer as a line from Psalm 31: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5). In John's account, Jesus' last words are: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). In the Greek text, this word (*tetélestai*) points back to the very beginning of the Passion narrative, to the episode of the washing of the feet, which the evangelist introduces by observing that Jesus loved his own "to the end (*télos*)" (John 13:1). This "end," this *ne plus ultra* of loving, is now attained in the moment of death. He has truly gone right to the end, to the very limit and even beyond that limit. He has accomplished the utter fullness of love – he has given himself.

In our reflection on Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives in chapter 6, we encountered a further meaning of this same word (*teleioun*) in connection with Hebrews 5:9: in the Torah it means consecration, bestowal of priestly dignity, in other words, total dedication to God. I think we may detect this same meaning here, on the basis of Jesus' high-priestly prayer. Jesus has accomplished the act of consecration – the priestly handing-over of himself and the world to God – right to the end (cf. John 17:19). So in this final word, the great mystery of the Cross shines forth. The new cosmic liturgy is accomplished. The Cross of Jesus replaces all other acts of worship as the one true glorification of God, in which God glorifies himself through him in whom he grants us his love, thereby drawing us to himself.

The Synoptic Gospels explicitly portray Jesus' death on the Cross as a cosmic and liturgical event: the sun is darkened, the veil of the Temple is torn in two, the earth quakes, the dead rise again.

Even more important than the cosmic sign is an act of faith: the Roman centurion – the commander of the execution squad – in his consternation over all that he sees taking place, acknowledges Jesus as God's Son: "Truly, this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). At the foot of the Cross, the Church of the Gentiles comes into being. Through the Cross, the Lord gathers people together to form the new community of the worldwide Church. Through the suffering Son, they recognize the true God.



Christ on the Cross, by El Greco (1585-95)

While the Romans, as a deterrent, deliberately left victims of crucifixion hanging on the cross after they had died, Jewish law required them to be taken down on the same day (cf. Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Hence the execution squad had to hasten the victims' death by breaking their legs. This applied also in the case of the crucifixion on Golgotha. The legs of the two "thieves" are broken. But then the soldiers see that Jesus is already dead. So they do not break his legs. Instead, one of them pierces Jesus' right side – his heart – and "at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). It is the hour when the paschal lambs are being slaughtered. It was laid down that no bone of these lambs was to be broken (cf. Exodus 12:46). Jesus appears here as the true Paschal Lamb, pure and whole.

So in this passage we may detect a tacit reference to the very beginning of Jesus' story – to the hour when John the Baptist said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Those words, which were inevitably obscure at the time as a mysterious prophecy of things to come, are now a reality. Jesus is the Lamb chosen by God himself. On the Cross he takes upon himself the sins of the world, and he wipes them away.

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THE CHALLENGE POPE BENEDICT HAS LEFT FOR HIS SUCCESSOR -- AND FOR ORDINARY CATHOLICS

By Phil Lawler
www.catholicculture.org

Although Pope Benedict caught nearly everyone by surprise when he announced his resignation, we can't say that he didn't give us fair warning. In an interview in 2010, the Holy Father explained at some length why a Pope should resign when he no longer had the strength to carry out his duties. He even said at the time: "I also notice that my forces are diminishing."

For months now, visitors to the Vatican have reported evidence of the Pope's physical decline. He not only needs help walking because of aching joints, but also has trouble concentrating through a long work session because of flagging energy. After a nap his mind is as sharp as it ever was, but the need for rest is coming more frequently. Apparently the Pope assessed his own condition – humbly, prayerfully, and unsparingly – and concluded that he can no longer do the work.

The decision must have been a painful one, because Pope Benedict still has several cherished projects to complete: the liturgical "reform of the reform," the completion of the Year of Faith, the new encyclical. An ordinary man would no doubt struggle to complete those last few projects, even if he knew that his strength was failing. But Benedict XVI is no ordinary man.

This has been a pontificate of surprises. The most important announcements have come without accompanying fanfare, without premature news leaks. Yet when he has taken action, Benedict XVI has always been decisive. His resignation announcement is no exception.

As my colleague Jeff Mirus points out, a papal resignation is not unprecedented. But nothing of the kind has occurred in this era of instant worldwide communication. From this day forward, for better or worse, every Roman Pontiff will face questions about if, or when, he plans to resign. The Twitter generation will begin asking questions whenever a Pope experiences a health crisis. (Is it possible to serve as a Pope while fighting early-stage cancer or heart disease? With failing eyesight?) More ominously, the same sort of questions will arise when the Pope loses a popularity poll; the political pressures on the papacy are sure to increase.

Count on it: The mass media will remark with surprise that the next Pope, whoever he is, is "conservative" on doctrinal issues, because he upholds perennial Church teachings on matters such as the male priesthood and the dignity of human life. The secular media cannot be made to understand that every plausible candidate for the papacy is "conservative" by their standards, since the papabile are all believing Catholics. An unbelieving world, accustomed to appraising all disagreements in political terms, cannot comprehend that the Bishop of Rome has no personal discretionary authority on questions of

doctrine: that he can only teach what the Church teaches. So the pressure on the new Pope will begin from the day of his election; the media will demand radical change, and attack him when he fails to meet their expectations. Pope Benedict has endured this sort of pressure for nearly eight years now, and never buckled. But the hostility of the mainstream media have undoubtedly taken their toll, as they will on his successors.

In retrospect we can see that Pope Benedict has been preparing for his own departure. If he has been contemplating resignation for months, as his brother reports, it is much easier to understand why he called two consistories within the space of one year. He wanted to ensure an appropriate balance within the College of Cardinals, among the men who will choose his successor. He chose to step down now, no doubt, so that he will not leave that successor burdened with too many tasks that he himself was unable to complete.

So now Pope Benedict has left us, the faithful, with a task of our own. We have a day to swallow the news of his resignation, and another day to digest it. Then Ash Wednesday will arrive, and we must all buckle down to a season of prayer and fasting for the good of the Church, and especially for the strength of Benedict's successor. □

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Repentance After Confession – Filling the Emptiness

Our issues seem insurmountable because they involve our nature. In the first chapter of the Bible, God says we are made in his image, designed for glory and significance. In the fall through Adam and Eve's disobedience, *we lost that glory, but we never lost our need for glory and significance*. Glory is core to our very essence. We'll never get healing of our very person until we see how desperately we need it and how frantically we grasp for it. When we feel empty of glory, something inside of us seeks to fill that emptiness. When I remembered my friend's betrayal, another thought inevitably accompanied that sense; I said to myself, "I would never do that." In saying, "I would never do that," I was trying to fill my empty glory. I was saying, "I'm not that bad; in fact I'm pretty good."

Whenever we try to self-satisfy our hunger for glory, we end up acting contrary to the new nature Christ has given us. And not only do we act wrongly, we also leave a wake of destruction caused by the sucking vacuum of our emptiness.

Take a moment and think of how others we know have created this vortex of destruction:

A man you know falls back into pornography because of an inner dissatisfaction, and he is discovered, and trust is broken.

Bosses you know who aren't satisfied with their recent promotion; in addition they take credit for others' ideas, they constantly promote themselves and they need to win at every office game. Their "management life" is about them and how great they are, not about their employees and how to care for colleagues.

Ministry workers unceasingly express self-affirmation: "Didn't I give a great talk, and wasn't that a profound idea? And look how well I lead small groups!" People flee from them like the plague.

Now take a moment and reflect on how we each fill our own emptiness:

- Do we always have to be in control or in charge?
- Are we constantly seeking affirmation?
- Are we constantly expressing, "Woe is me, I am so hurt, poor me."
- Do others consider us arrogant?
- How do we handle criticism, just or unjust?
- Do we frequently think of our own hard work or our relative goodness or smarts or success?

Can we see our own vain attempts to self-fill our inner emptiness, and can we see such attempts never satisfy? We keep trying to fill that void, but we are still devoid of glory. As in quicksand, the more we struggle within ourselves to fill this emptiness, the deeper we sink. We need something outside ourselves to fill us with glory.

This attempt to self-fill our own emptiness is just not possible. It's like trying to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps; motivational speakers love to teach it, but it's physically impossible. The more we try to pull our boots up, the more we pull ourselves – and others around us – down. We need outside help.

As I was praying, confessing my anger toward my friend, I felt God gently nudge me toward some self-reflection. Are there ways I betray Christ? The self-reflection convicted me in these ways: I take credit for my success in the computer industry; I take credit for working hard; I take credit for ideas God has given me. All of these self-congratulations form a type of spiritual plagiarism. I'm stealing credit from God. If I had been born 100 years ago in Tibet to other parents, what are the chances of my computer success, or my hard office work, or my "profound" ideas? Everything I have is from God's grace. And I take credit ... simply to fill that void of empty glory.

And yet, despite my own betrayal of God by my plagiaristic ingratitude, he continues to love me. He loves me so much he sent his Son to die in order to give me a new heart and a new life. In the moment of my deepest betrayal, God was there deeply loving me.

This is the change of heart I need; his love in the midst of my failure.

True repentance transcends mere commitment to behavior change. It is a change of heart and mind. It is a movement from trying to fill myself toward a heart that is filled by the glory and love of Christ. It means going to God in our emptiness and allowing him to fill that void with his love and care. We stop acting out of our old hearts and begin operating from our new hearts.

Do you feel condemned by a sense that you have been trying to fill yourself up? Stop it! That is just one more attempt at self-filling ("Oh, I feel so bad, aren't I great for feeling so bad!"). Instead, bring those convictions of self-filling (not condemnations) to Christ and pause in that confession. And sense his love, forgiving you and filling you with his love.

This is the deep repentance – the change of heart and mind – that we need for a rich life. It is seeing that the significance and importance we need in our hearts can only be satisfied by seeing what Christ paid for us in order to have us. It is hearing God say we are his beloved.

So, in the moment of confessing my betrayal of Christ; in the moment of emptying my self-glory – in that moment, Christ fills me with a sense of his incredible love. I see him loving me even in the midst of my betrayal, and now I care far less that someone betrayed me. All of a sudden, I no longer look for "justice." All of a sudden I begin to be filled with a sense of love for my friend. I begin to feel his emptiness and what he has to do to fill it, and I begin to care for him and feel the pain he must be feeling.

In that moment, I am filled.

The Philippians verse I quoted above ("do nothing from rivalry or conceit") is followed by an ancient song called The Kenosis or The Emptying. It goes like this:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 English Standard Version)

Most sermons on this song conclude with, "So live like Jesus did, be humble, and care for others." But the passage does not begin with, "Have this example among

yourselves." Instead, it begins, "Have this mind among yourselves." It is saying, "Change your heart and mind; truly repent."

Even though Christ is one with God, he does not "grasp" onto that glory; he isn't self-filling. Instead, he empties himself. What is he doing? He is emptying himself of his glory so that he can fill us with his glory. Christ emptied himself of glory so he could pour his glory into us. When we see him doing that for us, we are filled.

Deep repentance is not mere behavior change; deep repentance is the mind and heart which sees and senses – deeply knows – his love in our hearts in such a way that we are filled with his glory. Deep repentance is not merely clipping the dandelion flower of external actions; it is removing the tap root of self-filling behavior and coming to sense the deep filling love of the one who sees us as we are – and loves us. ☐

Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish Antioch, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men's retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. He is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefoftheHeart.com.



... "I am your mother Mary.

Today as you offer your own intentions offer souls of departed relatives, friends and enemies who are now being cleansed of sins committed. Continue to pray for unity and undertaking of all different religious leaders. In the days forward many changes will occur in the functionality of those people in power as these changes will affect daily lives. My children, pray for safety of your own children for these are easy prey for the evil one. Their thinking and religious upbringing are sometimes non-existent. When they are raised without fear for authority and respect for their parents their fear of God is void as well. I will be with you as these prayers become your own way to communicate with God. Thank you for heeding to my call. I love you my children."

*-Mary, your Lady of the Rosary
02162013*



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The Cross – the One True Glorification of God

Yet at the same time, there are echoes of Psalm 34, which says: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken" (Psalm 34:19-20). The Lord, the just man, has suffered much, he has suffered everything, and yet God has kept guard over him: no bone of his has been broken.

Blood and water flowed from the pierced heart of Jesus. True to Zechariah's prophecy, the Church in every century has looked upon this pierced heart and recognized therein the source of the blessings that are symbolized in blood and water. The prophecy prompts a search for a deeper understanding of what really happened there.

An initial step toward this understanding can be found in the First Letter of Saint John, which emphatically takes up the theme of the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side: "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree" (1 John 5:6-8).

What does the author mean by this insistence that Jesus came not with water only but also with blood? We may assume that he is alluding to a tendency to place all the emphasis on Jesus' baptism while setting the Cross aside. And this probably also meant that only the word, the doctrine, the message was held to be important, but not "the flesh", the living body of Christ that bled on the Cross; it probably meant an attempt to create a Christianity of thoughts and ideas, divorced from the reality of the flesh – sacrifice and sacrament.

In this double outpouring of blood and water, the Fathers saw an image of the two fundamental sacraments – Eucharist and Baptism – which spring forth from the Lord's pierced side, from his heart. This is the new outpouring that creates the Church and renews mankind. Moreover, the opened side of the Lord asleep on the Cross prompted the Fathers to point to the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and so in this outpouring of the sacraments they also recognized the birth of the Church: the creation of the new woman from the side of the new Adam.

[Excerpt from Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection, by Pope Benedict XVI, Chapter 8, © 2011 Ignatius Press (US), CTS (UK). Used with permission.]

KNOWING OUR SAINTS

SAINT CASIMIR - 1461 - 1484

FEAST DAY: MARCH 4

PATRON OF POLAND AND LITHUANIA

www.catholic.org

Casimir grew up in a world where his life was not his own. As a prince of Poland, the second son of King Casimir IV and Elizabeth of Austria, his life was scheduled to cement his father's authority and increase Poland's power.

Casimir realized from an early age that his life belonged to someone else, but to a much higher King than his father. Despite pressure, humiliation, and rejection, he stood by that loyalty through his whole life.

Born the third of thirteen children in 1461, Casimir was committed to God from childhood. Some of that commitment was the result of a tutor, John Dlugosz, whose holiness encouraged Casimir on his own journey.

It may be hard for us to imagine royal luxury as a pressure. But for Casimir, the riches around him were temptations to forget his true loyalties. Rebelling against the rich, fashionable clothes he was expected to enjoy, he wore the plainest of clothes.

Rejecting even ordinary comforts, he slept little, spending his nights in prayer. And when he did sleep, he lay on the floor not on a royal bed.

Even though he was a prince, many of those around him must have laughed and joked at his choices. Yet, in the face of any pressure, Casimir was always friendly and calm.

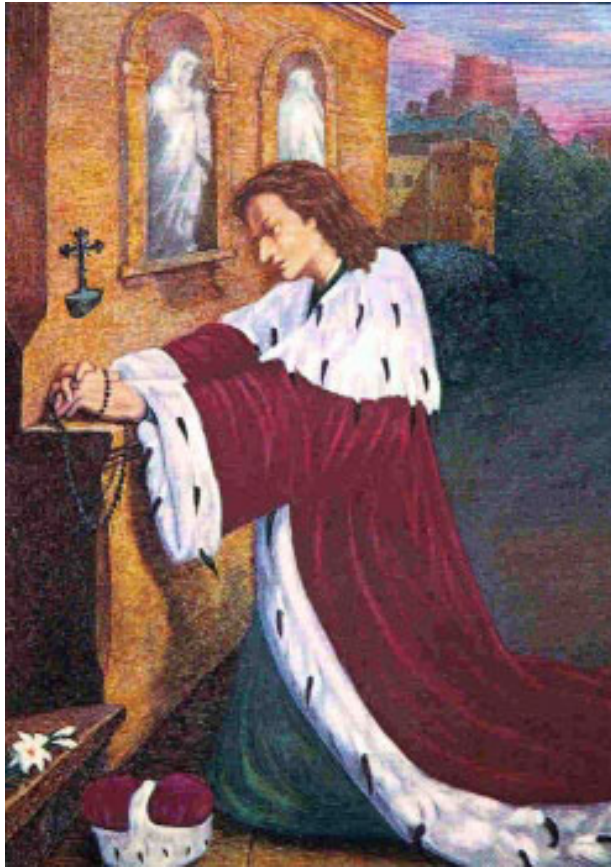
Though his father must have wondered about him, he must have seen and admired Casimir's strength. He showed that he misunderstood this strength when he sent Casimir as head of an army to take over the throne of Hungary at the request of some nobles there. Casimir felt the whole expedition was wrong but was convinced to go out of obedience to his father. He could not help but feel at every step that it was disobedient to his other Father. So when soldiers started deserting, he was only too glad to listen to the advice of his officers and turn back home. His feelings were confirmed when he discovered that Pope Sixtus IV had opposed the move.

His father, however, was furious at being deterred from his plans and banished Casimir to a castle in Dobzki, hoping that imprisonment would change Casimir's mind. Casimir's commitment to what he believed was right only grew stronger in his exile and he refused to cooperate with his father's plans any more despite the pressure to give in. He even rejected a marriage alliance his father tried to form. He participated in his true King's plans wholeheartedly by praying, studying, and helping the poor.

He died at the age of 23 in 1484 from lung disease. He was buried

with his favorite song, a Latin hymn to Mary called "Omni die dic Mariae" which we know as "Daily, Daily Sing to Mary." Because of his love for the song, it is known as the Hymn of St. Casimir though he didn't write it.

Casimir is patron saint of Poland and Lithuania.



MEDITATION & COMMENTARY

TRUE HOLINESS

THE HOLINESS WE SEEK DOES NOT CONSIST OF HUMAN PERFECTION OR STRENGTH OF WILL, BUT GOD'S GRACE

By Bruce Yocum

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A while ago I was counseling someone who had been battling with a particular area of sin. At one point in the conversation the person said, in some real anguish, "But surely God must know that I cannot change this!" In that brief sentence he revealed both the root of his problem and its ultimate solution.

This man wanted God to be merciful to him, but it was clear in our conversation that he thought God's mercy would come in the form of an exception: Yes, it is wrong to do this, but God will just have to excuse me for it, make an exception in my case, because I cannot change.

At least he was not choosing the more radical solution, a solution all too popular today, which goes something like this: No matter how hard I try, I cannot seem to conquer this area of sin. And a lot of other people are just like me. We are goodhearted, try to be decent, make efforts not to _____ (fill in the blank with your own favorite unconquerable sin), but cannot master this problem. Therefore, it must not really be wrong. Or at least, it isn't wrong for me.

No, this man was not taking that fatal turn in the road, but he was, just the same, surrendering to sin. His surrender did not involve a complete redefinition of sin, but the surrender did give up a part of his life to the sin's power. He realized that he did not have the strength to defeat this sin, so, in the place of obedience to God, he would offer his excuses ("I am too weak").

Sin's mastery reveals our weakness. Haven't we all found ourselves in this same position at least once in our life? Haven't we all encountered the strength of sin in such a way that we finally cry out, "Surely God must know that I cannot change this?" Anyone who has sincerely decided to follow the Lord and live a life of righteousness has encountered the overpowering mastery of sin, and in that encounter discovered, as well, his or her own weakness.

Well then, isn't that a pretty good excuse? "The problem is not only with me, everyone else has failed, too. Let's face it, even though we do our best, and on the whole live a pretty decent life, we are just going to have areas where we have to accept that we can't avoid sin. In the

place of complete obedience, God will have to accept some sin, for which we have a pretty good excuse."

When I was a child [more than 50 years ago], biographies of heroic and virtuous Christians were pretty popular among kids (and adults) who had had some religious upbringing, and I read my share. Those people were amazing. I admired them greatly, but the flickers of holy zeal to be just like them were quickly snuffed out by my almost daily failures. I admired those people, but I could not be like them because I just wasn't like them. Somehow, they managed to get born, or raised, or something, without the weakness I had.

Whether because of the way they were written, or because of my own ignorance, I drew the wrong lesson from those books when I was a child. I assumed they were spiritually invincible, but I realized now that all of those people were just like me in their weakness. Some of them had perhaps greater weaknesses than I. But they understood an important principle.

Not Excuses – but Grace. The man I was counseling a few weeks ago said, "Surely God must understand that I cannot change this!" And he was right. God does understand that. But God gives grace to change what we cannot change – if we are willing to ask, if we are willing to maintain the ongoing battle against sin, despite all the humiliating defeats. Ten or fifteen or thirty years of continuous, unsuccessful struggle against sin may seem to us to be a record of failure – the complete opposite of a life of holiness. But if we persist in the struggle, if we refuse to make excuses for our sin and, instead, repent each time and ask God for grace, then God in his mercy will make us holy.

The holiness we seek does not consist of human perfection or strength of will. It is a gift of God, a share of his own nature, a union with him that only he can produce. It is as far above and beyond our best efforts to obey and live righteously as the heavens are above the earth. Nothing that we can do and no effort that we can make is sufficient to produce true holiness. Only God can do that.

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GOD TOUCHED ME

Counting on God

I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you.

Isaiah 41:20

by Grace, a devotee

Our family of five has been so financially equipped until my husband (a European), whom I fondly call "Pop," lost his job sometime in September of 2007. We all thought it would be transitory – just like those times when he decided he wanted to change his career course or when he thought that he had worked long enough for a company and it was time to move on to another corporate culture, learn and benefit from it, professionally and personally. All he need to do then was search for employment opportunities, send his resume, and appear for interviews. A week or so later, he faces the challenge having to decide on multiple offers.

That was then but the current economic situation is uncompromising!

The **1st Year** was not bad at all. I was gainfully employed and he was, of course, entitled to his unemployment benefit, which was extended quite a few times in view of the ailing economy. So we lived our "customary" lifestyle of eating out and shopping [for things that are essentials and/or not so essential] on weekends. We kept our financial commitments to what I call our "apostolate". Our children stayed in private Catholic schools. We went on short family vacations and because we had a travel fund we budgeted for regularly in the past, we did not put-off our family vacation to Europe that we had planned for that year.

About the **2nd Year**, the unemployment checks stopped coming. But for us, everything still remained the same, except of course, the vacation travel part. There was no way we can budget for that, being subsidized by only one salary. We started drawing from our savings – hoping and trusting that Pop would soon be employed. We managed to make good all our financial commitments. As had been in the past, all bills were paid on time.

The **3rd Year** came and still no job for Pop. But he never lost hope. He kept on searching, sending his resume and had always been the "other" candidate during the final interview – but not the one to receive the engagement offer. I asked God what could possibly be wrong with him. He was a very intelligent man, a first rate executive, the best in whatever he puts his heart and mind into, a caring man, a superior who is exacting and rigorous in what he expects of his team but one who is fair -- looking out for the well-being and advancement of his deserving subordinates.

People say it's not him. He's not the only one. Some are even in worse predicament. It is the economy – and it's

not just local, it is global! On the third year, and for a proud man who was never without an income in all his adult life, this was a big let-down for my husband. I was afraid that he would slip into depression – which could result into so many incurable physical ailments and expenses. He didn't – at least to what was evident to me. I was thankful and grateful that he was always strong for me and our children – two of them were already preparing for their SATs and looking forward to admission in their university of choice. In my quiet moments with God, I ask Him what Pop feels – does he even cry out to Him? How can he still be faithful and devoted to Him? What's more, how can he still be truly joyful in the midst of what I am sure are his deep anxieties for the future of his family – without a job that will sustain their needs?

During all those times when I gave into my fears and my faith weakened, my husband would always pose to me the question: "Has God not provided for all that we need?" My husband's faith and devotion to God is contaminating. He taught me, by his example how to trust and abandon my concerns completely to our God. But I am a slow learner in this aspect. And more often than not, I will, and have succumbed to my fears.

On the **4th Year**, our children not only got into the universities of their choice, they also qualified for some scholarships. Their diligence in high school, coupled with the genes they must have inherited from my husband, paid off. Without us knowing, both of them applied for grants while in high school and approval came before enrollment. By this time, our savings were diminishing to the point that I had to close our money market savings as the monthly maintenance service agreement was stiff. Even with the university scholarship and the grants, there were still expenses to pay – the monthly tuition not covered by the subsidy, the books, room and board, and the other incidentals of college. But Pop and I wouldn't risk our children's chances of getting their college education, which they have worked so hard for. And so it was time to tap into the stocks my husband had invested into. He sold the shares equal to the amount our children needed to supplement the scholarships and the grants. The children managed to find some odd jobs in and around the school – which helped augment whatever measly allowance we could afford to give them. It was tough to see them trying to make ends meet. But our children were never wanting of love and support – it was the best and greatest investment they know from the time they were born – and never a time did they doubt it,

even during those times when they have to be disciplined for the choices they made!

The 5th Year was tough. There were no more savings to draw from. Whatever is left of the stocks at this time were our "reserve" for the kids' college necessities. And then came that one humbling "payday" experience. I was craving a shrimp taco plate for lunch at work and thought that I can give in to my cravings – it was Pay Day anyway. But eventually decided against it concerned that the payroll money credited to our account was barely enough to pay the bills that were due that pay period. It was this humbling experience, too, that prompted me to call my mortgage banker to find out if there was a way she can re-align our monthly home mortgage payments. She said she would look into it and let me know. She asked for documentation and we both hoped that a restructuring of the loan would be considered even with only one income to boot. As soon as I got home that evening, I told Pop about it. He was his usual jovial self – slightly irking me. Doesn't he see the reality of our situation at all? Couldn't he just console me in my misery? And he did. He said "trust." "God will provide."

He then told me about his job interview [the final one in a series of five qualifying interviews] that afternoon. He said his usual "oh they all like me!" and with my usual, "they always like you but they hire the "other" one – and we both laughed our hearts out! If being able to sincerely laugh at your seemingly hopeless situation isn't a blessing from God, I don't know what else to call it!

It must be our way of surviving the storms -- with rejoicing and great hope!

A few weeks later, we met with our banker to sign our new mortgage terms. Our new mortgage payment period was now up to 30 years, when we only had five more years to pay off the old one. Our monthly payment was however reduced to about 75% -- a big financial burden lifted off our backs!

And Pop – while signing the new mortgage papers winked at me and whispered to my ear, "When I get a job, we'll pay an additional 50% every other month. We should be done paying by the time we retire!" That spark of hope and rejoicing can only come from God!

God is too wise to ever make a mistake. When something appears to be wrong, it is not a mere accident. Regardless of what challenges we face, I know God has

permitted them -- honestly believing and trusting that He is correcting us gently and humbling us tenderly. There are a lot of times when I feel I do not understand His plans for our family. But in all the events of our lives, I see the clear evidence of His guiding hands leading us to the path we need to walk so we can become everything He desires for us to be.

As Pop has always taught me, we should not seek to escape the refining process but rather allow God's purpose in our trials to be accomplished!

Pop took me to a Champagne Brunch on Sunday for my Valentine's day treat. While we were waiting to be seated, he showed me his coupons. He had everything planned – enjoying a special day with his special someone at a very special price! But it's more of the special price he always has for God whom we all rely on for "manna" in our desert that He showers, not only during the daytime but likewise during the nighttime of our lives. ☐

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Meditation and Commentary

We have been put in a crucible, every one of us, a purifying test by fire which God uses to do what we cannot do. For in the circumstances of our daily lives, again and again we must choose to believe in and obey God's word, and to confront the humiliating reality of our own sinfulness, which is revealed in our failures. We can escape this struggle if we wish. We can avoid the humiliation of repentance by making our excuses. But if we do that, we will find in the end that we have surrendered ourselves to a far more humiliating slavery to sin.

"Surely God must know that I cannot change this!" Yes, God knows it, and he knows that in this you are no different than every other man, woman, and child, yet he has called us nonetheless to holiness. We do not have to offer God excuses for not being holy. We need simply to continually turn to him in humble and trustful repentance, and let him, through his grace, clothe us in his own holiness. ☐

Bruce Yocum is President of Christ the King Association and a member of the International Executive Council of the Sword of the Spirit. This article was originally published in New Covenant, February 1989.

SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT RECOMMENDED

- You are enjoined to practice Eucharistic Adoration at least an hour a week. Let us render God adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition. Kindly check with your respective parishes for schedules. Some churches are open 24-hours for Eucharistic Adoration.
- Pray at least one rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary daily.
- Pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy at 3:00 PM and at 9:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Angelus at 6:00 PM daily.
- Pray the Pro-Life Scriptural Rosary [www.rosaryoftheunborn.com] to make reparation for the crime of abortion.
- Think of ways to make reparation to Mary for the sins committed against Jesus and Mary. A very good one is to join the **First Saturday devotion**; another is the **2000 Hail Mary devotion**.
- On the 19th, you may want to consider preparing a Saint Joseph's altar – a reminder that those who have enjoyed some measure of good fortune must share it with those who have less.
- Pray The Way of Cross uniting yourself with Christ in His passion, pondering on all that took place on the road to Calvary. Please check with your respective parishes for schedules of the Community Station of the Cross and do your best to join them.
- Holy Thursday is also called Maundy Thursday because of Christ's mandatum to his disciples to do as He did at the Last Supper. We can do acts of charity for others on this day.
- Good Friday is a day of mourning. We should try to take time off from work and school to participate in the devotions and liturgy of the day as much as possible. In addition, we should refrain from extraneous conversation. Maintain silence during the 3 hours (12:00 Noon — 3:00 P.M.). We should also restrict ourselves from any TV, music or computer -- these are all types of technology that can distract us from the spirit of Good Friday.
- Pray the Divine Mercy Novena – it starts on Good Friday, March 29. Check the Prayer Tab at www.spiritualarmyofgod.org for a copy of the novena. ☐

THANK YOU

... a small and simple phrase that comes from a grateful heart!

Psalm 106:2

FOR PRAYERS HEARD AND PETITIONS GRANTED

Thank you, Eternal Father, for Your Will that transformed our sorrow into joy, our tears of anguish into tears of thanksgiving. Our physical and spiritual re-creation, through Your Healing Hands, kept us enclosed and revived in our hope for renewed lives as we look up to the heavens praising You, in Jesus' most Holy Name, through the intercession of Mary, our Blessed Mother, and of the angels and saints.



Faith Punzalan e-mailed that her aunt, Carole Punzalan Schlander, is out of ICU! Carole has personally thanked everyone for the prayers offered for her recovery through Facebook.

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2000 HAIL MARY DEVOTION

The Spiritual Army of God the Father acknowledges with thanks our generous March sponsors of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion. We are grateful that we have merited their partnership and support in providing a venue of spirituality and fellowship for the devotees of our Blessed Mother. The devotion continues to be a constant success.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Betty Ayasao

Los Angeles, California

Lolita Estrada | Linda Fajardo
Loreto Melo | Concepcion Poblete
Lilia Tuazon | Thelma Zamora

SPIRITUAL ARMY NEWS DISPATCH

TOYS THAT BRING SMILE TO CHILDREN

The devotees of The Spiritual Army of God the Father marked the end of 2012 by celebrating the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ with a wonderful Christmas party and the solicitation of toys for the ministry's Toy Drive for the Los Angeles Children's Hospital. The Toy Drive was a tremendous success as a considerable number of toys were donated. It is a known fact that the best therapeutic effect of toys is provided when the children touch and play with them since these toys give the children a sense of oneness and belonging.

Furthermore, a considerable donation of brand new baby clothes and accessories were received from the first time parents and grandparents who wanted to share the bountiful gifts they have received for and on behalf of their new bundle of joy!

To all our donors and benefactors, we extend our never ending thanks that only our hearts can say. Our partnership will not stop from here but will continue for as long as these toys bring smile and laughter to children of all ages, shapes, color and sizes. The generosity you have accorded to the children is a fulfillment of our temporal works for the glorification of Our Father in heaven. ☐

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEAST OF THE DIVINE MERCY

APRIL 7, 2013

THE MONASTERY OF THE ANGELS
1977 CARMEN AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, CA 90068

AND

ST. BRIDGET CATHOLIC CHURCH
220 N. 14TH STREET
LAS VEGAS, NV 89101

CORONATION OF THE BLESSED

VIRGIN MARY

MAY 4, 2013

CONVENT OF THE SISTER DISCIPLES
OF THE DIVINE MASTER

START SAVING UP FOR

PILGRIMAGE TO

MOTHER MARY'S

APPARITION SHRINES

PORTUGAL | SPAIN | FRANCE

INCLUDING A TOUR IN

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

DECEMBER 2014

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Thank You



Our very own Kristen, after having to give up her 1st year nursing education in the middle of the school year in 2010 to battle a recurring growth of cancer cells, is now driving herself to a state college close to home -- to resume her desire of becoming another Florence Nightingale to the sick deprived of compassion and care!



*Tracy Jayman (thru Betty Ayasao) thanks everyone for the prayers offered for her mother, Susan Evans, who had surgery and recovered the next day!
Considering her status, this is extremely fast recovery.*

DEVOTION SCHEDULE



THE SPIRITUAL ARMY OF GOD THE FATHER

WWW.SPIRITUALARMYOFGOD.ORG

cordially invites you to the following devotions:

In Los Angeles:

1st Saturday Devotion

The Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | 501 N. Beaudry Avenue | (213) 250-7962
Holy Mass starts at 8:30 A.M. | 1st Saturday Devotional Prayers follow.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the Month

The Monastery of the Angels | 1977 Carmen Avenue on Gower | (323) 466-2186
11:20 A.M. - Rosary to the Father | 11:50 A.M. - Holy Mass
1:00 P.M. - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
Confession ongoing from 11:20 A.M. to 11:45 P.M.

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – March 16, 2013

at the Convent of the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master | starting at 8:30 a.m.
Please see Victor if you wish to become a Sponsor of the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion.

In Las Vegas:

1st Saturday Devotion

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave, 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, Las Vegas, NV 89117 at 1:00 P.M.
Cenacle will be at 10:00 A.M. before the devotional prayers
Please call Evelyn at (702)274-4315 for entry to The Enclave or for more information.

Devotion to God the Father

Every 1st Sunday of the month at 2:00-3:30 P.M.

at The Cenacle House in The Enclave, 8455 West Sahara Avenue #172, Las Vegas, NV 89117

2000 Hail Mary Devotion – March 16, 2013

Please call (702) 255-9616 or (702) 274-4315 for

dates and venues for the coming months or for more information or if you wish to Sponsor the Devotion.

In Laughlin, Nevada:

1st Saturday Devotion

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church | 3055 El Mirage Way
Holy Mass starts at 8:00 A.M. Devotional prayers follow.

In Northern California:

1st Saturday Devotion

2000 Hail Mary Devotion

Please call (650) 766-2071 for dates and venues for information.

For Sacramento, please call Precy Rieta (916) 564-3733; Caring Sturgill (916) 897-3194;

Maria Rosario (916) 230-7756.

In San Diego

Rosary to the Father

Monday – Saturday after the 8:00 A.M. Mass [Look for Iris Haj]
St. Mary's Church | 1160 S. Broadway | Escondido, CA 92025

In the Philippines

2000 Hail Mary Devotion - Metro Manila Area

Letty Rollan has organized the 2000 Hail Mary Devotion in various areas of Metro Manila through the members of the "Mother Butler." Please call her U.S. Vonage phone (510) 779-6652, text her at Manila #916-384-9300, and/or call her Manila landline 939-4677. Mention Mila Lumba's name to be recognized.