



March 4, 2007

Volume IV

*“Oh! No! Here We Go Again,
Another Six Weeks of Lent...”*

*“What is
the reason
for all of
the fasting
and
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Why do I
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thing for
Six Whole
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That time of the year is here, again. Another six weeks of Lent. Each year we go through the same thing, and each year we ask ourselves the same questions: Why do I put myself through the same guilt trip each year? When am I going to learn the lesson about the real meaning of the season of Lent? The most important question to ask about Lent is “Why?” What is the reason for all of the fasting and abstinence? Why do I have to give up my favorite things for six whole weeks?

Like most Roman Catholics, I was always dreading the coming of Lent. As a boy, I knew, as soon as Christmas was over and the priest started wearing the green vestments for the Sundays after Epiphany, that it was only a matter of time until my parents would approach me with those most horrible words: “What are you going to give up for lent this year?” I would try and avoid them as much as possible, but it was no use. Sooner or later, my mom and dad would corner me and ask me THAT question. And to make matters worse, my grandparents lived right down stairs from us. So, if my parents didn’t ask me, my grandparents would. I couldn’t win! I was trapped and I knew it. I just had to face the music and tell them something!

Why couldn’t there be another way for us to go through the season of Lent? It almost seemed like we were being punished for being children, by making us give up our favorite things: candy; cookies; cake; chewing gum; soda pop; going to the movies; etc.

*Taken
from
“Oh! No!
Here We
Go
Again...”*

For the longest time I resented the whole idea of Lent. As a child it just didn’t make any sense to me, unless you come to the conclusion that the Catholic Church is sadistic! But, something happened to me that would change my mind and my whole concept of the idea of Lent. I met a priest when I was a young man. A true man of God who sat me down one day and explained to me just how much God really love me, I sat there in awe of what he told me. Then, trying to justify myself, I asked him about the seemingly

“Oh! No! Here We Go Again...” (cont.)

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sadistic attitude of the Catholic Church towards Lent. What he said in response to my statement was something I didn't expect. He asked me if I knew the real reason why Lent is a time of self-sacrifice? I gave him the “textbook answer” about preparing for God's fulfillment of His promise to mankind in regards to the Redeemer and the Redemption of men by the God-man, Jesus Christ, by buying our salvation back for us through His Passion and Death. How we should follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice, and do the exact same thing, in our own way, to show Him how grateful we are for His Sacrifice for us.

When I finished my statement, he asked me if there was anything else. I thought that maybe I had forgotten something and so I asked him: “Is that wrong?” He said: “Of course not, but you left out something; something that is very important for human beings to understand.” I was confused and so I asked him: “What are you talking about?” He invited me to sit down and get comfortable. “This is going to take a little while”, he said. So, I sat down and he began: “ In the Gospel, we learn about a situation that took place with two of Our Lord's Apostles: St. Peter, and St. John. During the second year of Our Lord's Public Ministry, Jesus began sending the Apostles out for ‘on the job training in the field’. They were paired up and sent to: teach the Gospel; Baptize; exorcize those who were possessed; etc. So, when St. Peter and St. John returned from their trip, they approached Our Lord and they told Him of a ‘problem’ that they encountered. They had met a man who was being possessed by the devil. When they tried to free him from the devil, he wouldn't leave that poor man. The Apostles were surprised. This had not happened to them before. So, they told Our Lord and He said to them: ‘ That specific devil is the demon of impurity. He can only be driven out by prayer and fasting.’ Prayer and fasting would give them the power they needed to drive away that stubborn devil.”

After Father finished telling me this story, he asked me if I now knew any other reason why we fast and abstain during Lent, as well as do other acts of self-sacrifice. I still couldn't put it all together. He said to me: “ Don't you get it? Fasting and prayer gives us power over evil.” The Catholic Church, through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, has created the season of Lent for all of us, so that we can strengthen our defenses against sin and temptation. Obviously, fasting, when combined with prayer, has some power over evil that most human beings do not understand. Almighty God, through Holy Mother Church, gives all of us an opportunity to fast and pray every year for the entire season of Lent, to “recharge our spiritual batteries”, and gain more power over evil.

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Finally, it began to sink in. Holy Mother Church wasn't being sadistic. She was helping all of her children to achieve spiritual strength during the season of Lent, by following the example of Jesus Christ, and His lessons of self-sacrifice. Lent is an opportunity for us to do the things that Jesus showed us to do, for strength against sin and evil.

What a great way for us to become more Christ-like! Every year, we have the chance to get spiritually stronger. Hopefully, by doing so, we will sin less frequently and remain in the state of Sanctifying Grace. Now I understand! It took me a little while, but I finally appreciate the season of Lent for the opportunities that it presents to me. If we all would see the real reason for the season of Lent, it would make self-sacrifice easier because of our better understanding of it.

What a Wonderful God we have! He creates us to share eternal life with Him, and then He helps us every step of the way, to achieve salvation and eternal life! But, in the end, it all comes down to the choices we make. So, for this season of Lent, do your best to strengthen yourself against sin and temptation, by following Our Lord's directions given to St. Peter and St. John to gain power over evil by prayer and fasting. By doing so, you will show your gratitude to God for the Sacrifice He made for us. Amen.

Have a Blessed and Spiritually prosperous Lenten Season.

Sermon from Fr. Martin Stepanich: Prayer, Part IV; “Hallowed be Thy Name”

When we pray the Our Father, we think of God first, not of ourselves. The whole Lord's Prayer centers mainly around God, not around us.

So, in the very first petition of the Our Father, we ask that the Name of God the Father be glorified. “Hallowed be Thy Name,” we say. In other words, “May Your Name be regarded as sacred.” And, therefore, “May Your Name be held in reverence.”

God impressed the sacredness and the greatness of His Holy Name on man already in days of old. And He let it be understood that His Name was not just a common name. It was not to be thrown into ordinary, everyday conversation as just another word. “Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord, Thy God, in vain!”





Sermon (cont.)

And, least of all, should the Sacred Name of God be used in cursing or as part of a curse word, as is so often done in our day, sad to say. There are those who use the Name of God in cursing make the alibi that it's "just a habit", and they "don't mean anything by it". It's a habit all right, that's for sure—but it's an evil habit, displeasing to God and very offensive to Him. And where did the habit come from? From constant repetition, of course.

And they say they don't mean anything by it? Just whom are they trying to kid? They know what the words mean and they use them because they want to use them! So what excuse do they have? They are only trying to whitewash themselves when they say they don't mean anything by it when they use the Name of God in vain, irreverently, and blasphemously.

It is heartrending to realize that supposed Catholics, even those in high places, approve and recommend books that are filled with curse words involving the Name of God—books that make a shambles of the Second Commandment of God and are an insult to the Sacred Name of God.

And it is unbelievable that books of that type are found on required reading lists of some Catholic schools in this country—which goes to show how terribly the Christian sense has deteriorated among us. (Referring to "Catcher in the Rye.")

Yet, the Second Commandment of God will forever stand as a divine admonition and warning to all those who use the Name of God irreverently and blasphemously. That Commandment must not be played down. It cannot be phased out or abolished by violations of it.

My dear friends, when we pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name," let us really mean it! And let us not be double-mouthed—pretending to praise the Sacred Name of God with one mouth, as it were, while pronouncing that Name irreverently with the other mouth.

Jesus, our Divine Master, has instructed us in the Our Father to hold as hallowed the Sacred Name of God, the Heavenly Father. And in Her immortal Song of Praise, the Magnificat, while visiting St. Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary extolled God's Name, saying, "He Who is mighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name." (Luke: 1:49).

The saints have always taught us to greatly magnify the Name of God and they would have dreamt of pronouncing that Name except with the greatest reverence.

Can we dare do otherwise?

(given in Chicago, Ill. on January 5, 1964.)

*"The
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*Taken
from
Sermon of
Fr.
Martin*

Catechism: "The Necessity of Religion"



What is religion? This word comes from the Latin word meaning “to bind”. An ancient writer, Lactantius, said: “ We are tied to God and bound to Him by the bond of piety, and it is from this that religion has received its name.”

Religion implies: a) the recognition of a Divine Personality in and behind the forces of nature, the Lord and Ruler of the world, God;

b). the conviction that the mysterious, supernatural Being has control over the lives and destinies of men, who are, therefore, dependent on Him;

c). the persuasion on the part of man that he can bring himself in friendly, beneficent communion with the Godhead on Whom he feels he depends;

d). the performance of certain acts of homage meant to bring divine help, peace, and happiness;

St. Thomas Aquinas says religion is a virtue, which prompts man to render to God the worship and reverence that is His by Divine Right. Objectively, religion is the voluntary acknowledgement of man’s dependence on God through acts of homage.

The conception of a personal deity is necessary for religion. Imagination is stirred by recognition of the unseen world. The longing for communion with God arises from man’s need for Divine help. Joy is excited by the consciousness of friendship with God. Thankfulness is prompted, by the obtaining of benefits in answer to prayer. Awe results from knowledge of God’s immense power and wisdom. Fear, sorrow, and the desire for reconciliation arise from consciousness of having offended God and observed punishment. Love of God springs from the contemplation of His goodness and excellence.

Religion implies faith or belief. Correct views concerning the existence of a personal God, divine providence, and retribution, the immortality of the soul, free will, and moral responsibility are of vital importance to right religion. But, in Christianity, which is a supernatural religion, these fundamental beliefs are supplemented and complemented by a larger knowledge of God and His purposes in regard to man. Christians know that God has spoken to men, telling them that they are destined for filial communion with Him through the life of grace and that this has been brought within their reach through the Incarnation and Redemption. In Christianity, the things to be believed and the things to be done, in order to obtain salvation, are guaranteed by divine authority.

Today, men talk of religion without dogmas; but any thinking man must recognize that right belief is essential to religion, and that right belief implies dogmas. Christian dogmas are not intellectual puzzles. They have the practical

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*Taken
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purpose of enlightening man on the right fulfillment of which his supernatural perfection depends.

“The Practice of Religion”

“The history of religion proves that Religion is necessary to Human Nature, and that It is entirely Natural.

That is, man by his whole Nature is impelled to worship a Supreme Being, Whose existence he spontaneously recognizes.”

Taken from “The Necessity of Religion.”

The practice of religion comprises acts of homage by which man acknowledges God’s dominion over him, and seeks His help and friendship. These acts of homage are Three kinds: direct acts of worship; regulation of conduct outside the sphere of moral obligation; the regulation of conduct within the sphere of moral obligation.

- a) Acts of worship: Religion demands that God be adored, thanked, propitiated and asked for all that is needful for soul and body. It is by prayer and sacrifice that these forms of worship are carried out.
- b). Regulation of conduct outside the sphere of moral obligation: All religions recognize the practice of self-denial, works of piety, etc., with a view of obtaining a larger share of divine favor or to secure more than ordinary sanctity or perfection.
- c). Regulation of conduct within the sphere of moral obligation: God is the Guardian of moral law. That law, therefore, is to be regarded as His command. Obedience to it merits God’s favor; disobedience merits His punishment.

“The Need of Religion”

No one can deny truthfully that the practice of some form of religion by man is universal. Whether one studies those tribes whose existence is hidden in the dim mists of history, or the so-called primitive peoples of the present day, the fact that they all practice religion must be acknowledged. Dogmas are found everywhere—at least in the existence of some supreme being, superior to man, caring for man, capable of helping or injuring man, and so to be placated, adored, and propitiated. Everywhere moral law exists, always forbidding disrespect towards the deity or parents, and injustices towards fellow man. Everywhere the deity is worshipped according to minutely regulated rites.

Therefore, the history of religion proves that religion is necessary to human nature and entirely natural. That is, man by his whole nature is impelled to worship a Supreme Being Whose existence he spontaneously recognizes.

The only valid explanation of the universality of religion is to be found in the fact that without religion man cannot attain the complete satisfaction of the highest aspirations of his nature. He finds his intellect striving after knowledge of the whole truth in regard to his origin, nature, last end, and the means to attain it, etc.; he finds his will seeking out the satisfaction which



comes from the acknowledgement of a Supreme Being. It is only religion that can satisfy these yearnings of the intellect, the will, and the senses of men. It is religion, which convinces the intellect that man comes from God, and must go to Him, and teaches man the means to attain God as the last End; it is only in religion, that the will finds the goodness and truth capable of satisfying its aspirations; it is in religious worship that man's sensible nature finds its greatest satisfaction.

“Religion is a Duty”

Right reason teaches that if God exists as man's Creator and Conserver, on whom man is totally dependent, His supreme dominion must be recognized by adoration. The fact that He has freely bestowed existence, and many other favors on man, requires that God be thanked. That man is conscious of having offended God brings the duty of penance and sorrow, while the knowledge that God is the Source of all good and of everything of which man stands in need, dictates the obligation of asking God to help him. Hence, the very relationship of man to God places on man the grave obligation of practicing religion, that is, of acknowledging God as the Principle on Whom he entirely depends and expressing that acknowledgement in worship. Therefore, religion is not merely useful for man; it is absolutely obligatory. God has a strict right to the worship of man; to refuse to recognize that right is to offend against Divine Justice.

Religion, then, is part of the virtue of justice. It is a virtue. Now a virtue is that which makes man good; vice is that which makes a man evil. It is therefore good to practice religion; evil to neglect it.

Irreligion is a vice. An irreligious man is a vicious man. Only by accident can a man be moral without believing in God, for God is the basis for morality. He has, to quote St. Paul, written the obligations of the law in the hearts of men (Rom. 2:15). He has given men the light of reason to discover the moral law that He has revealed.

“Morality needs Religion”

Liddon, in his “Elements of Religion”, says: “Morality served from religious motives is like a branch cut from a tree; it may, here and there, from accidental causes, retain its greenness for a while, but its chances of vigorous life is a very slender one. Nor is it possible to popularize a real morality, a morality that shall deal with motives as well as acts, without unveiling to the eyes of the soul, something more personal than an abstract law.”

If religion is not the basis of morality, what is?

Not utility, for man is not wholly subject to society, and the good of society is far from being his all and embracing end;

Not pleasure—for that would legalize immorality and crime;

Not the fact that virtue is its own reward—for often virtue walks in rags;

“Now a virtue is that which makes a man good; vice is that which makes a man evil. It is therefore good to practice Religion; evil to neglect it.”

Taken from “The Necessity of Religion”



Not the inner sanction of conscience—for experience shows how easily indulgence in evil deaden the conscience.

Not legal sanctions—for these cannot touch inner motives and thoughts;

Not public opinion—for it is often corrupt, praising evil men and blaming the good.

God alone can read the inner most secrets of minds and hearts; He alone can estimate every motive; He alone can adequately and justly punish evil, or reward good thoughts, deeds, and words.

A morality divorced from God, the Author of the moral law, cannot be sustained. As Cardinal Mercier says: “It is a vain hope to expect the moral law to be observed without recourse to the idea of God. For how is the observance of the moral law to be sufficiently guaranteed, if man has no certitude that a Just and Powerful God will sooner or later establish an eternal harmony between virtue and happiness on the one hand, and between vice and misery on the other?”

It is submission to God that makes a man good, rebellion against God that makes him evil. No man can be good without religion. Men who want to be thoroughly evil persecute religion and try to suppress it because it opposes their evil designs.

Religion is a form of Justice. This means that it is concerned with what is right and not merely with what is pleasant, useful, fashionable, or consoling.

“It is submission to God that makes a man good, rebellion against God makes him evil.”

Taken from “The Necessity Of Religion”

“Some False Notions”

Many people look on religion as a source of pleasure for themselves; they even derive gentle entertainment from it. For them, it is little more than a pastime, a hobby, or a luxury. When they feel like it, they practice it, and when they do not, they neglect it. Often they flit about from one religion to another to satisfy their peculiar desire for this type of entertainment and fascination.

But their motive is the obtaining of pleasure for themselves. This is a perversion. There are even Catholics who neglect to attend Mass on Sundays because “They get nothing out of it.” These people are not interested in doing their duty to God; they want God to serve them. The center of their universe is self, not God. Somewhat similar are the people whose only concern with religion is that they may find it useful to themselves. When things go wrong, they turn to God; when all is well, they ignore Him. This is an abuse of religion akin to that practice by those who seek what they can make out of religion by commercializing it and turning it into a racket.

It is perfectly true that religion is often a source of consolation and happiness, but this is a consequence of it and not the reason for practicing it. That reason must be simply the will to be just.



Non-Catholics have said that Catholics only attend Mass because they are forced to do so. The truth is that Catholic people have been consistently taught that it is their duty to attend Sunday Mass. It is right for them to be there, wrong for them to stay away. Therefore, other things being equal, the person who attends Mass is better than the one who deliberately stays away, for the one who goes to Mass, discharges his debt to God according to the law of his religion.

“Public Worship”

External worship is due to God because He is the Creator of both soul and body. Both must recognize His dominion. Therefore, by the very posture of his body at prayer, man acknowledges that he must worship God with his whole being, and not merely internally by acts of the will. If this internal worship is sincere, it will express itself outwardly in words and special ceremonies and rites. In other matters, we express outwardly what we feel inwardly. Our handshake expresses friendship; our kiss, love; our blows, anger. Why, then, should we not give outward expression to our love of God and our friendship with Him? We are not disembodied spirits, but creatures of body and soul. Our senses are apt to draw us away from God; we need some help in the form of externals to make the senses help awaken spiritual ideas and drive away distractions.

“External worship is due to God because He is the Creator of both soul and body.”

Social worship is due to God. Society—the family, or the state—is a divine institution, a creature of God, under a debt of gratitude to Him. It must discharge that debt through the public practice of religion. Moreover, it is in the interest of the community for the civil authority to promote religion, for without religion there can be no true basis of respect for authority.

Taken from “The Necessity of Religion”

Nowadays, religion has become identified with the service, not of God, but of man. He is the god of the universe. Philanthropy is better than prayer; it is better to build homes for men than temples for God. Religion and respectability is the same thing. In fact, religion is little more than sanctified “good form”, or decency.

All this is a reversal of the true order of things. Religion is right; it is a fundamental need of man. Duty to God, the Creator, is more important than duty to man, the creature. But duty to God implies duty to man. In fact, duty to man will only be properly fulfilled by those who are faithful to their higher duty to God.

Very often the “reasons” alleged by the irreligious and unbelievers are no more than smoke screens covering up the fact that they have not the courage to practice religion because it would hit their human passions too hard. If religion is true, they would have to change their lives or go to hell. The former is unthinkable, the latter unpleasant, hence the smoke screen of arguments which is an insult to ask an intelligent man to consider.



Multitudes of men today are indifferent to the practice of religion. They boast that they are Christians. In fact, they claim to be proud to have fought during the war against Hitler for the survival of Christianity. But how do they differ from the Pagans? To the personal practice of religion, they are quite indifferent. In other words, they are indifferent to God. Yet, they say they believe in Him. So, there is no excuse for them. They do their duty to wife, children, and friends, but their main duty to God is completely neglected. This is criminal. For as long as God is God, and we are His creatures, religious duties—definite, private, public, social—will be obligatory and the right thing to do.

The conclusion is obvious. True Religion matters more than anything else in life. It is the only supremely important thing because it shapes our relationship with God in time, as well as for eternity. Therefore, it must occupy the most important place in our lives.

(Taken from “*This is Our Faith*” Published by Catechetical Guild Educational Society, St. Paul, Minn. *Nihil Obstat, and Imprimatur, January 25, 1951.*)

The Following of Christ: Book I; Chapter 16 *“Of Bearing the Defects of Others”*

Whatever a man cannot amend in himself, or in others, he ought to bear with patiently, until God ordain it otherwise. Reflect that perhaps it is better so to prove yourself, and your patience, without which our merits are of little worth. Nevertheless, it is appropriate for you to make supplication under such hindrances, that God would vouchsafe to come and help you, and that you may be able to bear them in good part.

If anyone, once or twice admonished, does not comply, contend not with him; but leave it all to God, that His will may be done, Who knows how to turn evil into good, and that He may be honored in all His servants.

Study to be patient in bearing the defects of others, and their infirmities, be they what they may; for you have many things, others must bear with. If you cannot make yourself what you would be, how can you expect to have another so exactly to your mind? We would fain see others perfect, and yet our own faults we amend not.

We would have others strictly corrected, and we will not be corrected ourselves. The large liberty others take displeases us, and yet we ourselves will not be denied anything we ask for. We wish others to be kept within the rules, and we ourselves will not bear to be checked ever so little. And so it is clear how seldom we weigh our neighbor in the same balance with ourselves. If all Were perfect, what then should we have to bear from others for the love of God?



The Following Of Christ (cont.)

But now God has thus ordered it, that we may learn to bear one another's burdens; no one is sufficient for himself; no one is wise enough for himself: but we have to support one another, help, instruct, and admonish one another.

But the measure of each man's virtue is best seen in occasions that are adverse. For the occasions do not make the frailty of a man, but they show what he is.

Practical Reflections

How excellent a means of sanctifying us and fitting us for heaven in the exercise of that charity by which we support in ourselves, and in others, those weaknesses which we cannot correct! For nothing can humble and confound us before God more than a sense of our own miseries; and nothing can be more just than that we should bear in others those things which we would have them support in ourselves. We should, therefore, bear with the tempers of others, and endeavor to give no cause of uneasiness to anyone on account of our own. It is thus, according to St. Paul, we shall carry one another's burdens, and fulfill the law of Jesus Christ, which is a law of charity, meekness, and patience.

Prayer

How true is it, O Lord, that contradictions are most advantageous to a Christian who endeavors to support them with patience and resignation! For they prove and purify his virtue and bring it to perfection. But Thou knowest what difficulty we experience in supporting these trials, and how sensitive we are to everything that opposes our desires. Permit us not, O God, to yield to our feelings; but grant we may sacrifice them for the happiness of pleasing Thee; since to feel much, and not to follow the bent of our feelings, to keep silence when the heart is moved, and to withhold ourselves when we are all but overcome, is the most essential practice, and the surest mark for that truly Christian virtue which is to gain for us eternal happiness. This, O Jesus, we hope to obtain from Thine infinite bounty. Amen.

The Explanation of Our Mission and of Our Logo.

Since this is the first year of the “Mystical Rose”, it would seem only prudent that we explain why we call our newsletter, “Mystical Rose”, and why we have designed this Logo at the top of the first page.

The title, “Mystical Rose”, is taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Logo of the crown of thorns, with the roses attached, symbolizes Our Lady’s suffering during Our Lord’s Passion and Death. It also symbolizes Her suffering for us, her spiritual children. The seven roses affixed to the crown of thorns represents the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady.

We dedicate this work to Our Blessed Mother and we ask Her to help and guide us, so that we may be able to serve God’s people by printing material that will be spiritually edifying: bringing those who read it to a better knowledge of their faith; a better understanding of what God requires of them in order to achieve salvation; and a more sincere desire to serve the Living God to the best of their ability.

Information about Catholicism is so very necessary in order to live a good life. The world in which we live today is in dire need of that information, in order to save mankind from its own self-imposed ignorance. We hope, by the grace of God, that our newsletter will help to inform.

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