

# the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

*Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course*

8 December 2013; Cycle A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Volume I, Issue 2



## Chasing Holiness

This week is John of the Cross's feast day (14th). A Carmelite priest, mystic, and saint of the 16th century, he has come to be most closely associated with the notion of "the dark night of the soul." John is a wonderful example for us all. Granted, we don't all have the luxury of the acres of time on our hands that he had while imprisoned for refusing to renounce the reform of his order. But, we don't have to endure the tortures that he did either. His writings are a light in the darkness to any who are serious about strengthening their faith and prayer life. And, they also offer a special challenge to our understanding in the getting there.

Like Jesus' teachings, much of what John writes seems to be a paradox, or an apparent self-contradiction:

"...To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing...."

For in coveting nothing, nothing raises it up and nothing weighs it down, because it is in the center of its humility."

*(Ascent of Mt. Carmel, 13.11)*

But, it is his mastery of these spiritual disciplines that has made him a Doctor of the Church and an abiding guide to all who comprise the Church, for "Since the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others..." (CCC 947)



## Dear Sr. Mary Inquiry,

**I've heard about a lot of types of doctors, but what is a "doctor of the Church"? And what kind of school do you have to go to become one of those?**

**Signed,**

**Lily, Looking at Colleges**

Dear Looking,

Whoa...! You can stop looking at schools—this is not how one becomes a 'doctor of the Church'! Fr. Thom, an expert, explains... "A doctor of the Church is one whose life and writings have had a large impact on the life of the Church. Whether as a result of great learning as with Thomas Aquinas or divine instruction and inspiration as with Thérèse of Lisieux, these people's words instruct, guide, and inspire!"

"The requisite conditions are enumerated as three: *eminens doctrina, insignis vitae sanctitas, Ecclesiae declaratio* (i.e. eminent learning, a high degree of sanctity, and proclamation" by the Pope or a general council...)" (see website)

Long a male stronghold, the Church's hierarchy has acknowledged the importance of the words of some of the women who have given their lives to God: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower), and Hildegard of Bingen are Doctors of the Church. So, pray much, practice virtue much, write much... and never give up...!

Stay the course, honey,  
Sr. Mary Inquiry



## SCRIPTURAL SECRETS

This week's readings call us to prepare for the birth of Jesus: Isaiah (11:2-3) mentions gifts of the Holy Spirit as he describes 'the shoot' that will rise from the root of Jesse. Romans describes the Old Testament as instructions for us in the present, so that we may take hope and patience from them. Matthew, too, underscores the necessity of reform. What does this reform involve...? Prayer and a life of virtue!

He has showed you, O man, what is good;

And what does the Lord require of you

But to do justice, and to love kindness,

And to walk humbly with your God. *Micah 6:8*

... so, so simple, and yet so incredibly difficult. How does one 'do justice,' 'love kindness,' and 'walk humbly with one's God' ...

Some have said that a good start would be to judge others by their intentions, assuming the best of these, and judge the self by one's actions.

This too is very hard to do. It cannot be accomplished until we actually develop a daily discipline of prayer to ground our efforts, and a daily discipline of action to form our soul. This means it is time to stop talking about prayer and virtue, and do them! Do the rosary, *lectio divina*, or meditations on the mysteries of the rosary; do works of mercy, refrain from adding to the gossip, tell the truth, etc.

Practice doing...!!

## It's Been Said...

...that the Immaculate Conception points to Jesus' being conceived without benefit of marital relations. Not So! This dogma instead says something about Mary! On 8 December 1854, Pope Pius IX infallibly declared the Immaculate Conception a dogma of the Church, thus binding all Christians to accept it as a key element of faith. In the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, the Holy Father stated, "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."



[Jesus' being conceived without need of relations is termed the "Virgin Birth."]

Interestingly, on 8 December 1933, Bernadette Soubirous was canonized by Pope Pius XI. In 1858, just four years after this dogma was declared, Bernadette Soubirous, an unlearned school girl who could have had no knowledge of this terminology much less the existence of this dogma, told her village's priest that the lady in the apparition in the grotto at Lourdes finally identified herself, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

As Catholics, we are not bound to accept personal revelation (apparitions being such). But, by any standard, this one does give one cause to pause.



## CATECHETICAL CORNER

In urging all the faithful to read the Bible, the Second Vatican Council boldly borrows from St. Jerome in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, "...For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." (*Dei verbum*, 25) This is a bit like being told by the police that "ignorance of the law is no excuse, ma'am." It ticks you off, but you know they're right. Since Jesus Christ is the Word incarnate, and with the Bible so readily available in every language, we have no excuse for not coming to know God in the person of Jesus the Christ.

Whether called Sacred Scripture or the Living Word, the unique source of this book has kept it relevant throughout all ages (*CCC* 136). Divinely inspired, this book alone lives forever, offering insight and inspiration to the individual and illumination to each age, just as it more poetically puts this in Psalm 119: 105 "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Because of the centrality of the Bible, there have been those who have referred to us at various times in history as a 'people of the book'. This isn't quite right, though. It is what this book is about that gives us our identity: the miracle and mystery that is our God and his saving action. We are a people of the covenant. We are specially blessed with a God, transcendent and beyond words, who humbled himself to bend low enough to touch man on the shoulder and say, "Hey- I created you and I love you."

Sacred Scripture traces the history of this relationship. It recounts our salvation history, starting with our creation "in his image and likeness," and our fall and the consequences of this. It tells of gathering us in, the giving of the law, and the stories of our ignorance and steely willfulness in how we responded. It describes the faithful love of this God in the tears and anger of the prophets sent to call us back. And, it showcases the type of love that God is and has for us in the life, Passion, and death of his Son, the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. (*CCC* 140)

Food for thought...

## Saints Preserve Us!

**St. Juan Diego** - (1474-1548); model of the humble heart ...and canonized by Pope John Paul II on 31 July, 2002 as first indigenous "Saint of the Americas." He is truly a displaced saint in the 2014 liturgical calendar because his feast day conflicts with the observance of a major feast, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is moved from its normal date of December 8 to December 9 to accommodate the Second Sunday of Advent. But fret not for St. Juan because he accepts this willingly due to his noted humility... and because he can't help but be remembered as an essential part of the feast day celebrated on Thursday, December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. His role in the drama of Our Lady's first (?) recorded visit to the Americas makes for a good story...

He was an un-presupposing Nahua tribesman, married without children, a farmer, weaver and laborer, and a very early convert to Catholicism among his indigenous Mexican people. He was so committed to his faith that he reportedly walked 15 miles each way from his village to the nearest church in present-day Mexico City to attend daily Mass. On December 9, 1531, passing Tepeyac Hill on his way to Mass, he encountered a young woman dressed as native nobility on the hilltop who identified herself as Our Lady. She requested that he tell the bishop that she desired a church be built there from which she could minister to the native peoples. The bishop naturally wanted proof, and Our Lady provided Juan with his cloak filled with non-native roses and her image miraculously imprinted on its inside.

The rest is history... except for one bit of information that is seldom mentioned about Juan Diego. He was so in love with the Eucharist that he received special permission from his bishop to receive communion three times a week. This occurred at a time when frequent reception of the Eucharist by a layperson was unheard of!