

# the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

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

9 February 2014; Cycle A, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## CHASING HOLINESS

When St. Francis of Assisi stepped away from mainstream society, he did so in a most memorable way. He rejected all he had and took on the rags of a beggar. Being the well dressed son of a wealthy merchant, this must have raised some eyebrows if not scorn from those in his circle. Imagine how angry these people would have been if the rumors of his shedding his clothes and running naked through the street of his village are accurate! People don't like seeing everything they strive for rejected in such a public way. Whether or not the story of the naked run is true, the shedding of his old life for a new one that pursued simplicity and poverty, is a choice made that changed the world forever. Francis

created an order that sought God by taking a sidestep from life as we know it. Working in the world with the least and most vulnerable among us, the Franciscan measures herself by looking to God alone (spiritual poverty) and not to the pursuits and accomplishments of one's friends or professional peers (material poverty). After suffering the initial scorn and humiliation of a society that won't stand for one who rejects it, the Franciscan comes to settle into an abiding humility and communion with God that serves her well as she walks through each day responding to the evangelical call.



## Dear Fr. Thom,

*Why do we have to do prayer or fasting or almsgiving in private? Isn't it enough just to do them?*

*Sick of All the Rules*

Dear Sick,

Ahhhh! You're referring to the discipline of humility:

*"The New Law practices the acts of religion: almsgiving, prayer and fasting, directing them to the 'Father who sees in secret' in contrast with the desire to 'be seen by men'..." (CCC 1969)"*

Actually, the reasons for doing these things quietly are very practical. Not broadcasting your good works and drawing attention to yourself help you grow in at least two ways: 1. it allows you to *feel* real humility instead of just wearing it like a coat when on the inside you're actually feeling full of yourself, and 2. it will *form* within you a true faith in God. This is the way you exercise your spiritual muscle. If we do not allow ourselves to feel the praise of others, or the applause and pat on the back we supply, we are then forced to look to God to fill this need for esteem. God will use your talents; this is the best form of praise. Soon you will notice that your faith, hope, and love are growing stronger too.

This practice of not looking for praise is not meant to make you feel bad about yourself. It's meant to develop your inner eye so that you always use your talents with the awareness of who is standing next to you and look only for his praise. When you start measuring yourself by the assessment of others, you end up trying to do things and be things that aren't important. Don't worry~ God sees 'what you do in secret'.

Fr. Thom



## TIMES

NEW TESTAMENT

Someone is worth one's salt—that is, worth his pay. This phrase, scholars say, derives from the Latin term *salarium* (root of our word *salary*). *Salarium* was the money Roman soldiers received to purchase salt as part of their rations. Jesus obviously wasn't referring to this use of salt when he commented in Matthew 5: 13, *"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."* Here he is comparing the good works that his disciples could/would do to the zest that good salt adds to food. He cautioned them that if they lose this, then they would be like salt that has lost its flavor: useless for the table and good only for tossing.

Did they understand his comparison? Yes! As Jews of that place and time, they knew that most of the salt that they could afford came from deposits along the Dead Sea, not from sun-dried Mediterranean brine. They also knew (long before the advent of chemical analysis) that depending on where the Dead Sea salt was obtained it might be so mixed with other minerals as to be worthless for their meals. Such off-tasting salt was really only good for its ability to bind water, thus holding down dust when thrown down on dirt roads. Good works can help prevent the 'dust-ups' that so often arise between people. But, most importantly, good works like good salt, are the spice of a Christian life.

## It's Been Said...

that certain individuals are closer than two peas in a pod. This applies to saints, too. St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictine order, and St. Scholastica (whose feast day we observe on Monday, February 10), were fraternal twins. As such they not only were inseparable in the womb, but stayed that way into young adulthood. They also managed to achieve and maintain a closeness to God despite the wealth into which they were born. Then, Benedict went off to Rome to study. Eventually the sinful ways of his fellow students drove him off to a hermitage near Monte

Cassino, Italy, where he ultimately founded a monastery. Scholastica moved within five miles of Benedict, to Plombariola where she founded a women's monastery and subjected it to Benedict's rule and supervision. Each year the two would make sure to visit. It is told that one year, when it came time for Benedict to leave, Scholastica was not ready for the visit to end. But it was getting late and Benedict insisted on leaving. Scholastica is said to have prayed to God for help and a furious storm came out of nowhere. Benedict was forced to stay the night until the storm passed. Thus they stayed, with the help of God, closer than two peas in a pod.

## CATECHETICAL CORNER



Why are actions so important? They don't "earn" us salvation. Simply put, right action *forms* our spiritual body. While believing, or having faith, is a critical practice of the mind we must also practice good works. These good works form our attitude, *how* we approach God and others. It is hard to consistently bend to take care of the weak and infirmed and stay arrogant and haughty. It is impossible to look into the eyes of the homeless or the thirsty and not feel how dependent on God we really are. Anything can happen at any moment. Job loss, natural disaster, or a random injustice done to us would quickly strip from us that "I can do anything!" assumption.

"... Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: efforts at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity 'which covers a multitude of sins.'" (CCC 1434)

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are known as the *Three Eminent Good Works*. These actions, like the Corporal Works of Mercy, are like the exercises athletes do to bring about the proper muscle development to win the race. Like runners might focus on building up leg muscles, our spiritual bodies need to focus on developing the spiritual muscle into a humble one. This can only be done when we bend in service to another or before God and admit to our own vulnerability and dependence.

## IN THE YEAR

### 1858 A.D...



On Thursday (February 11), Our Lady first appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in a little grotto near Lourdes, France. In total there were 18 apparitions (appearances), the last on July 16, 1858. These events are noteworthy, not just because of Mary's appearance, but also because of her on-going intercession in miraculous healings. The first approved healing was of 39 year old Mrs. Catherine Latapie, whose partially paralyzed right hand was immediately restored upon immersion into the grotto's spring on March 1, 1858.

Interestingly, what the movie *The Song of Bernadette* presents as the first cure (the blinded quarry worker Mr. Louis Bouriette) is the second accepted miracle. To date there have been about 7,000 documented cures, but by the Church's stringent criteria only 69 of them have been approved. What are the criteria? To begin with, the Church established a medical office at the Shrine of Lourdes staffed now by members of International Medical Committee of Lourdes (C.M.I.L.). In its examinations of reported cures C.M.I.L. applies these principles: 1. the illness must be real and accurately diagnosed, 2. the prognosis must be permanent or soon terminal, 3. the cure is immediate, complete and lasting, and 4. any previous treatment cannot be claimed for the cure or aid in it. Moreover, any person cured may have to return to Lourdes several times to assure the C.M.I.L. of its lasting nature before a final report is issued. Then it is in the hands of the Bishop of the patient's diocese to certify it as "presenting a supernatural character". We Catholics are a very cautious bunch!

