

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

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

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Saints Preserve Us!

Up to the 1950s there was an unwritten rule which almost every Sister, regardless of her order, learned as a novice: Catholic school girls and boys must never sit together at children's Mass. The kids were segregated by grade and gender, lined up, and marched into church. The girls were seated on the 'Mary side' and the boys, on the 'Joseph side'. These sides were determined by the life-size statues of Our Lady on the 'gospel side' of the main altar and of St. Joseph on the 'epistle side'. Back in the day Father's back was to the people (*ad oriens*, or, facing east) when he said Mass so the 'gospel side' was to his left and the 'epistle side' was to his right.

The boys would notice this about the statue before them: this St. Joseph stood tall, looked right at you, and held in his right hand a staff topped by a bunch of lilies. A staff growing lilies... where is that in scripture? Mark does not mention Joseph at all.

John mentions him only twice (Jn 1:45; Jn 6:42). Neither Matthew nor Luke mentions a staff! So where do artists get this impression? Answer: A second century writing presents the legend of Mary's parents placing her at age 3 in the service of God. It also tells of the High Priest deciding when it was time for Mary to leave this service to be married and how a suitable husband for Mary was chosen. To choose a husband, the priest would gather all eligible bachelors of the House of David. They were to bring wooden staffs/sticks to place on the Temple altar. Supposedly, a dove emerged from Joseph's staff indicating that he was God's choice as a husband for the Virgin Mary. This story was changed in the 13th or 14th Century in the *The Golden Legend* which said that flowers blossomed from the end of the staff rather than a dove. Ever since, most depictions of St. Joseph have him holding the flowering staff or a short stick, also flowering. The lily seems to be the flower of choice and is present even when Joseph is holding the infant Jesus. The flower idea really took root!

Dear Fr. Thom,

Is it true that Catholics are mostly against learning? That they're just supposed to "pray, pay, and obey"?

Defensive

Dear Defensive,

Nothing could be further from the truth! Historically, we have been gathered from all lands and all backgrounds. We have noblewomen and men, theologians, scientists, inventors, writers, teachers. And like the rest of the world, most of us are workers who are just trying to put food on the table.

At the end of the 11th century, St. Anselm, a doctor of the Church, described theology (*the study of God*) as "*Faith seeking understanding*." This is a guiding light for the Catholic mind. Faith, a gift from God, must be nurtured if it is to grow. We feed it with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. But, we gather these in the framework of awe before the Lord, strength, piety, and how to please this Lord.

What is truth? I would suggest that truth is comprised of what we come to know through study, experience, and prayer which is then pressed into the service of love. Since we are God's creatures, all things are looked at from within the framework of being within God's creation. We strive to learn the origin and purpose of everything so that we may cooperate more fully in God's saving plan. Truth for us is one of information and *formation*! Not only do we strive to know the "what's," "when's," and "how's," but we also try to learn the answers to the big questions ~ *the "why's"*! Keep the faith... and keep learning!

~ Fr. Thom



LENTEN FACTOIDS...

Most people might associate the pretzel with German beer halls, but its history can be traced to much earlier times than Oktoberfest. Some food historians find evidence that the pretzel was an invention of Christians in Rome in the 4th century A.D. They made a simple, bread-like, Lenten fare from water, flour, and salt because they observed the strictest of fasts out of respect for the Lord's Passion. Our early brothers and sisters in the Faith ate neither milk, butter, cream, cheese, eggs nor meat throughout all of Lent. Their Lenten breads were called *bracellae*—Latin for 'little arms'—because they were shaped like crossed arms, reminding people of the way Christians crossed their arms over their chests while praying.

Another version of the pretzel story advances the timeline by 200-300 years to an Italian monastery where a monk made these piously-shaped breads to treat children for learning their prayers and lessons. It's claimed that he called these little breads '*pretiola*'—Latin for 'little rewards'—from which the word pretzel may have been derived. A further Christian refinement of the story is that the three enclosed areas of the traditional pretzel represent the Holy Trinity. You choose...

And the Proper Term Is...

Catholics love a good time. We celebrate numerous occasions and don't shy away from singing, dancing, feasting, and enjoying drinks of a certain strength. Thankfully, the Church encourages us to enjoy God's blessings, moderately of course. She even offers us a whole year's worth of special days to celebrate-- first at Mass, then afterwards. St. Patrick's Day (17th) and St. Joseph's Day (19th) are examples this week. But there are so many more feast days to observe. While we laity apply the term 'feast day' generically, the Church ranks these special observances in three orders of importance.

The top ranking goes to a *solemnity*. The liturgy for this has all the elements of the Sunday Mass. Examples of Solemnities are Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the Immaculate Conception, The Ascension, some titles of Jesus (e.g. Christ the King), and



Catechetical Corner:

The Transfiguration, a major event in the life of Jesus Christ, is the fourth of the five "*Luminous Mysteries*" of the Rosary. The Luminous Mysteries (Mysteries of Light), introduced by Pope John Paul II in 2002, reflect upon major events during the ministry of Jesus. The Transfiguration (*change + form*) is an event that is filled with hope and promise, as is the first luminous mystery, his Baptism.

"On the threshold of the public life: the baptism; on the threshold of the Passover: the Transfiguration. Jesus' baptism proclaimed 'the mystery of the first regeneration,' namely, our Baptism; the Transfiguration 'is the sacrament of the second regeneration': our own resurrection." (CCC 556)

Only on these two occasions -the Baptism and the Transfiguration- does the Father identify Jesus as his "beloved Son." He then goes on to say, "listen to him." (CCC 444) In the transfiguration, Jesus stands as the model for all. (CCC 459) He is the fulfillment of the Law (seen standing by Moses) and the fulfillment of the prophecies (seen standing by Elijah). His glorified appearance would be a source of hope for the apostles who would soon be forced to see him tortured and hung on a cross. It also would offer a strength in a time when their faith would be tested.

Just before this event, Jesus had warned them that some would not "taste death" before they saw the Kingdom of God. Many believed the kingdom's arrival meant the end of the world. Yet, when Jesus was transfigured and showed Peter, James, and John his glory, we are reminded of his appearance to the apostles after the Resurrection. This 'glorious appearance' was so unbelievable that many "did not see him." We are left to ponder this glory and its connection to the Kingdom of God, here and now. Jesus' death and resurrection brought this glory to earth now to guide his people. The Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked the presence of this Kingdom of God sent to us.

days dedicated to extraordinary saints like St. Joseph and Sts. Peter and Paul. *Feasts* rank second. These Masses include the Gloria but will only have two readings. They honor either a title of Our Lord and his Mother or special saints such as the Apostles and Evangelists. A *memorial*, third in rank, honors most saints and is celebrated in the format of the weekday Mass.

Many solemnities are holy days of obligation (e.g. Christmas), requiring Mass attendance just as on Sundays. Often overlooked, however, is the obligation "to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body." (CCC 2185) Granted that we live in a society that has made '24-7' an expectation for availability, but there are limits to a Christian's compliance with secular standards. What your limits are can be best determined by having a chat with your pastor.



Scriptural Secrets

The first 11 chapters in Genesis cover what we call "pre-history" and are read in a slightly different way. Chapters 12-15 review the time of our ancestors, or the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, from 1900 to 1500 B.C. [To put this in perspective, the Great pyramids of Egypt were built around 2685 B.C. and Stonehenge was begun about 2000 B.C.] Despite the sins and betrayals of Adam and Eve, as well as Noah's clan (those with whom God had already made covenants), God had still not abandoned his creation. He makes another appearance and calls to Abraham. In Genesis we hear him make Abraham a three-fold promise in this new covenant: land (15:18), a kingdom (17:5), and "descendants by which all nations will bless themselves." (22:18) The sign of this covenant is the circumcision. This sign reminds the people of what God will do for them. All that is required of the people is that they be faithful and trust God alone.

As in our lives, the questions always seem to be, "Should I trust this God?" and "When, Lord, **when?!**" Throughout salvation history we are shown again and again that God's time is not our time. When would this three-fold promise be made good? The promised lands, kingdom, and 'descendants by whom all nations will bless themselves' would be a good long while in arriving. The last of these three promises is not believed to have been fulfilled until Jesus arrived some 1700-2000 years later!

By any standard this time frame would be considered 'the Big Picture.' Even though God is intimately involved in each of our lives on an individual basis and has a unique plan for each of us, we must strive to see our lives against the backdrop of a very long history, a *very Big Picture*, into which we all fit.

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