

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

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

28 September 2014; Cycle A, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Volume I, Issue 44

Chasing Holiness

As this column's title implies, we do try to become holy. It's written in our hearts; we try to chase after it. Yet, only God, who is holiness, can make holy (or sanctify) his creatures. So while we can chase after it, the becoming of it is left to God's grace. Like we have said before, we are called to cooperate in this process.

One of the simplest, yet most difficult, of practices we may take on to work with God in this saving plan is to forgive. Forgiveness is the action that confirms and transmits God's mercy to another. Pope St. John Paul II said that "forgiveness in fact always involves an *apparent* short-term loss" (one's

claim on another) "for a *real* long-term gain" (healing and reconciliation). We set aside our own baggage, foregoing our 'need' for restitution, satisfaction, apologies, vindication, etc. and we put on a different mindset. Even though our emotions might take awhile to catch up, this mindset says, "You must be broken, just like me, to have done that. I forgive you."

The choice to forgive makes possible a totally different future, one where we all become conduits for God's love. Forgiveness is not the approval of wrong. It is the linchpin of God's love and charity. Perhaps if we continue to 'chase holiness' in this way, God will eventually catch us.



Gazing Back At God

Did you know that the Vatican has eyes on the sky... literally! Our definition of 'sky' is what can be seen when we look up. This eliminates heaven and points to the visible universe. To this very physical thing the Vatican has taken a very physical approach. Pope Leo XIII established the Vatican Observatory (*Specola Vaticana*) in 1891 to show that the Church didn't oppose "true and solid science, whether human or divine." The original observatory is located adjacent to the Pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, 15 miles southeast of Rome in the Alban Hills. A second research facility, known as the *Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope*, is located at Mount Graham International Observatory near Tucson, Arizona! Both facilities enable astrophysicists to conduct basic research into the nature of our universe.

Another quick note: the most basic question about the universe is its origin. Scientists today agree that the universe is expanding and that it began as a single 'particle' which exploded, creating space, matter, energy and time (Big Bang Theory). The expanding universe and the Big Bang both exist as verifiable concepts due to the insights of a brilliant astronomer-mathematician, Msgr. Georges Lemaître, a Belgian Roman Catholic Priest (1894-1966). Thus, the Church gazes back at God by studying his creation.



SAINTS PRESERVE US!

On September 30 we celebrate the life of St. Jerome, priest and Doctor of the Church, who gave us the Vulgate, the Bible translated into Latin from Hebrew and Greek. He was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius around 342 A.D., in today's Slovenia. His well-to-do Christian parents educated him at home then sent him to Rome for further studies. There he developed a love for classical Latin and Greek literature, public speaking, and fine living. Escaping the 'lure of the hedonistic life', he was baptized at age 18 and set about traveling and studying theology and scripture. While living among desert monks, he even learned Hebrew.

He ended up in Rome, where he earned a reputation for a caustic tongue. Pope Damasus, who urged him to correct a faulty Latin version of the four Gospels, made him his secretary. When Damasus died though, Jerome 'fled' the anger of the Roman clergy and the new Pope, who had been alienated by his blistering disposition.

He ultimately settled in Bethlehem where he was supported in his biblical studies by a wealthy Roman widow, Paula, and her daughter, Eustochium. Paula provided the money to cover Jerome's upkeep and penchant for acquiring books. Eustochium was a scholar in her own right and directly assisted Jerome in his commentaries on Hebrew Scriptures. While the women's names are seldom mentioned, St. Jerome's is remembered for the Latin translation of the Bible.

It's Been Said...

... by critics of Christianity, that the gospels and epistles were written far too long after Christ died to be accurate or to prove anything. While much of early Christian culture was orally transmitted, some scholars are now dating the earliest writings (Paul's letters) to within a couple decades of Jesus' death (e.g. I Thessalonians)! The passage from Philippians read today is believed by most to have been written in the early 60s A.D.

Specifically, Phil. 2:6-11 is known as a *Christological Hymn*. Paul includes several Christological Hymns in his Epistles. Whether or not he wrote them is debated. The words used in the hymns are very different than Paul's normal vocabulary. Also, the writing style is more similar to the Hebrew Psalms found in the Old Testament than any style used by Paul, or by any other Greek poet at that time.

The style of these hymns made them more akin to language found in our Mass today and point to very early liturgical

services. These services included fellowship, readings, and these hymns, which were probably sung like a chant. Noteworthy was the fact that Jesus' name would be invoked when new followers joined. And, the mention of bending the knee at the uttering of Jesus' name even points to the use of reverential postures.

What does this all mean? It means that these hymns give evidence of an *active devotion* to Jesus Christ as divine which sprang up within a short time after his Resurrection. Something about *this* man, like no other 'messiah' at that time, prompted Jews and gentiles to fall to their knees in praise and worship when it was neither wise nor safe to do so! It means that a human response to this God-man came quickly and furiously before writings, doctrines, or structures had a chance to evolve!

Whether or not modern-day critics agree with the early Christians' belief in the divinity of Jesus, they can no longer maintain that this is a belief that came as a product of time and the evolution of ideas.



Catechetical

"Truth as uprightness in human action and speech is called *truthfulness*, sincerity, or candor. Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy." (CCC 2468)

Since God is the source of all that is true, we "are called to live in the truth." (CCC 2465) This means that we are called to right words *and* right actions. To not have right actions following up right words, we are building our house on sand rather than rock. (Mt. 7:24-27) This house will fall quickly in the storms of life, erasing any hope of once again living eternally in the truth.

Today, the parable of the two sons and their approach to their working the field highlights once again the difference between words and actions. While the first son does not honor his father with words, he turns back toward his father and honors him in action. The second son honors his father with his words, but turns away and does not go to the field, dishonoring him by his action.

Interestingly, the second son addresses the Father, *Kyrie*, (Lord, Sir). This is the same word used by Jesus in Mt. 7:21, the passage reviewed in July: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord!' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Continually, Jesus reminds us of what we find in the eighth commandment: the importance of living in truth, not just in words but in actions as well.



SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...

The Parable of the Two Sons is another found only in Matthew. On one level its message is simple: all are called to live in the truth, in word and deed. But who was Jesus directing these comments to?

This chapter of Matthew (21) begins with Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem (our Palm Sunday). After arriving, he cleanses the Temple. Here, Matthew paints a grim picture of the status of the Temple. So corrupt is it that Jesus himself needs to clean it out. Matthew follows this story up with the Cursing of the Fig Tree. This story is not as random as it may seem. The tree, a symbol of life, is only enhanced as a symbol because it is a Fig tree. This was the sweetest of all trees in that area and was a symbol of plenty and joy. Israel herself is frequently referred to as a Fig tree; it reflects God's continued blessings and favor. But this tree had no fruit! When Jesus curses this fruitless tree, it is confirmation that what he did in the Temple was meant to say more: the corruption of the leaders that was killing Israel would soon end.

When Jesus tells the Parable of the Two Sons, his authority had just been challenged by the corrupt religious and secular leaders. But, he knew how to pose a question that would make them condemn themselves. And, they did. They all knew the two sons in the story represented the bankrupt leadership (false Israel), and the faith-filled downtrodden (the true Israel). They all knew which was condemned. The animosity between Jesus and the leaders would now only grow.

Corner

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Joseph R. Binzer, Vicar General, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, June 19, 2014; The Imprimatur ("Permission to Publish") is a declaration that the work is considered to be free of doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

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