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

16 November 2014; Cycle A, 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time *Volume I, Issue 51*

Chasing Holiness

There is a famous story often used in sermons that sets the stage for today's theme. One name for it is the Allegory of the Long Spoons:

Just after a car accident, the driver stopped breathing and immediately saw a Messenger from the other side. Glowing, the Messenger smiled and said to the victim, "It's not yet your time. But, before you return, there's something you need to see."

As soon as he said this a scene opened up before Traveler. It was a huge dining hall, like those found in old castles. A table stretched out as far as the eye could see. It was covered with all kinds of magnificent foods~ the freshest of breads, juicy prime rib, steaming potatoes, fresh and crisp vegetables, fruits ready to burst, and all manner of desserts! It was beyond anything the Traveler had ever seen.

Every seat at the table was taken... but the entire picture was one of torment and agony! Every guest writhed in pain and looked emaciated from not eating! All the diners were only capable of weak swings at each other with their spoons!

And then the Traveler saw them: the spoons at every plate had handles longer than the arms that used them! They couldn't even get this food into their mouths! The Traveler knew hell when he saw it and couldn't understand the anger and self-absorption that prevented the diners from enjoying the banquet. Just then, the Messenger motioned him to come, "Now, look at this..."

Again, another scene opened up before the Traveler. It was the same as what he had just seen, but here there were smiles, giggles, talking, twinkling eyes, and much happiness! All were enjoying the banquet put before them. The Traveler noticed that they too had long spoons. But they fed each other, gladly, selflessly.

Before the Messenger sent the Traveler back, he made him look long and hard at heaven and what it took to get there.







Different Endings

In a free society there is no obstacle to honoring the dead. But the earliest Christians were not free. They were persecuted and often killed simply for not paying tribute to Caesar as a god. Even the duty of burying their dead was problematic. Though they might be martyred in Rome, no one could be buried within the confines of the city. And burial in the countryside required ownership of the land.

The people of Rome solved this dilemma in one of two ways: 1. burial in crowded, public, pagan cemeteries, or 2. (preferable for citizens) cremation, with their ashes placed in urns and kept in the home. For Christians though, cremation was unthinkable because they anticipated the resurrection of the dead. Consequently they came to adopt the custom of the Jews who 100 years earlier had started placing their dead in crypts in the catacombs dug outside the city. Along the Appian Way (the major road leading into Rome), Christians dug networks of interconnecting, multi-tiered, tunnels in the soft volcanic rock in which they gathered all their dead on shelves (*loculi*, cut into the sides of narrow passages), or in crypts. The *loculi* were sealed with brickwork or marble slabs. Each site was identified with name, age, and date of death along with symbols often signifying martyrdom. Here did the dead saints await the Lord's second coming.

SAINTS PRESERVE US!

St. Cecelia was so highly venerated as a virgin and martyr that her name was memorialized early on in the Mass. However, her true identity became so intertwined with legends as to be lost. A highly romanticized version of her life is found in the *Golden Legend*. (see Website) As a result, church historians pieced together bare facts from her different burial sites.

It would seem that Cecelia was martyred in Rome sometime between 177 and 230 and buried in a tomb in the Catacomb of Callistus. Her body was moved to the Catacomb of Praetextatus and finally, in the early Ninth Century, again moved to the Church of St. Cecelia in the Trastevere district of Rome. In 1599 her body was exhumed and found to be *incorrupt*, appearing so lifelike that she seemed to have just fallen asleep. Cardinal Sfondrato commissioned sculptor Carlo Maderna to sculpt a likeness exactly as she appeared. To this day, this statue is situated in front of her crypt in St. Cecelia's. An exact copy has been placed in front of her former tomb in the Catacomb of Callistus.

When the Academy of Music was founded in Rome in 1584, she was named as its patroness. Her patronage of church music spread worldwide. Ironically, any connection between Cecelia and music is based on a legend of her singing in her heart to God and vowing her virginity while musicians played at her wedding, arranged for her by her father against her will.

SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...



The message of last month's gospels was one of warning: Israel's leadership was corrupt and would be brought down very soon! Today's gospel is the third in a row this month of stories meant to alert the disciples, "Watch! Be attentive! No one knows the day or the hour!" [The special occasions on the first two November Sundays this year pre-empted the gospels that would normally have been read.] The call to 'be watchful' and 'be prepared' for the master's return is especially timely since we are now ready to begin our new year with Advent, the watchfulness for the Master's first coming!

We are told to be watchful and use our time well. The *talent* referred to in the gospel originally meant an amount of money. It was actually tied to a measure of weight (e.g. gold), so the value changed depending on the time and place. All can agree though, that it was a very large sum of money (some estimates put it at twenty years' wages)! The *talent* was given based on ability, and was "a gift committed to one for use and improvement." Thus, the *talent* brought with it an agreement to develop it, like a 'loan' is expected to be returned with 'interest'!

It is with this sense of responsibility that we come to accept our God-given gifts. These individual abilities are treasures that must be accounted for. Accordingly, we now refer to our abilities as talents.

It is also noteworthy in the parable that no one knew when the master would come back to check on his investment. Be attentive! One day, when we are not expecting it, he will return to measure what we have done with his talents!



Catechetical Corner





The Church believes that all men and women were created in the image and likeness of God, thus having the same origin in God. Because of this, the Church teaches that our equality "rests essentially on (our) dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it..." (*CCC 1935*) It is in our creation that we have an equal dignity and worth before God.

So what about the differences? What do they mean? Woman/man "...is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life." (*CCC 1936*) As seen in Matthew, "the 'talents' are not distributed equally." (*CCC 1936*) We are all of different ages. We have vastly different capabilities in our physical, intellectual, emotional, and psychic areas. Why? Surely God could have given each of us what we require to develop a good bodily/spiritual life.

Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church (and one of the catechism's sources!), is the author of the work, *The Dialogue*. This book is written as a conversation between "the Eternal Father" (God) and "a human soul" (Catherine). It lays out man's spiritual life and what we are asked to do. It explains why there is an 'inequality of talents' among God's children:

> (God speaking): "The same is true of many of my gifts and graces, virtue, and other spiritual gifts, and those things necessary for the body and human life. I have distributed them all in such a way that no one has all of them. Thus have I given you reason -necessity, in fact- to practice mutual charity... I wanted to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me." (*see website*)

In the giving, one to another, charity forms the soul of the giver, increasing humility, patience, and other virtues necessary to one day stand before God. To not recognize or accept our 'inequality of talents' denies us the chance to offer what we do have to another, as well as accept, in charity, what another offers us. Our similarities give rise to the chance to one day stand again before God. But it is how we embrace and use our differences that will get us to that place.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Joseph R. Binzer, Vicar General, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, July 10, 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.

©2013 The Catholic Navigator • All rights reserved. Distribution rights granted to license holders solely for print copy.
For source materials go to *www.TheCatholicNavigator.org*