

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

Vol. 60, No. 6 - A WESTERN DOMINICAN PUBLICATION

As the joyous season of Advent approaches, we are honored to present a reflection on the Visitation, written by Fr. Paul Conner, O.P., Associate Professor of theology at Providence College. Fr. Conner's further considerations of Mary and womanhood will appear in Light and Life during the New Year.

THE FEMININE GENIUS, PART 1

Fr. Paul Conner, O.P

In every mystery of the Rosary we discover what Pope John Paul II happily identified as "the feminine genius." Mary is the perfection of womanhood, and the Rosary allows us to consider each mystery from her point of view. The second Joyful Mystery, the Visitation, related in Luke's gospel (1:39 - 56), is a fruitful point of departure for such discovery.

Mary set out and traveled... in haste.... [She] entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth... Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out, ..."most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb...."

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...."

In this account, Mary and Elizabeth portray women at their best. Each (one a virgin, the other infertile) is open and responsive to God, trusting He can give new life. This wondrous gift was a singular opportunity for these women, and each accepted it in a way that drew out of her womanly potential the myriad admirable qualities of motherhood.

Only a woman can know the unique joy and gratitude for the gift of life, and the growing experience of it in her womb, and throughout her - and her child's- years. Only women can become the most revered members of families and societies, not seeking their own good, but through the self-giving that motherhood requires.

As we examine the qualities of Mary and Elizabeth shining forth in St. Luke's story of the Visitation, amazing faith and trust form the womanly starting point. Each believed God could make her pregnant beyond the limitations of nature, and each believed God would act



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

if they but trusted. But who were these women? The simplest of beings: unknown villagers, of a minor race, living in the poorest of settings, one unmarried, the other past menopause! Yet God spoke, and they believed. Men are not so apt to grant God this trust!

Mary was so attuned to the Holy Spirit she sensed the possible in the impossible - that after a lifetime of sterility her aunt was indeed pregnant. Elizabeth was so attuned to the Spirit she sensed that Mary, though a virgin, was pregnant, and with the Lord Himself.

The most sensitive feminine openness to the Holy Spirit led each woman to join in the other's virtuous response to grace. St. Luke tells us Mary walked in haste more than 90 miles, from Nazareth to the hill country of Ain Karim, knowing her elderly aunt would need help in the latter part of her pregnancy. What a lack of self regard this shows, for Mary herself was pregnant, with a Child she must guard to the utmost!

(Continued on page 4)

THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

Rosary Center, P.O. Box 3617, Portland, Oregon 97208

Subscription Rates:

United States	\$7.50 Per Year
Canada & Mexico	\$8.50 Per Year
Other Countries	\$9.50 Per Year

2 Novenas of Masses
in honor of

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Nov. 30 - Dec. 8 — Dec. 9 - 17

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Apostles Creed, Part 9

The Communion of Saints and the Forgiveness of Sins

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Heroes are the great individuals who stand out in our lives, in the history of our country, and in the history of our faith. We properly acknowledge these men and women for their singular actions – deeds that set them apart from the rest of us. Our parents and teachers urge us to follow the example of these individuals, and grace and perseverance may allow us, like them, to make a mark on the world that is uniquely ours.

LIFE WITH OTHERS

But while we strive to exceed the common example of humanity, we must never forget we are also called to serve the common good. As cells, nerves and muscles operate for the benefit of our bodies, each of us is called to cooperate for the good of the physical society in which we live, and for the good of the spiritual body we call the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas quotes Aristotle, who teaches *“the common good takes precedence of the private good”* in human society; in our spiritual lives, St. Paul reminds us, *“...we who are many, are one body in Christ, and... members one of another”* (Rom. 12.5).

LIFE WITH OTHERS, IN CHRIST

St. Paul employs the image of the human body to help us understand the Church's spiritual reality. The head, with its manifold capacities, directs the activity of the material body's limbs and physical activities. Likewise, Christ shares His goodness and power with the members of His body. This community of believers, with Christ as their head, is called the communion of saints.

A SACRAMENTAL LIFE

In human society, material goods are transported physically from one place to another, for the benefit of the individuals who will use them. The Church has no need for commercial markets to share its goods, but the benefits of life in Christ must nonetheless be brought to the individual members of the Church. This is done through the sacraments, the physical realities Jesus chose as the means to convey the saving power of His death, for the forgiveness of our sins.

A DEFINITION

Every Catholic youngster learns that a sacrament is “an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.” This daunting definition means that Our Savior recognized the importance of certain “things” in our human experience – realities like food, drink, and words, as well as human relations and actions. He then endowed these realities with an additional, spiritual, value, which

is the ability to touch our lives with His life, and to draw us closer to Him.

BAPTISM: THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

The first of the sacraments is Baptism, a spiritual birth as momentous as our physical birth. The one provides life in the flesh, the other life in grace. *“Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit,”* Jesus warns Nicodemus, *“he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3.5). Baptism employs water, an element essential to physical life, the means by which material objects are cleaned, and a powerful force by which they may be moved.

The physical effects of water find their counterpart in the spiritual effects of Baptism: we are cleansed from sin, given spiritual life, and propelled on a journey that leads to everlasting life in God's kingdom. The power of Baptism is complete: it removes every sin, as well as all the punishment due to sin. For this reason, no penance is imposed on the adult who is baptized. Such cleansing is not only infinitely powerful; it is unique. We are born only once in our human body, and we are re-born only once as members of Christ's body, the Church.

Christ's Passion is the source of Baptism's power, so St. Paul reminds us, *“all who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in His death”* (Rom 6.3). The physical actions of the baptismal liturgy bring one to life in Christ, of course, but they also remind us of the physical aspects of Christ's death and resurrection. Thus, water is poured three times to recall the three days Christ spent in the tomb. When the sacrament is conferred by immersion, the individuals to be baptized are immersed three times, and their coming up out of the water is an additional reminder of Christ's emerging triumphant from the grave.

THE STRENGTH OF CONFIRMATION

Any birth, be it spiritual or physical, is a momentous step. But it is only a first step, and the newly-born person is, necessarily, weak and defenseless. The gift of an individual's birth must be fortified and strengthened if it is to achieve its full potential. Our human society is very conscious of the physical benefits of medicine and exercise; the sacrament of Confirmation plays a similarly strengthening role in the Christian's spiritual development.

Moreover, the sacrament of Confirmation equips an individual to assume and exercise the responsibilities of Christian adulthood. St. Paul remarks, *“when I became a man, I put away the things of a child”* (1 Cor 13.11), and St. Thomas Aquinas teaches,

...in the life of a body a certain special perfection consists in a man's attaining to the perfect age, and being able to perform the perfect actions of a man...so therefore does man receive spiritual life in Baptism... while in Confirmation man arrives at the perfect age, as it were, of spiritual life (ST III. 72).

After His resurrection, Jesus commanded the apostles to remain in Jerusalem, *"till you be endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49). For us, no less than the apostles, the "perfect action" of our adult life is the witness we offer to Christ. The modern Christian shares the Church's early heroes' need to be fortified for the task of preaching the gospel, by word and the example of our lives; Confirmation responds to this need.

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

The 19th Century poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wrote, *"earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God,"* a reminder that we can learn deep spiritual truths by observing ourselves and the physical world around us. Once we are born, we do not have to be very old, nor very long without food, to learn the painful truth of hunger.

If we acknowledge the similarities between our physical birth and the spiritual birth we experience at Baptism, we will have no trouble discerning a spiritual hunger that corresponds to the physical hunger we experience in our bodies. Our faith tells us that Christ's gift of the Eucharist provides the food to satisfy this hunger.

Jesus shocked some of His contemporaries when He said, *"unless you shall eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink of His blood, you shall not have life within you"* (Jn 6:54). If we look no further than the surface of Jesus' words we may be tempted to share his listeners' dismay. However, faith teaches that the spiritual reality of Christ's Body and Blood lies far deeper than the human flesh and bone we perceive with our senses. The gift of Christ's Body is no less real for being spiritual. Indeed, were it not spiritual, the gift could not satisfy our spiritual longing.

In the Lenten sermons on the Apostles' Creed that we have been considering, St. Thomas does not develop his theology of the Eucharist; he presupposes his listeners' belief in this sacrament, and addresses their practical concerns. Because we cannot share Christ's life if we do not share His Body and Blood, the Angelic Doctor teaches, we must avail ourselves of this sacrament – at least occasionally – and we must approach it worthily. The one who does not, St. Paul warns, *"eateth and drinketh judgment to himself"* (1 Cor 11.29).

MEDICINE FOR THE SPIRIT

When our body is sick we turn to medicine for assistance. The Sacrament of Reconciliation plays a similarly helpful role when our spiritual lives suffer as a result of sin. Our disposition toward Christ's reconciliation, and the attitude with which we must approach His healing, are all important as we consider the effect of the sacrament in our lives.

The first of these attitudes is contrition, which we understand as sorrow for sin coupled with a purpose of amendment. The unique qualities that make us human (our physical bodies and our intellect) are intimately connected with our spiritual lives, and neither thrives at the expense of the other. When we approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we must be sorry for our sins, but to receive Christ's forgiveness worthily, this sorrow must be accompanied by the resolve to change our sinful behavior.

Tears are not merciful if they are shed without offering some practical relief to someone in distress. Sorrow is likewise incomplete if we are unwilling to alter sinful behavior. Here we can make another comparison between physical and spiritual health, because the doctor who attends our bodily ailments will often prescribe some change in behavior (e.g., increasing exercise, or avoiding certain foods) if a medication is to achieve its full benefit.

In addition to expressing sorrow for our sins, we must confess them (without omitting any), and we must be willing to perform some good work as a satisfaction for the wrong we have done. This latter is the penance imposed by the priest to whom we confess our sins. This may consist of nothing more than a few prayers, which seem altogether disproportionate to the sin we have committed, but here we must remember that God's grace speaks primarily to our hearts. St. Therese of Lisieux said, *"to pick up a pin for love can save a soul;"* the sincerity of spirit with which we perform the penance can have a far greater impact on our spiritual life than a severe bodily mortification.

HELP FOR THE SICK

A Church that provides abundantly for the soul at the beginning of life will hardly ignore that soul when its bodily home is sick or in danger of death. The apostle James writes

Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man...and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him (James 5:14).

In this anointing we pray for the physical health of the individual who is ill, but the sacrament is principally ordered to the health of the soul, through the forgiveness of sins. Death comes in many forms, and for many reasons. If our prayers for physical healing are not granted, we must assume that an individual's body has contributed all it can to the salvation of his soul.

A GUARANTEE FOR THE FUTURE

For the Church's sacramental life to continue, Our Savior had to plan for a time when neither He nor His disciples would be a direct part of the Church's everyday activity. The Sacrament of Holy Orders provides the Church with ministers to meet the sacramental needs of the faithful, thus securing its sacramental life.

Although the privilege of acting in Christ's person is an immense one, we must never forget that the

sacraments receive their power from Christ, not the ministering priest. Priests are challenged daily to meet the high moral standard set by Jesus, the Eternal Priest, but their occasional failure to do so – although lamentable – does not limit the power of the sacraments they minister on Christ’s behalf.

THE COVENANT OF LOVE

The sacrament of Matrimony provides the means for married men and women to sanctify themselves, and to be sanctified by one another. Each day, married partners are called – through their love for one another – to be clearer and clearer signs of Christ’s love for the Church. The vowed love of marriage is not only a source of the partners’ own growth in holiness, but becomes an invitation to all Christians to draw closer to Christ, the source of all love. Marriage is subject to numerous trials and stresses; none of these may be minimized, but each must be recognized for what it is: a married couples’ particular challenge to experience the painful reality of Christ’s cross, and an invitation for others in the Church to minister to the suffering Christ in their midst.

FORGIVENESS: PREPARATION FOR EVERLASTING LIFE

Each of the sacraments conveys Christ’s love, which is manifest especially in His willingness to forgive our sins. The sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation offer this forgiveness directly; the sacraments of Confirmation and Matrimony indirectly, but all the sacraments exist to purify our hearts, cleanse our souls and draw us closer to spiritual perfection – the only means by which we may hope to enter God’s kingdom. ■

THE FEMININE GENIUS *(Continued from page 1)*

Should not heaven and earth bow before her whom God had so singled out? Should Mary not expect Elizabeth to attend to her? Mary, rather than thinking of herself, gave of herself, and served Elizabeth for three months.

Elizabeth, too, rose to the virtue of the feminine genius. In her society, an elder woman was honored by a younger, and Elizabeth has experienced God’s special favor by becoming pregnant in old age. Should she not expect her young niece to lavish respect and congratulations upon her? But at Mary’s visitation, Elizabeth experienced both the revelation of the Holy Spirit and the joy of her own infant son, and her expectations were in no way self-concerned. Instead, she needed to honor Mary and her divine Child,

incredulous though she was, that they would come to honor and serve her.

In the Magnificat, St. Luke records Mary’s longest speech in Scripture. Responding to Elizabeth’s praise for her trust in God’s promise, Mary shifts the focus to praise of God’s greatness and kindness. She glorifies God for gracing her and all future generations, for casting down the proud and mighty, while lifting up the humble; for filling the hungry, while allowing the rich and oppressive to end up empty-handed.

In this mystery of Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth we discover signature qualities of womanhood lived at its best. How beautiful this feminine portrait is, an utter delight to any man’s deepest heart, and a pure joy to its Creator. These two women display limitless faith and trust in God, utter openness to the inspirations and actions of the Holy Spirit, a humble and loving focus on God and others over self-interest, and profound joy and gratitude at the opportunity of motherhood.

We should notice how the qualities that are special gifts to women, and with which women infuse family and social life, are fast becoming counter-cultural; the media’s pictures of woman are starkly the opposite on every point. Let us pray that women, old and young, will look to Mary – and to Christian saints like Elizabeth – to see their best potential activated, and find role models for their own growth as persons. ■

THINKING AHEAD FOR CHRISTMAS?

In the last issue of Light and Life we mentioned two new CDs available from The Rosary Center, “Is the Catholic Church the One, True Church?” and “Mary, the New Eve.” We are now pleased to announce a third CD, “Eros in the thought of Pope Benedict XVI.” The three CDs are reflections by Fr. Robert Christian, O.P., Assistant Dean of the theological faculty at the Dominican’s international seminary in Rome. You will find these CDs, together with many other gift ideas, in the enclosed order form.

A GIFT FOR THE FUTURE

The Rosary Confraternity Memorial Education Fund continues to grow, and with it grows our friends’ influence on the life of the next generation of Dominican students preparing to preach the Good News of Mary’s Rosary. If you are considering end-of-year charitable gifts, we beg you to keep the Memorial Education Fund in mind, and if you are making or changing your estate plans, please include the Education Fund among your bequests. Income from the Fund will carry your kindness far into the future of Dominican life and ministry.



SHIPPING & HANDLING RATE CHART		
Order Amount	Within the USA	To Canada
\$ 0.00 to \$4.99	\$2.25	\$4.50
\$ 5.00 to \$9.99	\$4.25	\$7.75
\$10.00 to \$29.99	\$4.75	\$20.00
\$30.00 and Over	16% of order	20% + \$15.00