

## THE COLORS OF EASTER

As we walk past stationery stores these days, and even when we visit the local supermarket, we can hardly ignore the commercial preparations for Easter. Bright, pastel colors invite us to rejoice that the dark days of winter are finally giving way – at least in the Northern hemisphere – to the longer and brighter days of spring.

Green seems to be the prevailing color of these Easter preparations, and Easter baskets overflow with “Easter grass” in every shade of green. But as we look around at our yards and trees as they undergo their annual renewal, green is a far less prevalent color than red.

Peonies, when their shoots break through the frosty ground, are a deep, almost purple hue, as is the new growth of rosebushes. The first, tiny leaves of trees and shrubs are generally a lighter shade, but the color, on the whole, is unmistakably red.

God gave us the world as a textbook, and the colors that begin to greet us in the days of Lent invite us to consider that the gay colors of Easter evolve from far more somber hues, just as the glory of Our Savior’s Resurrection dawns only after the world is shrouded in darkness on Good Friday.

The darkness we associate with Christ’s agony on Good Friday is an appropriate illustration of our human hearts, so darkened by sin that we could invent the horror of Calvary. The red that greets us as we watch our world put forth its new shoots is a similar reminder that Christ purchased the joy and color of Easter at the price of His blood.

Each of us at the Rosary Center prays that the days of Lent and Easter will be a time of growth and renewal for our countless friends. These most important days of our Church year are an invitation to look within – and to look without, to one another and to the world God has entrusted to our care.

As Our Savior makes his journey to Jerusalem and the trials that await Him, He invites us to examine our lives, and to identify the areas that need His grace



**PIETA**

*Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.*

and healing. Our liturgical participation in Jesus’ Last Supper, His passion and death on Good Friday, and the anticipation-filled hours of Holy Saturday call us to acknowledge and confess our sins, so that at Easter we may renew the promises of our Baptism with a sincere commitment to carrying Christ’s light to the world.

## TO HONOR ST. PAUL

As we continue our pilgrimage with St. Paul during this Jubilee Year to honor his birth, the Rosary Center proudly offers new CDs, by Fr. Brian Mullady, which shed welcome light on this great saint’s immense contributions to our faith. *The Paradoxes of St. Paul* is a single disc that introduces the listener to the great themes in *(continued on page 4)*

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## CHRIST OUR SAVIOR & EASTER

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The Our Father, Part VI Forgive Us Our Trespases

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

### THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

In previous reflections we have considered the connection between the words of the Lord's Prayer and the Holy Spirit's gifts of fortitude and knowledge. Knowledge, we have seen, is the capacity to live a good life, principally by our willingness to learn from others, especially from the example of Our Savior. When we pray "*Thy will be done,*" we acknowledge – humbly – we are neither the source of our talents and gifts, nor the sole guide by which we lead our lives.

In the Lenten sermons he preached in 1273, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that when we ask God to give us daily bread we pray for the virtue of Fortitude, which strengthens our spiritual resolve (when doing a good deed seems too difficult), much as food strengthens our physical bodies for the tasks of material existence.

Experience teaches that our physical strength and intellectual capacities can lead us astray if we do not allow ourselves to be guided in the proper use of these gifts. Likewise, we reasonably seek the moral guidance that helps direct our spiritual gifts toward their proper goals. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are said to soften our will – not in the sense that they weaken our moral resolve, but because they allow us more easily to cooperate with God's will (*ST II-II, 52.1*).

Human beings appropriately use their intellect as they learn to perform particular actions; if we need advice, we turn to someone qualified to guide, or counsel, us. The same is true in our spiritual lives. God understands all things, so we reasonably turn our minds to Him for moral guidance. This activity, through prayer or study, is called the gift of counsel. In the moral sphere, counsel allows us to be guided by God in the same way we allow a human expert to guide us when we find ourselves able to address a physical goal, or when some challenge proves beyond our capacity to overcome.

### AN AID TO VIRTUE

The Book of Proverbs admonishes, "*Purpose is strengthened by counsel*" (*Prov. 20:18*), a helpful reminder that the good we seek to do is enhanced when we allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's counsel also comes to our aid when we must choose which of several options will help us most effectively to reach our moral goals. When we were children we learned that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. As we mature, we learn that our

moral lives become far more efficient when we allow ourselves to cooperate with God's Spirit.

God's counsel does not abandon us once it has helped us make a proper choice. St. Thomas observes that the sun continues to brighten the sky after it has risen. In a similar way, His counsel continues to enlighten our moral decision-making.

*In this way, then, God causes in us virtue and knowledge, not only when we first acquire them, but also as long as we persevere in them: and it is thus that God causes in the blessed a knowledge of what is to be done, not as though they were ignorant, but by continuing that knowledge in them* (*ST II-II, 52.4*).

### A REMEDY FOR SIN

St. Thomas preaches that we need a doctor's counsel when we suffer physical illness. Likewise, we must seek moral counsel when we are in trouble, and especially when we have sinned. Here we begin to see the connection between God's counsel and our petition in the Lord's Prayer, "*Forgive us our trespases as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"

The dictionary defines trespass as an unlawful act causing injury to the person, property, or rights of another. God has the right to expect us to choose His will over our own; He, after all, knows what is best for us. When we choose our will over God's, we deny God's right. This is sin, and we properly call this poor choice a "trespass," a debt we owe to God.

Our faith assures us that although we may turn away from God, God never turns away from us. His love continually calls us to union with Him. When we sin, God's gift of counsel inspires and encourages us to seek His forgiveness. We do this for two reasons: to grow in humility, and to live in hope.

### PERSEVERANCE IN HUMILITY

Only Christ and His Blessed Mother have lived on earth in perfect virtue. St. John reminds us that sin is the far more common experience of humankind. "*If we say that we have not sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*" (*1 John 1:8*). Humility is the virtue by which we acknowledge God as the source of everything we have, and everything we are. It is the ability to look at ourselves honestly, and to see how we measure up to God's will for us, and how we have failed to do so. The words of the Lord's Prayer are a

plea for humility, for when we ask God to forgive us our trespasses, we not only seek His forgiveness for our sins, we remind ourselves of our constant need for His mercy.

## TO LIVE IN HOPE

Although we are sinners, the words of the Lord's Prayer are a constant invitation to hope. Throughout the gospel Jesus tells parables of individuals forgiven immense debts when they demonstrate true repentance. Sorrow for sin is essential, and sorrow itself is evidence of God's mercy, for we could not express contrition were we not called to repentance by God's grace.

"Consequently," St. Thomas preached in his Lenten sermon, "*whenever you ask for mercy you shall receive it, provided you ask with repentance for your sin.*" The words of our prayer, in which we ask God to forgive the debts we owe Him, are a constant reminder of God's mercy, a source of constant hope that throughout our lives on earth God is always willing to accept our repentance and forgive our sins.

## THE "WHEN" OF FORGIVENESS

When we speak of sin we refer both to the sinful act, by which we choose our will over God's, as well as the punishment we deserve as a result of our wrong choice. To ask God to forgive our trespasses, addresses both aspects of sin, provided our words reflect the true state of our hearts.

To express genuine sorrow for sin, our contrition must include the intention of atonement, by which we promise to repair the wrong we have committed (through sacramental reconciliation), as well as a purpose of amendment, by which we promise to avoid a sin in the future.

St. Thomas considers the consoling words of the Psalmist, "*I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and Thou forgave the iniquity of my sin*" (Ps. 31:5). He concludes, "*...man must not despair, seeing that contrition together with the intention of confessing suffice for the forgiveness of sin.*"

## A NOTE OF CAUTION

Lest we conclude that sacramental confession is unnecessary for our salvation, St. Thomas reminds us that the Church's reconciliation not only forgives sin, it takes away at least a part of the punishment due our sinful act. Our sorrow lays claim to God's mercy, for He is always willing to forgive the wrong we have done. But St. Augustine observes that the punishment due even venial sin is no small thing; we should not, therefore, ignore the sacramental means by which the punishment is lessened.

## AN ADDITIONAL PROMISE

Nor should we ignore the value of indulgences. These have been a source of bitter debate among Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, but St. Thomas'

words (preached before many of the controversies arose) offer a refreshing and simple reflection on the nature of indulgences and their purpose.

*...many are the good deeds of holy men...which deeds were done for the common good of the Church. Likewise the merits of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin are, as it were, the treasury of the Church. Thus the sovereign pontiff and those whom he delegates...can allocate these merits wherever the need occurs. Consequently sins are remitted not only as to their guilt by contrition, but also as to their punishment by confession and indulgences.*

## OUR RESPONSE TO FORGIVENESS

Thus far we have considered only the effect of God's forgiveness of our sins against Him. What shall we say about the parallel words in the Lord's Prayer, by which we express our willingness to forgive others? To repeat these words commits us to a course of action, and St. Thomas turns to two passages from the Scripture to illustrate our responsibility to imitate the generosity of God in our relations with other. The first of these passages, from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, asks rhetorically, "*Man to man reserveth anger; and doth he seek remedy of God?*" (Ecclus. 28:3). The second, from the gospel, is far less poetic, and considerably more direct, "*Forgive and you shall be forgiven*" (Lk. 6:37).

The petition by which we ask God to forgive our sins is the only one in the Lord's Prayer to which a condition is attached, and the condition is immense. "As" may be one of the tiniest among the innumerable words in the language, but its consequences are vast. "As" means "to the extent that" or "in the same way." Either definition is a clear reminder that our disposition is an essential part of the equation in which we, God, and our fellow men relate to one another. The Angelic Doctor is very blunt when he reminds us, "*...if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven.*"

He is equally blunt when he reminds us that Christ, who taught us The Lord's Prayer, remembers what He taught us. "*He will not be deceived. If, therefore, you say the words with your lips, fulfill them in your heart.*"

## FORGIVENESS AND BEATITUDE

Throughout His sermons on the Lord's Prayer, we have seen that St. Thomas continually make connections between the petitions of our prayer, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the beatitudes. Often these connections are subtle, and, perhaps, difficult to see, at least at first. This is not the case with our asking God to forgive us our trespasses. St. Thomas sums up his reflection on this petition very succinctly, "*This leads us to another beatitude: Blessed are the merciful, for mercifulness makes us show mercy to our neighbor.*"

Mercy is a word we use frequently, perhaps without much thought. This is a pity, because mercy is a

beautiful – and challenging – part of our spiritual life. The word deserves the same honored place in our vocabulary that the deed holds in our attitude toward our fellow men. Mercy means “compassionate sorrow for another’s distress, coupled with a practical will to relieve it.” To cry at the end of a sad book does not demonstrate mercy. To be merciful, our tears must be united with some effort to relieve the condition that inspires them.

As we pray the Lord’s Prayer we must remind ourselves – continually – that God’s mercy toward us is so great that He sent His Son to die for us. When we had incurred, by sin, a debt we had no means of repaying, God provided the remedy. But God’s gifts are never given to enrich only the person who receives them; they are given for the entire Church. Thus, when we experience God’s mercy in our prayer, or in the Sacrament of Penance, we pledge ourselves to show others the same practical compassion God has shown us.

This is something to consider whenever we say the words of the Lord’s Prayer, of course, but the days of Lent and Easter are an especially urgent reminder of how much we have received, and how much we are challenged to share.

## MARY, THE FINAL WORD

And here we might consider our Blessed Mother, whom we address as *Mater misericordiae*, “Mother of mercy.” As the mother of Our Savior, Mary is, truly, the Mother of Mercy Incarnate. But in her life, so far as the gospel allows us to penetrate the modesty that continually surrounds Mary, we see a continual example of what constitutes a merciful life, a life filled with practical compassion. ■

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## ST. PAUL *(continued from page 1)*

Paul’s writings. *In the Year of St. Paul* is a four-disc “mini-retreat” that considers conversion of heart, the peace of grace, and the knowledge of truth that forms the foundation for a life of grace in action. ■

## FROM THE CONFRATERNITY’S BOOK SHELF

Those looking for profitable Lenten reading will be quite pleased with the second volume of Fr. Paul Duffner’s spiritual reflections, *To Know Him, II*. Fr. Duffner is a master of the spiritual life, and his essays for the Confraternity’s “*Light and Life*” bulletin proved very valuable to our readers throughout the more than two decades Fr. Duffner devoted to directing The Rosary Center. He has newly revised these reflections, and we are certain they will deeply touch a new generation of readers. Topics include the Trinity, Christ the Redeemer, Mary our Mother, Grace and Virtue, and the Last Things.

*Prayers for Each and Every Day* is a charming and inspirational book for children. It includes Scripture readings and prayers for the morning and evening of each day of the week, as well as special reflections,

often in easy-to-grasp poetry, for special days and seasons. Lois Rock provides the following chant for Palm Sunday

*We sing and clap and wave and cheer  
For Jesus, who comes riding near.*

*We cheer and wave and clap and sing  
To welcome Jesus as our king.*

*The Rosary for Children* has recently been revised to include reflections on the Luminous Mysteries. Beautiful illustrations by contemporary artist William Luberoff accompany Sr. Karen Cavanaugh’s poignant meditations on the Mysteries, in words simple enough to touch the youngest pray-er.

Fr. Reginald, director of the Rosary Confraternity, has been complimented on his writing skills. If asked whether he enjoys writing, he will reply that editing is far more pleasurable, and he takes great delight in the ever-lengthening shelf of books he has helped find their way into print. Among these is Fr. Brian Mullady’s *Man’s Search for God*, now available from the Rosary Center.

As its title suggests, the volume includes Fr. Mullady’s investigations of our desire to see God, Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*, attitudes toward death, and a remarkable reflection on the Mystery of Transubstantiation.

Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has often lamented an attitude that embraces the social challenges of the Second Vatican Council, while ignoring, or discounting, the corresponding call to spiritual union with God. The Institute on Religious Life has just published a brief “primer on the theology of vocation,” *The Call of God*.

Anyone discerning a vocation, or would like to understand more about the vocation she or he feels called to, will find this small volume a concise and helpful starting point. The book considers the universal call to holiness, the gifts the laity offer the Church, and the married, religious and priestly life. The author is Fr. Brian Mullady, and the volume contains a thought-provoking introduction by Thomas Doran, Bishop of Rockford, IL.

## FOR OUR CANADIAN BENEFACTORS

Bank charges assessed on checks drawn on Canadian banks result in the Rosary Center’s receiving considerably less than the value of our Canadian donors’ gifts. We encourage our Canadian friends to use credit cards whenever possible, or to use money orders on U.S. banks to make gifts in U.S. funds.

## A REMINDER

If you pray the Rosary but have not enrolled in the Rosary Confraternity you are not benefiting fully from the daily prayers Confraternity members offer for one another. To become a full participant in this worldwide fellowship, visit the Rosary Center website and sign up on-line. Alternatively, you may write the Rosary Center and we will happily send the enrollment form.