

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., DIRECTOR

Vol. 63, No. 6 - A WESTERN DOMINICAN PUBLICATION

AUTUMN REFLECTIONS

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

I am writing on October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, anniversary of the Christians' decisive victory over their Turkish foes in 1571. As our civil year draws to its close, today's feasts by no means the last feast of Our Lady we will celebrate, but it is the last feast of the year that commemorates a military victory.

Technical advances in the last hundred years allow us to anticipate and, if necessary, undertake military action at any time. Obviously, this was not always the case. Unpredictable winter winds threatened sailing, and seasonal cold, with its threat of snow, forced armies to seek the shelter of winter accommodations. Our ancestors had many reasons to welcome autumn, and one of them must have been the promise – at least temporary – of a time of peace.

These autumn days allow us to look forward to the joyous celebrations of Mary's Immaculate Conception, her appearance at Guadalupe, and, of course, the Solemnity of Christmas which, one of our favorite hymns reminds us, warmed "a cold winter's night that was so deep," in a rare period when (in St. Luke's words) the whole world was at peace.

Our Scripture readings of our Advent and Christmas seasons, the hymns that adorn our liturgies and even the greeting cards we send during these days employ the word "peace" over and over. Many things may come to mind when we think of peace, but as we look forward to the birth of our Savior, the Prince of Peace, we must recall – at least occasionally – our theology's definition of peace: a state of tranquility within oneself, or among individuals.

The reality described by these words is a world away from the "armed neutrality" that characterizes the peace that governs (or fails to govern) relations among the nations of the world. That should not deter us from seeking Christ's peace in our lives, or seeking to share it in our families. Christ is the Prince of Peace and His Mother is the Queen of Peace. They call us to find refuge in their love, reconciliation in the sacraments, and strength and hope in prayer.



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

With this issue of *Light and Life*, we begin a new series of reflections. The first considers the nature of the Church; following issues will devote themselves to the "signs" or "marks" of the Church that we acknowledge when we profess the Creed: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. Each of these will remind us of the obligations that accompany our membership in the Body of Christ, and each will reflect the role of Mary in the life of the Church, and the life of its individual members.

"The Church" may seem a serious topic to consider during these happy days that lead to Bethlehem and the birth of Our Savior, but this reflection, and those that follow, extend an invitation to follow Mary, the "Mother of the Church." Mary is our model in all things and at all times. This is never more true than in these Advent days when she calls us to imitate her humility, obedience and joy, as she accepts the Word of God

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THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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

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Other Countries	\$12.50 Per Year

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Church, Part I: The Nature of the Church

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

THE USE AND BEAUTY OF LIGHT

The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* begins by stating a truth professed by all Christians, "Christ is the light of humanity." The document then lays out and embraces a dramatic challenge

...it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of this sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly in the Church.

We have become so used to light that we take it for granted. A swift motion of our hand can turn night into day. Because light is so common, we cease to think about it. For just a moment, though, let us give some thought to the role light plays in our lives. Physicists can explain what light is, but we do not need to be scientists to understand what light does: it makes things bright, and it makes them warm. We may not often consider this, but light also makes things safe – as anyone knows who has walked down an empty street at night.

CHRIST OUR LIGHT

We acknowledge Our Savior by many titles; "Light of the World" reminds us how much Christ has given us, and how very different (and how vastly poorer) our lives would be without Him. Our *Catechism* is unequivocal when it describes Christ's relation to the Church, "The Church has no other light than Christ's," and the text continues, "according to a favorite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun" (CCC, 748).

CHRIST REFLECTED IN THE CHURCH

The word "Church" comes from the Latin and Greek terms that mean "convocation" or "assembly." The *Catechism* adds, "It [the word "Church"] designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose" (CCC, 751). St. Paul also uses "Church" to describe both the small, local congregations that we call "parishes" (1 Cor. 11:18), and the larger, universal reality, which includes all members of all congregations who profess their faith in Christ (Gal 1:15).

"The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body (CCC, 752).

PRESENT REALITY, FUTURE HOPE

The Council document continues, "The Church will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven..." Until

then, "The Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and the Lord's consolations" (CCC, 769). God does not leave us alone on this journey. He has given us one another for strength and companionship, and St. Paul reminds us that we "who were far off" are "no longer strangers and sojourners, but...fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:17-19).

At present, this citizenship is limited by all the weaknesses that beset our human nature, including our inability to see and understand divine things. Nevertheless, even now, the life we share with other believers is a sign of the community we look forward to, a community that will include the angels and all those who already enjoy God's everlasting life. "The Church, on earth," St. Thomas Aquinas taught, "is the congregation of the faithful; but, in heaven, it is the congregation of the comprehensors" (ST III, 8.4, ad 2). The character of the community will be vastly enriched, and its membership increased, but the bonds that unite the community will endure.

GOD'S PEOPLE

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that "natural things have a natural inclination...to spread abroad their own good amongst others, so far as is possible" (ST I, 19.2). He continues, "...if natural things...communicate their good to others...much more does it appertain to the divine will to communicate...its own good to others as much as possible."

Here we discover the reason for creation: God is eternally aware of His goodness, and seeks to share that goodness. The universe, in its complexity and manifold beauty, is the result of God's wishing to cast His goodness as widely as possible. Human creatures are an essential part of this project, and the Book of Genesis tells us that God created humankind to touch and guide our world with His power, that is, to be the means by which creation comes to know His goodness.

THE RESULT OF SIN, AND ITS REMEDY

The disobedience of our first parents interrupted God's plan, but did not overcome or destroy it. God always wills to share His goodness, and the Old Testament is a history of God's repeatedly reaching out to mankind, inviting us to return to Him, and to reconsider both the goodness He calls us to enjoy, and the great vocation He calls us to embrace, which is to be the visible instrument that shares His goodness. The Letter to the Hebrews gives us a succinct synopsis of the history of our salvation, reminding us how God, "In many and varied ways...spoke of old to our fathers

by the prophets,” and it goes on to say “...in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...” (Heb. 1:1).

JESUS: SEED OF THE CHURCH

Our Savior repeatedly remarked the mysterious way in which small things grow into larger. The parables of the mustard seed, and of yeast kneaded into dough (Mt. 13:31-33) are reflections of Christ’s own ministry, and of the growth of the Church. It began with no more than a few followers; it gradually increased to become the “crowds” the evangelists tell us Jesus addressed; today it offers shelter and comfort to individuals throughout the world.

THE CHURCH: FAMILY OF CHRIST

In everyday life, our families may be weakened by many defects and flaws. Nevertheless, we instinctively know what a family should be. Not surprisingly, so did Jesus. And whatever the size of the groups that formed around Jesus, he identified them as extensions of His family. St. Matthew describes an occasion when Jesus’ mother and other relatives sought Him while He was preaching

“But he replied to the man who told him, ‘Who is my mother and who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother’” (Mt. 12:49).

Here we see the Church in miniature – individuals who listen to Christ’s word, and answer Christ’s call to proclaim the goodness and life God has prepared for His creatures. “They form Jesus’ true family,” our *Catechism* teaches, and “to those whom he thus gathered around him, he taught a new ‘way of acting’ and a prayer of their own” (CCC, 764).

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CROSS

Jesus taught this new way of acting by means of a very powerful example. The individuals who follow Christ – and that includes us no less than the original Twelve – will share His friendship, and even share His power. But only if we are willing to share His fate. The cross is the supreme sign of Christ’s love for us, and our willingness to embrace the cross is the supreme sign of our love for Christ.

THE CROSS AND THE EUCHARIST

We can find countless ways to embrace the cross, of course, but the Eucharist, which our *Catechism* reminds us, is the principal liturgical prayer that identifies Christ’s Church, is the action by which the cross is made most clearly visible. The importance of the Eucharist in our liturgical life, and its centrality to our identity as Christ’s family, deserves further reflection.

Let us begin by observing that the cross is an eternal event. Its power reaches backward and forward, and its memorial character makes the cross present to us whenever we gather to share Christ’s Body and Blood.

THE VALUE OF MEMORY

As we commonly understand it, memory is a passive faculty, something to be jogged when necessary, and

a pale reflection of a reality. In our everyday life, memory is decidedly second-rate, something we put up with when the real thing – whatever that may be – is unavailable.

This is not at all what God meant when He told Moses, “*This day shall be for you a memorial day...*” and gave instructions for a memorial feast (Ex. 12:14). It is likewise not what Jesus had in mind when He told His disciples to eat and drink in His memory (1 Cor. 23-25). For Moses, for Jesus, for us, His Church, memory is an active faculty that enables us to experience an event as if we were there when it originally occurred.

THE DRAMA OF MEMORY

Aristotle said that tragic drama purged an audience through pity and terror. By watching a dramatization of the great events of their history, the Greeks were to be so caught up in the drama that they actually became a part – not of the play on the stage, but of the events the play remembered.

We are properly reluctant to think of our worship as drama because we have mislaid our sense of drama as worship. In a triumph of miniaturization, we have reduced drama to the sensational series we can see at any hour on television. Drama, so called, becomes a way to pass the time. It beguiles, it distracts, it fills in gaps in the conversation. Above all, it entertains. But because they so seldom inspire awe, most of our dramas cannot be said to purge.

But all that changes at the Mass, which calls us to cast aside our passive attitudes about memory and embrace the drama of the Eucharistic liturgy that defines us. What we do at Mass is more than a ritual act – it is a moral act that makes us a part of our salvation history. When we consume the consecrated bread and wine, transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, we open a window onto eternity and stand at the foot of the cross.

EUCHARISTIC TRANSFORMATION

Every other food we eat is changed to become part of us. The Eucharist is unique. “When we eat this bread and drink this cup” we become what we eat, the Body of Christ, given to the world, and given to one another. The Eucharist that identifies the Church draws us to Christ – and it also thrusts us into one another’s arms. At the Last Supper, when Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, His words charge mortal actions with immortal value. “*As I have done, so you also must do*” (Jn. 13:12) “*in memory.*” The imperative in Christ’s words is very important. These words are an order: to be for the world what Christ, by sharing in our mortality, is for us.

TRANSFORMED WITH COURAGE

The Acts of the Apostles describes the fear and sorrow that fell upon the disciples after Jesus’ Ascension. We, who have the advantage of knowing how this chapter of our salvation history will end, know that those anxious days were transformed by the triumphant outpouring of God’s Spirit at Pentecost. One feature of that first

Pentecost (Acts 2:4) was the apostles' ability to "speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This gift enabled the apostles to proclaim the gospel to individuals who would not otherwise have been able to understand their message.

St. Thomas Aquinas remarks this was a remedy for "...the diversity of tongues...brought upon the nations..." as punishment for human pride (Gen. 11:1-9). It was also the beginning of the Church as an assembly of all peoples, by which Christ calls every nation to become a part of His body.

TRANSFORMED TO GIVE LIFE

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of God's "purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things of earth" (Eph. 1:10). This purpose and plan are revealed in the Church, which enjoys relations with God as intimate, St. Paul continues, as the union of spouses in marriage (Eph. 5:32).

The old "Exhortation before Marriage" reminded couples that, in marriage, God "...gave to man a share in the greatest work of creation, the work of the continuation of the human race." Our union with God, in the Church, is meant to be equally fruitful. What God has begun on earth, in our midst, and employing our talents, "must be further extended until it has been brought to perfection in him at the end of time" (CCC, 782).

MARY, OUR MODEL

To be the means by which God's Kingdom becomes a reality on earth is a daunting challenge. We may be grateful, then, that we have the Mother of Christ as our example. Pope John Paul II said "the 'Marian' dimension of the Church precedes the 'Petrine'" (CCC, 972). By this, the *Catechism* tells us, he meant that Mary "goes before us in all the holiness that is the Church's mystery as 'the bride without spot or wrinkle'." Friends of the Rosary Confraternity will find inspiration in the Pontiff's teaching that Mary's memories of Christ, treasured in her heart – the value of memory once again! – "were to be the 'rosary' which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life."

The gospel presents a very clear picture of Mary's words and actions, and the evangelists are careful to present Mary in a way that always allows us to identify ourselves with her. This is so we can find ourselves wherever we encounter Mary in the Scriptures. As "Mother of Church" Mary invites us to listen to God's word, as she did, and, like her, to allow the word to take flesh and blood within us, so that we – the Church – can present the saving face of Christ to the world. ■



AUTUMN REFLECTIONS (Continued from page 1)

into her heart and allows it to grow there, until, at last, she gives body, blood and a human face.

Each of us at the Rosary Center offers you, our friends and benefactors, our very best wishes for a holy Advent and a blessed Christmas. You are always in our prayers, and you may be certain we will remember you and your families as we progress toward Bethlehem with the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

This year the days of Advent bring additional reason to rejoice. On December 21st our beloved Fr. Paul Duffner will celebrate the 70th anniversary of his priesthood. More than twenty of those years were devoted to Fr. Duffner's watchful and loving care of the Rosary Confraternity. He is one of the few Western Dominicans who have served God's people in Anchorage, Alaska, and Chiapas, Mexico – the furthest ends of our Province's geographical bounds.

Closer to home, Fr. Duffner is remembered as pastor, administrator, and Novice Master, introducing 15 classes of young men to the beauty and discipline of Dominican Life. Fr. Duffner celebrated his 95th birthday in April, so his novices are among the senior pastors and other leaders of our life in the Western Province. Many have already celebrated fifty years of priestly ministry; others look forward to doing so soon.

Anyone who has accompanied Fr. Duffner through the years he edited this *Light and Life* bulletin can imagine what a sought-after confessor and spiritual director he has been in the nearly three-quarters of a century of his priestly service. Easier to count, perhaps, are the number of Masses he has celebrated. Even if he offered the sacrifice only once a day (and we know he often offered more than one Mass on Sundays and feast days) this anniversary would acknowledge more than twenty-five thousand Masses offered for us, or intentions, and the needs of God's Church.

As novice master, Fr. Duffner had the opportunity to touch the lives of men who answered Christ's call to follow Him in His priesthood. No one will be surprised to learn that Fr. Duffner never lost interest in those he readied for their priestly studies. He endowed two scholarships at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, and in the past five years the Rosary Center has been fortunate to contribute a quarter of a million dollars toward the purchase of a new building for our School.

These are gifts in addition to the support your generosity allows us to share, each month, for the education and training of our students. To honor Fr. Duffner's seventy years of priestly service, the Rosary Center has made an additional \$100,000.00 gift toward the purchase of the Dominican School building. This gift honors Fr. Duffner, but we have made it with sincere thanks to you, the many, many friends of the Rosary Center, whose sacrifices and love have made it possible. If you wish to add to our gift, we will gratefully include your contribution to the tribute we have already sent.