

THE ROSARY

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Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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A REFLECTION ON LENT

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

This year Ash Wednesday falls a mere two days after the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. At first glance these two liturgical days appear to have little in common, but closer inspection reveals a common thread that unites them.

Lourdes is renowned for physical cures, but in her twenty-eight apparitions, the Blessed Virgin never told Bernadette Lourdes would be known for physical healing. What she did say was, *"Penance! ...pray for sinners... kiss the ground for the conversion of sinners."*

Penance is a word we will hear often during Lent, and because penance is no fun, we are blessed to have Mary as our companion during these forty days. Mary had no need for penance, yet her life was characterized by a little-discussed penitential aspect of spirituality called "abandonment."

The perfect example of abandonment is Jesus, in the Garden, where, a Dominican writer reflected, *"He deliberately allowed His flesh to recoil from the pain of the Passion... to be as close as possible to all His fellowmen."* For Mary, the foot of the cross was her personal Gethsemane, the sword that pierced her heart on Golgotha her moment of abandonment. There, Jesus' prayer became hers, *"Not my will, O God, but yours, be done."*

In Lent God invites us to experience our own Gethsemane, so we must be grateful Jesus and Mary have made the journey before us, to transform these days from a time of pain into a time of revelation; when we face our weakness we can embrace the humility that is the remedy for pride. Wherever we find the Garden or the Cross is where we'll find ourselves. And Mary.

We have two new CDs from Fr. Brian Mullady that should prove profitable spiritual aids during this Lenten season: *Conscience Preparing for Lent* delves into how and why the formation of your conscience is so vital. Great for preparing an examination of conscience anytime, not just lent. *Confession and Conversion* considers the place of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the life of the Christian, and its importance for the individual's growth toward sanctity. \$10.00 each plus postage and handling.



Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF LOVE?

The Song of Songs for Catholics

Fr. James Thompson, O.P.

PART 10: CONCISE COMMENTARY 3:6-5:1

THIRD POEM

The third poem in the Song of Songs starts at 3:6 and runs through 5:1. Poem 3 divides into three sections. The first describes the wedding procession of "King Solomon" (3:6-11), the lover's delineation of his beloved's physical charms (4:1-11) followed by a description of the beloved as his garden (4:12-5:1). My interpretation of the literal intent of the first section can certainly be challenged, but this seems to me to make the most sense within the whole context of the Song. I agree with the New American Bible's designation of 3:6 as in the voice of the daughters of Jerusalem, but verses 7-11 would seem to call for another voice. It sounds like the voice

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit: VII COUNSEL

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

MAKING PROPER CHOICES

When we considered the moral virtues, we reflected that what separates the wise person from the foolish is the wise person's care, the caution with which he judges his options and chooses actions that avoid extremes. Our faith calls this practical ability Prudence, which the Catechism defines as *"the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it"* (1806).

PRACTICAL VIRTUE

"Practical" reason is the human capacity by which we choose the paths that will lead us to a particular goal. It is less concerned with theoretical knowledge than with the here-and-now realities we must deal with in our everyday lives. To be sure, this requires some knowledge of general principles of right and wrong, but the goal of Prudence is action – specifically, making proper choices. St. Thomas Aquinas quotes Aristotle, saying Prudence is *"right reason applied to action"* (II-II, 47:2). St. Augustine defines Prudence simply as *"the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid."*

THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

St. Thomas Aquinas taught (ST, II-II.52.3) that lower principles of movement (such as bodies) are helped and perfected by higher principles (such as spirits). Because Divine Reason provides the standard by which we judge any human act to be good or evil – Divine Reason is the standard of righteousness our human actions should aspire to – no one will be surprised to learn that the Holy Spirit has given us a gift to correspond to the virtue of Prudence. This is the gift of Counsel, which perfects the virtue of Prudence. The Benedictine writer who has been our companion through these reflections observes,

The gift of counsel, Donum consilii, might truly be called the most interesting of the gifts; through it the Church in her administration, individual Christians in their decisions, follow instincts which are beyond all that human prudence can do. Through it, according to St. Thomas, man is like one who is counseled by God Himself...Through the gift of counsel the Christian enters into the secret ways of God; unknowingly yet unerringly he will choose, in the practical contingencies of the spiritual life, ways that will lead to eternal salvation. Who does not see what a role this gift must play in the great life of the Catholic Church where decisions are being taken constantly in matters that affect the spiritual welfare of millions? (Anscar Vonier, *The Spirit and The Bride*, p. 192)

A SPIRITUAL AID

Before we continue this discussion we ought to note Fr. Vonier's repeated use of the word "spiritual" in his remarks. We are dealing with practical realities here, and while Prudence may, indeed, provide invaluable guidance as we consider underlying moral issues when we weigh the individual choices we make in stock market investments, Prudence and the Spirit's gift of Counsel are intended to increase our spiritual – not necessarily our material – fortunes. One writer states,

...we could say that Counsel is a Gift of the Holy Ghost, which makes us discern with certitude the best means of arriving at our last end...it is a quality given by the Holy Ghost to the soul in the state of grace, which quality so perfects the intelligence that it understands perfectly well all that must be done or avoided in the interest of eternal salvation. (James F. Carroll, C.S.Sp., *God the Holy Ghost*, pp. 59-60)

TOWARD PRACTICAL ENDS

Echoing these thoughts, a 20th Century Dominican noted

Prudence...can seize upon the intentions of charity and transform them into practical realizations, putting the will under the control of justice, ruling the passions by temperance and strength...It is the virtue of governing, the hub of the supernatural moral life: it changes the aims of love into detailed acts, and love proves itself in deeds. (H.D. Gardeil, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life*, p. 70)

THE GIFTS PERFECT VIRTUES

As we have stated above, and as we have seen in each of our other reflections on the Gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit's gifts perfect the virtues. They do so by making a virtue easier to practice, or by enabling us to practice the virtue more intensely, quickly, and with greater fervor. Cardinal Manning put this very eloquently when he described a Gift as

...a certain quality or perfection infused into the reason of man by the Grace of the Holy Ghost, whereby the reason is made able to discern not only right and wrong, not only the way of obedience, but also the way of perfection; that is to know that which between two things, both good and right, is better, higher and more pleasing to God. It gives also...a ready will to carry out into practice, that which we see to be the higher and better part.

When he relates this principle to the Gift of Counsel, our Dominican writer says,

Since the gift of counsel perfects the faculty of practical governing, it is found at the centre of the Holy Spirit's working in us. Higher, there is contemplation; lower, the practical everyday life; in between, counsel throws the light of contemplation on to practical dictates, like prudence, but in its own way which is a superior one. (p. 70)

COUNSEL: HELPING US ADAPT

But how, exactly, we may reasonably ask, does the Gift of Counsel manifest its superior potential for governing? First, by enabling us to adapt to the changing circumstances of our life. We possess the moral virtue necessary to make proper decisions, but

conditions of life change, plans are altered, our own personal life does not remain the same, we vary with age, we change, we advance, we fall back. We have to adapt these powers of strength, justice, temperance, to a material essentially malleable, difficult to mould...By ourselves we shall not know how to succeed. (p. 71)

HELPING US TRIUMPH

Secondly, because we are short-sighted, the gift of Counsel enables us to overcome some of our natural flaws and weaknesses. Cardinal Manning wrote wisely, quoting St. Paul, "*The...great antagonist of this spirit of counsel is the wisdom of the world...the prudence of the flesh.*"

We do not have to look very far to identify either of these challenges. The objective, moral universe changes about us every day. A landscape of shifting political values, questionable business ethics, and ever-emerging scientific discoveries make the question of public trust, and moral decision-making in the public realm, a greater and greater dilemma for even the most cautious and well-informed Christian.

Decision-making in our personal lives is hardly easier. In our reflections on the other gifts of the Spirit, we have seen that self-interest, the lure of comfort, the natural love of our family, and any number of other, lesser, distractions can easily stand in the way of progress in the life of virtue. The threats to Prudence are no less and no different.

TRIUMPH OVER – WHAT?

If we consider the result of these combined influences in our lives, we see that they often lead to an unguarded word, a rash, unheeded act, or – by contrast – either a state of spiritual paralysis, or at least a feeling that our capacity to "know what to seek and what to avoid" has been seriously compromised.

St. Thomas gives formal titles to these realities, naming them Imprudence, Precipitation, Thoughtlessness, Inconstancy, and Negligence. They can be sinful, he says, if they are embraced from contempt for God's law (ST, II-II, 53. 4-5) but our human experience generally proves them more apt to be the result of stress or confusion in the face of competing claims upon our attention. Our Dominican author tells no more than the sad truth when he remarks, "*Such*"

...is often our psychology in the ruling of ourselves.

The virtue of prudence, though supernatural, places itself within this poor psychology: becoming ours, it belongs to us to employ it, keeping to ourselves the initiative. It is indeed a supernatural perfection, but we still have passions, secret aims, we do not act with frankness, with perseverance... It is in order to help out this weakness that the Holy Spirit intervenes...We are tempted to go too fast; something restrains us, makes us think twice, makes us pray before acting: counsel keeps us from rushing headlong. If we are, on the contrary, given to negligence, [the Spirit] rouses us.... (pp. 72-3)

COUNSEL AND CONSCIENCE

If this guidance of the gift of Counsel begins to sound a great deal like our conscience, we must remember that God is the source of both the voice of conscience and the Spirit's gifts. "*This voice of conscience,*" writes Fr. Gardeil,

...strongly resembles the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Our reason is right when it is under the influence of God's reason...But in a person made divine through grace...who is under the constant influence of the Holy Spirit...there is more: there is inspiration properly so-called. All that, however, conscience and inspiration, are part of the same whole. In the concrete it is the same God who illumines our conscience and who gives us inspirations.... (p. 73)

When we surrender to the God's Spirit, the Gift of Counsel can express itself through the movement of our conscience.

The Holy Spirit makes the light of our conscience twice as bright by his inspirations. Now in a soft manner: a whisper, but persuasive and insistent. At other times, a hard reproof, when we do not listen and are obstinate. (pp. 76-7)

COUNSEL AND SURRENDER

Let us listen once again to St. Thomas Aquinas, who taught that the virtue of Prudence is perfected by the Gift of Counsel. Although we may mark similarities between the Gift of Counsel and the instruction parents give children, or the directions any of us receive from a superior, this gift is a great deal more than good advice we receive when we listen to others at a meeting. It is, St. Thomas, says, God's gift, by which Prudence is "*helped through being ruled and moved by the Holy Spirit*" (II-II, 52.2).

COUNSEL AND THE BEATITUDES

Prudence directs us to make proper choices that will yield good results. The Spirit's Gift of Counsel elevates this natural capacity to make it a sign of God's goodness for the world. In this way, the Gift of Counsel closely allies Prudence with the Beatitude in which Christ promises, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*" (Mt. 5:7). The reason for this is that Prudence directs us to make the right choices, and Counsel directs Prudence to choose the best among a multitude of good options.

Obviously, the best choices we can make are those that will benefit God's creatures. Mercy (which is compassion for another's distress, coupled with a practical will to relieve it) is the supremely good act, in which we come closest to imitating Our Savior, who – mercifully – offered His life for our salvation. He bade us take up His yoke, promising to bear it with us.

Our Lord thus shines into us the light of his own cross. He gives understanding of the mystery of the cross. He says to us as he said to Peter fleeing from martyrdom: 'I am going back to Rome to be crucified anew.' Well, then, let us go back to Rome and let us take up our cross again. (p. 76)

MARY, MOTHER OF GOOD COUNSEL

Let us draw this reflection to a close by considering yet another individual in whom we may find the Spirit's Gifts always at work – the Blessed Virgin, whom we address as "Mother of Good Counsel." Our Dominican companion, Fr. Gardeil, encourages us to have recourse to her when we pray for the Gift of Counsel, urging that if we do, we shall have a double guarantee: that of the Spirit, and that of Mary, "who, over and above her own gifts, will know how to launch our good will by praying the Holy Spirit that he may give us his gifts when we need them." (p. 77) ■

THE SONG OF SONGS

(Continued from page 1)

of a third-party narrator. Therefore, I would take the New Jerusalem Bible's approach (except for vs. 6), and consider this indeed to be an exceptional intervention of the authorial voice. Structurally, this poem is central, and it describes the bridegroom's wedding procession as that of King Solomon himself, the one to beat all other processions. In other words, this is poetic hyperbole to say that at the moment of the wedding, the bridegroom is king, even if in "reality" he is "only" a shepherd.

Daughters of Jerusalem, come forth and look upon King Solomon. (3:11) The maidens are called to behold the wedding procession, and to take special note of the crown his mother gave him. The Church Fathers made much of this in terms of Christ's passion and his mother's accepting participation. In his 1869 commentary, Littledale quotes an old hymn that sums this up:

*Daughters of Sion, see your King!
Go forth, go forth, to meet Him!
Your Solomon is hastening
Where that dear flock shall greet Him!
The sceptre and the crown by right
He wears, in robe of purple dight.
It glitters fair, His diadem,
But thorns are there entwining,
And from the Red Sea comes each gem
That in its wreath is shining:
Their radiance glows like stars at night,
With precious blood-drops are they bright.*(Littledale, 141-142)

The first half of the second section (4:1-5) is the first of three places (also 6:4-7 and 7:2-9) in the Song that the lover lists a description of the beloved's physical attributes.

She does the same for him in 5:10-16. In this place he starts with her eyes and works his way down to her breasts.

The garden motif, similar in function to the metaphor of the vineyard is introduced here. His garden, which is also her garden (verse 16) is her body. You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride. (4:12) The general drift of this passage is that his access to the garden is exclusive and permanent; and her self-giving to her lover is total. Although the relationship is mutual (2:16), the reason that the image is not reversible is because of the ancient (perhaps universal?) metaphor of the woman's body being the field upon which the man's seed is sown.

Mystically the Church is an enclosed garden, formed by God and cultivated by the Apostles. St. Paul said of the Corinthian church "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). Then he continued, "For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field" (vs. 9). With respect to the individual soul, Richard of St. Victor interpreted this passage to mean that:

The soul is a garden wherein the plants of virtue and the seedlings of spiritual pursuits are cultivated. This garden is dug, when vices are rooted up in it, and the habits of life are turned over.

You are a park that puts forth pomegranates. (4:13) It is probably no accident that the author chose the word "park" here to parallel "garden" in verse 12. The Hebrew word is *pardes*, borrowed from Persian, and is the cognate from which we get our word, "paradise." In this central poem of the Song of Songs, which seems to point to a happy marriage as a bit of heaven on earth, a reversal of the expulsion from Eden, their relationship is described in terms of a garden. The Fathers with their allegorical lenses in full focus would see the Apostolate of the universal Church planting local Churches throughout the world, thereby establishing little paradises; and, of course, the bright red juice of the pomegranate is suggestive the blood of the martyrs. ■

POSTAL PALS

Once again we turn to you to beg help for mailing rosaries to foreign missions. The U.S. Postal Service has raised the cost of shipping a box of rosaries from \$47.99 to \$59.95. I no longer recall what the cost was when I arrived at the Rosary Center, back in 2004, but this is an astronomical leap in a mere eight years.

We continually receive letters from the missionaries to whom we send rosaries; you cannot imagine their gratitude! Your kindness and generosity fulfill Jesus' command to take the gospel to "all the world," and the individuals who receive the rosaries for which you underwrite the postage are more grateful than you can imagine. Please continue your support of this vital ministry!

AN IMPORTANT BIRTHDAY

On April 15 Fr. Duffner will celebrate his 98th birthday. Although he has suffered some recent health problems, Fr. Duffner continues to attend his daily duties at the Rosary Center. Please pray for his continued well-being.