

LIGHT & LIFE

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

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

I have the great honor to serve as chaplain to members of the Order of Malta, and my chaplaincy has introduced me to something of which I was formerly unaware – the representation you see to the right of this page, which shows Mary as Our Lady of Philermo.

The icon has a very interesting history. After their defeat at the Battle of Acre, in 1291, the Knights of St John of Jerusalem fled to Cyprus, where they remained until 1306. From there they succeeded in capturing Philermo, the mountain-top capital of Rhodes. Three years later, they completely controlled the island.

On Mt. Philermo they found the icon in a monastery. Legend says it was painted by St. Luke, believed to be the artist responsible for many representations of the Blessed Virgin. Another legend described the painting's miraculously making its way to Rhodes in the 8th Century. Still another said it arrived, in the hands of pilgrims, in the 10th. Whatever the case, when the painting came into the Knights' possession, they deemed it one of their greatest treasures.

When Moslem forces drove the Knights from Rhodes, they brought the painting to Malta, where they continued to venerate it until Napoleon defeated the Knights, in 1798. Napoleon allowed the Master of the Order to take the painting with him, into exile. The rest of the Order's treasures were loaded onto French ships, and I think we may enjoy the irony that these same ships were sunk – and their treasures lost – when the British defeated the French forces at the Battle of the Nile.

The icon was given to the Russian Czar, Paul I, who served, briefly, as Master of the Order of Malta. When he died, in 1801, the painting was sent to the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, where it survived the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Devout members of the Russian imperial family guarded the painting, and, in 1941, entrusted it for safekeeping with the monks of an Orthodox monastery in Montenegro.

The icon then vanished, and was presumed a casualty of the communist upheavals after World War II. However,



The Holy Virgin of Philermo

Icon written by Philip Davydov

in 1993, after the fall of communism, monks of the Monastery of the Nativity brought the icon out of hiding. It now hangs in the National Museum of Montenegro.

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

Your humble servant is approaching his seventieth birthday, the age when Western Dominicans may “retire” from their active ministries and embrace a more contemplative life. Our Dominican Provincial has agreed to relieve me of the Director’s duties at the Rosary Center, so I shall no longer oversee the “business” operations of our ministry, although I shall continue – for the near future, at least – to contribute the reflections for *Light and Life*.

The new Director is Fr. Dismas Sayre, a Dominican ordained in 2008. He presently serves as Parochial Vicar

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THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Capital Sins: Part III

ENVY

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

THE GOOD OF SENSATION

Our sensitive appetite, that part of our nature that governs our physical feelings, directs our longing for the good things we lack. Our *Catechism* employs a very concrete example when it mentions our appetite's turning us toward food when we are hungry, or toward warmth when we are cold. (CCC, No. 2535) Such desires are good in themselves because they protect us and insure our health. However, they can become sinful if "they exceed the limits of reason and drive us to covet unjustly what is not ours and belongs to another or is owed him."

SENSATION'S LIMITS: THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

What is essential to understanding the *Catechism's* teaching is its stress on reason and justice. Economists say, "no one will ever repeal the Law of Supply and Demand," so markets exist that individuals may offer goods in exchange for the wealth and earnings of others. This is no more than common sense and experience demonstrate. But our moral training teaches we may not take the wealth of others by force, nor may we seek to triumph at the destitution of another.

In an earlier reflection, when we considered the Tenth Commandment, we discerned this commandment is one that governs our dealings with others, and our *Catechism* quotes the *Roman Catechism*, which admonishes

...merchants who desire scarcity and rising prices, who cannot bear not to be the only ones buying and selling so that they themselves can sell more dearly and buy more cheaply; those who hope that their peers will be impoverished, in order to realize a profit either by selling to them or buying from them...physicians who wish disease to spread; lawyers who are eager for many important cases and trials. (CCC, No. 2537)

SADNESS AT THE LIMITS: ENVY

What we should note in these words are their emphasis on the unjust desire of individuals to succeed at the expense of their neighbors, as well as their description of the sadness such individuals feel when a competitor excels at their expense. This sadness brings us face to face with the sin of envy.

St. Thomas Aquinas defines envy as sorrow for another's good. (ST, II-II, 36,1) But lest we be led astray by the apparent simplicity of this definition, Thomas is quick to distinguish between sinful and non-sinful sorrow. The latter, non-sinful sorrow, includes *fear* that another's good may do us some harm – something students

experience when taking competitive examinations, or the reasonable fear a nation may experience if a totalitarian government assumes power.. Likewise, we may identify *zeal*, which causes us to long, and strive, for the spiritual goods others possess but we do not. Finally, St. Thomas considers *indignation*, something we experience when individuals receive good things or honors they do not deserve.

ENVY vs CHARITY

St. Thomas teaches that true envy occurs, when "...we grieve over a man's good in so far as his good surpasses ours...because to do so is to grieve over what ought to make us rejoice, [namely] over our neighbor's good." Here we might profitably refer back, for a moment, to indignation, which is reasonable sorrow over others' receiving honors or wealth they do not deserve. This is what the Psalmist laments when he cries, "I was filled with envy of the proud, when I saw how the wicked prosper." (Ps. 72:2) Such indignation is justified; the sin of Envy, on the other hand, is opposed to the Virtue of Charity, which urges us to rejoice at others' receiving the good things they deserve or have earned. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us the greatest of the theological virtues is Charity. (1 Cor. 13:13) That envy should be opposed to the greatest of the virtues provides some insight into its gravity.

ENVY, PRIDE, & THEIR OFFSPRING

The 18th Century poet and playwright, John Gay, wrote, "Envy's a sharper spur than pay," which suggests envy might have a positive side to it. If so, Gay alone seems to have discerned it. From our earliest days, the Church's theologians have identified envy as a fault derived from pride, and the source of several ills, among them *tale bearing* and *detraction*. The two are identical in their purpose, which is to lower an individual in the eyes of the world; they differ only in their means. Detraction is use of a public forum to belittle a person's accomplishments – perhaps making jokes or demeaning comments in the individual's presence. Tale bearing is private gossip by which one person secretly seeks to damage the reputation of another.

At the beginning of this reflection we remarked St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of envy as sadness at another's good, which the tale bearer certainly experiences if gossip and detraction fail in their effort to damage another person's reputation. If, on the other hand, the efforts are successful, the sinner experiences yet another manifestation of envy, and

that is joy at another's misfortune. In either case, we see immediately that envy is altogether opposed to the charity that ought to characterize our relations with one another.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ENVY: ISOLATION

If we consider the pride from which envy springs, and the actions which envy begets, we see quite clearly that to commit the sin of envy is to isolate ourselves from the Body of Christ into which we were baptized. This is a frightening state, and St. John Chrysostom warned

...envy arms us against one another...If everyone strives to unsettle the Body of Christ, where shall we end up? We are engaged in making Christ's Body a corpse...We declare ourselves members of one and the same organism, yet we devour one another like beasts.

The common image of Hell is undoubtedly a place of eternal fire. But in Dante's *Inferno*, the closer the poet draws to the Devil's own place of torment, the colder he finds the environment. This is because the closer he approaches Satan, the further he draws away from God's charity. Compare this to the Scriptural image of Christ, which is one of light, an image we call to mind each Sunday, when we repeat the words of the Nicene Creed.

Thomas Merton said the saddest invention of the modern age was artificial light, because it allows us to ignore the difference between light and darkness. Light has become so cheap we take it for granted, and no longer consider its benefits. In fact, light bestows a number of gifts upon our world: it makes things bright, and it makes them warm. And if we have ever walked across an empty parking lot at night, we realize light also makes our world safe.

SPIRITUAL DARKNESS & COLD

Compare this to the darkness of sin, the world Judas entered when he abandoned Jesus and his brother disciples, at the Last Supper. "And it was night," St. John tells us. The night Judas entered was not simply a time of day, it was a spiritual reality devoid of the light, warmth, and safety of Christ's love. If we look at Judas, we realize that committing sin does not merely distance us from one another in Christ's Body; it isolates us from the safe and consoling warmth of Christ's love. If we allow envy to blind us so completely that we persist in embracing our own perceived good over that of another, we are condemned, eventually, to find ourselves alone and cold, isolated in a solitary spiritual universe.

A BLESSED ALTERNATIVE

This is not the fate we were created for. Our *Catechism* reminds us

The economy of law and grace turns men's hearts away from avarice and envy. It initiates them into desire for the Sovereign Good; it instructs them in the desires of the Holy Spirit who satisfies man's heart. (CCC, No. 2541)

At the beginning of St. Matthew's gospel account, we read, "[Jesus] taught them, saying: 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'." (Mt. 5:2) With the Beatitudes, Jesus intends his words to lead his hearers away from a disordered dependence upon material goods and the world's honors. And he also intends these words for us. A large crowd listens to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but St. Matthew tells us Jesus addressed his words to his disciples. This means we ought to pay special attention, for whenever we find Jesus speaking to the disciples, he is speaking to us, the Church.

THE BLESSING OF POVERTY

When we consider poverty of spirit, the first thing we need to remember is that Jesus commends poverty precisely because those *economically* deprived in this life have nothing to cling to except the promise that things will be better in a better world; Scripture condemns the rich because a spirit of irresponsibility often accompanies wealth. Cultivating a poverty of *spirit* is a remedy for envy because it helps us find the source of our true happiness in Jesus, rather than created things or honors. This is nothing more than Jesus urges when he warns, "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33)

LOOKING WITHOUT

Poverty of spirit enables us to look beyond ourselves, and to embrace the many other members of Christ's Body with whom we are called into union by our Baptism. Kevin Vost, author of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, writes that poverty of spirit restores the relations that ought to characterize this unity. To accomplish this end, he suggests "a kind of internal 'three Rs'" when we are tempted to envy – "not reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic, but *reaction, reflection, and resolution*." (p. 113)

LOOKING WITHIN

Vost suggests we cultivate the first of these, *reaction*, by recognizing the initial stirrings of envy when we learn of another's good fortune. To offset them, we should train ourselves to recognize what is taking place within us, and ask, "Is envy sneaking up on me?" Once we realize we are feeling envious, Vost says we are faced with a choice: the time is ripe to ask whether we will cultivate the negative feelings or crush them. Finally, we must take a look at our reaction. If we have allowed our feelings of envy to take flesh in some action that demeans another, or simply allows us to surrender to the sadness that we have not been so blessed as one of our neighbors, we must ask ourselves what we can do to set the matter aright here and now (the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an ever-present remedy) and how we might act differently in the future.

LOOKING UPWARD

Poverty of spirit accomplishes another – and deeper – effect, and that is the proper ordering of our relations with God. Thus, our *Catechism* reminds us, "In order to possess and contemplate God, Christ's faithful mortify

their cravings and, with the grace of God, prevail over the seductiveness of pleasure and power.” (CCC, No. 2249) The more successfully we accomplish this mortification, St. Augustine encourages us, the more perfectly we achieve the union with God our Baptism calls us to.

There will true glory be, where no one will be praised by mistake or flattery; true honor will not be refused to the worthy, nor granted to the unworthy; likewise, no one unworthy will pretend to be worthy, where only those who are worthy will be admitted. There true peace will reign, where no one will experience opposition either from self or others. God himself will be virtue’s reward; he gives virtue and has promised to give himself as the best and greatest reward that could exist...”I shall be their God and they will be my people...” This is also the meaning of the Apostle’s words: “So that God may be all in all.” God himself will be the goal of our desires; we shall contemplate him without end, love him without surfeit, praise him without weariness. This gift, this state, this act, like eternal life itself, will assuredly be common to all.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

In this, as in all things, our example is Jesus. One of our Church’s early writers (Basil of Caesarea, AD 329 – 379), pointed out that the teaching in the beatitudes is always preceded by an action, an action of Jesus, himself. Therefore, Jesus can urge us to poverty of spirit, because

...being rich by nature, since all the Father’s goods are his, he became poor on our account in order to enrich us by his poverty...it is he... who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave in order that we might receive gift for gift from his fullness.

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

And, of course, we have the example of Our Savior’s Blessed Mother. In his *True Devotion to Mary*, St Louis de Montfort remarked, “I am speaking mainly for the poor and simple who have more good will and faith than the common run of scholars.” (26) The economic poverty which befalls so many of the world’s peoples – and over which these individuals have no choice – forces one to see the world in very real, life and death terms.

Voluntary poverty, on the other hand, is closely allied to humility, the virtue by which we see everything we have, and everything we are, as God’s gift. Humility allows us to see ourselves as we truly are, in relation to God. To acknowledge our strength, beauty, talents and skills is no more than right – so long as we acknowledge God as their source. When she utters the majestic words of her *Magnificat*, the Blessed Virgin turns her back on the very hint of *false* modesty. “All generations will call me blessed,” she says, [for] he has “exalted the lowly.”

THE WEALTH OF POVERTY

To be poor in spirit is to see – and rejoice in – all we are capable of, because of God’s action in our life, and

the lives of those around us. Kevin Vost quotes Louis of Grenada, who observed this result

When you envy the virtue of another you are your own greatest enemy [but] if you continue in a state of grace, united to your neighbor through charity, you have a share in all his good works, and the more he merits the richer you become. So far, therefore, from envying his virtue, you should find it a source of consolation... [and] the profit of his labors would also become yours.

When we identify God as the source of our blessing, we have no need of envy. And we become free to rejoice in the gifts he has bestowed upon our sisters and brothers. ■

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP *Continued from page 1*

at Holy Rosary Parish, the church across the street from the Rosary Center. He is quick to remark that his arrival on the scene marks a change in directors, not a change in direction. The Rosary Center will continue to preach the Good News by promoting devotion to Mary’s Rosary, striving – especially in this Year of Mercy – to share Our Lady’s prayer with those still longing for the saving touch of Christ’s love.

A NEW SAINT OF THE ROSARY

Last spring our Holy Father canonized Blessed Marie-Alphonsine Ghattas, a member of the Sisters of the Rosary. This congregation was established in the Holy Land in the 19th Century, and embraced by the Dominican Third Order. Sr. Marie-Alphonsine shared the May 17th honors with another religious from the Holy Land, Sr. Marie of Jesus Crucified, and both were honored at a Mass of Thanksgiving at the Dominican School of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem.

NEW BOOKS

I take great pleasure in announcing a booklet published by the Dominican nuns at Corpus Christi Monastery, in Menlo Park, California. *Praying the Rosary for the World* invites us to enter more deeply into the life of Jesus and His Mother, by directing our attention – and intentions – as we offer this sacred prayer. The booklet holds a special place in my heart because I am deeply fond of the Dominican Sister who was the unflagging Motive Force behind it. I offered some minor editing assistance, but that was nothing compared to the hard work – in the midst of their very busy prayer schedule – the sisters embraced to produce this volume, which celebrates the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Dominican Order. We are proud to offer the booklet for \$2.50.

In our last issue of *Light and Life* we mentioned *A Pathway Under the Gaze of Mary*: This is a fascinating biography of Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart, the only one of the three children who witnessed the miracles at Fatima to survive into adulthood. The book is available for \$19.95.