

FATHER DISMAS SAYRE, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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A REFLECTION ON THE ASSUMPTION

One of the lesser-known medieval saints is Bl. Amadeus of Lausanne. He was born in 1110, and entered the Cistercian monastery when only fourteen years old. St. Bernard was his teacher. St. Bernard is known for some remarkable reflections on the Blessed Virgin, and perhaps his mentor's devotion inspired Bl. Amadeus, for he, too, left behind a collection of homilies on Mary.

In a homily for August 22, the octave day of the Feast of Mary's Assumption, Amadeus preached:

...Because of the honor due her Son, it was indeed fitting for the Virgin Mother to have first ruled upon earth and then be raised up to heaven in glory.... The angels rejoiced to see their queen; the apostles rejoiced to see their lady, and both obeyed with loving devotion. Dwelling in the loftiest citadel of virtue, like a sea of divine grace or an unfathomable source of love that has everywhere overflowed its banks, she poured forth her bountiful waters on trusting and thirsting souls.

These words magnificently establish our worship of Jesus as the context within which we honor His Mother. Mary's unique relation to Our Savior has merited a place next to him in heaven. Her loving and obedient service sets the example for everything we do, and promises us the same ultimate reward.

Amadeus' homily continues:

Has anyone ever come away from her troubled or saddened or ignorant of the heavenly mysteries? Who has not returned to everyday life gladdened and joyful because his request has been granted by the Mother of God? ...In her abundant goodness she has channeled the spring of reason's garden, the well of living and life-giving waters...until they surround the shores of every far-flung nation. With divine assistance she has redirected these waters and made them into streams of peace and pools of grace.

These streams of peace may appear quite elusive these days, as nearly every morning greets us with details of some new and horrifying act of deadly violence. This evidence of



Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Guido Reni

our fallen human nature undoubtedly increases our thirst; may it also call us to turn more urgently to Our Mother, the Queen of Peace.

ALTHOUGH SOME THINGS CHANGE

Change is once again afoot at the Rosary Center. Our Dominican Provincial has asked Fr. Dismas Sayre to abandon the reins at the Rosary Center and undertake direction of the Western Province's Shrine of St. Jude.

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Signs of the Church: I The Church is One

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

UNITY: A DREAM LOST TO SIN

In the liturgy for the Vigil of Pentecost, the book of Genesis describes a time when humankind spoke one language, and everyone knew the meanings of every word. In our pride we built a tower we said would reach into the heavens, but God thwarted our ambition and confused our speech. This put an end to our high-rise dreams, but we have only to think about those words our parents forbade us to use when we were growing up to realize the power of our fallen, sinful tongues.

When words no longer bind us together, speech acquires an amazing power to drive us apart. Not only exotic words like “Baghdad” and “Sudan,” but simple words like “West,” “Bank,” and even common place names such as London and Paris remind us that when we stop using words to create, we are not long in using them to destroy. Until, the Acts of the Apostles tells us, God sent tongues of fire upon our ancestors in the faith, to destroy the Babel of our tongues of flesh.

THE REMEDY OF PENTECOST

The Pentecost event in the Acts of the Apostles is unique, and it marks “paid” to a long-standing debt. In olden times the one language of our human race became many, but with the descent of the Spirit on the Apostles and God’s Mother in the Upper Room, our many languages became one. At Pentecost, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cappadocians, Phrygians, Asians, Romans, Cretans – sixteen nations representing every human tongue – witnessed the many languages of our human family reunited to proclaim, “Jesus Christ is Lord!”

THE TRINITY: OUR SOURCE OF UNITY

This miraculous calling together of God’s People is a reflection of the unity that characterizes the life of the Holy Trinity. Our *Catechism* quotes the Vatican document, *Gaudiam et Spes*, to observe:

The Church is one *because of her founder*: for the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross...restoring the unity of all in one people and one body. The Church is one *because of her “soul”*. It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church’s unity. (CCC, 813)

The Church possesses nothing of her own; her very identity and existence are gifts. “The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.” (CCC, 811)

An important principle in our faith that tells us if we want to know what the Church believes we need only look at how the Church prays. So although we can never understand the mystery of the Trinity completely, examining how we pray will tell us quite a bit about it.

Think of any of the prayers of the Mass, especially the Eucharistic Prayer itself. In each of them we address the Father through the Son, in the Spirit. The structure of our prayer expresses our belief that the persons of the Trinity are related but distinct. Our prayer also reminds us that the Father is the source of everything that is and everything we can want, that these gifts are revealed and given us through the Son, and that the Spirit is the bond that unites us to God in love – and to one another in prayer.

This is what St. Paul means when he tells the Romans, “we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit...” (Rom 5:5) We have been created in God’s image, so the Trinity is not only the object of our worship, it is also the principle of our moral identity as Christians. This suggests that the more we embrace the mystery of the Trinity and examine the works of God, the more clearly we can discern the model for our behavior, and the challenge to reflect in our relations with one another the unity that characterizes the life of the Trinity.

OTHERS’ CONTRIBUTION TO UNITY

But this is not to deny the manifold gifts of the countless individuals who make up the Church. God is prodigal in the distribution of riches, and each of us has something unique to contribute to the Body of Christ, which we experience as the Church. These many gifts, when added together, contribute to the immense wealth of the Body of Christ, the One Church. The same is true of the contribution offered by communities which are not part of the Roman Church, but which profess the Church’s essential beliefs. Thus, our *Catechism* remarks:

Among the Church’s members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions and ways of life. “Holding a

rightful place in the communion of the Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions.” The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church’s unity. Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity. And so the Apostle [in his letter to the Ephesians] has to exhort Christians to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (CCC, 814)

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO UNITY

St. Paul echoes this theme, urging his listeners to embrace charity, “which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Eph 4:3) But our *Catechism* observes that while charity is essential to Church unity, we have other bonds as well. Among them are the profession of faith we have received from the Apostles, our common celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments, and what has been termed “apostolic succession.”

SO-CALLED APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

The last of these unifying characteristics requires some explanation, simply because it is so often misunderstood. When we were young, many of us imagined apostolic succession nothing more than a chronological history of ordinations, particularly the ordinations of bishops. In our naïve simplicity we believed a bishop could name the bishops who ordained him, those who ordained them, and so on – back to the Apostles.

TRUE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

In fact, apostolic succession is far more than a mere history lesson – and far more rewarding to study. Apostolic succession is the Church’s continuing to maintain, throughout its history, the same beliefs professed by the Apostles. Any attempt to determine the history of bishops’ ordinations is doomed to failure; we simply do not possess all the necessary records. However, a history of the development of our faith – the evolution of those basic beliefs that identify us – and the groups and individuals responsible for helping the Church formulate those beliefs, are quite easy to find.

THE BLESSING AND CHALLENGE OF ECUMENISM

The Second Vatican Council extended a loving hand to members of all religious communions. At the same time, it was very clear that the Catholic Church alone enjoys the fullness of apostolic succession.

For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone... that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God.

Twenty centuries of Christian history demonstrate that Church unity is quite fragile, threatened from its earliest

days. When we consider the divisions that separate Christians we may think immediately of the Protestant Reformation, but the readings from the Acts of the Apostles that accompany our daily liturgies throughout the Easter season, are a powerful reminder that even the earliest Christians were forced to overcome serious obstacles to maintain their unity of faith.

THREATS TO UNITY: HERESY

The greatest threats to Church unity are heresy, apostasy, and schism. Each deserves our attention. Heresy is a baptized person’s obstinate denial of some fundamental truth. Heresy is concerned only with the elements of our faith that have been explicitly defined by the Church or maintained from the Church’s earliest days, e.g., the elements of the Creed.

Issues not defined remain open to debate, but no one may reinterpret an established Church teaching in light of current intellectual trends. The First Vatican Council stated unequivocally, “If anybody says that by reason of the progress of science, a meaning must be given to dogmas of the Church other than that which the Church understood and understands, let him be anathema.”

APOSTASY

Apostasy is a baptized person’s turning her or his back on the faith. If someone denies a personal commitment made to God (such as religious vows or ordination to the priesthood) St. Thomas Aquinas terms this “a backsliding,” (ST, II-II, 12:1) that does not necessarily diminish the individual’s faith. However, “...if he give up the faith, then he seems to turn away from God altogether: and consequently, apostasy simply and absolutely is that whereby a man withdraws from the faith....In this way apostasy...pertains to unbelief.”

SCHISM

Schism is a refusal to submit to the Pope, or abandoning the fellowship of those who are faithful to him. St. Thomas observes, “...schismatics...are those who willfully and intentionally separate themselves from the unity of the Church.... [This unity] consists in two things; namely, in the mutual connection or communion of the members of the Church, and again in the subordination of all the members of the Church to the one head....” (ST, II-II, 39:1)

JUSTICE AND OUR NON-CATHOLIC NEIGHBOR

The *Catechism* does not deny the tragic effects of these ills, especially schism, on Church unity. However, the text does remind us that “one cannot charge with the sin of separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ....” (CCC, 818) The text continues by reminding us that members of non-Catholic religious communities “have a right to be called Christian, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church.”

Moreover, non-Catholic Christians can teach us a great deal. The moral sanctity of such individuals, as well as their spiritual traditions, are signs of God's hand at work in our midst, and can, thus, be the subject of our admiration. "Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as a means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to his Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him, and are in themselves calls to 'Catholic unity'." (CCC, 819)

AN INVITATION TO LOOK OUTWARD

These words are not an invitation to religious indifference. Rather, our faith teaches that the fullness of revelation has been entrusted to the Catholic Church and her leaders. However, we must not be blind to values outside our tradition. The Church's medieval philosophers and theologians availed themselves of the work of pagan writers, and incorporated many of these "non-Catholic" notions into what has become the worldview of our Western Civilization. So long as we do not deny the truths that define us as Catholics, we need not hesitate to learn from those outside the Catholic fold.

In his farewell words to his disciples, at the Last Supper, Jesus prayed, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us...." (Jn, 17:21) These should be words of immense consolation; they not only promise us union with Jesus and God the Father, they are a promise that what we strive to accomplish here and now has eternal consequences. The *Catechism* quotes the Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (The Restoration of Unity), "Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time."

THE PERSONAL CHALLENGE OF UNITY

The text continues with the admonition that "the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity Christ wills for her," (CCC, 820) and states that this requires the Church's permanent commitment to renewal as well as our willingness to embrace a greater and greater conversion of heart. Striving to embrace gospel values brings us closer to God and one another; our lack of fidelity to this goal is the source of division.

We should also reach out to our non-Catholic neighbors. The more we know about one another's devotion, and the closer we draw to one another in genuine friendship, the more closely we approach the unity Christ begs of us. Praying with our non-Catholic friends is a splendid way of establishing and strengthening the bonds that draw us together. Collaboration on charitable enterprises is yet another way to build and cement these unifying links.

THE CHALLENGE OF MARY

St. Clement of Alexandria, the renowned Third Century theologian, left a breathtaking reflection on Church unity. He wrote, "What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos [Word] of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her 'Church'." Mary's name may not often come to mind when we ponder the mystery of the Trinity, but when we consider her role in our salvation, we must bow before the member of our human race who gave flesh and blood to God's Word, and thus, demonstrates what we must do for the world's salvation. ■

ALTHOUGH SOME THINGS CHANGE Cont. from page 1

Fr. Dismas has proven a very able administrator at the Center – and a very tidy one. The Dominican Archives have been enriched by his sorting through boxes of old personal correspondence and sending some unusual postage stamps to Fr. Reginald, our former director, who now serves as the Western Province's Archivist.

The new Director of the Center is Fr. Joseph Mary Sergott, a Dominican whose name bears witness to his dedication to the Rosary Center's ministry. Fr. Joseph is a native of Michigan, who encountered the Dominicans in the 1980s, when he came to California to work in the aeronautics industry. He joined the Dominicans in 1988, was ordained in 1996, and has served most recently as Assistant to our Dominican Provincial.

MOST REMAIN THE SAME

Our friends will be happy to learn that the staff at the Rosary Center moves forward without undergoing any change. Fr. Duffner, our 102 year old stalwart Director *Emeritus*, and model for his Dominican brothers' devotion to the Rosary, continues to come to the Rosary Center office each day. And Fr. Reginald Martin will continue to write the reflections for *Light and Life*. "I hoped I might serve as Director for twenty years, as Fr. Duffner did," he says, "but God had other plans. I've found immense consolation in writing these reflections since 2005. I pray God and my superiors will allow me to keep this up!"

A NEW EDITION OF A CLASSIC

Before sending Fr. Dismas on his way, we made certain he finished one of his pet projects: revising our best-selling, *Scripturally Based Rosary*. Our new edition is beautifully illustrated, and includes the Luminous Mysteries. Each Mystery is introduced by a passage from the Bible, or another source that will provide inspiration for grace-filled prayer.

The paperback booklet contains 53 pages. Cost: \$3.00

