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"His Will Is the Truth and Is Love"
excerpt from Palm Sunday Homily, April 5, 2009
Pope Benedict XVI

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Finally, St. John also put Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Olives in a modified form in his composition for "Palm Sunday." There is first of all the statement, "My soul is troubled" (12:27). Here Jesus' fear appears, which is amply illustrated by the other evangelists -- his fear in the face of the power of death, in the face of the entire abyss of evil that he sees and into which he must descend. The Lord suffers our anxieties together with us, he accompanies us in the last anxiety until we come to the light. Then there follow, in John, Jesus' two questions. The first is only expressed conditionally: "What will I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?'" (12:27). As a human being, Jesus also felt driven to ask that he be spared the terror of the passion. We too can pray in this way. We too can lament before the Lord like Job, present all our questions that arise in us in the face of the injustice in the world and the problems affect us personally. Before God we must not take refuge in pious phrases, in a world of make-believe. Praying also means struggling with God, and like Jacob we can say to him: "I will not let you go until you have given me a blessing!" (Genesis 32:37). But then there is Jesus' second request: "Glorify your name!" (John 12:28). The Synoptic Gospels put this request in this way: "Not my will but your will be done!" (Luke 22:42). In the end, God's glory, his lordship, his will is always more important and more true than my thoughts and my will. And this is what is essential in our prayer and in our life: understanding this right order of reality, accepting it interiorly; trusting in God and believing that he is doing the right thing; understanding that his will is the truth and is love; understanding that my life will be a good life if I can learn how to conform to this order. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the guarantee that we can truly entrust ourselves to God. It is in this way that his kingdom is realized.

Dear friends, at the end of this liturgy, the young people from Australia will give the World Youth Day Cross to the young people of Spain. The Cross is on its way from one side of the world to the other, from sea to sea. And we accompany it. Let us go forth with it along this road and, in this way, find our road. When we touch the cross, indeed, when we carry it, we touch the mystery of God, the mystery of Jesus Christ. The mystery that God so loved the world -- us -- that he gave his only-begotten Son for us (cf. John 3:16). We touch the marvelous mystery of God's love, the only truth that is really redemptive. But we also touch the fundamental law, the constitutive norm of our life, that is, that without the "Yes" of the cross, without walking in communion with Christ day after day, life can never be a success.

The more that, for the love of the great truth and the great love -- for love of the truth and love of God -- we can make some sacrifice, the greater and richer our life will become. He who wants to keep his life for himself will lose it. He who gives his life away -- daily in small gestures, that are part of the great decision -- will find it. This is the exigent truth, a truth that is also deeply beautiful and liberating, in which we want to enter, step by step, on the cross' journey over the continents. May the Lord bless this journey. Amen.

courtesy of Zenit.org

Q & A

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"Only God Can Forgive Sins"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

First, thank you for this Q & A; some of the answers here have really helped. I'm currently discerning a vocation to the priesthood. I've been in contact with the Jesuits and I'm going to visit them in the beginning of January. Recently, however, I've had real doubts. I've come to realize more and more my sinfulness and wonder how could I, being the sinner that I am, give absolution to others. How could I, who have used my

hands to sin, hold up the consecrated Host? I'm beginning to doubt my capacity and my very ability to function as a priest. (That is, IF I'm let through the process of becoming one.)

Second, I recently met this girl. She is one of the sweetest, most wonderful persons I've encountered and the attraction seems to be mutual. I've tried to keep the relation at a friendly, platonic level but this is becoming harder and harder since we take classes together at the university. I realize that if I am to follow my vocation, dating and such is of course out of the question. But how should I handle this? Should I simply try not to be alone with her and avoid anything that could encourage her? Should I tell her how I feel about her and then tell her about my vocation?

Well, this is my situation. I guess I am mostly writing to get things of my chest; still, I'd appreciate your prayers. -

-Alex

A. Dear Alex,

Let's take your two questions separately.

One: you feel unworthy, you have sinned and you think it would be hypocritical for you to pardon others and to raise the pure Host in your hands. If sinlessness were the condition to be called to the priesthood, who would be left? It is not we who pardon, it is Christ who uses us (the priest forgives in the person of Christ) to pardon sins. Only God can forgive sins. So the fact of being a sinner is not an impediment to priesthood. However, the nature of the sins we have committed, their frequency, how deeply rooted they are in us, and the effect they have had on our mind, will and passions do matter. So here you will have to seek some advice from a confessor or spiritual director to see if your case your concrete past would be an impediment to a vocation.

Two: you are smitten and you don't know what to do. You know that if you have a vocation dating her is out of the question. Good. You are thinking straight so far. If she gives a hint that she is attracted towards you and seems to want to get to know you better you might just want to scare her away by telling her you think you have a vocation. It may not help much if you tell her you are attracted to her. If she has not given real signs she is particularly interested in you there wouldn't be much point in letting her know your feelings.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

Q & A

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"Jesus Himself Present in the Eucharist"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

I`m in discernment with a Franciscan community, although I won` t be able to enter until I complete my education. My parents were pretty upset when I told them I wanted to be a Sister, but over time (and with a LOT of prayers) they seem to be mellowing out a little. I`m wondering if you know of any resources that could be helpful to my parents as they try to come to terms with this crazy, completely counter-cultural way of life that their only daughter feels so drawn to.

-Amy

A. Dear Amy,

As regards your parents, you must keep in mind that a vocation is a completely supernatural happening. Though the way we discover it might seem natural enough (a person we meet, a retreat we go on, a book we read, someone we admire, a community we visit and feel at home in sometimes the circumstances seem so simple that we even doubt it really is a vocation), it is always an initiative of God's grace, and with all its demands it can only be understood from the point of view of faith. There is really nothing logical, outside of the logic of faith, about giving up so many good things to follow Christ as religious (family, marriage, possessions, our independence), not to mention the particular rules of each religious family.

So, the first and best resource to assimilate your vocation is right there in front of your parents, they are probably already using it, but perhaps not with this intentionality: Jesus himself present in the Eucharist. His sacrifice on Calvary and his silent, serving presence in the Eucharist are key in order to understand the consecrated vocation. Next to him, as always, is Mary, the first mother to face the shock of the Father's hand upon her Son when he was 12 yrs old. "Did you not know I must be about my Fathers' business?", and Mary had to process that, She kept all these things in her heart, turning them over. Her fullness of grace did not exempt her from feeling difficulties, it did not give her immediate and untroubled understanding. It just gave her trust and acceptance in which she could grow in her understanding, consciously giving God his place.

It may also help your parents to get to know the particular group of Franciscans you will join, it would be great if they could visit, meet some of the sisters, see for themselves, ask questions and also to see the transformation in you when you are in their company (that is, of the Franciscans).

As far as your question regarding resources you can use as a support during your necessary wait before joining religious life, I know you are already doing this, but the principal one is prayer, constant and regular use of the sacraments (daily Eucharist and regular Confession, weekly if you can), and devotion to Mary. Continue to grow in your personal relationship with Christ.

Then, if it is possible, try to visit regularly the community you intend joining, and also if possible, be in touch with other candidates to the community so that you can support each other. If the Newman Center at your college does not have a vocations group, offer yourself to help get one off the ground. For example, you could bring in speakers, organize a special Mass each month, get a discussion group going. If you need help getting materials we will be able to help you here at vocation.com.

I will pray for your intentions and your perseverance.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

Meditation - Divine Mercy Sunday, 2nd Sunday of Easter

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"Fear, Faith, and Peace"
John 20:19-31

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On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, Thomas' hand touched the wound in your side, and saw that you had conquered death. I truly believe this as if it were my hand. I hope in you because I am convinced that you will never die again, risen from the grave. I love you because your love for me is so great that you gave your life for me. I thank you for all the benefits you have so generously given me. I recognize that I am a sinner, my Lord and my God!

Petition: My Lord and my God let me always trust in your mercy and presence.

1. "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?" Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." The faith of the entire Church hinges on the faith of the apostles. It was their prerogative to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection. They are the ones who can tell us that the Risen One really is the same Jesus as lived among us and died for us. They touched him, saw him for themselves, watched him eat and they knew for a fact that he was real and not a ghost. Our faith is different. At first it may seem poorer since it lacks the human corroboration of the senses that the apostles had, but in reality that makes it even more wonderful, more marvelous, more incredible. It is truly a great blessing to receive from God the gift of believing without seeing. What an enormous gift! What amazing power, to be able to say to the Risen Christ when he becomes present at Mass, "My Lord and my God!", and to be able to adore him in the Eucharist.

2. "Peace be with you." The peace that is experienced through true faith is admirable. Thomas was in turmoil. He loved Jesus; he would have liked more than anything for him to be alive but he had seen him die on the cross, and he knew he couldn't have it both ways, a dead and a live Jesus. What the other apostles told him only added to his confusion. What had happened to them? Had they not seen the same as he? Why couldn't they accept that Jesus was dead? If they were being deceived by a ghost of their imagination or an imposter Thomas knew the answer: look for the wounds. Thomas' turmoil was extreme. He would have wanted nothing more than for Jesus to be alive, but he knew that couldn't be. Confusion enters our heart and soul when we place conditions on God's action and power, when we keep him at a distance, when we place conditions on our faith. Then, his suffering and death, the suffering and persecution of his body the Church, our personal trials and sufferings make no sense and cause us only turmoil. Christ comes with a message of peace, which begins with our accepting him into our lives, on his conditions, ready to be taught by him. Christ brings light, Christ brings peace.

3. The doors were locked. The doors were locked for fear of the Jews. The apostles were afraid the same would happen to them as happened to Jesus. Peter had said, Even if I have to die with you I will not abandon you. Yet here we have him hiding behind barred doors. How humiliating it must have been for him to discover he was so weak. He knew he had denied Jesus, he knew he had broken his promises, he felt wretched, and possibly was tempted to think there was no hope for him. If it weren't for Jesus' mercy and power, the barrier to keep out the Jews might also have kept Him out. Jesus' mercy is effective because it is the mercy of God, who is all-powerful. The gates of hell shall not prevail against his Church, his Kingdom. And the gates of hell are also the barriers of our lack of faith, our lack of trust, our lack of hope, our humility that degenerates into

despair and refuses to let his pardon and mercy enter our lives. The power of God's mercy is such that he walks through these barriers and places his mercy within our grasp. Let us open our hearts to the pardon and peace Christ offers us in his mercy.

Conversation: Lord Jesus, amid the many distractions and temptations I face in my daily life, grant me an increase in faith to recognize your presence and to discover what you want of me. Help me to live a true and lively faith in your presence and pardon. Make me a source of peace and hope for all I will meet today. You died and are risen for me, Alleluia.

Questionnaire:

1. How would I rate my faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist and at Mass?
2. Does my faith bring peace to my life? What is my attitude towards the many crosses, large and small, that I encounter in my life?
3. What are the doors in my life that are still barred to God's mercy? What is keeping me from a relationship with Christ that is full of trust and self-giving?

Spirituality

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"Apostles of Charity"

It will take sacrifice to live the mission to which God has called us. The first thing we have to begin sacrificing is our self-love and desire for attention, because these are the first obstacles to the unity in love that Jesus Christ wants us to seek.

We must teach ourselves to forgive and forget, to love and not to hate, to seek unity and love –and this not only among our closer acquaintances but among all people.

Obviously we must teach above all with the good example of our lives. So we must be always on the watch, and keep in mind always what charity and unity mean to us as we strive to work for the Church. It is Jesus' desire that we be one, so we ought to prefer to lose everything rather than disappoint him. We must make our friendship and love in Christ so close that we form but one person in Christ with all those who follow him. These words might seem exaggerated, so we need to meditate on Jesus' prayer to his Father, and make our own the same prayer He said at the Last Supper: Father, make us holy so that we may be one, as you and Jesus your Son are one.

Special

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"Zealous Messenger of God's Mercy"
Regina Caeli, Second Sunday of Easter, March 30, 2008
Pope Benedict XVI

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the Jubilee of the Year 2000 the beloved Servant of God John Paul II established that throughout the

Church the Sunday after Easter should be called Domenica in Albis and Divine Mercy Sunday. This occurred contemporaneously with the canonization of Faustina Kowalska, a humble Polish Sister who was born in 1905 and died in 1938, a zealous messenger of the Merciful Jesus. Indeed, mercy is the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God, the Face with which he revealed himself in the Old Covenant and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive Love. May this merciful love also shine on the face of the Church and show itself through the sacraments, in particular that of Reconciliation, and in works of charity, both communitarian and individual. May all that the Church says and does manifest the mercy God feels for man, and therefore for us. When the Church has to recall an unrecognized truth or a betrayed good, she always does so impelled by merciful love, so that men and women may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10: 10). From divine mercy, which brings peace to hearts, genuine peace flows into the world, peace between different peoples, cultures and religions.

Like Sr Faustina, John Paul II in his turn made himself an apostle of Divine Mercy. In the evening of the unforgettable Saturday, 2 April 2005, when he closed his eyes on this world, it was precisely the eve of the Second Sunday of Easter and many people noted the rare coincidence that combined the Marian dimension - the first Saturday of the month - and the dimension of Divine Mercy. This was in fact the core of John Paul II's long and multi-faceted Pontificate. The whole of his mission at the service of the truth about God and man and of peace in the world is summed up in this declaration, as he himself said in Krakow-Łagiewniki in 2002 when he inaugurated the large Shrine of Divine Mercy: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind". John Paul II's message, like St Faustina's, thus leads back to the Face of Christ, a supreme revelation of God's mercy. Constant contemplation of this Face is the legacy he bequeathed to us which we joyfully welcome and make our own.

In the coming days, on the occasion of the First World Apostolic Congress on Divine Mercy, there will be a special reflection on Divine Mercy. It will be held in Rome and will begin with Holy Mass at which, please God, I shall preside on Wednesday morning, 2 April, the third anniversary of the pious death of the Servant of God John Paul II. Let us place the Congress under the heavenly protection of Mary Most Holy Mater Misericordiae. Let us entrust to her the great cause of peace in the world, so that God's mercy may achieve what is impossible for human forces on their own and instil in hearts the courage for dialogue and reconciliation.

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Upcoming Events & Retreats

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((Listed here are retreats directed by the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi members. For a listing of diocesan activities and other events, click here to go to the vocation.com website))

the very latest

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- Retreats for Men
 Retreats for Women

LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST

Mark Your Calendars! Test Your Call Weekends for the 2009

Calendar Year. Experience the novitiate in Cheshire, CT with retreats for young men ages 16-27 sponsored by the Legion of Christ. These weekend retreats combine time for personal reflection, preached meditations, conferences, and opportunities for confession and spiritual direction with the experience of the day to day life of the seminarians. For more information, please call Br.

Francois at (800) 420-5409 or email

vocation@legionaries.org. Dates in 2009: April 24-26, May 22-25, June 19-21, July 3-5, July 24-26, August 14-16, September 4-6, October 23-25, November 25-29, December 19-23, and December 26-30.

REGNUM CHRISTI consecrated women

Come and See Weekends. Spend a weekend with the consecrated women of Regnum Christi, learning about their life, spirituality and mission within the Church. Activities include: Talks/conferences about the Church, Regnum Christi, the Spiritual Life, and consecrated Life in Regnum Christi; a half-day retreat; opportunities for confession and Spiritual Direction; daily Mass and time for prayer, silence and reflection; sports and meals with the consecrated women; vocational panel: Questions & Answers with consecrated women. Ages 16-30. For more information, contact Jill Swallow at vocation@inteducators.org or 401-949-2820. 2009 dates: May 22-25, and July 10-13

ShoreLines

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