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Come Spend Your Holy Week at the Side of Christ

Join the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi for a Holy Week Come and See Retreat. April 8-13, 2009. Activities include: Eucharistic Celebration of the Last Supper, Adoration on Holy Thursday, Good Friday Ceremonies, Talk on the Seven Last Words of Christ, and more. Register by March 28, 2009. For more information, view the [flyer](#).

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[Holy Father »](#)

[Q & A »](#)

[Q & A »](#)

[Meditation- 5th Week in Lent »](#)

[Spirituality »](#)

[Special »](#)

[breaking news Vatican »](#)

[breaking news USA »](#)

this week in ShoreLines

- A "Therapy" to Heal All
- Reflections
- With the Help of Grace
- Three Truths
- To Enlighten and Search
- Creed 6: Crucified, Dead, Risen

this week in the Church

- Pontiff Proclaims Year for Priests (Zenit)
- Pontiff Offers Riches of God's Kingdom to Africa (Zenit)
- St. Joseph Lived His Fatherhood Fully, Says Pope (Zenit)
- Pontiff Notes Africa's Vocation to Know Christ (Zenit)
- Pope Highlights Women's Mission to Defend Humanity (Zenit)
- Vatican Web Site Introduces Chinese Section (Zenit)
- Cardinal George Meets with President Obama (Zenit)

Holy Father «« Return to top
Jump to next segment »»

"A "Therapy" to Heal All"
excerpt from the Lenten Message 2009
Pope Benedict XVI

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In our own day, fasting seems to have lost something of its spiritual meaning, and has taken on, in a culture characterized by the search for material well-being, a therapeutic value for the care of one's body. Fasting certainly brings benefits to physical well-being, but for believers, it is, in the first place, a "therapy" to heal all that prevents them from conformity to the will of God. In the Apostolic Constitution *Pænitemini* of 1966, the Servant of God Paul VI saw the need to present fasting within the call of every Christian to "no longer live for himself, but for Him who loves him and gave himself for him ... he will also have to live for his brethren" (cf. Ch. I). Lent could be a propitious time to present again the norms contained in the Apostolic Constitution, so that the authentic and perennial significance of this long held practice may be rediscovered, and thus assist us to mortify our egoism and open our heart to love of God and neighbor, the first and greatest Commandment of the new Law and compendium of the entire Gospel (cf. Mt 22, 34-40).

The faithful practice of fasting contributes, moreover, to conferring unity to the whole person, body and soul, helping to avoid sin and grow in intimacy with the Lord. Saint Augustine, who knew all too well his own negative impulses, defining them as "twisted and tangled knottiness" (*Confessions*, II, 10.18), writes: "I will certainly impose privation, but it is so that he will forgive me, to be pleasing in his eyes, that I may enjoy his delightfulness" (*Sermo* 400, 3, 3: PL 40, 708). Denying material food, which nourishes our body, nurtures an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by His saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Him to come and satisfy the deepest hunger that we experience in the depths of our being: the hunger and thirst for God.

At the same time, fasting is an aid to open our eyes to the situation in which so many of our brothers and sisters live. In his First Letter, Saint John admonishes: "If anyone has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, yet shuts up his bowels of compassion from him – how does the love of God abide in him?" (3,17). Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who bends low and goes to the help of his suffering brother (cf. Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 15). By freely embracing an act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that our brother or sister in need is not a stranger. It is precisely to keep alive this welcoming and attentive attitude towards our brothers and sisters that I encourage the parishes and every other community to intensify in Lent the custom of private and communal fasts, joined to the reading of the Word of God, prayer and almsgiving. From the beginning, this has been the hallmark of the Christian community, in which special collections were taken up (cf. 2 Cor 8-9; Rm 15, 25-27), the faithful being invited to give to the poor what had been set aside from their fast (*Didascalia Ap.*, V, 20,18). This practice needs to be rediscovered and encouraged again in our day, especially during the liturgical season of Lent.

Q & A

[«« Return to top](#)
[Jump to next segment »»](#)

"Reflections"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

First of all, let me say, "Thank You" for the posted responses on this site. It has given me a lot to think about. I have always felt a great desire for the vocation of marriage and parenthood, however I have had several people who have told me that I should consider being a priest. Although I can't foresee myself in that life I believe that I would be spiteful to Him if I didn't give it the consideration that others have recommended. I decided today to talk to my priest. However, due to my currently not thinking that this is where the Lord wants me I wonder how to approach my priest without forever being questioned about the choice I make if I decide it is not for me? I hope that you can make sense out of my question, and give me

some guidance in this area.

Peace of Christ,

-Adam

A. Dear Adam,

Your question reminded me of a seminarian I know, so I showed it to him and asked him for his reflections. Here is what he wrote: *What Adam is going through is exactly what happened to me. I never thought about the PH until 3 very different friends asked if I had. Initially I was defensive, saying we are all called to live and spread our faith, and so if I do that that doesn't mean I'm called to the PH. At that time, I was only thinking of being a family man. But, after some reflection on the comments of those 3 friends from 3 different walks of life, I told God I'd look into the PH simply because I wanted to show him I was sincere in wanting to only know and follow his will, even though I had no longing for the PH and sincerely believed that God didn't want me to be a priest. So I decided to seriously devote my energies, my prayer life, my sacramental life, my readings, etc., to this intention. I turned it over to the Blessed Virgin, and she gently guided me to Christ and ultimately to Gods will. **I took the comments of my friends as a sign from God that he wanted me to look into this option, and to do so with all my heart and with all sincerity.***

I think it is worth your while to speak to your priest about what is happening in your soul. He will be as desirous as you are to help you make a clear and honest discernment, and I am sure that after helping you as much as he can he will respect your final decision. He will most probably walk you through all the signs of a vocation and your spiritual journey, and he will question you in depth. If after he gives you his read on your situation you end up opting for a different path to what he thinks is the correct one, I would expect him to try to encourage you to reflect further, but once he has done that I am sure he is going to respect your final decision.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

Q & A

«« Return to top
Jump to next segment »»

"With the Help of Grace"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

Hey there again. Thank you for the list of colleges that you sent me. I think that they will help me out some. They will at least give me a head start about where I can look. This time I am writing you because I know that you are supposed to be in pretty good health to become a nun, right? I was wondering if there are any ways that you could tell if you are psychologically well. Is there any way to really know other than going to a doctor? Thanks again for you help.

-Sherry

A. Dear Sherry,

Most religious congregations do a psychological evaluation of their candidates using the services of a professional psychologist. They usually make sure that the psychologist understands the nature of religious

vocation and the workings of grace, since otherwise he won't have all the elements needed to come to his conclusions. It is not just a question of having "psychological health" in general, but of having a psychology that with the help of grace is a good basis for the religious commitment.

God bless.

-Fr Anthony

Meditation- 5th Week in Lent

[«« Return to top](#)
[Jump to next segment »»](#)

"Three Truths"
Jn 12:20-33

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Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him. Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said an angel has spoken to him. Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. He said this to show by what death he was to die."

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to follow your example of love, of your self-giving, and embracing the cross of my own self-surrender. I pray for the faith and courage to die to myself so that in the furrow of life there may sprout forth new life of your grace. I ask your blessing on my surrender that I unite to yours with fruits of the eternal life for souls that you have entrusted to me.

Petition: Lord, enlighten my mind to grasp the meaning of your words recorded in Scripture: unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Inflame my heart with a love that is willing to surrender my entire life to do your will so that my life may bear all the fruit you want from it.

1. Sir, We Wish to See Jesus. Do I want to see Jesus? Do I have in my heart at least the same determination and interest as the Greeks mentioned in this Scriptural passage to pursue and persevere in seeking out Jesus until they found him? Our Lord is anxious for us to have this disposition in order that he might tell us the most intimate and important truths about himself. But as a Christian, not only am I a searcher for Jesus, I am called also to be a giver of Jesus. How many people would come to me if they wanted to find out something about him? How many can tell from my behavior that I am baptized, and that I am striving to live a life of grace? Would they know to ask me if they wanted to find out something about Jesus, or simply find Jesus?

Lord, help me always to seek you and to accept you as you are and as you revealed yourself to me in Scripture and in my daily encounters I have with you. Let me always be convinced that you are nearest to me when I suffer in my surrender of my will out of love for you and for souls. Help me to know that in suffering, when united to your suffering on the cross, I am imitating you in your heroic surrender of your life for the

salvation of souls.

2. When I Am Lifted Up from the Earth, I Will Draw All Men to Myself. Do you think the Greeks accepted Jesus self-description? Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show by what death he was to die. By being obedient unto the cross and his crucifixion, he would glorify the Father, completing His plan of salvation and striking the death blow to the ruler of this world, Satan. It would be a triumphant blow that would break definitively Satan's power of evil. Jesus knew that if he went to the cross, the sight of his upraised and crucified figure would in the end draw all men unto him. Jesus was announcing the battle to come and was looking for a conquest where he would conquer and subdue the hearts of men forever and for all generations, only by showing himself to them on the cross.

The truth of his self surrender on the cross is the hardest lesson for every true Christian and follower of Christ to heed because of the condition of our weak and fallen human nature and because our triple concupiscence that has us avoid even the mention or glimpse of such a reality. But this truth is readily confirmed by the Father's own divine words. Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' How it must have gladdened the hearts of the Greeks when Jesus revealed himself in terms of glorification! But how it must have sunk them into confusion and disbelief when they realized that this glorification was in reference to his upcoming crucifixion!

Lord, you teach me in Scripture about yourself and how you would glorify the Father in your self-sacrificing love you have for all men and even for me. You did not flee from suffering but endured all of this for our salvation. Grant me the grace and courage to fulfill your desire noted in scripture: Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29). For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21). Lord, help me to follow your example of humility, obedience and suffering, offering everything to God the Father for the salvation of souls.

3. Where I Am, there Shall My Servant Be Also. Let us accept our Lord's doctrine of the cross: This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Our Lord will prove himself strong enough in His love to endure the cross, but he powerfully manifests his Father's approval here to secure us in our thoughts and to strengthen our resolution of will so that we too embrace this difficult and arduous way of the cross that is plotted out for us for our salvation.

Our Lord confirmed three truths in his doctrine of the cross: 1) Only by death comes life. 2) Only by spending life do we retain it. 3) Only through service comes greatness. Am I able to accept these truths? Am I prepared to live my life by them? Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:20-25).

Our Lord makes it clear that to accept him is to accept the cross of self-surrender in our life. Where I am, there shall my servant be also. We are not to escape even its shadow if we really want to consider ourselves to be his true followers.

Conversation: Lord Jesus, teach me to despise this life if it jeopardizes my eternal life or the eternal life of my fellow men. Grant me the grace to follow you in the most intimate moment of your self-surrender on the cross so I may learn to live centered on you and on the mission you entrust to me. In those bitter and difficult moments of my self-surrender, never let me lose my trust in you, but rather remember and be consoled by your words, Where I am, there shall my servant be also. I am but your servant, Lord, and therefore my one prerogative in following you, my master, is to carry my cross and die to myself and to my

self-love. Never let me forget that this is the way to life eternal with you, the source and fountain of true, authentic love.

Questionnaire:

1. What is my greatest desire? Is it to seek Jesus? Do I have true apostles around me who lead and bring me to encounter the real Jesus who lovingly surrenders and embraces the cross and death? Or is my search for Jesus hindered by my search for an easy life or my search for mere consolations, fickle things that spark my curiosity?
2. How can I receive more personally into my life the three truths of the doctrine of the cross (only by death comes life; only by spending life do we retain it; only by service comes greatness)? Does Christ dying on a cross discourage me from carrying mine or motivate me to imitate him?
3. In what ways have I noticed in this meditation that I sometimes avoid the cross and even its shadows? How can I practice more sacrifice in my life to offer up graces for the salvation of souls and to know and identify with the mission God has given me?

Spirituality

[«« Return to top](#)
[Jump to next segment »»](#)

"To Enlighten and Search"

A person's spiritual director should be very close when there is an important decision to take, especially if it has to do with his vocation, in order to clarify the positive or negative motivations in play, to give light and offer elements of judgment, to support and encourage.

Naturally the director should never put pressure for or against, but must rather leave the person in full freedom to decide for himself. His action should not be to impose, thereby nullifying the freedom of the one who comes to him, nor to reduce that person's freedom to a passive and merely automatic execution of what he tells him. His place is to enlighten and search together with the one he counsels, bringing up the pros and the cons that the person needs to consider in order to make a responsible and fully informed decision.

This leads us in passing to a point that is raised today as regards spiritual direction. Spiritual direction, they say, is an interpersonal relationship that functions within the structures of human communication, whose fundamental premise is respect for the individual's freedom. Thus, in order to respect this freedom, it should be nondirective; in other words it should not impose a line of action, advice, or a specific solution. Consequently many authors prefer not to speak of a director-directed relationship, but of a consulter-consulted relationship, as occurs in the area of counseling, social assistance and psychology a benevolent, neutral, non-demanding relationship. This would empty spiritual direction of an important element, which is to help the person directed accept objective morality and objective criteria into his decision-making process. The director has to enlighten.

Special

[«« Return to top](#)
[Jump to next segment »»](#)

"Creed 6: Crucified, Dead, Risen"
Courtesy of the National Catholic Register
Mark Shea

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When Jesus “came down from heaven,” it was not simply to be born in Bethlehem.

He came further and further down, to poverty, rejection, pain, betrayal, death, and, finally, to the depths of the grave through crucifixion, the very worst form of death hell ever invented.

There is no abyss he has not seen, no depth he has not plumbed.

The first movement of that descent begins in a place where many of us encounter hell: in a bureaucracy. Pilate had a long résumé of accomplishments in the Roman bureaucracy and had led a life of Distinguished Public Service. If Barbara Walters had asked him, “What will you be remembered for?,” he probably would have given her the usual blah-blah. It would have ended with the normal faux humility we expect from “public servants”: “I’m not perfect. But I’m sure I’ll be remembered for doing the best darn job I know how.”

And so he is remembered — every day, in every language of the world: “crucified under Pontius Pilate.” There are only two mortals mentioned in the creed: Mary and Pilate. These image the only two destinies we mortals ultimately can choose.

John’s ambiguity in describing the trial before Pilate is striking.

Just when it looks like Jesus is the victim, John reminds us that, by God’s mysterious providence, he is calling the shots.

Jesus tells his disciples he has power to lay down his life and power to take it up again. He offers judgments of his judge Pontius Pilate. He is clothed in royal purple and a crown of thorns by people who have no idea he is really and truly entering in his reign by these tokens of his passion.

The Passion itself is more than simply the expiration of Christ.

It involves not simply the stopping of Jesus’ heart, but the breaking of it. For his own unfathomable reasons, Our Lord willed that he suffer, not simply die in his bed at a ripe old age. We shall never be able to really comprehend this: We can only receive it.

Yet, by his stripes, we are healed.

And when the moment comes for his death, it comes not because of some accident of myocardial rupture, but because Jesus chose that moment to “give up his Spirit.” In that willed and chosen act, Jesus gives up his Spirit to the Father for us, making us sharers in his Spirit.

The seal on this promise of the Spirit is the Resurrection. Many people complain of the Resurrection as a crass, crude, physical ending to the Gospels. Such people prefer a Jesus who rose spiritually and lives on in the hearts of Nice People Everywhere — which is to say: They prefer him dead. The thing is, as Peter Kreeft has noted, resurrection is a crass, crude, physical thing because death is a crass, crude, physical thing. That’s why he was buried and did not fade into the mist like Yoda or Obi-Wan.

The world thought it was burying a corpse. God knew we were burying a seed that would sprout on the third day.

Why the third day? Jesus hints at a possible explanation, when he calls his resurrection a fulfillment of “the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Jonah’s three-day adventure in the belly of the whale was a sign to the hard of heart that they were hard of heart. The inference about our fallen race is not a flattering one.

When people speak of Jesus “fulfilling” the Scripture, they often have in mind the notion that the Old Testament has a series of Nostradamus-like “messianic predictions.” According to this scenario, all the attentive first-century Jew had to do was follow Jesus around with his Messianic Prophecy Checklist and say, “If this guy is Messiah, then according to the Checklist, his mother will be a virgin, he will heal the sick, cleanse the Temple, and die and rise from the dead.”

But, of course, nobody was expecting anything of the sort. And the reason is simple: People didn’t see Jesus fulfilling the Scripture until after he did so. It was a case of 20/20 hindsight.

With a Great Collective Apostolic Forehead Smack, the early Church looked at the life of Christ and only realized after it was all over that he was hidden in plain view in the Old Testament — and they had not seen it. That was why the risen Christ had to practically rub the disciples’ noses in their own Bibles on the Emmaus Road and interpret to them in all the Scriptures “the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

This means that the Resurrection — though a wonder we never expected and a startling reversal which suddenly turns tragedy to joy — is also what all things have been about all along.

Newer than a newborn and older than the universe is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Mark Shea is the content editor for CatholicExchange.com

Upcoming Events & Retreats

«« Return to top
Jump to next segment »»
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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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Northeast



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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 8-12, 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.

Test Your Call Weekends, Canada! Experience the novitiate in Cornwall, ON 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. April 9-12, 2009. For more information, please contact Br. Xavier Kleinermann de Lance at xkleinermann@legionaries.org or (001) 613-203-3776.

Holy Week Missions in Mexico! Door to door evangelization missions in Guadalajara, Mexico for young men ages 15-25. Spend 10 days spreading the faith like the first

apostles. Training provided. Sponsored by the Legion of Christ. Cost \$550 plus airfare. For more information please contact Fr. Daniel Wilson at dwilson@legionaries.org or (914)409-2930.

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

Holy Week Vocational Discernment Retreat. Greenville, RI. A vocational discernment convention featuring conferences, meditations, and opportunities for Mass, Confession and spiritual direction, for young women ages 16-30, interested in discerning a vocation to the consecrated life. Sponsored by the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi. April 8-13. For more information please contact Jill Swallow at vocation@inteducators.org or 401-949-2820.

ShoreLines welcomes your questions and comments at questions@shorelines.org. If you do not specify otherwise, your question may be posted in the Vocations Q&A section.

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