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"It Is Essential that You Should Be United Among Yourselves"
excerpt from 'Words at Shrine of the Annunciation'
Pope Benedict XVI

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What happened here in Nazareth, far from the gaze of the world, was a singular act of God, a powerful intervention in history, through which a child was conceived who was to bring salvation to the whole world. The wonder of the Incarnation continues to challenge us to open up our

understanding to the limitless possibilities of God's transforming power, of his love for us, his desire to be united with us. Here the eternally begotten Son of God became man, and so made it possible for us, his brothers and sisters, to share in his divine Sonship. That downward movement of self-emptying love made possible the upward movement of exaltation in which we too are raised to share in the life of God himself (cf. Phil 2:6-11).

The Spirit who "came upon Mary" (cf. Lk 1:35) is the same Spirit who hovered over the waters at the dawn of Creation (cf. Gen 1:2). We are reminded that the Incarnation was a new creative act. When our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived in Mary's virginal womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, God united himself with our created humanity, entering into a permanent new relationship with us and ushering in a new Creation. The narrative of the Annunciation illustrates God's extraordinary courtesy (cf. Mother Julian of Norwich, Revelations 77-79). He does not impose himself; he does not simply pre-determine the part that Mary will play in his plan for our salvation: he first seeks her consent. In the original Creation there was clearly no question of God seeking the consent of his creatures, but in this new Creation he does so. Mary stands in the place of all humanity. She speaks for us all when she responds to the angel's invitation. Saint Bernard describes how the whole court of heaven was waiting with eager anticipation for her word of consent that consummated the nuptial union between God and humanity. The attention of all the choirs of angels was riveted on this spot, where a dialogue took place that would launch a new and definitive chapter in world history. Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to your word." And the Word of God became flesh.

Q & A

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"The Daily Walk"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

I am in my late twenties and a brand new convert to the faith (just this year) from a Protestant denomination. As I have begun living as a Catholic, a few things have been happening. First of all, I have begun discovering just how horribly self-centered I am and how many vices I have rooted in my soul. Secondly, I struggle with doubts and question whether or not I actually believed as firmly in the Church as I should have when I was received.

With all of this going on, somehow I have a desire to give myself totally to Christ as a woman religious. I do worry that, with all of the pride I have discovered, that this desire is really out of self-interest (a desire to be "special").

When pride seems to taint all that I do, how can I ever know Gods will for me? And since I often question the Faith, I am obviously weak. In this light, is there a good progression that I should follow in discerning a vocation? Or should I understand my struggles to mean that I should not consider a religious vocation?

Thank you so much. I have received a lot of encouragement from your replies to others.

-Marie

A. Dear Marie,

Welcome to the Catholic faith, and I hope your first Christmas as a Catholic has been one of much peace and many graces.

A regards your questions, I think you should take as your point of reference St Paul's attitude as explained it

to the Philippians, "I do not reckon myself as having taken hold of it; I can only say that forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing towards the finishing-point to win the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. So this is the way in which all of us who are mature should be thinking, and if you are still thinking differently in any way, then God has yet to make this matter clear to you. Meanwhile, let us go forward from the point we have each attained."

You were not perfect when you were received into the Church, you are not perfect now, and I don't think anyone of us is going to be perfect in the foreseeable future; our call is to battle on and, knowing there will be shortcomings, to strive in everything to put on Christ Jesus. We should not give up in our efforts to do good even though to our chagrin there may be much vanity and self-love involved in our desires and actions. What we need to do is to set our hearts on what is right, start working, and as we work, to purify over and over our intention and purpose in doing it. That is what daily prayer, daily Eucharist and frequent Confession are for.

As regards a religious vocation, you have to look beyond your struggles in order to discover God's will; they are not the only factor nor are they the determining factor, they are no more than one element in the whole mix.

Before following a vocation, some time needs to pass since your entrance into the Church in order to make sure that there are true signs of a call and that it is not only a passing fervor. However, this does not mean you should forget about it, quite the contrary. Seek to mature in your faith, in your prayer. Spend time studying, start getting engaged in some apostolate or service, find a spiritual director, and for the time being don't embark on anything that would compromise or jeopardize your possible vocation until you see things more clearly.

With your spiritual director you will be able to go over the usual signs of a vocation, the type of consecration you feel called to (lay consecration, active religious life, contemplative religious life). All of these terms may be somewhat mysterious to you right now, and understanding them will help you in your vocation discernment. Your spiritual director can recommend readings and retreats to help you grow in your understanding.) Above all, your vocation is going to become clearer to you as your relationship with Christ grows and deepens. This relationship is made real in your life of grace, which is the result of prayer, the Sacraments and service to others out of love for Christ.

This is where he can speak directly to your soul, and you will become more sensitive spiritually to what he is asking of you in each moment. In this way he guides us gently, though not without our struggles, to the total giving of ourselves to him in the walk of life that he chooses for us.

God bless,

-Fr Anthony

Q & A

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"Know Thyself"
with Fr Anthony Bannon LC

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Q. Dear Fr Anthony,

Please help me. I'm a seminarian in my 3rd year of philosophy. I've been in seminaries right from the junior school days. Please, I need your assistance. I want to pursue my further studies in the near future. I also want to know if God is really calling me. What happens in the ministry scares me away. Till I hear from you,

Dominus vobiscum!

-Harrison

A. Dear Harrison,

I am afraid you are asking me something that only your spiritual director in the seminary or some other priest that knows you well will be able to answer. You see, you are asking not about general principles, but how they apply to you, and not knowing you I am hard pressed to give an answer.

What should you bring up with your spiritual director? Well, the knowledge of yourself that you have gained in these years in the seminary - your strengths and weaknesses, your growth in prayer, your life of faith, your motivations to become a priest, your sense of responsibility, your character and strength of will, your attachments.... Then go over your fears with him - what it is precisely that scares you about the priesthood, why you doubt you have a vocation.... Also take into account the needs of souls, what you want to do for Christ in your life, what you are willing to sacrifice for him.

I hope these suggestions help.

-Fr Anthony

Meditation - Pentecost Sunday (Vigil Mass)

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"Renew the Face of the Earth"
Jn 7:37-39

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On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Introductory Prayer: Lord Jesus, before you left this world to return to the Father, you promised that you would send down the Paraclete upon us. I wait in eagerness for his coming. I trust in your promise, and I place all my hope in it, for he is the Spirit of Love and I want to love you fully, and to love and serve you in my neighbor, that he will come again just as he did on that great day of Pentecost to renew the face of the earth.

Petition: Lord, help me remove any obstacle to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and any obstacle to his action in my soul.

1. Come Holy Spirit. "Our heart is restless until it rests in you" (St. Augustine, The Confessions, 1, 1, 1). Our heart yearns for peace and tranquility, and the heart cannot find rest until it fully rests in God. We cannot live without the Holy Spirit. The Lord did everything that he needed to do before he passed on to the next world. Before he departed he said, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7).

What would we do without the sweet guest of the soul, and our guide and craftsman in holiness? Without the Holy Spirit, there is little we could do. St. Paul says that we cannot say that Jesus is Lord, were it not for the Holy Spirit (cf. 1Cor 12:3). How important it is for us to have him!

How little we can do without him! How much we need him if we are to fulfill our mission!

2. Fill the Hearts of Your Faithful. Because the Holy Spirit is the anointing of Christ, it is Christ who, as the head of the Body, pours out the Spirit among his members to nourish, heal, and organize them in their mutual functions, to give them life, send them to bear witness, and associate them to his self-offering to the Father and to his intercession for the whole world. Through the Church's sacraments, Christ communicates his Holy and sanctifying Spirit to the members of his Body (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 738). We are in need of spiritual help. We are spiritual creatures who cannot be without the nourishment of the Lord. Who else is there to drink from but Christ? The world will not fill us. Things leave us dissatisfied, only wanting more, resulting in a vicious cycle that leaves us starving and empty. If we are filling ourselves with ourselves, however it may be, we perish. "My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord" (Ps 84:2). How much the Holy Spirit wants to dwell in our hearts and fill us to the point of overflowing!

3. Kindle in Them the Fire of Your Love. "God is Love" (1 Jn 4:8) and love is his first gift, containing all others. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5). That fire that the Holy Spirit enkindles in a soul is unquenchable. One cannot cease to proclaim the message of the Gospel. One senses the urgency and the need to extend the Kingdom of Christ. This is what love does. Love is something that is outgoing, that pushes us to share what we have with others. Love sets the world ablaze. St. Paul says: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1Cor 13: 1-7)

We can only do these things if we have the Holy Spirit, and if we do, then the Spirit will fill the whole earth.

Conversation: I want your Holy Spirit to dwell in me, through his power for you to do great things in me just as you did in the hearts of the Apostles on the day when your Spirit came down and rested on the heads of each of them. I need your gift, for there is little that I can do without him. I open my heart to your Holy Spirit so that you can live and work within me.

Questionnaire:

1. In what ways do I cultivate my relationship with the Holy Spirit? Do my actions illustrate that I have a relationship with him?
2. When he speaks in my soul, how do I respond? Do I recognize that he is there working within me?
3. How often do I pray to the Holy Spirit?

In our effort to acquire the habit of interior life, we have to keep very much in mind your docility and openness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit because we are his temples (cf. 1 Cor 3:16), because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), because the Holy Spirit will guide you to all the truth (cf. Jn.16:13) and because no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except

by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). May the Holy Spirit never be the great stranger in our lives! May he instead be the guest of our souls with whom we carry on a continuous and joyful conversation.

Special

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"10 Signs of Hope"
The Editors, National Catholic Register

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May 24-30, 2009 Issue

These are disheartening times for Catholics. It is a helpful time to review some of the strong signs of hope in the Church today — signs of hope that simply weren't here 20, or even 10 years ago.

1. New Catholic Colleges.

The past 10 years have seen seven new American Catholic colleges founded in the spirit of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*; other, older schools are renewing themselves according to what the Church asks.

In America 20 years ago, very few Catholic colleges put fidelity to the Magisterium at the center of their concerns. But three editors of the nation's leading Catholic news publications — the Register, Our Sunday Visitor, and Catholic World Report — all graduated from one school devoted to the Magisterium, the St. Ignatius Institute. What will come from the graduates of today's "Magisterium-friendly" schools? Far more. They will surprise us with what they accomplish.

2. Young Catholics.

The record-setting World Youth Day crowds have helped supply students for these new Catholic colleges, and these colleges have helped supply attendees for World Youth Day, in a symbiotic circle.

The March for Life is literally filled with young Catholics. Young pro-lifers bring spirit and originality to the right-to-life movement.

They are comfortable with the new mediums of video and viral Internet messages. NCRRegister.com often features their efforts, such as Planned Parenthood expos's, the Catholic.org ads and the "May Feelings" videos promoting the Rosary.

3. Pro-Life Majority.

The efforts by young people are working. Statistics have shown a years-long trend in the general public toward pro-life views. The slow and steady rise of right-to-life support sharpened this year. New data from the Pew Research Center shows that overall support for legal abortion is down 8%. The percentage of respondents saying abortion should be legal in all or most cases declined to 46% in April.

4. Renaissance of Religious Life.

The crisis of women's religious life has reached the point where apostolic visitors are investigating one major association of nuns. But the untold story of women's religious life is the other association of nuns — the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. These include such congregations as the Missionaries of Charity, the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, the Nashville Dominicans, the Sisters of Life and the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. Their fidelity to the Church is symbolized by one important factor: They still wear habits.

Many of the houses of this association of nuns are experiencing a crisis of a different kind: not enough room for all the new postulants.

5. "John Paul II" and "Benedict XVI" Priests.

A few years ago, The Catholic University of America's Life Cycle Institute did a study of new priests. They compared new priests in 2005 to new priests in 1990.

Among the telling findings: Few priests in 1990 (before Denver's 1993 World Youth Day) cited Pope John Paul II as a major influence. In 2005, Pope John Paul II's influence was clear.

Our favorite finding: In 2005, new priests were more likely to subscribe to the Register than to a dissenting Catholic newspaper. In 1990, the dissenting newspaper beat us handily.

6. Bishops' Increased Engagement.

In 2004, when John Kerry, a Catholic, was at the top of a presidential ticket promoting a new assault on the right to life, many bishops set about clarifying the policy positions that make candidates impossible to support. In 2008, that new attitude was even more in evidence as many bishops warned their flocks not to vote for a candidate who rejected the right to life. This spring, dozens of bishops taught that the University of Notre Dame is violating bishops' guidelines by honoring President Barack Obama at the height of his legislative assault on the right to life.

7. Renewal of the Liturgy.

Nearly every year since the Jubilee Year 2000 (which Pope John Paul II called "profoundly Eucharistic") has seen a major document come from the Vatican on the Eucharist, seeking to renew the Mass and return it to its roots. As we reported last week, some parishes in the United States are already gearing up to teach the new Roman Missal. The Vatican is seeking to restore authenticity, awe and reverence to the liturgy. As the Mass is the "source and summit of Christian life," this can only bode well for the future.

8. New Interest in Catholicism.

At the bookstore, titles that explore Catholicism — sympathetically or antagonistically — continue to be top sellers. Church attendance swells in places where a concerted effort is made. A recent survey purported to show "the death of Christianity" actually showed the death of mainline Protestantism. The percentages of evangelical Protestants and Catholics grew. *God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World* is the new book by the editor of *The Economist*.

9. Confession's Comeback.

Tim Drake found several signs of hope for confession in his story "Confession's Comeback" in the Register, but he wasn't alone. Time magazine in 2007 also printed a story called "A Comeback for Confession."

As Pope Benedict XVI said last year in Washington: "To a great extent, the renewal of the Church in America depends on the renewal of the practice of penance."

10. Eucharistic Adoration.

The most important sign of hope in America: the renewed interest in Eucharistic adoration, where Catholics come in contact with the Lord of History himself.

We included it here because we at the Register have seen anecdotal evidence of an increase in Eucharistic adoration. First, the Register's chapel started to offer adoration. Then, during the past several months, two nearby churches began offering adoration for the first time.

But the numbers at TheRealPresence.org confirm a larger trend. The number of chapels offering exposition of the Blessed Sacrament has swelled to 7,046, and more than 800 chapels in the United States now offer perpetual adoration.

So, we can take heart. Christ is still the Lord of the universe and we can be absolutely certain that sticking to his plan will win in the end.

courtesy of the National Catholic Register

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

Select a region of the United States or Canada.

Northeast

- 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: 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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