PRIOR’S COLUMN

A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW, BUT WHY?

Why did Our Lord Jesus Christ teach in parables? The answers to this question vary. To many, these earthy stories are like supernatural versions of Aesop’s Fables or Grimm’s Fairy Tales: great stories with a solid moral lesson, only even better because, well, Jesus told them.

Others would say that the parables employ figurative language — as extended similes — to teach obscure and hidden things using easily understood figures. And that answer, too, sounds reasonable.

But neither of these is the reason Jesus Himself gave for teaching in parables. He was asked by the disciples why He taught the multitudes this way (Matt. 13:10), and He answered the question in a way that might mystify us:

Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: but to them it is not given. For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound: but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath. Therefore do I speak to them in parables: because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And the prophecy of Isaias is fulfilled in them, who saith: By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. (Matt. 13:11-15)

These challenging words should be pondered and explained, but before I explain my own ponderings on them, it will be good to consider their context. Our Lord says these things after telling the Parable of the Sower, which prompts the disciples to ask him why He teaches in parables. After His jarring reply, above, Jesus tells the disciples how blessed they are for seeing and hearing His Person and His divine teachings, things which the saints of the Old Testament longed for but were not given the grace to witness (Cf. Matt. 13:16-17).

At that point, Jesus goes on to explain to them in detail what the Parable of the Sower means. In summary, there are three categories of bad soil and then there is the good soil, which, in Matthew’s telling, is also threefold. The bad ground comes in these varieties: the wayside soil, hard from being trampled on by the husbandmen, represents those who hear God’s word and do not understand it, the demons taking the word from their hearts; the rocky soil, where the seeds first take root and then quickly wither because they have not much soil, are those who receive the word joyfully but fall away when persecution comes; lastly, the thorny ground, where the seeds take root and grow only for the plants to be choked by the thorns, represent those who are too taken with the cares of this world and “the deceitfulness of riches,” which render these men spiritually “fruitless.”

It would seem that these categories of men fail respectively in faith, in hope, and in charity.

Finally, there is the good soil, which Jesus distinguishes into a further three categories, showing thereby that there are different degrees of spiritual fruitfulness, i.e., of earthly merit and its consequent heavenly reward: “But he that received the seed upon good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth, and beareth fruit, and yieldeth the one an hundredfold, and another sixty, and another thirty” (Matt. 13:23).

And now, to explain those challenging words of Our Lord I cited above (Matt. 13:11-15). The short review of the Parable of the Sower was first necessary because that parable tells us something about the “method behind the madness” of this manner of preaching, for the Parable of the Sower is reflexive; that is, it is a parable about parables — and, by extension, about hearing the word of God in general. Considering those harsh words of Matt. 13:11-15 in light of the three categories of bad soil Jesus Himself explained, we may conclude that He preached to the multitudes in the (unexplained) enigmas of parables because they were the bad ground. By contrast, the disciples, whom Our Lord here calls “blessed,” are the good ground. There is a parallel, then, between Matt. 13:11-15 and Matt. 13:19-22 and another parallel between Matt. 13:16-17 and Matt. 13:23.

Cornelius a Lapide, in his Great Commentary admits that there were probably among Our Lord’s auditors at Capharnaum some who were of good will and therefore who truly constituted “good ground,” and that these would have humbly asked Our Lord or the disciples for some explanation of the parable. Yet these were not representative of the majority, who were not, due to their own ill will, worthy of the sublime truths they were being taught obscurely and in a manner beyond their reach.

We should keep in mind, too, that to the Apostles, the nascent ecclesiastical hierarchy, it was “given to know the
mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11). They could and did teach those mysteries later to the four corners of the world.

This episode unfolded in time as a part of Our Lord’s larger public ministry, and many of His hearers likely had other opportunities to hear His teaching, or subsequently the preaching of the Apostles. Even among those who clamored for the crime of deicide, there were those who later “had compunction in their heart” at the preaching of Saint Peter on Pentecost day (Acts 2:37). Their hard-packed, stony, or thorny ground was, in time, harrowed by their own sins, by the preaching of the Apostle, and by the remorse they felt for their part in the horrors of the Passion. Above all this was God’s grace at work.

Soil can change; just ask a farmer. Souls can change; just ask a priest.

Regular readers are aware that the Brothers and Sisters from Saint Benedict Center in New Hampshire attend the Maronite Rite with some frequency. In the Pre-Anaphora of the Maronite Divine Liturgy (corresponding to our Roman Offertory), the following lovely words are sung from the vantage point of Our Lord:

I am the Bread of Life. From the Father I was sent as Word without flesh to give new life. Of the Virgin Mary I was born, taking flesh as man; as good earth receives a seed, her womb received me. Priestly hands now lift me high above the altars…

The words I underlined show that whoever wrote this sublime liturgical text beautifully juxtaposed the mystery of the Annunciation with the Parable of the Sower — and all just moments before the Eucharistic consecration. How’s that for an Angelus meditation!

Just as there are varying degrees of bad soil, there are varying degrees of good soil, too. Mary’s is the best — the richest, the most perfectly prepared soil, for it is the mystical “garden of delights” heralded by the terrestrial paradise of Eden, as Saint Jerome and Saint John Eudes assure us.

There is so much to the Parable of the Sower, and indeed there is much more to Our Lord’s use of parables in general than what I have written about here. I refer the reader to the masterpiece of Cornelius a Lapide that I have already referenced. I will close these lines with one lovely passage from that work, but before doing so, I would like to turn tropological.

In the medieval quadriga, the four-fold manner of interpreting Holy Scripture, the tropological sense is that reading of the Bible that “turns” the passage upon the reader so that he may examine himself in it as in a mirror. How can we turn this parable upon ourselves? We can and we should, by becoming spiritual “soil scientists” and seeing how it is we respond to the seed of the word in the Gospel. Do we receive it well? Even those passages that are challenging? Even those passages that fulminate against our very favorite vices? A good examination of conscience might reveal to us that we have become hard, stony, or thorn-choked and therefore fruitless; our faith, hope, and charity may need reviving. The fertilizer of prayer and penance may be necessary to break up the clods, while the purging action of toil and good works may be necessary to trim back the thorns that would choke the life of grace in us. We have been commanded to bear fruit (Luke 13:9, John 15:4). Are we doing so?

Soil can change from good to bad and back again. Change is a constant in this vale of tears, but not all change is good.

Here is one of Cornelius a Lapide’s insights into the Parable of the Sower, which beautifully ties in the parable to the Catholic doctrine of grace and free will:

Just as a father and a mother cooperate in generating offspring, so too, for the production of fruit, there must be a meeting of earth and seed, in such a way, however, that the earth draws from the seed all of its power to produce this or that kind of fruit. Similarly, for good works there must be the concurrence of the word of God, which is both an external force and even more so an internal force, and
of man’s free will, which must cooperate with the word of God, in such manner, however, that the will derives all its power of producing a spiritual, supernatural and divine work from the word and grace of God, in order that they may be pleasing unto God, and may merit eternal life. This is taught by the Council of Trent, session 6. In like manner, from free will the fruit derives liberty, that is to say, the fact that it is a free work and not compulsory nor done of necessity. For the interior word, which God speaks in the soul, stirring it up and strengthening it for acts of penance, patience, charity, religion, etc., is nothing else but the grace of God itself, illuminating the understanding, and strengthening the affection or the will, and inflaming it to the divine works of virtue. This interior word, or grace, God customarily adds to the external word of preaching, thus enlivening, so to speak, what would otherwise be without grace and inanimate, incapable and powerless to perform such works. Therefore, what the preacher speaks outwardly in the ear, God must speak inwardly in the heart, if it is to bear fruit.

All three Synoptic Gospels relate the Parable of the Sower. In this piece, I have relied exclusively on Saint Matthew’s account in chapter thirteen of his Gospel. I recommend to my readers the parallel passages in Mark four and Luke eight. They all provide ample matter for meditation.

Perhaps it’s because I have recently been thinking more than I am accustomed to about such things as animals, plants, and soil, but Our Lord’s agricultural similes are more meaningful to me lately. I hope that’s a good sign. If the parables of Our Lord grow on us, maybe we are good ground.

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of Wisdom

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Dear Reader, have you ever forgiven someone? No really, have you ever forgiven someone “from your heart”? If you ever have, you know that it was not easy. Even the secular dictionary defines forgiveness as something deeper than merely saying, “Yes, I forgive you.” It says that forgiveness is giving up bad feelings towards someone which we had because of some injury that he gave us.

Now, ask yourself if anyone has ever apologized to you. What was your response? Perhaps a hasty, “Oh, don’t worry about it.” And perhaps this “forgiveness” that you showed was followed by mean thoughts about the person, gossip about him, and perhaps even acting towards him in a stiff or otherwise unkind way. Do you think that in the cases in which you have followed this line of “forgiveness,” that you have really forgiven the person?

Holy Scripture says that we should forgive every one “from our hearts”. The secular definition that you will find in the dictionary is much closer to this than the type of forgiveness that you have, perhaps, been showing. The secular definition speaks of a change of feelings towards a person to make them good feelings. In fact, it speaks of giving up bad feelings towards someone. You might reword it as changing your “bad will” for someone into “good will”. And here is where we come closest to the inspired Word of God on the subject of forgiveness. When the words “from the heart” are found in Holy Scripture, they are talking about charity. And what is charity, or love, anyway? Love is “willing good to another.” Ah! It sounds like “good will”…only backwards! But don’t let that fool you! It’s the same thing.

Hmmm. So if someone does me wrong and I “forgive” him, I should then have good will towards him, or, in other words, should will good to him. Well, that doesn’t leave much room for nasty thoughts about him…..

How about feelings? The secular dictionary talks about giving up our bad feelings for someone and replacing them with good feelings towards him. Can I really help it if I feel a certain way towards someone after he has done something wrong to me? And anyway, isn’t it only important to will good to someone rather than feel good towards him?

This is very perplexing. I mean to forgive someone and will good to him, and I even make a point of saying “good morning” to him in a cheerful voice, and maybe helping him out in some need he has. But I can’t help it if I keep feeling upset at him. I can’t. I just can’t!

Well, that’s that! So we’re helpless in the face of our feelings. And forgiveness is really a hypocritical act that we put on. Right?

So if I go to Mass and this person sits ahead of me…all during Mass I’m tormented with bad thoughts and feelings about him. Am I tormented, or do I enjoy the thoughts? If I contracted amnesia and sat in the same pew behind the same person, I would not have bad feelings about him. Why not? Because I wouldn’t have bad memories or bad thoughts about him. Eureka! That’s it! The feelings follow upon memories and thoughts. Now I see where my feelings and my will meet, only the opposite of what I first thought. So if I either induce amnesia or change my thoughts, I won’t have the bad feelings that fire me on to more bad thoughts and actual bad will toward a person.

What can I do to change my thoughts? Well, I’m not allowed to induce amnesia, so that’s out. I find that I am only partially conscious of many of the thoughts floating through my head, but some of them command my whole attention and overwhelm me with feelings even when I am at something as sacred as the Holy Sacrifice. At some point I become conscious that I am having these thoughts (maybe when they seem like they’re forming words on my lips and I almost open my mouth to yell…but then realize I am not in the place to do so). It is just at this moment of recognition that I can will good to this person in a very meritorious way.
In the midst of the storm that is going on inside of me, I can say. “Dear Jesus, please bless (name).” If I persevere in making this unselfish, charitable act, willing good to this person by name, I will, if I want it, have peace inside of me. I will find that I have to make a choice between hanging on to the nasty thoughts and feelings or having charitable sentiments about him.

Eventually, I might make a list of his good qualities. And now I am advancing to the point that occurs before the bad feelings — that is, to the thoughts that instigate the feelings. When I am able to think well about a person, I can then feel good about him, and will good wholeheartedly to him. Although this seems like an unreasonable amount of effort, as I grow closer to the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, it will not be as difficult.

Now what about the worst case scenario? You know, the person who does really painful things to you, does not ask forgiveness, is not sorry, and actually continues to wound you. Can you forgive him? Well, if you don't, you will not only have him wounding you from the outside, but you will have your own torturous bad will wounding you on the inside! In other words, you will not have peace. The wonderful thing is that we can have good will for a person no matter how he is disposed to us, and even if he never accepts our forgiveness to benefit from it himself. So we have the power to give up bad feelings towards someone (even on the natural level), and on the supernatural level we have the ability to obtain great graces and mercy from God for ourselves and others.

Now, do you have a few more lights on what was going on when Saint Stephen, the protomartyr, said, as he was being stoned, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”? And how about Our Lord, right after He was nailed to the Cross and was being jeered at and blasphemed by people down on the ground…when at that moment He said, “Father, forgive them…for they know not what they do…”

So, Dear Reader, I ask you again, have you ever forgiven someone? Remember, every time you say the Our Father you ask God to follow your example of forgiveness in your regard.

Email Sister Marie Thérèse, at convent@catholicism.org

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And he said to them: Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am consummated (Luke 13:32).

One cannot accuse the Son of God of being “nice.” Both He and John the Baptist called a spade a spade, so to speak, as when they both dubbed the pharisees a “brood of vipers.”

The “them,” to whom Jesus speaks in the epigram used above, are the pharisees. Our Lord was preaching and healing at this time in the area of Perea, east of Jerusalem and south of Galilee. Perea and Galilee were under the rule of King Herod Antipas. It was three months before Our Lord’s Passion.

At first reading one might think that these pharisees were sincere in warning Christ to beware of Herod, claiming that Herod was out to kill Him. But this was not so. Herod was curious to see Christ and even enjoy (in his superstitious inanity) the favor of a miracle perhaps (Luke 9:9) and he had no intention of arresting Him as he did John the Baptist. What, then, were the pharisees up to? Cornelius a Lapide opines that these pharisees were trying to test Our Lord and see if He would flee the area and go to Judea where, they reckoned, the chief priests could more easily apprehend Him. These were the “foxes.”

Not that Herod was not a “fox.” He surely was. The word in Greek for fox, ἔλεφος, carries with it the meaning of a “crafty one,” as in “sly as a fox.” The Latin Vulgate uses the word, vulpes, for fox. The use was metaphoric. Some scholars of Koine Greek (Biblical Greek) say it can mean anything from a snake to a worm. Brother Francis, in his commentary on this verse, said that the word Our Lord used colloquially in Aramaic (Brother Francis’ first language was Arabic) meant to connote something more like a “skunk.” I remember so well how Brother would emphasize that.

A moral sense here is not without merit. In cultures that ripen around vineyards, the fox is a notorious pest. The little varmint will break down hedges to feast on the fruit of the vine. (Remember Aesop’s fable of the Fox and the Grapes?)

Our Lord compared His Church to a vineyard, He is the Vine and we are the branches: I am the vine; you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing (John 15:5). So, the fox is any enemy of the Church who would seek to spoil the fruit by inseminating heresy or any moral corruption into the soil that nourishes the word of God. “Catch us the little foxes,” it is written in the Song of Songs, “that destroy the vines: for our vineyard hath flourished” (Canticles 2:15).

Furthermore, a Lapide notes that Jesus used the demonstrative adjective ταύτης, “this,” “Tell this fox,” as we have it in the inspired Greek, rather than “that” as we have it in the Douay English, which translates it this way literally from the Latin Vulgate. In the Vulgate, we have dicite vulpi illi, which means “tell that fox.” Our exegete’s point is that Our Lord is calling not only Herod, but these cunning pharisees, foxes. It is as if Jesus is looking directly at the pharisees or their spokesman and saying to the whole group of them as a unit, “Tell this fox,” that is you all, etc.

Hear a Lapide: “Titus says that ‘He appears, as some think, to direct the whole force of His words against Herod alone, but He turns them against the wickedness of the Pharisees rather than Herod, for He did not say ‘that fox,’ but ‘this fox.’ In fact, to show that the Pharisees resembled foxes by their pretended fraud, He carefully used a middle term, and, as St. Theophylact says, ‘with intention,’ for by saying ‘fox’ in the singular He, made them think that He meant Herod, but by the addition of the demonstrative pronoun (sic) ‘this,’ He signified that they themselves were the crafty ones.”

Jesus, our God, had no fear of any man, nor could He. He would deliver Himself up when He willed to do so. That moment was soon to come: Behold, I cast out devils, and do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am consummated. Today and tomorrow He would continue to cast out devils and cure the ill, and then, “the third day,” His work of redemption would be consummated on the Cross. Thus, Our Lord continues: Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following; because it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. (v. 33).

To “walk,” as used here by Our Savior, is a Hebraism, which can be employed to mean “to work,” as it is in this case.

It is as if Jesus were saying, ‘Therefore, ye pharisees, you seek to make me afraid of Herod? I am not! Nor am I afraid of you. When I finish my “work” of the gospel, then and only then, I will go to Jerusalem and my work will be consummated there as My Father has so ordained’:

Therefore doth the Father love me: because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from me: but I lay it down of myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10: 17&18).

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(From You’d Better Come Quietly)

Man: It is impossible to hold a conversation with you.

Angel: Why?

Man: Why? Because I must do both the talking and the answering. You never answer.

Angel: That is not true. I do answer.

Man: I never hear you.

Angel: Do you expect me to make sounds?

Man: A little sound wouldn’t hurt.

Angel: But I am a pure spirit. I have no dimensions, no body, no mouth, nor hands, nor any instrument of noise. Do you want me to stop being an angel?

Man: You might accommodate yourself to me as a man. I have a body. I have ears.

Angel: Why should I stay outside your ears when I can go straight to your intellect? What good to knock at a door which one can pass through?

Man: It might let the occupant know that you have arrived.

Angel: In which case the arrival would not be an angel.

Man: But something very much more satisfactory. Something one could see and feel and hear, not simply guess at, as I am now doing with you.

Angel: You will simply have it that I must stop being an angel if I am to continue to exist. Is that not it?

Man: No, that’s not it. But why not materialize, assume some shape, and appear to me? It would make this conversation less nonsensical . . .

Angel: And likewise very much less angelical. An angel with a shape is a nonsense. Would you prefer to know me as I am not, rather than to know me as I am?

Man: But do I know you at all?

Angel: You seem to know me well enough to abuse me. I think maybe you do not like angels.

Man: I must confess I find them very tiresome.

Angel: You mean you find your own brain very tiresome, with all its convolutions, its water and its pulp. I cannot be tiresome who am lighter even than your own thoughts.

Man: Excuse me if I yawn (He yawns.) I am no longer interested. I shall employ my poor soggy brain in thinking about things I can feel and see.

Angel: And will you find in them any real satisfaction?

Man: A certain satisfaction. That kind at least which you are unable to give me.

Angel: Would you like me to go?

Man: Nobody said, “Would you like me to go?” I have just fancied that you said it. I simply supply you with words I think you might say if I were sure you were here.

Angel: But you are not sure?

Man: No.

Angel: You are not sure of what God has revealed? Has He not promised to give me charge over you “lest you dash your foot against a stone”?

Man: I am quite unaware of any influences you have upon my feet.

Angel: Just at present I am trying to keep you from dashing your head against a rock.

Man: What do you mean?

Angel: Would you not prefer the impact of a rock upon your head to the soft fusion of your spirit with mine? You have said as much.

Man: I did not really mean to say you are not here. I meant I do not know whether or not I am talking to you. God did not say that every time I fancy myself talking to you I really am doing so.

Angel: I should be a rather poor Guardian Angel if I paid no attention to you precisely at the time when you are paying attention to me, should I not?

Man: Really, I cannot be bothered with this subject any longer. It’s all too stupid. If you’re here, stay here. If you know what I am saying to you, you are welcome to know it. But certainly I have no way of knowing that you know it.

Angel: Isn’t that rather silly talk?

Man: Now you can’t tell me that anybody said, “Isn’t that rather silly talk?” Nobody said it. I just made it up in my own mind, and in writing it down I am supposing myself to have supposed what you might possibly have said if you were aware of what I am thinking.

Angel: You have to become very involved in order to get rid of me, don’t you? You have to take refuge in a muddled, complex sentence. Angels detest complexity.
Man: What do they like, then?
Angel: Simplicity.
Man: Well then, very simply: Am I thinking about you?
Angel: If not, what are you thinking of?
Man: A possible angel who may or may not be present to me.
Angel: But God has said there is a real angel where you suppose the possible one to be.
Man: But not that the real angel knows that I am thinking about him.
Angel: What do you think that I think you are thinking about?
Man: I do not know.
Angel: Oh, I see. So we may put it this way: I, who am always thinking about you, do not know when you are thinking about me.
Man: No, I admit that you know that I am thinking about you.
Angel: But you did not say that before. Or rather, you said it, and then retracted it.
Man: Well, now I admit it. But this is what I do not admit. I do not admit that we are holding a conversation.
Angel: Because I make no sounds in your ears?
Man: Don't you see what I mean? I grant you that being an angel, you are not supposed to make sounds. But a soundless conversation from my side is quite impossible.
Angel: And so you can never hold a conversation with an angel unless he becomes a man?
Man: We are certainly not holding a conversation!
Angel: What are we holding?
Man: We are holding a monologue.
Angel: How can two persons hold a monologue?
Man: How can one person hold a conversation?
Angel: How can WE be ONE person?
Man: But is there a you?
Angel: You have already admitted that.
Man: But I have not admitted . . .
Angel: What have you not admitted?
Man: I have not admitted . . . just a minute and I shall tell you what I have not admitted . . . I have not admitted that the you to whom I am attributing the thoughts I am thinking you are thinking, are really thinking the thoughts I am thinking you are thinking.
Angel: Involved, again, I see! Worse than before!
Man: That last sentence of mine may be a bit involved, but it is unanswerable.
Angel: Naturally, I cannot answer it if you are unwilling to admit that the answer you suppose I am answering is really the answer you suppose I am answering. Now, how do you like me in an involved sentence? Let me hear you answer that?
Man: Who is the one who is talking to me when I suppose you are talking to me?
Angel: Whom do you think?
Man: Nobody.
Angel: Can nobody talk to somebody?
Man: But somebody can talk to himself. That's what I am doing. I am talking to myself.
Angel: It took you a long time to find that out.
Man: It wouldn't have, if you hadn't interfered.
Angel: I interfered? That's splendid!
Man: I mean unless I were fool enough to imagine that you were interfering.
Angel: Isn't it marvelous what trouble this imaginary angel is causing you?
Man: Yes, it is.
Angel: It's hard to see how a real angel could be more bothersome, isn't it?
Man: Of course, I'm causing myself all the bother.
Angel: Are you both angel and man, to say that you can fight yourself this way?
Man: No. But I am supplying you a part and trying to imagine what you would say if you were saying anything.
Angel: Are you sure I am saying nothing?
Man: Well, for goodness' sake, this is a make-believe story! You certainly are not writing the script for your own part, are you?
Angel: Naturally, I cannot write.
Man: Nor are you thinking it.
Angel: No?
Man: You can't be thinking what I am thinking.
Angel: You don’t say?
Man: Well, you certainly are not my intellect.
Angel: Are you thinking your own intellect?
Man: No, but I am thinking thoughts with my own intellect.
Angel: About me.
Man: But you are not those thoughts!
Angel: I am the object of them.
Man: But you don’t cause them!
Angel: Every object causes the thought of it in some way. But let’s not go into that. Can you think of nothing in a thought?
Man: I can have a sort of a thought about nothing.
Angel: And am I that nothing?
Man: In the way I am thinking about you, you are.
Angel: Then why are you so exasperated at me if I am nothing?
Man: I am exasperated at my own idea of the nothing I conceive you to be.
Angel: But conceived as nothing, I am not the angel God sent to guide you.
Man: No, the angel God sent to guide me is real, but the angel with whom I am holding this conversation is an imaginary angel to whom I am attributing thoughts of my own.
Angel: But you began this conversation by wanting an imaginary angel to materialize and make sounds. That’s even worse than wanting a real angel to do so.
Man: I admit there were certain inconsistencies on my part in the beginning of this conversation.
Angel: And the imaginary angel cleared them up for you?
Man: I cleared them up for myself.
Angel: Really, you seem to be a better angel, when you play the part of an angel, than I am.
Man: I think that’s true.
Angel: My dear man! My dear philosopher!
Man: Now I know that you are not a real angel . . .
Angel: My dear child!
Man: Now I know that you are!

Cornelius a Lapide’s
Commentary on the Four Gospels

Cornelius a Lapide created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics (often available only in 30 some Latin volumes) for hundreds of years. The good folks at Loreto Publications have undertaken the truly massive project of producing a translation and designing a beautiful edition of this exhaustive commentary so long hidden from the eyes of most Catholics. Now is your opportunity to own this masterpiece of Catholic scriptural erudition.
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GUEST COLUMN
THE PASSING OF THE TORCH

When, amid the chaos of the past few months, I saw that a guillotine had been brought onto the streets of Portland, Oregon by so-called “peaceful protesters”, I was not surprised. Had they brought out a noose, the outcry would have been deafening, but the guillotine seemed to pass relatively unnoticed.

Perhaps this is because for many, the French Revolution (if they have heard of it at all), was a positive development which stood for “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”, an expression even referred to by Pope Francis in his recent encyclical, “Fratelli Tutti”. Yet, even if we could agree on the meaning of those terms and defend the concept, the French Revolution stood for much more than that. It stood for a concept of Freedom that cannot coexist with Christianity. In fact, in many churches in France at that time, the churches, including Notre Dame cathedral, were renamed Temples of Reason, and statues of Our Lady were replaced by those of the “Goddess of Liberty”.

For a time during the Reign of terror, it also stood for unrestrained murder; hence the guillotine now in evidence on the streets of Portland, with apparently no protest from Americans, who, for the most part, have no historical memory and doubtless would proclaim, if asked, “It can't happen here!”

Yet it most certainly can. Our own American Revolution, inspired by the Deism of the Enlightenment and the spirit of Freemasonry, was not, as many claim, an attempt to establish a Christian nation. Rather, as a cousin of the French revolution, it produced a type of godless plutocracy (hardly can one call it a republic anymore) in which we now can be told, and must meekly submit, to churches being deemed “nonsensical”, and allow them to be closed indefinitely.

When the great Catholic historian Warren Carroll wrote his history of the French Revolution, The Guillotine and the Cross, he stated, “Of all the great human upheavals in history, none came as so great a surprise as the French Revolution”. In other words, the average Frenchman would have said, “It can't happen here”; but it did. And we now have at least one major political party in this country which, along with the overwhelming majority of the opinion forming mass media, seem to be under the grip of what Sister Lucia of Fatima referred to as a “diabolical disorientation.” She was referring to the liberalism within the Church. A weakened Church has enabled all forms of sexual perversion to multiply exponen-

tially. Values have been inverted such that evil is now good and good evil. We all know this.

To make matters worse, much of the Church hierarchy (not all), seems to have surrendered the Catholic position or is in hiding while all this is going on. Bishop Mark J. Seitz of the diocese of El Paso, Texas, even stooped so low as to grovel, kneeling, at a Black Lives Matter protest, while vandals were in the process of decapitating a statue of Our Lord in one of the churches in his diocese. With such cowardice in high places, it seems that the Revolution is progressing quite nicely, thank you.

Yet, as Catholics, we must not lose heart. Under persecution, there has always been a remnant who survive, and refuse to surrender. In France, at the time of the Revolution, it was the Vendee, those Frenchmen who were willing to fight to the death for the restoration of the Monarchy, the Church, and Christendom. And although, while they were willing to shed their blood for Christ, they could not stop the Revolution in its tracks, they managed to defang it enough to help to bring on what we sometimes refer to as “The Great Nineteenth”, a century which gave us St. John Marie Vianney, the Venerable Emmanuel D’Alzon, Saint Therese of Lisieux, and Dom Prosper Gueranger, among many others.

Then in our hemisphere, in the 1920’s, in a campaign that gave us many canonized saints, those Mexican people known as the “Cristeros” had to engage in open warfare to rescue the Faith from the destruction planned by then President Plutarco Calles, an atheist and Freemason whose hatred for Christ and His Church knew no bounds.

Only a few years later, in 1936, in another military campaign referred to as a Crusade by many of those involved in it, the people of Spain, under the leadership of Generalísimo Francisco Franco, overthrew a government which had become largely Communist and who, if allowed to remain in power, would have turned Spain into a smaller version of Russia. During the course of the Spanish Civil War, 13 bishops, 4,184 diocesan priests, 2,365 religious priests and brothers, 283 nuns and 249 seminarians were assassinated for their religion, almost all of them by the Communists.

And now the plot thickens. The aforementioned, “diabolical disorientation” has reached the highest places in the Catholic Church. Within a few days of what is known as the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, Pope Francis broke ranks with all his predecessors and endorsed civil unions for same sex couples. As he is doubtless aware, it is the Church’s long held teaching that sodomy is intrinsically disordered and that it is one of those specific sins that “Cry out to heaven for vengeance”. Apparently, though, praxis does, indeed, take...
precedence over doctrine in today’s Vatican, and certainly accommodation with Modernity seems to take precedence over the salvation of souls in this particular regime.

On October 25th, the Feast of the Kingship of Christ itself, the Holy Father named a new group of Cardinals, including one Wilton Gregory, Archbishop of Washington, mainly known to most people due to the fact that he chastised President Donald Trump for visiting a Catholic shrine, rather than taking that splendid opportunity to meet with the president, make him feel welcome, and invite him to become a Catholic. Many reading this will remember that our own Fr. Leonard Feeney, in the midst of his own trials, took the time to write President Eisenhower and tell him that he must become a Catholic in order to save his soul. Such a challenge was not even on the table for Archbishop Gregory.

The reader will perhaps have noticed that I have mentioned the recent Feast of the Kingship of Christ more than once. Why? Because this Feast was established by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in the context of, among other things, the anti-Catholic situation which gave rise to the revolt of the Cristeros, whose battle cry was, “Viva Cristo Rey!”

This feast, celebrated the last Sunday in October, should call to our minds that Christ reigns not only in heaven, but that His Kingship extends to the entire earth, and that one of the goals implicit in our Crusade to convert America is that it is necessary to establish the social Kingship of Christ on earth. As is stated in the Gradual of the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, “He shall rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. And all kings shall serve Him, all nations shall adore Him” (Psalm 71:8,11).

On the one hand, it would seem that many of our politically correct prelates, apparently in search of approbation on social media, should consider the words of Our Lord, “Woe to you when men shall bless you: for according to these things did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Yet you and I are trusted with our own mission, which needs to be done: the saving of our souls and those of our loved ones, the preservation of the dogma “Outside the Church there is no Salvation” and the conversion of our nation to the One, True, Faith. We must focus on this, no matter what is going on around us. It seems as though today, here in this country, we, along with other like minded Catholics, are the new Vendee, the new Cristeros. The torch has passed to us. While the fight may or may not involve the shedding of blood, we know that it will not be easy, yet we must follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, not flinching, carrying the message, and doing our duty so that, as stated in the postcommunion reading on the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, “We have received the food of immortality and beg, Lord, that we who are proud to fight under the banner of Christ the King, may reign with Him forever in his realm above”. Viva Cristo Rey! Pray for our heroes. Pray for Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò.

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RECONQUEST

SEEKING THAT WHICH WAS LOST... AND FIGHTING FOR IT.

Brother André Marie’s radio show is on the Veritas Radio Network’s “Crusade Channel.” Each weekly one-hour episode airs on Wednesday night at 8:00 PM Eastern (7:00 PM Central) and is then rebroadcast on Friday at 7:00 PM Eastern (6:00 PM Central), and again on the following Monday at 3:00 PM Eastern (2:00 PM Central) and 7:00 PM Eastern (6:00 PM Central)

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A Catholic Media Breakthrough Without Precedent

“But” Mike went still further. He began broadcasting explicitly Catholic material on the air, showing how Church teaching is intrinsically related to a just and moral resolution of political questions and that religion has everything to do with politics rightly understood. In short, there was nothing like the Mike Church Show in the entire history of American talk radio.

And the results were astonishing: Mike was changing minds and hearts and making converts almost weekly. He began receiving one email after another from Protestants whose eyes had been opened by the truth he was presenting. They were joining the Catholic Church because of the Mike Church Show. I think you know what happened next. Mike received word from the Sirius Radio management that after thirteen years his show was being cancelled. The only reason given was “editorial decisions.” In other words: Mike had become too Catholic for Sirius Radio.

And that is where you come in.

“Mike knew what was coming when he began to speak the truth about God and His Church on the air, and so he prepared for the day when Sirius Radio would shut him down. Almost from the moment he heard the news, Mike was ready to launch the project I am personally asking you to support now: The Veritas Radio Network’s CRUSADE Channel, featuring The Mike Church Show.” - Christopher Ferrara.

Read Chris Ferrara’s entire essay on Mike’s story “The Only True Voice In ‘Conservative’ Talk Radio Has Been Silenced. Here is what we Catholics can do about it” at: mikechurch.com

Listen To The All-New, Mike Church Show Online For Free

www.veritasradionetwork.com
GUEST COLUMN
WHY PHILOSOPHY XXIV: THE THREE “A’S” OF CONTEMPLATION

As students of Brother Francis know, his philosophy courses are more than mere instruction in Thomistic or Scholastic Philosophy. They are specifically designed to teach wisdom in the tradition of *philosophia perennis*, the true philosophy, the school which includes St. Thomas, St. Augustine and other great Catholic and pre-Christian philosophers, but it is not limited to any particular philosopher. It is the timeless, true philosophy: philosophy as wisdom. Brother’s purpose is to help us become truly happy when we realize that happiness is contemplation.

The contemplative experience means being captured by something of the goodness, truth or beauty of God, usually through one of His creatures. It is not simply understanding something with the intellect; it is fully realizing its depth. In this life, contemplation is a good, not of means, but of end. It is a proximate end, one that points to the last end, the Beatific Vision. It may be defined as “The complacent, loving gaze of the soul on divine truth already known and apprehended by the intellect, assisted and enlightened by divine grace.”

As may have happened to you already, after reading the preceding, you found this can be very confusing! Brother understood this difficulty. To help us with this, he gave us the Three A’s of Contemplation: Appreciation, Adventure, and Accomplishment.

The contemplative experience can be taken at two intensities. First, it can be highly specialized, such as a contemplative religious who devotes his entire life to prayer and contemplation. Second, it can be less specialized. While God is the chief object of contemplation, He is not the only object. Because all goodness, truth, and beauty we find in the world are reflections of the Goodness, Truth and Beauty in God, whenever there is a realization involving a creature, it is a foretaste of contemplating God. Our discussion here is of the second intensity.

A problem with the contemplative experience is this: When it is not directed towards God, it can be a distraction away from Him. The experience can be either a stepping stone towards happiness or a movement away from it. For example, a contemplative experience can be as earthy as being completely absorbed in a football game. One’s experience can begin and end in the game itself, or it can be raised to another level. For example, a man could use it as a spring-board to appreciate the magnificent athletic prowess given by God to his creatures and be grateful to Him for it.

*Appreciation* is the first word Brother gave us in order to understand contemplation better. To appreciate is to grasp the nature, worth, quality, or significance of. It is often accompanied by gratitude or thankfulness for some benefit received, but it is separate from it.

As a result of the Fall of Adam and our inheritance of Original Sin, we begin in a state of imperfection. In fact, we are the most imperfect of all material beings. We know nothing; we are completely helpless; and we suffer from concupiscence. Our education for heaven is a removal of these imperfections by growing in appreciation. When we experience something such as looking at a famous painting, hearing a symphony, or smelling a flower and we are raised to appreciate something of the Goodness, Truth, or Beauty of God, we have had a contemplative experience.

Brother reminds us that the whole scheme God intended for this mortal life is to school us into appreciation. As a personal example, many years ago I decided to make dandelion wine. At the time, my lawn was a sea of dandelions. We picked all the blossoms and I made my home brew. The next year, for some reason, very few dandelions grew in our lawn. I quickly developed a real appreciation for them and longed for them to return!

Do we appreciate the powers given to us by God? If I am able to go to Mass and receive Holy Communion, do I meditate upon all the things that made this possible and do I appreciate them? Do I enumerate everything that made this happen — thinking, walking, swallowing, digesting, knowing how to pray and to read, etc., and did I thank God for them? Or am I like Louis of Granada’s description of the swine fed acorns by the farmer? They squeal, grunt and push each other around while remaining completely oblivious to, and unappreciative of, the farmer who has dispensed them.

What if we began to appreciate that every human soul will live forever, that its destiny will be eternal beatitude or everlasting suffering, and that we may be able to influence that outcome? Imagine what a difference that would make in our interactions with everyone we meet.

*Adventure* is the second word. Brother Francis explained that it is an element in any human activity which makes people happy. It is a foretaste of a very much higher order. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, adventure is an undertaking usually involving danger and unknown risks.

Most people would agree that climbing a mountain is an adventure. Adventure is accompanied by the exhilaration...
which is gained from the push, the struggle, the focus and the discipline involved in some difficult endeavor. When you are climbing Mount Everest and you have nearly reached the top, when your head is swimming from lack of oxygen and your limbs are freezing and you cannot breathe, you know you’re almost there. That is adventure. Most of sports are a matter of adventure. Father Feeney said that, if you discipline yourself for holiness as you discipline yourself for football, you will become a saint.

Adventure is not limited to extreme sports. The physical risk or danger enhances the experience but does not need to be extreme. It may be experienced by a mathematician working a very difficult problem or a mother assisting her infant to make his first steps. The sense of adventure can come from the risk of professional embarrassment or the mother’s anxiety as the infant tries to avoid hitting the hard floor.

**Accomplishment** is Brother’s third word to help us better understand contemplation. The fine arts offer a good example. The audience participates in the contemplative experience of the artist himself. The violinist is the servant, the one who provides the experience, but he also has the taste of finality, the sense of achievement.

Brother says that one of the causes of unhappiness in today’s work place is the loss of the contemplative spark provided by personal achievement. For the most part, wages govern one’s work in the modern world. In the time of the guilds, a craftsman had a sense of achievement; plus, he got paid for it. With the assembly line, the contemplative aspect of work is greatly reduced. A sense of achievement could be regained if the heads of families increased their understanding of the importance of their role as provider and developed an appreciation for it.

Appreciation, Adventure and Accomplishment let us know that even the lower grades of happiness contain elements of contemplation. When trying to explain to someone that happiness is contemplation, you can say, “Every time you are happy, you are having a foretaste of the thing we are talking about.” In all the activities of men, these three elements are what human nature must be educated for, disciplined for, prepared for.

These three elements are most manifest in the lives of the saints. Who better appreciates the world and its Creator and the value of human souls better than they? What can be a greater adventure than the process of winning souls for Christ and His Church? What greater sense of accomplishment can there be besides the knowledge that one has assisted in the salvation of someone’s eternal soul?

Brother’s conclusion is this: God is the chief object, but He is not the only object of contemplation. Wherever man gets any taste of happiness, he is getting a taste of the contemplative experience. When a man is happy about anything, even on the lowest planes, it is always a reflection of the thing that the philosophers define as contemplation. And, for those who are educated for their true happiness, St. Thomas Aquinas says, “All human occupations appear to serve those who contemplate.”
OUR CRUSADE:
The propagation and defense of Catholic dogma — especially Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus 
—and the conversion of America to the one, true Church.

A PRAYER FOR THE CONVERSION OF AMERICA
O Mary, Mother of mercy and Refuge of sinners, we beseech thee, be pleased to look with 
pitiful eyes upon poor heretics and schismatics. Thou who art the Seat of Wisdom, enlighten 
the minds that are miserably enfolded in the darkness of ignorance and sin, that they may 
clearly know that the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church is the one true Church of 
Jesus Christ, outside of which neither holiness nor salvation can be found. Finish the work 
of their conversion by obtaining for them the grace to accept all the truths of our Holy Faith, 
and to submit themselves to the supreme Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth; 
that so, being united with us in the sweet chains of divine charity, there may soon be only 
one fold under the same one shepherd; and may we all, O glorious Virgin, sing forever with 
exultation: Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, thou only hast destroyed all heresies in the whole world. 
Amen.
Hail Mary, three times (Pius IX, Raccolta No. 579).

EXTRA ECCLESIAM NULLA SALUS

Ex Cathedra: “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the 
salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” (Pope Boniface VIII, 
the Bull Unam Sanctam, 1302).

Notes:
• SAI: For more information, including videos and a free class, go to the Saint Augustine 
  Institute: www.SaintAugustInstitute.org
• More articles, newsletters, commentary on news and all things concerning the Faith, 
  visit our website: Catholicism.org