

The Evangelization Station

"Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation"

CCC §1816



Newsletter



Vol. 1, Issue 3, © October 2010

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The Priesthood

The Priest, the Beggar, and the Pope

This month, I would like to share with you a moving story about Servant of God, Pope John Paul II. In an article entitled "The Priest, the Beggar and the Pope," written by K. D'Encer, the author powerfully reveals the real-life direct intervention of God's mercy upon a priest.

Mr. D'Encer writes about a young man who had a vocation to the priesthood and how his bishop sent him to study in Rome. After his ordination, the priest served in his diocese for several years. Then, his bishop sent him to Rome again for further study.

During this second period of studies, the priest would visit a small church in Rome to say his office and to pray. At the door of the church sat a group of beggars seeking alms, and one of them made him feel uneasy for some inexplicable reason. So the priest went to him and asked, "Do I know you?" "Yes," the beggar replied. "I studied for the priesthood with you here in Rome, and was ordained."

The priest was shocked. "Whatever happened to you?"

The beggar said, "I encountered crisis after crisis in my life and eventually renounced the priesthood. I had my priestly faculties taken from me. I lost everything and am reduced to begging."

The priest could not get the beggar out of his mind and prayed constantly for him. The study course he was attending was drawing to an end, and the students were invited to receive individual blessings from Pope John Paul II. They were

forbidden to speak to the Holy Father personally. However, as the priest knelt to receive the blessing, his mind was so full of thoughts of the beggar that he blurted out: "Holy Father, please pray for 'X' who sits begging outside a church in Rome. He was ordained a priest, but has resigned from the priesthood and had his priestly faculties removed."

He hardly had time to finish before he was hustled away by the indignant attendants.

A few days later, the priest received an invitation, and he hurried to the small church and found the beggar. "Come quickly," the priest said. "We are to dine with the Pope." "Impossible," replied the beggar. "How could I visit the Pope in this state?" The priest insisted and helped the beggar to tidy up. Then, together, they set off for the Vatican.

They crossed St. Peter's Square and passed through the great gates, where Monsignor Dziwisz, the Polish priest who was then the secretary of Pope John Paul II, met them. He conducted them to the dining room, where His Holiness was awaiting them. After they had been introduced, they sat down to a lovely meal.

When it was time for the dessert, the Pope signaled to his secretary. The secretary rose, beckoned the beggar to follow the Holy Father, and together they left the room. After about 15 minutes, the Pope and the beggar returned, and the meal concluded normally. Nothing was said about what had transpired during their absence.

It was time to leave. As the two crossed St. Peter's Square, the priest, overcome with curiosity, asked eagerly what had transpired while they had been away from the room.

This is what the beggar told him. "When I was alone with the Holy Father, he turned to me and said, 'Father, please hear my confession.' In great confusion and distress I replied: 'I cannot do that. I have renounced the priesthood. My priestly faculties have been taken away from me. I am no longer a priest.' He looked at me with loving compassion. Then he raised his right hand and, wagging his finger at me, said, 'ONCE A PRIEST, ALWAYS A PRIEST.'

"After a long pause he told me: 'As Bishop of Rome and head of the Catholic Church I can restore your priestly faculties to you ... but you would have to ask.' I was overwhelmed and close to tears as I said simply:

'Please, Holy Father, please!'

"Then he heard my confession and restored my priesthood to me. Afterwards he repeated his original request and I heard the confession of Pope John Paul II. "After a pause for prayer and meditation, the Holy Father said, 'When you leave here, I want you to go to the church where you have been begging and seek out the parish priest. I am appointing you curate in that parish, with special responsibility for the beggars who seek alms at the church door.'"

I can only hope this true story reaches every priest who has left his ministry and is seriously considering the possibility of returning to the benevolent graces of his Bishop. Equally important, we can all hope and pray it reaches the countless souls who feel they cannot be forgiven for some act or a lifestyle that God could not condone.

Our Lord specifically told St. Faustina: "My secretary, write that I am more generous toward sinners than toward the just. It was for their sake that I came down from heaven; it was for their sake that My Blood was spilled. Let them not fear to approach Me; they are most in need of My mercy" (*Diary*, 1275).

"O Jesus, give us fervent and holy priests! Oh, how great is the dignity of the priest, but at the same time, how great is his responsibility! Much has been given to you, O priest, but much will also be demanded of you ..."

— *Diary of St. Faustina*, 941

Who would want to become a priest?

Seminarians sometimes hear this question. The question is odd, for if we truly understood what an

awesome privilege it is to be a priest, what a mysterious and tremendous gift the priesthood is to the world, seminaries would be filled to capacity. Reflect upon the gifts God confers upon His priests. It is not uncommon for a person to say, "I'm not worthy". No one is truly worthy, but that doesn't stop God from calling. He does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Is he calling you?

Priests are men through whom God enters the world in a special way. God speaks to us through their preaching and teaching. When a priest celebrates the sacraments, God becomes present to us and the saving actions of Jesus Christ are accomplished in us. In the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the priest makes God fully and substantially present to us as Jesus.

The priest stands between heaven and earth, with a foot in both places. He is the bridge between the two, bringing God to earth in the sacraments, and bringing God's people to Him through his prayers. This is the glory and excitement of the priesthood.

Who would want to be a priest? To that is answered, who wouldn't want to be a Priest?

"Render to Caesar..."

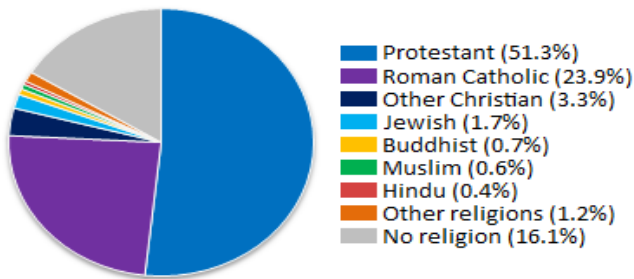
Matt 22:21 tells us to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and render to God what is God's.

"... of all the duties which man has to fulfill, that, without doubt, is the chiefest and holiest which commands him to worship God with devotion and piety. This follows of necessity from the truth that we are ever in the power of God, are ever guided by His will and providence, and, having come forth from Him, must return to Him. Add to which, no true virtue can exist without religion, for moral virtue is concerned with those things which lead to God as man's supreme and ultimate good; and therefore religion, which (as St. Thomas says) "performs those actions which are directly and immediately ordained for the divine honor", rules and tempers all virtues.¹

More than 100 million Americans do not worship God in any formal way.

¹ *Libertas, On the Nature of Human Liberty...* Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, June 20, 1888.

Some Catholic U. S. Statistics²



- 23.9% of Americans who identify themselves as Catholic equates to approximately 73,910,528 individuals.
- Overall, 41% of Catholics attend Mass weekly. 41% of 73,910,528 = 30,303,316.
- 9.79% of Americans actually attend Holy Mass at least once per week.
- 34% of Catholics ages 18-29 (8.12 % of Americans) attend Mass weekly. 34% of 73,910,528 = 25,129,579.
- 16.1% equates to 49,789,100 Americans who claim “No religion”. Half of these describe themselves as “theistic”, and half describe themselves as “Atheistic/Agnostic”. In other words, approximately 25 million Americans claim to be atheists, and another 25 million claim to be agnostic.
- There are more people that identify themselves as “atheistic/agnostic” than there are Catholics who attend weekly Mass.

Americans ages 18 to 29 are considerably less religious than older Americans. Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. Fully one-in-four adults age 18-29 (25%) are unaffiliated, describing their religion as "atheist," "agnostic" or "nothing in particular."

Compared with their elders today, young people are much less likely to affiliate with any religious tradition or to identify themselves as part of a Christian denomination.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Survey

An extensive 2007 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life details statistics on religion in America and explores the shifts taking place in the U.S. religious landscape. Based on interviews with more than 35,000 Americans age 18 and older.

Keep in mind that the respondents identify themselves as Catholics.

- Only 56% consider religion “Very Important”.
- 72% believe God exists.
- 38% do not consider the Bible the Word of God.
- 21% of Catholics read Scripture at least once per week.
- 39% say Bible not to be taken literally.
- Only 16% of Catholics believe that Catholicism is the only true religion.
- 77% believe in an afterlife.
- 60% believe that hell exists.
- 58% believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society.
- 19% believe that there is more than one way to interpret Catholic doctrine.
- 45% believe that Abortion should be legal in all/most cases.
- 45% believe that Abortion should be illegal in all/most cases.
- 51% believe in bigger government, more services.
- 77% believe that there are absolute standards of right and wrong. (In other words 23% believe in situational ethics).

Complacency in Religion

Satan has learned that complacency can be more destructive than activism.

Father John M. Lenz, a prisoner for 6 ½ years under the Nazi rule (five in Dachau), touched on this issue of Catholic complacency.

“If our Catholic Faith had really been something living, something vital to our very existence, it is doubtful whether a proportion of our people would have fallen prey to the Nazi pseudo-religion. We had been too luke-warm, our religion had become something conventional and had lost its living quality, so that it was easy

² <http://www.pewforum.org/Age/Religion-Among-the-millennials.aspx>

for many to lose sight of the essential values, to become blind to truth. So much depends on our leaders, the men and women who are Christ's servants as priests and religious, who duty it is to fire those in their care with a new enthusiasm for Christ, to keep His teachings perpetually before their eyes, to strengthen, uphold and protect, so that their flock should never again lose sight of the eternal truths manifested in the teachings of the Church."³

In the early days of Nazi Germany, those in authority, who had a moral responsibility to protect those who could not protect themselves, put blinders on their eyes and blocked their ears. So began the slide down that slippery slope that led to the death of many millions. It began, in the darkness of night with the murder of the insane and ended with the daylight slaughter of the innocent, simply because these lives were judged as unworthy.

First they came for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up,
because I wasn't a Communist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up,
because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up,
because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me,
and by that time there was no one
left to speak up for me.

by Rev. Martin Niemoller, 1945

"Awake, O sleeper"

Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eph 5:14).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of our responsibility in winning souls for Christ: "The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it" (§ 1816). Quoting *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the World) 42, (cf. *DH* 14) it goes on to say: "All however must be

prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks."

The catechism further states: "Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: 'So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven'" (Matt 10:32-33). There are such things as sins of omission. There is also a decided up-side: St. James tells us that "If any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19-20).

The Code of Canon Law, Title II, § 781 – 790, are also very specific about the need to evangelize. Can. 781 describes evangelization as "a fundamental duty of the people of God."

Questions from our friends

How can I Evangelize?

Evangelization is living a Catholic life in Christ in community.

When you strive for holiness and spiritual perfection in your own life, it becomes apparent to others and they will be drawn to Christ through you. True Catholic Christians radiate a sense of peace and joy, which comes from the grace received in the proper reception of the sacraments.

You are probably already evangelizing in one way or another i.e., whenever you do Catholic action. By visiting a sick friend or someone in prison, by giving a helping hand whenever possible, by attending Mass with your family, by living a life of integrity, you are evangelizing. But, that's not all there is to it, that's only the beginning. We must each develop the ability and gain the knowledge necessary to share our experience of faith with others, which is not something we Catholics are accustomed to doing.

One of the most important aspects of being a Christian is sharing the knowledge and truth of Jesus Christ and His Church. Here are some important tips to help you succeed as a Catholic evangelist.

³ Lenz, John M., *Christ in Dachau*, (Missiondruckerei St. Gabriel Modling Bei Wien, Austria. 1960) 5. Reprint available from Roman Catholic Books.

1. Personal Holiness: In order to properly share the love and peace of Christ with others, you must first have that love and peace yourself. After all, you can not give what you do not have. Therefore, it is critical for the evangelist to have a deep devotion and love for God. This is done by committing yourself to daily prayer, receiving the sacraments, frequent reading of Scripture, and turning away from sin. It may also be useful to periodically read the writings of the Saints, which will inspire you to serve God faithfully and with zeal.

2. Charity: The Apostle Paul said that every action must be done with love (1 Cor 16:14). Evangelizing is certainly no exception. Your goal is not to win arguments, but to proclaim the truth with love. Since God is love, it is hypocritical to share the Gospel without love.

3. Knowledge: Holiness and charity will certainly go a long way, but eventually your knowledge of God will be necessary to properly share the faith. To fulfill this requirement, constant study is required. This includes frequent reading of Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, writings from the Popes, and solid Catholic books. It is also important to read books written by non-Catholics. This will enable you to understand their perspective and learn their arguments for embracing their particular beliefs.

4. Understand your role: Keep in mind that you can not convert anyone. That is up to God and the person to whom you are sharing the faith. Your role is to present the truth of the Catholic faith with love and clarity. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 3:7, "Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters in anything, but only God who causes the growth." You must remain focused on the role of planting the seeds. You may not be around to see if that seed grows, but you know that you have done your job if you explain the faith clearly and with love. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit.

5. Be reasonable about your expectations: Do not expect instant results. Conversion can sometime take a long time. All that you can hope for is that you have planted a small seed that may bear fruit in the future. If you simply correct one misunderstanding or make one good point, then you have succeeded.

6. Don't pretend to know something that you don't: If you are asked a question and you do not know the answer, honestly admit it and tell the person that you will have to get back with them. Most of the time, your ignorance of a subject stands out easily if you try and "squirm" your way to a proper answer. This can be damaging to your cause since most people will tend to remember only the "squirming" and forget about the good points you made during the conversation.

7. Equal Time: Typically, Catholics are forced to defend so many beliefs that there remains no time to ask the non-Catholic questions. Make sure you keep this from happening by dividing the time equally and asking your own questions.

Your questions should be phrased in such a way to get the other person to think. For example:

How do you know your interpretation of Scripture is correct?

How do you know when a Scripture verse is to be taken literally?

Did Jesus establish one Church or many?

Did Jesus leave behind a visible authority?

8. Mark up your Bible: No, it is not sacrilegious to write in your Bible. By highlighting verses and writing notes in the margin, you can save precious time finding key passages. You may also find it useful to keep a piece of paper in your Bible listing all the important passages for certain topics.

9. Realize the truth will always be attacked: It is a sad reality, but true. Because of this reality, the world is full of anti-Catholic people and literature. Catholicism is like no other faith in the world. While it is just about impossible to find anti-Presbyterian organizations or anti-Fundamentalists organizations, it is not difficult to find anti-Catholic organizations. Don't be discouraged when you encounter this. Evangelizing is not for those who have thin skin. Jesus was attacked, so why would we expect anything different. In fact, Jesus promised that we would be hated by the world (John 15:18-19). One thing is for sure, when you take a stand for Catholicism brace yourself for a bumpy ride.

10. Learn from your experiences: After sharing the faith with someone take a moment to reflect on the

conversation. Think of the things you said that may have been inappropriate or incomplete. Commit yourself to study these things so that if the same things happen in the future, you will be better prepared to handle them. Thank God for the opportunity to share his love and truth with someone. Most importantly, take the time to pray for that person.



History Forgotten

Did you know that 52 of the 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence were orthodox, deeply committed Christians? The other three all believed in the Bible as the divine truth, the God of scripture, and His personal intervention.

It is the same Congress that formed the American Bible Society. Immediately after creating the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress Patrick Henry, who is called the firebrand of the American Revolution, is still remembered for his words, "Give me liberty or give me death." But in current textbooks the context of these words is deleted. Here is what he actually said: "An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death."

These sentences have been erased from our textbooks. Was Patrick Henry a Christian? The following year, 1776, he wrote this "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here."

Consider these words that Thomas Jefferson wrote on the front of his well-worn Bible: "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator."

On July 4, 1821, President Adams said, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."

Calvin Coolidge, our 30th President of the United States reaffirmed this truth when he wrote, "The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country."

In 1782, the United States Congress voted this resolution: "The Congress of the United States recommends and approves the Holy Bible for use in all schools."

William Holmes McGuffey is the author of the McGuffey Reader, which was used for over 100 years in our public schools with over 125 million copies sold until it was stopped in 1963.... President Lincoln called him the 'Schoolmaster of the Nation'.

Listen to these words of Mr. McGuffey: "The Christian religion is the religion of our country. From it are derived our notions on the character of God, on the great moral Governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions. From no source has the author drawn more conspicuously than from the sacred Scriptures.. From all these extracts from the Bible I make no apology."

Of the first 108 universities founded in America, 106 were distinctly Christian, including the first, Harvard University, chartered in 1636. In the original Harvard Student Handbook, rule number one was that students seeking entrance must know Latin and Greek so that they could study the scriptures: "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, John 17:3; and therefore to lay Jesus Christ as the only foundation for our children to follow the moral principles of the Ten Commandments."

James Madison, the primary author of the Constitution of the United States, said this: "We

have staked the whole future of our new nation not upon the power of government; far from it. We have staked the future of all our political constitutions upon the capacity of each of ourselves to govern ourselves according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments.



A Prayer for America

Father, we beg Your blessing for the Right to Life, the Unborn, the weak, the sick and the old; all who are finding themselves being targets of the vicious culture of death; that our Lord Jesus bless and protect all who stand up for the Christian dignity of persons. That God enlighten those who are traveling down death's highway by their involvement, in any way, with either the contemporary death culture, selfishness, relativism, or any of the new age errors of our times, that God envelop our culture with His Divine protection and help us both individually and as a nation to true enlightenment, conversion and repentance of ourselves and our culture. Help us to turn from our national sin of abortion, and return to, and once again become a Christian nation, on the narrow road, that is, the path to becoming a nation and culture, under God. Amen.

Value What is Yours!

The owner of a small business, a friend of the poet Olavo Bilac, met him on the street and asked him, "Mr. Bilac, I need to sell my small farm the one you know so well, could you please write an announcement for me for the paper?" Bilac wrote,

"For sale, a beautiful property, where birds sing at dawn in extensive woodland, bisected by the brilliant and sparkling waters of a large stream. The house is bathed by the rising sun. It offers tranquil shade in the evenings on the veranda."

Sometime later, the poet met his friend and asked whether he had sold the property? To which he replied: I have changed my mind. When I read what

you had written, I realized the treasure that was mine.

Sometimes we underestimate the good things we have, chasing after the mirages of false treasures. We often see people letting go of their children, their families, their spouses, their friends, their profession, their knowledge - accumulated over many years, their good health, the good things in life. They throw out the window what God has given them, so freely, things, which were nourished with so much care and effort.

Look around, appreciate what you have: your home, your loved ones, friends on whom you can really count, the knowledge you have gained, your good health, and all the beautiful things of life, that are truly your most precious treasure.

We can no longer shower kindness on those we love, after they have died. It is useless to want to redo the work that we may have done negligently. It's best to appreciate and do things well now.

Ask of God at every moment that our problems and concerns never degenerate into feeling of sadness and anxiety.

Be in union with God, who will provide the courage needed to be certain of victory in the struggle, because God will give with abundance what we need.

We are all imperfect. Always praise and value your family, do all you can to make it even better. Always praise and value your work companions. See what you can do to improve your environment.

Instead of isolating yourself, because of weakness or failure, seek to invest in true and constructive friendship in your life.

Faith in God is necessary to strengthen self-esteem in dealing with daily problems.

My wish for you be with God – and may God be with you.

From: *The Song of the Birds*

Pablo Casals (Dec. 29, 1876 – Oct. 22, 1973)