

THE ROSARY

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Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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ADVENT: MARY'S SEASON

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

We dedicate the months of October and May to our Blessed Mother because these months celebrate the great feasts of her Rosary and Visitation. But the Church's liturgy focuses on Mary throughout the season of Advent, and these days leading up to the Nativity of Our Savior are an invitation for us to follow the example of Mary, by cherishing the Word of God in our hearts, and allowing it to take flesh there, so that – like her – we may present the world with the human face of Christ.

As Advent draws closer to Christmas those readings will take on a different character, and we will encounter Zachariah, Mary, and Elizabeth – Zachariah struck dumb by the angel Gabriel's good news, and Elizabeth so overwhelmed by it she hides herself away. Mary, by contrast, realizes the Good News of the Incarnation is too good not to be shared, so she goes "in haste" to Elizabeth, and the joyful words of her Magnificat make her the first of the Evangelists, setting the pattern each of us must follow, proclaiming in our lives the mighty deeds of God.

Each of us at the Rosary Center wishes you every blessing during the holy days of this Advent season. We will remember you gratefully in our prayers during the Novenas to honor our Blessed Mother's Immaculate Conception, and we pray that the joy of our Savior's birth will fill your hearts at Christmas and throughout the New Year!

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

Fr. Brian Mullady has prepared a CD devoted to a discussion of the 'O'Antiphons of Advent that are an important part of the Prayer of the Church in the days immediately before Christmas. Catholics who are unfamiliar with the Church's tradition of Morning and Evening Prayer will find this CD an excellent introduction to the brief prayers that go before Mary's *Magnificat* every day at Evening Prayer.

In the days before Christmas, these short prayers invoke the assistance of Jesus, called by a series of familiar Scriptural names. Fr. Mullady explores the context and meaning of the names and the place each holds in the



THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Scripture and in Christian tradition. Even if one does not wish to pray the Church's Evening Prayer, the CD will prove an excellent spiritual aid during the holy days of Advent.

The Christmas Mouse is one of the Rosary Center's best-selling Christmas books for children. It tells the story of a mouse that, while running away from a cat, falls into a book and finds himself in the stable where the Blessed Mother has just given birth to Our Savior.

Advent, A Family Celebration, invites grown-ups and children to explore the Scripture and prayers of this holy season. It is a gentle, yet powerful, reminder that our Baptism calls us to be members of the Holy Family of Jesus, wherever we find ourselves, no less than Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem.

THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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| United States | \$10.00 Per Year |
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2 Novenas of Masses
in honor of

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Nov. 30 - Dec. 8 — Dec. 9 - 17

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Part II

The Fear of the Lord

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

GIFTS: HABITS OF PERFECTION

In our previous reflection we saw that the gifts of the Spirit are habits by which the soul gains the power to attain special perfections. We seldom think of fear as perfection, but that is because our language betrays us into imagining fear can only be associated with cowardice or trepidation.

THINKING ABOUT FEAR

In our everyday lives, we experience four types of fear. The first is a “worldly fear,” the apprehension that we may lose the material things that make our lives pleasant. These consist of material goods, of course, but they also include intangible goods – the honors or benefits that may come our way as a result of our education, position in society or job, wealth, privilege, or even our appearance. God, obviously, plays little part in this sort of fear, and because its object is so ignoble, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas consider it evil.

...worldly love is, properly speaking, the love whereby a man trusts in the world as his end... Now fear is born of love, since man fears the loss of what he loves, as Augustine states...Hence worldly fear is that which arises from worldly love as from an evil root, for which reason worldly fear is always evil. (II-II 19.4)

When we consider the obsession with which some individuals pursue their work, to the exclusion of everything and everyone else in their lives, we can see what a great tragedy overshadows the natural and spiritual life of a person who falls under the spell of worldly fear.

SERVILE FEAR

A second fear concerns God, but this is a God of anger and vengeance rather than the God of love revealed in the Scripture. This fear is named “servile” because it is the fear experienced by a slave in the presence of an intolerant and capricious master. St. Augustine observed that those who exhibit this fear shun sin, not because they love God, and not because they hate sin. Rather, because they fear God’s punishment.

St. Thomas Aquinas challenges us to make a distinction. He says that the fear in servile fear is not defective; what limits its power to ennoble us is its slave-like quality. Those who labor under servile fear may lead what appear to be outwardly virtuous lives, but until this fear is mixed with piety and liberated with

true love for God, it is imperfect and, like imperfect contrition, it is based on dread of punishment rather than dread of offending God. To that extent, servile fear is sterile and ungenerous.

Because servile fear is often linked with a crippling personal scrupulosity and spirit of harsh judgment, it is neither personally satisfying nor a source of peace or growth in the Christian community. We need only consider fictional characters like Dickens’ Uriah Heep, or Francois Mauriac’s Brigitte in “Woman of the Pharisees,” to grasp the hypocrisy and utter emptiness of the lives of those governed by servile fear.

THE BEGINNING OF VIRTUOUS FEAR

A third fear is “initial” fear, the beginning of true, virtuous, Fear of the Lord, and this enables us to cooperate with the grace of our Baptism to outgrow servile fear, and to see beyond the limits placed by worldly, or material, fear. St. John tells us that love “casts out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18), so we begin our spiritual growth toward true fear when we begin our journey toward true love. This initial fear is vastly superior to either of the other sorts of fear we have considered, simply because initial fear allows God to guide and strengthen our will, but as its name suggests, it is only a beginning.

St. Thomas Aquinas describes initial fear thus

...if a man turn to God...through fear of punishment, it will be servile fear; but if it be on account of committing a fault, it will be filial fear, for it becomes a child to fear offending its father. If, however, it be on account of both, it will be initial fear, which is between both these fears. (II-II, 19.2)

TRUE, HOLY FEAR

In our Catholic theology, true fear, “holy” fear, is a growing sensitivity and awareness of sin. As the Holy Spirit prompts us to turn toward God with greater and greater ardor, we are simultaneously called to turn away from sin – not because we fear punishment for doing wrong, and not because we seek some reward for doing good – but because our love for God makes us more and more want to do God’s will.

AN EXAMPLE FROM FAMILY LIFE

In our human families, if our parents treat us with the love children deserve, we are not long in outgrowing a fear of our parents’ punishment. As our love and

respect for our parents increase, following their rules becomes far easier. As we grow, their instructions become less and less direct, and more and more a matter of our intuition. To be sure, fear is a part of this growth, but if we – and our parents – are truly growing in love, then our fear arises less from the threat of punishment should we make a mistake, than from an unwillingness to offend our parents by failing to carry out their instructions.

If we continue the analogy of unspoken communication between loving parents and their children, we can see that as the Holy Spirit guides our lives, and draws us more deeply into love for our heavenly Father, we may be confident that we will progress from simply carrying out God's commands to an intuitive appreciation of God's desires. At this point our fear of God is in no way that of a slave; rather, it is "filial" fear, that of a child, dependent, loving, and obedient.

St. Thomas writes that filial fear differs from initial fear only in degree.

...initial fear stands in the same relation to filial fear as imperfect to perfect charity. Now perfect and imperfect charity differ, not as to essence but as to state. Therefore we must conclude that initial fear, as we understand it... does not differ essentially from filial fear. (II-II, 19.8)

THE VIRTUOUS EFFECTS OF FEAR

Because Fear of the Lord is the Spirit's grace enabling us to discern what will offend God, the first effect of this gift is a growing awareness of how very sinful we are in God's eyes. As we grow in love for God, and grow more and more aware of God's immensity and goodness, we will grow correspondingly aware of how very small we are, and how very imperfect.

If we look at our personal weaknesses, or the illnesses of the invalids Jesus encounters in the gospel, we see that disease and weakness are symptoms of deeper weakness that afflicts creation, as a result of sin. This should by no means cause us to withdraw from the world God has entrusted to our care, but it should remind us of the tremendous magnitude and power of sin. We must withdraw from sin, and the gift of Fear of the Lord, which increases our love for God, will increase our desire to draw back from sin and whatever might lead us to sin.

FEAR AND REPENTANCE

Once we become aware of our sinfulness, we become aware of our need for repentance. Fear of the Lord reveals the weakness of our spiritual condition, but it also reveals the remedy. The gift of filial fear is a gift that refines the will, so it increases our humility, which is the capacity to see everything we have and everything we are as God's gift. The more clearly God's Spirit enables us to see ourselves as God's handiwork, the less apt we are to want to soil that effort, and the more attractive the Sacrament of Reconciliation will become.

"TO AMEND OUR LIVES"

One promise we make in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to avoid what will lead us to sin in the future. This amendment of life is yet another result of our growth in filial fear. As the Holy Spirit enables us to grow in love for God, we realize more and more clearly that we have been created in God's image. At some point this will lead us to conclude that our actions should bear some trace of our Creator, so that we will do no harm to ourselves or one another, and so that the world may continue to feel God's healing touch through us, His creatures.

A 20th Century writer observes

In the sacrament of penance the gift of fear acts at its highest level of all; during and after absolution we remain under the influence of filial fear: the spirit of fear inspires our repentance, our sorrow, and, in consequence, the desire to oppose our faults and overcome them.

St. Thomas also teaches that the gift of fear is a powerful auxiliary of the virtue of temperance. Those who, recognizing in their flesh the ever-reviving source of all their faults, truly fear God with a childlike fear, are temperate, penitent, sober, and humble. The virtue of temperance has no better auxiliary than the spirit of fear which puts us on our guard against our sinful wills.

*This gift of fear is therefore a help both to our piety which it prospers, to our hope which it strengthens, and to temperance, which it enables to rule. (H.D. Gardell, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life*, p. 15)*

TO LOOK WITHIN

Finally, the gift of Fear enables us to purify not only our relations with the world outside us, but also the world within us, and that, of course, is our own hearts. The word "heart" occurs over and over in the Scripture, a sign of how important our hearts are. Jesus tells us, "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Mt. 6: 21) – rather frightening words when we consider some of the things that make our hearts beat faster. We may be grateful, then, that the gift of Fear makes our hearts beat more chastely.

Jesus also tells us

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Mt. 11:29-30)

OUR HEARTS TRANSFORMED

Once again we hear an invitation to embrace the gift of filial fear. If we are to enjoy everlasting life with Christ in God's kingdom, we must allow our hearts to be transformed into images of His heart. This can happen in only one way, which is by accepting Christ's yoke. He assures us the yoke is easy, and so it is; it is, after all, His yoke. We are merely sharing it. If we accept His invitation, the gifts of the Spirit become more and more

a part of our lives. They enable us to identify ourselves more and more closely with Jesus, who manifest these gifts perfectly throughout His life, and who calls us to find the pattern of our lives in His, especially in His cross.

FEAR AND HOPE

The gift of Fear is especially linked to the virtue of Hope, by which we trust that God will enable us to come to share His everlasting life in heaven. St. Thomas writes that the gift and the virtue are “linked together” and “*complete one another,*” for through fear “...we dread lest we relinquish the helping hand of God.” (II-II, 19.9) When one writer considers the gift of fear his words remind us of Jesus’ invitation to assume His yoke. He says the gift of Fear

...banishes from Christian life every vestige of presumption, of self-sufficiency, of hypocrisy; it is the mother of Christian humility, that wonderful blending of confidence and trepidation in the presence of God.
(Anscar Vonier, *The Spirit and the Bride*, p, 192)

The virtue of Hope is trust in God’s mercy and promise. The gift of Fear allows us to cast ourselves altogether on God’s merit, forgetting our own. And in this regard, the gift enables us to embrace a spirit of poverty, which is an excellent remedy for the material fear that can work such harm in our lives. The gift of Fear enables us to see that God is all we need. The more closely we allow the gift of Fear to identify our wills with His, the more completely we understand the immensity of Jesus’ words on the mountainside, when He promised His kingdom to those who are poor in spirit. ■

THE SONG OF SONGS

Who Wrote the Book of Love?
The Song of Songs for Catholics
Fr. James Thompson, O.P.

PART 5: CONCISE COMMENTARY 1:1-2

With this installment we begin a Concise Commentary on the Song of Songs. For the Prologue (1:1-5), I will be giving a line-by-line interpretation to show how to read it in the context of what I have written in the introductory installments of this series. Most of the rest of this Concise Commentary will not go into the same amount of detail, but will nevertheless give hints for interpreting the main sections of the Song of Songs.

TITLE & ATTRIBUTION 1:1

Most books in the Hebrew Scriptures do not include the title as part of the text, but the first verse of this book does so: “The Song of Songs by Solomon” (NAB). The phrase “song of songs” uses a Hebrew idiom to express something that is utterly superlative. Probably the best known example is that the inner sanctum of the Jerusalem temple was known as the “holy of holies,” meaning the most holy place. So the title itself proclaims this song to be superior to all other songs. Marvin Pope (Anchor Bible) translated this verse as “*The Sublime Song of Solomon*”

PROLOGUE 1:2

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! (1:2) This Song of all Songs commences with a simple desire: the beloved lady is yearning for the loving presence of her lord. This poem deals more with the yearning for love than in its consummation, and the consummation is, as we shall see, expressed indirectly through double entendre and luscious figurative imagery. Marriage is not all courtship and marriage bed, but this physical relation is the basis of the marriage bond. The tenderness of kisses and caresses from one viewpoint are simply physical expressions of growing closeness of two souls, and from another angle these are the means by which the two become one.

Thus *more delightful is your love than wine*. Those reading the Song for the first time are often struck by this immediate shift in grammatical person from third to second person. Such sudden transitions are also found in other ancient near eastern poetry, but here commentators have seen a subtle shift of emphasis, as if in the first line the lover is absent, but by the second line he is so present in her memory that she can address him.

WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

This verse sets the tone for the entire Song in another way: though others come in and out of dialogue with her throughout, the principal point of view is from the woman's perspective. At the beginning she yearns for his love-making: *Let him kiss me*. The summary highpoint of the book (8:6-7) is in her voice, and at the very end she gets the last word: *Be swift, my lover, like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices* (8:14).

DESIRE AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

With respect to our spiritual life, it, too, is characterized more by desire than in satisfaction, in yearning more than fulfillment. We have our peaks when we know with every aspect of our being that God is with us and working in us. At such times God's love for us is as apparent to us as the love of an absent lover, mediated through the memory of past affectionate actions. Much of the time, however, we may be walking entirely by faith, and long for his coming. In fact, one reason that marriage is so strong an image of the divine is because being in love provokes such powerful yearnings for union, for fellowship, for utter understanding and completion in another. And yet, in this life, this is never fully possible.

The very yearnings that love incites point to their fulfillment beyond the here and now. Hunger and thirst are satiated by food and drink; even sexual urges find physical completion for a time in post-coitus relaxation. But the deeper yearning of a human person for acceptance, cherishing, and communion by another human soul always seems to hit a blank wall. Even when we are together in a sense we are still alone. But in a truly happy marriage, the pain of this existential separateness is greatly reduced, and it produces not only offspring but also an environment of joy and peace, even in the midst of hard times.