

## **“CONTEMPLATION AND GIVING OF THOSE FRUITS TO OTHERS”**

Orange County Catholic Prayer Breakfast

September 28, 2011

I am glad to be here to speak to you today. When I was thinking about this prayer breakfast, I couldn't help but think that a prayer breakfast celebrates two of the good things that we do and I would even be so bold as to say, in imitation of Christ. In a rather far-fetched sense we could say that there is a long tradition of Catholic prayer breakfasts, beginning with the third resurrection appearance of Our Lord. I must say that I prefer our menu this morning to His.

I think there is more to our coming together than meets the eye. In carefully considering what I wanted to say to you I will just put it bluntly. I believe that for all serious minded Catholics it is time to circle the wagons. I would like to propose something for our imagination and circle the wagons around all the Catholics in the world or even those in the United States. This should be done not out of fear or isolation but to seek unity in belief and mutual support to fight the powers of evil surrounding us. This is more than obvious in our world today. I got the idea from the book of Joshua. Let me explain. When Moses died it was the task of Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land. Once again the Lord intervened and the Chosen People, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, passed through water, this time through the Jordan, on dry land. When they reached Shechem, I would say, Joshua circled the wagons, and addressed all the people. He went through the whole history of salvation and related all that the Lord had done for them. Not only had He taken them from slavery in Egypt but fed them in the desert, delivered them

from their enemies (the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jubusites). Joshua said it was *now time* to renew their Covenant with the Lord and that they should serve the Lord completely and sincerely. He went on, “If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve....As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. That day the people renewed their Covenant with the Lord.

How wonderful it would be if we could circle the wagons around all the Catholics in the world and, as Joshua recalled all the wonders God had wrought for the Chosen People, we, too, would recall all the Lord has given us in the Catholic Faith we profess. His gifts are so incredible it is hard to even begin to realize their magnificence. We have the fullness of Faith. Christ has given us the Sacraments, most particularly the Most Blessed Sacrament which is His body, blood, soul and divinity and which we can actually receive. We have the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation by which our sins are forgiven, etc., etc. The Catechism of the Catholic Church assures us that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. We, as Catholics, believe in the Communion of Saints which means, as stated in the Catechism, that there is “a perennial link of charity existing between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.” With all this in mind and much more regarding our Faith we need to renew our Baptismal Covenant *today* and profess our Faith in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. United in our belief in all the teachings of the Church we would be able to change

the culture and help transform the world. Just to think that we would be able to do this by the grace of God is such a great gift.

Perhaps to understand how we can remain strong in the Faith so freely given, it would be helpful to look at this man, Joshua, from whom I gleaned my example. What can we learn from him to help us on our pilgrim journey? We find Joshua as a young man chosen by Moses to represent his tribe along with eleven other men chosen to represent their tribes and given the task to scout out the land of Canaan which the Lord had promised them and find out all they could about the land and the people living in it. When they returned all but Joshua and Caleb said they could not attack the people of Canaan because the inhabitants there were too strong and the land consumes its inhabitants. Joshua and Caleb, two out of twelve, said that “If the Lord is pleased with us He will bring us in and give us the land, a land flowing with milk and honey....The whole community threatened to stone Joshua and Caleb.” In the long run, the men whom Moses had sent to scout out the land and who, on their return, incited the whole community of Israel to grumble against the Lord by disparaging the land were all struck dead. Only Joshua and Caleb remained alive. God said that His servant Caleb was of another spirit and, because he obeyed perfectly, He would bring him into the land and his race would possess it. And of course Joshua was the faithful young man who would lead the people into the Promised Land. God told him to keep the Law and never swerve from this to the right or to the left. He told him to be strong and to stand firm, to be fearless and confident because He would be with him.

What made these two men strong enough to go against such a majority? A clue can be found in the Book of Exodus. Moses had great intimacy with the Lord and “Whenever

he would enter the Tent Tabernacle, containing the Ark of the Covenant, the column of cloud would come down and stand at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses.” The Lord spoke to Moses face to face as one man speaks to another. Moses would then return to the camp, but his young assistant, Joshua, son of Nun, would not move out of the tent.” Joshua was a contemplative and let God work through him. That could be the only explanation for the walls of Jericho falling when Joshua ordered the priests to march around the city with the Ark of the Covenant and on the seventh day to blow the horns and have the people shout. We, too, will be able to do great things for the Lord and tear down the walls of hostility if we are contemplative and let God work through us. We have to be men and women with a strong prayer life.

I mentioned earlier the Communion of Saints and how we are united with the saints in Heaven. Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important for us to remember the saints, our brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers in the faith. Our communion with the saints has been a theme in some of Pope Benedict’s writings. At John Paul II’s funeral, I remember him assuring the desolated crowds that we are never alone, surrounded as we are with the saints. As Cardinal Ratzinger, he wrote this about the litany of the Saints:

The person who is set about by dangers in time and eternity finds a shelter in the communion of the saints. He gathers the redeemed of all ages around him and finds safety under their mantle. This signifies that the walls separating heaven and earth, and past, present and future are now as glass. The Christian lives in the

presence of the saints as his own proper ambience.

Isn't that a beautiful image? The walls between heaven and earth are glass, with the saints watching over us through it. It is a good image to ponder. We are not trapped in our own historical moment. We are in communion not only with God and each other today at this prayer breakfast, but with all the saints.

I am glad of this, especially since the topic of my talk to you today is "Contemplation and Giving of those Fruits to Others." This isn't an original title. It is a concept and a phrase which reaches back across many centuries. As a concept, it is familiar to all of the saints. All who were, in one way or another, experts at contemplation and sharing its fruits are in heaven now, where they share the vision of God and pray for us, and are even more expert at it. I would like to look at a few of them who can assist us in our search for contemplation. I will mention three qualities of a Contemplative.

**I. Joy.** I must mention Saint Wenceslaus whose feast we celebrate today and who is known mostly through the Christmas Carol. It is hard to think of this jovial King who struggled to evangelize the culture of his people and was rewarded with martyrdom by his own brother who killed him out of hatred for his faith. His brother later repented. In some way, our gathering here for a Catholic prayer breakfast is a cultural action to strengthen Christianity in our culture. We are continuing the same struggle that St. Wenceslaus fought many years ago. We pray that our joy and our prayer may flow from the same source as did his.

In fact, the joy of heaven in which the saints share is itself the fruit of their

contemplation. Joy flows from knowing God and his love. Christian joy is the first fruit of contemplation that we must share with others. In Christianity, there is something ultimate about joy. In eternity, before time began, the Trinity existed in perfect love and joy. It was to share this joy that God created man. In his book, *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton said about joy: "Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an ...interlude, a ...fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul." There are true sorrows and pains in human life, but joy has the first chapter of human history, and we trust that it will be the last chapter of each of our lives.

T. S. Eliot in his poem "The Hollow Men" contrasts Christian hope with the despair which can seep into modern life. The last section of the poem is interspersed with the alternating lines "For thine is the Kingdom" and "Life is very long." The answer to the despondent, depressed attitude that "Life is very long" and meaningless, is to assert with joy "Thine is the Kingdom." The world is desperately in need of witness that there is a kingdom beginning now but reaching beyond this life, which is the home of joy. All the saints have been these witnesses. This joy is part of the light which shines through the glass walls of eternity on to those of us alive today. We need to be the witnesses to joy in the world today. In his diary, Bl. Pope John the XXIII writes that joy is the atmosphere of the heroic virtues. He affirms again that holiness thrives in an atmosphere of joy.

**II.** If God has gifted us with so much love and grace in our Catholic Faith, we are bound to share this with others. We must give to others the Fruits of our Contemplation but one cannot give what one does not have. These are words of a motto which has

belonged to the Dominican Order for around 800 years. In Latin it can be said more concisely: *Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* (i.e., to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of your contemplation). St. Dominic founded the Dominican Order in the 1200s as a response to the Albigensian Heresy. This heresy denied the goodness of material things, the Incarnation, and other doctrines of the faith. The Dominicans were supposed to be teachers, well versed in the faith, who would be able to go into the cities and universities to preach the Gospel to the sophisticated citizens.

But even before the men's order was officially established, St. Dominic founded the Dominican contemplative nuns. He understood that it would be their prayers that would bless the apostolate of the Friars, and make the Order flourish. He knew that prayer was the most important thing and had to be the basis of the Dominican Order. Of course, the Friars and the active sisters pray too, but it is a special encouragement to us to know that there are contemplative sisters who are also praying for our work.

“To Give to Others the Fruits of Your Contemplation” has several further meanings beyond what I have already said about joy. The first of these meanings of the fruits of contemplation is the power of prayer. We give to others the fruits of our contemplation when we pray for them. God has chosen to use our prayers as the instruments through which He accomplishes His work on earth. When you think about it, this power is awesome. You may remember the old catechism definition “God is the Supreme Being, Infinitely Perfect, who made all things and keeps them in existence.” Any good that happens or that we are able to do is “kept in existence” by God. He makes it possible. So we should always pray.

It is also awesome that God wants to use our prayers to accomplish great things in the world. He doesn't need us, but he has great respect for human nature. He made us free, able to know and love, and out of his love for us, gives us a place in His plan. When St. Thomas Aquinas talks about the Incarnation, he says that God did not have to send His Son as man to redeem mankind, but He chose this as the most fitting way, because it would allow human nature to participate in repairing the evil which it had caused. Prayer is something along these lines. God has chosen to allow us the gift and glory of participating in bringing His Kingdom to earth. It is a great blessing to be able to pray.

More is wrought by prayer than the world will ever know. When I think of the power of prayer, the saint who comes first to my mind is Pope Pius V. He was a sixteenth century Dominican who was elected Pope in 1566. One of the most dramatic events which happened during his reign as Pope was an Ottoman Muslim invasion of Europe. The key naval battle in this conflict was the battle of Lepanto, fought off Greece in October 7, 1571. In this encounter, roughly 200 ships from each side fought each other. Numbers of combatants were similar, with a slightly higher number on the Muslim side. The Ottoman fleet had not been defeated for decades. A defeat for the Christian forces would mean invasion of Europe and a severe curtailing of religious freedom. A victory would mean breathing room. Before the battle, Pius V urged Christians to join him in praying the Rosary for Christian victory. With the help of these prayers, the Christians had a decisive victory. Their losses were only a fraction of those of the Ottomans—something like 5,000 to 30,000. In gratitude, Pius V established the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary on the anniversary of the battle, that is, October 7<sup>th</sup>. To my mind, this is one of the great examples



of the power of prayer in our history.

Another way in which saints have given to others the fruits of their contemplation is by allowing themselves to become their true selves through prayer. If God works through our prayer to accomplish His will in the world, he also works through our prayer to accomplish His will in us. Just as sitting near a campfire warms you up, so spending time in prayer makes us more like God—clearer in mind, more compassionate in heart, stronger in spirit. Simply being in the presence of God, loving him, and bringing before Him the thought of those whom we love is a powerful thing. God will touch us directly and purify our ability to love.

It is this time in prayer that makes us able to love others authentically. God has called each one of us to a particular work, and it is He who can shape our minds and hearts to make us fit for His work. Again, we cannot give what we do not have. We want to bring Christ to the others, not just ourselves. You have all probably had experiences where your presence meant more to a loved one than anything that you could do. This is especially true in times of grief. Just being present as a loving friend to someone who is suffering can be so comforting to him. In a similar way, simply being men and women of prayer, men and women who love God is the most important contribution that we can make to our world. We prepare ourselves to bring the fruits of our contemplation to others when we allow ourselves to be changed by our prayer.

St. Catherine of Siena is the saint whom I always think of as an example of this effect of prayer. She was a tertiary Sister who lived in the 1300's, in Italy. Of all the Dominican Saints, she might have been the one who was the busiest and who accomplished the

most things. Certainly reading her writings there is a sense of a holy impatience and energy. Catherine tended the sick during an outbreak of the Black Plague, made peace between various warring Italian families and Italian cities, and even convinced Pope Gregory XI to come back from Avignon to live in Rome where the Pope belongs. Yet in order to understand all of these things which Catherine did, it is necessary to look at the prayer which prepared her. Before she began to go out into the world and to do all of these things, she spent three years living a life of retirement and prayer. It was only when Our Lord insisted that she go out to others that she began her activity. It was almost as though God knew that Catherine would live an extraordinarily busy life later on, so he gave her the opportunity to become contemplative first.

Yet, even though Catherine did so many practical things, one of the most astonishing stories told about St. Catherine is not something that she did, but something that she was. She was a force of holiness wherever she went. When Catherine would go through the countryside, people would flock to her. Wherever she would go, three priests needed to go with her to hear the confessions of people who were converted back to God simply because they had looked at Catherine. Crowds would turn back to God, simply from seeing Catherine. She was so close to God that just seeing her was enough to give them a sense of all they were missing in not loving God and to make them want to come back to Him. What was important for Catherine's ministry was less what she did, than who she had become through her prayer. For Catherine, the fruits of her contemplation were manifest in her face, her look, her way of speaking, her walk. It can be a good prayer to ponder how we would act if we were closer to God, and to ask God to change us.

Catherine of Siena was the saint who said “If you are who you should be, you will set the world on fire.” These are words for all of us today.

**III.** A third way of sharing the fruits of our contemplation with others is according to the mind.. Strictly, speaking “contemplation” refers only to gazing on the truths of the faith. Our prayer, however, also needs to include learning these truths, and pondering them in our hearts so that we can contemplate them. We need to think about their relationship to our lives and the lives of those we encounter. The rosary, which supplies us with 20 mysteries from the life of Jesus and Mary and gives us time to ponder these mysteries as we pray each decade, is a wonderful prayer for our minds. Of course, the mind is always in union with the heart.

When we have done this studying, praying and thinking in the presence of God, we can share what we have learned with others. Sometimes “sharing the fruits of our contemplation” will involve teaching others the truths of the faith. Sometimes it will include directly discussing what we have read. Sometimes it will simply mean that we bring clearer and more peaceful minds to the problems of our lives and to our relationships with others.

Maybe the first Dominican Saint whom you think of in relation to this way of sharing the fruits of contemplation is St. Thomas Aquinas. But I would like to say something about his teacher, St. Albert the Great, known as “the teacher of everything there is to know” and who was a great scientist before the age of science. He was a young German student when he decided to join the Dominicans in 1223. He never met St. Dominic, since he joined the order a few years after Dominic died. After he joined the Dominican Order, he studied theology and philosophy. Eventually he was assigned to teach

at the University of Paris and the Dominican House of Studies in Germany. He spent much of his life as a professor, studying, writing, and teaching. He was the teacher who started St. Thomas Aquinas on the road to writing his famous *Summa*, but he also taught many other students. At least three of his students became canonized Saints or Blesseds, and many others internalized the truths which he taught and became preachers and teachers to pass them on to others.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful aspects of St. Albert's life was his attitude to St. Thomas. Albert recognized Thomas' potential when he was just a student and encouraged him by making him his assistant. Actually, Thomas had terrible handwriting, and we have difficulty understanding some of Albert's works nowadays because they were transcribed in such awful writing! Albert knew that Thomas would surpass him in his systematic formulation of theology, but instead of being jealous, Albert encouraged Thomas. When Thomas died before St. Albert, St. Albert walked across Europe to Paris to defend some of Thomas' writings. St. Albert had the humility and love of the truth necessary to want to pass on the fruits of his contemplation, not to increase his own fame and prestige. You can all probably call to mind teachers or catechists who did the same for you. And I am sure that you all have people in your life to whom you are teachers of the faith. All of the examples of saints which I have used are dramatic, but each of us can imitate them in simpler ways in our daily lives.

As mostly members of the laity, there are situations which you go into, where only you can bring the love and knowledge of God. There are people in each of your lives who are waiting to be nourished by the fruits of your study and prayer. Each of you has a

unique place in the plan of God. The holiness to which he is calling each one of you is a call to which only you can respond. There are things which God will accomplish through your prayers and example that He will accomplish through no one else's.

And yet, we are all in this together. We are surrounded by the “shelter of the communion of saints.” We are reminded by their lives how thin the wall is between heaven and earth, and how easily the light of Heaven can shine into our world. We are here together today for Mass, Prayer and Breakfast and when we leave this meal, we need to remember that we are in union through Christ and need to continue to support each other and the whole Church until we come to eternal joy. For now let us circle the wagons, strengthen one another by our prayer and example, profess together our Faith and go forth zealously to reclaim our culture for Christ.

John 21:4-10

Joshua 1:1-5

Joshua 3, 4

Joshua 23, 24

Joshua 24:14-15

*Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 95*

CCC 1475

Numbers 13:30-33

Numbers 14:8, 10

Numbers 14:36-38

Numbers 23, 24

Joshua 1:7-9

Exodus 33:9

Exodus 33:11

Joshua 6

Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 9.

G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Ch. IX “Authority and the Adventurer”

Baltimore Catechism, question 2

*Summa Theologica*, III.1,1 and 2

c.f. Alfred Lord Tennyson

c.f. St. Catherine of Siena, *Letter T368*  
Fr. Clifford Stevens, *The One Year Book of Saints*

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