

THE ROSARY

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LIGHT & LIFE

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

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TWO GREAT FEASTS OF LOVE

When we reflect on devotion to the Sacred Heart, most of us think of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1646-1690) a Visitation nun who, early in her religious life, received visions of Jesus. Our Savior taught the young Sister that His human heart was to be the visible symbol of His love for the human race for which He had taken flesh and suffered death on the cross.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart, however, actually began some centuries earlier. St. Gertrude the Great (1256-1302) wrote

You are the praise of my heart and mouth. You glow altogether red in the spring-like loveliness of the festival of your love.

She also reflected

You have so often melted my soul with your loving caresses that, if I did not know the abyss of your overflowing condescensions, I should be amazed were I told that even your Blessed Mother had been chosen to receive such extraordinary marks of tenderness and affection.

The Blessed Virgin has been a key element in the Church's liturgy from its earliest days. Her *Magnificat* has been the Church's own hymn for centuries, and the earliest artistic representations of the crucifixion show Mary at the foot of the cross, receiving John the Evangelist as the final gift of her dying Son. However, devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, like that of devotion to the Sacred Heart of her Son, was slower to develop, and we can trace its roots to about the same time.

The Church's liturgical year points out many wonderful comparisons and parallels between the lives of Jesus and Mary, and the close celebration of the feasts of love represented by their hearts is one example. But here we must point out one significant difference. Jesus' love for mankind is direct; Mary's is indirect, reflected in her love for Jesus. In his Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, Pope John Paul II wrote

No one has devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary...Mary's gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would



The Sacred and Immaculate Hearts

never leave him...Even now, amid the joyful songs of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reasons for her thanksgiving and praise remain unchanged. They inspire her maternal concern for the pilgrim Church....

St. Bernard (1091-1153) was one of the great medieval writers to praise Mary's love. In one of his homilies he addresses Mary directly, and begs her to say "yes" to the angel who has come to announce that she is to become the Mother of God

Adam asks this of you, O loving Virgin, poor Adam, exiled as he is from paradise with all his poor wretched children; Abraham begs this of you, and David...Why delay? Why tremble? Believe, speak, receive...open your heart to faith....

We can sentimentalize our hearts, and reduce them to decorations on greeting cards, or we can turn them into such objects of scientific scrutiny that they become nothing less than the center of our physical universe. Neither path allows us to acknowledge our hearts as the very best we have to offer one another – and the very best we can offer God. What better image than the heart to show the love of Christ and His Blessed Mother for us?

THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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**The Sacred Heart of Jesus and
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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Gifts of the Spirit: V Understanding

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

A MOMENT'S REVIEW

We have considered the Spirit's gifts of Piety, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord. These, we have seen, perfect our will, making us ever more eager to love God as His children, and more and more ready to set aside whatever stands in the way of our pilgrimage toward Our Father's kingdom.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Spirit has poured out four additional gifts, and these enrich our intellect or reason. Two of these gifts help us as we consider abstract truth, and two come to our aid as we make practical judgments regarding what is right and wrong. The first of these gifts we will consider is that of Understanding.

UNDERSTANDING: A DEFINITION

St. Thomas Aquinas begins his reflection on the gift of Understanding by considering the grammatical meaning of the word. He writes, "*Understanding is intimate knowledge, for intelligere...is the same as intus legere (to read inwardly)...[in which] knowledge penetrates into the very essence of a thing.*" (ST II-II, 8. 1) He continues and says that our human knowledge concerns itself, first of all, with the "outsides" of things, the surface, the exterior. Once we comprehend the surface, then we can begin to penetrate and understand the reality that lies beneath the surface.

The example St. Thomas uses to illustrate this point is words. Words, as we know, take up space on a page and resonate in our ears. We depend upon words for everything we do, but by themselves, the outsides of words count for very little, as we quickly realize when someone addresses us, or we see a sign written in a language we do not speak. For words to count, they must exist in a context that gives them meaning by allowing them to reveal what St. Thomas calls their "essence," their inner value. Otherwise, they remain nothing more than abstract and meaningless signs, pointing to nothing.

Only when words become the means for expressing our thoughts to another – and when we are able to interpret words as the expression of another person's thoughts or feelings – do we begin to grasp the true value of words. The opening chapter of the Book of Genesis shows us the immense power of words, and one of the titles by which we address Jesus is "Word of God," an acknowledgment of the greatness and majesty of words, and not only the regard in which we should hold words, but the care with which we should use them.

UNDERSTANDING: A STEP BEYOND

The human mind is a fascinating subject. Space travel, mathematics, and advances in modern medicine are tributes to humankind's efforts to understand the universe God has created for our benefit. But human intelligence is not without limits. No matter how brilliant we may be, we will, eventually, come to the end of our intellectual powers. This is the case with any of the natural sciences we may choose to study, but it is particularly the case if we strive to comprehend supernatural truth, which, as its name suggests, resides on a level above natural science. "*Consequently,*" St. Thomas writes, "*man needs a supernatural light: and this supernatural light which is bestowed on man is called the gift of Understanding.*" (*Ibid.*)

We see the gift of Understanding at work in the gospel, when St. Luke describes the two disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The disciples have been presented with the truth of Jesus' message, and they obviously wanted to believe that He is the Son of God. But the undeniable reality of Jesus' death stood in their way. The reports of His resurrection offered an invitation to trust in His numerous promises, but those reports proved somewhat confusing. Then Jesus appeared, and His calm words offered them the gift of Understanding everything that had taken place. "*...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.*" (Lk. 24:27)

UNDERSTANDING AND CERTAINTY

What began as a pilgrimage in sorrow ends as a celebration of triumph and joy, as the disciples return to share the good news of their encounter along the road and their recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The gift of Understanding, which provided such consolation to those disciples, plays a similar role in our lives, allowing us to grasp more fully the truths we profess and believe by faith. The limitations of our human reason allow us to grasp these truths only dimly, but the gift of Understanding provides a certainty we cannot hope to achieve by unaided reason alone.

We began our reflection by quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, who characterized understanding as an "*intimate*" knowledge of something. When our *Catechism* describes the bond that faith creates between God and His people the text uses a similar, intimate imagery

Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps (i.e. the gifts) of the Holy Spirit...Even in

human relations it is not contrary to our dignity to believe what other persons tell us about themselves (for example, when a man and a woman marry) to share a communion of life with one another.

THE DESIRE TO KNOW

Understanding builds upon our faith and, not surprisingly, this makes us want to know more about the God in whom we believe and place our faith. The result, our *Catechism* remarks, is a deeper faith and a more intimate union with God.

It is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love.

St. Augustine summed this up very simply, and very beautifully, in one of his sermons, when he said, “*I believe that I may understand; and I understand, the better to believe.*” Once again, our human friendships parallel our lives of faith and shed light upon them. As we come to know someone, if we grow to love that individual, we will want to learn more about her or him. The more we learn about the individual, the more we will find to love. The invisible link that keeps us in love with another person corresponds to the Spirit’s gift of Understanding, which makes us want more and more to embrace God in love, and more and more to discern who God is and what God wants for us.

UNDERSTANDING AND FAITH

Belief in God, faith, is essential to our salvation. When we considered the theological virtue of faith in an earlier issue of *Light and Life*, we reflected that faith is the habit by which we believe in God and what He has revealed. Because Christ entrusted His teaching authority to the apostles, faith is also the habit by which we embrace the teachings of the Church. Faith precedes the other theological virtues because its first act is to allow us to recognize the existence of God, who is the object every virtue seeks to possess.

Experience teaches that this is not always easy, but the Old Testament is the history of God’s coming to the aid of His people, repeatedly manifesting Himself when they had lost sight of Him, and calling them back when they had forgotten the sound of His voice. At last, so we might no longer mistake His intentions, God took on our flesh, to show us all that we had sacrificed to sin and all that we might become through grace. Thus, the Second Vatican Council declared, “*In reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22. 1)

A hundred years earlier, in 1870, a document of the First Vatican Council (*Dei Filius*) spoke of God’s eagerness to build up our faith, willing that “*...external proofs of... Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit.*” These, our *Catechism* explains, include “*...the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church’s growth and holiness, her fruitfulness and stability.*” (CCC, 156)

These visible and invisible signs are very powerful evidence of God’s hand at work throughout the ages, especially in the ministry of Jesus and the Church for which He was willing to offer His life on the cross. Even these aids, though, may not serve to move our will to an act of faith. The gift of Understanding allows us to abandon doubt, and assent “*...to the Divine truth... moved by the grace of God....*” (ST II-II, 2.9) At the very least, St. Thomas writes, if the gift of Understanding does not help individuals to believe, it should help them “*...understand that they ought to believe [the truths of the faith] and that they ought not to deviate from them.*” (ST II-II, 8, 4, ad. 2)

The gift of Understanding, then, is a very practical gift, indeed. By leading us to reflect and meditate on God, the gift contributes to a deepening of our love for God and an appreciation of the many blessings He has given us. In his first letter, St. John writes that love does not begin with our loving God, but with God’s loving us. Our ability to love God is God’s gift, and this allows us to love God in return. The more we love God, the more we come to love as God loves, with the result that we come to love ourselves unselfishly and want to live as God wants us to live. We may not be able to perceive God’s plans by unaided reason, but the gift of Understanding helps us order our lives according to God’s eternal law.

UNDERSTANDING: THE BASIS OF COMMUNITY

When we speak of life in God we cannot speak of a life in isolation. The gift of Understanding leads us to a greater and clearer grasp of God’s law, and this, ultimately, leads us to appreciate our lives with one another in the community of God’s Church. The *Catechism* reminds us,

It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of the “law of Christ.” From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustain him on the “way.” From the Church he learns the example of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary. (CCC, 2030)

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

Because Mary the model for the Church, is Christ’s mother and ours, the *Catechism* speaks eloquently of the Church’s “motherly” care for us, granting us

...the mercy of God which prevails over all our sins and is especially at work in the sacrament of reconciliation. With a mother’s foresight, she also lavishes on us day after day in her liturgy the nourishment of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord. (CCC, 2040)

Throughout every moment of our spiritual lives, Mary stands for us, and wherever we encounter her in the gospel, the evangelists wants us to find ourselves. The habit we name the virtue of Faith, and the Spirit’s accompanying gift of Understanding, enables us – like

Mary – to surrender to a great deal that we could grasp in no way other than God's revelation.

Surrender is seldom easy, but in moments of darkness and trial, we should remember we are not alone in being called to make it. Mary was there first. The poet Rilke described the moment of the Annunciation, with Mary and the angel looking at one another

*It did not scare her that he entered
But that he was so utterly present...
That his gaze and hers, looking up to him collided
As if everything outside had become empty....*

We can easily imagine the thousand questions that must have come to mind when Mary heard the angel's proclamation that she was to become the Mother of God. The grace of her Immaculate Conception allowed her to say "behold the handmaid of the Lord," even though she could have had no idea everything that her assent would entail.

If we think of any picture we have ever seen of the Annunciation, one aspect is very clear; the calm and ordered quiet of the scene. Early Christian theologians taught that the Incarnation was a greater event than the creation because in the beginning God simply brought into existence things that hadn't "been there" before, while in the Incarnation, He raised our humanity to share His divinity.

This is a world-changing event, and yet every artist has agreed to show Mary presiding over it with a calm and unperturbed grace. Her example challenges us to create a similarly still place in our hearts where God's gaze can encounter ours in loving intimacy. Where the only sound we hear we hear is God's question, "Will you?" and the gift of Understanding strengthens us to make only one reply, "Yes." ■

MY ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE

As I write these reflections, I am preparing to accompany members of the Order of Malta on their annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. We will, once again, be about three hundred individuals making the journey – fifty or sixty *malades* (persons suffering serious or terminal illness), volunteer care-givers, doctors, nurses, and a dozen or so priest-chaplains.

You will read this after my return, but I assure you I will remember you, your family members, and your loved ones – especially those who are ill – in the prayers I offer each day. In fact, I will have a special reminder of the Rosary Center while I am away. Last year I thought we might "do better" with some of the material we handed out, so I sent the Pilgrimage leaders samples of the Rosary Center's offerings. The other day one of the leaders asked if I would bring some copies of "Praying the Rosary without Distractions."

A VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY

By the time our friends read this the eldest member of the Western Province will have celebrated his 97th birthday. Fr. Paul Aquinas Duffner is one of the few Western Dominicans who has served at the northern and southern limits of the Western Province's ministries. When he reflected on these extremes, Fr. Duffner said

it would be hard to imagine a greater contrast between the snow that greeted him at Holy Family Parish, in Anchorage, Alaska, and the tropical jungles that were his home for the eight years he served as a missionary in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico.

Fr. Duffner came to Portland, Oregon, in 1975, to serve as pastor at Holy Rosary Parish. He also established the Rosary Center and resumed leadership of the Rosary Confraternity, which he had directed in San Francisco, shortly after his ordination, in 1940. In Portland he joined forces with Fr. Thomas Feucht, who had begun publishing *Light and Life: Theology for the Laity*, in 1969. The result is a newsletter sent around the globe, and whose readers make a significant contribution to the Western Province's students and retired members.

SOME INTERNET ADDRESSES

Confraternity members' generosity not only allows us to send rosaries to missionaries around the world but you also support the Western Province's students, as well as its elderly members. You might enjoy learning more about these men who are so important a part of our life. We are quite proud of the Western Dominican Province's website, and I am sure you will enjoy taking a tour, at <http://opwest.org>.

Among his Dominican brothers Fr. Duffner is probably best remembered for the sixteen years he served as the Western Province's novice master. However, this achievement is one that he, himself, shrugs off. "I think I enjoyed working with the natives in Mexico more," he says, "but there were some real similarities. The young men who come to us are looking for something, and it is a real honor to be with them at the beginning of their search, and to share what one's learned through prayer and one's own experience in the religious life."

And because our friends help us educate and train the next generation of Western Dominican preachers, I invite you to explore the website for St. Albert Priory <http://sap.opwest.org/> the Dominican community where our students live and pray. Our students preach at Vespers (evening prayer) on Saturday and Sunday, and often their homilies are recorded. You can find them at <http://students.opwest.org/blog/> and I believe you will be quite impressed to encounter the young men who will carry the Rosary's Gospel Good News into the 21st Century. These young Dominican preachers are a valuable return on your investment of prayer and financial support!

NEW DVD FROM THE ROSARY CENTER

Fr. Brian Mullady offers two new lectures, on a professionally produced DVD, "The Natures and Person of Christ, Son of God and Savior of the World." In this DVD Fr. Mullady explains the basic Catholic doctrine of the natures and person of Jesus Christ. Topics include the place where the union between God and man takes place and the necessary results of that union for Jesus' human knowledge, will and moral integrity.

Cost of the DVD is \$15.00, and can be found on the order form.