

Los Pequeños Pepper

Publication of Los Pequeños de Cristo

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

*New Encyclical on the Eucharist
laments abuses; affirms Sacramental
transcendence*

Page 4

Catholic Meditation or Occult Meditation?

*Centering Prayer has several highly
occult qualities to it.*

Page 6

Eucharistic Healing

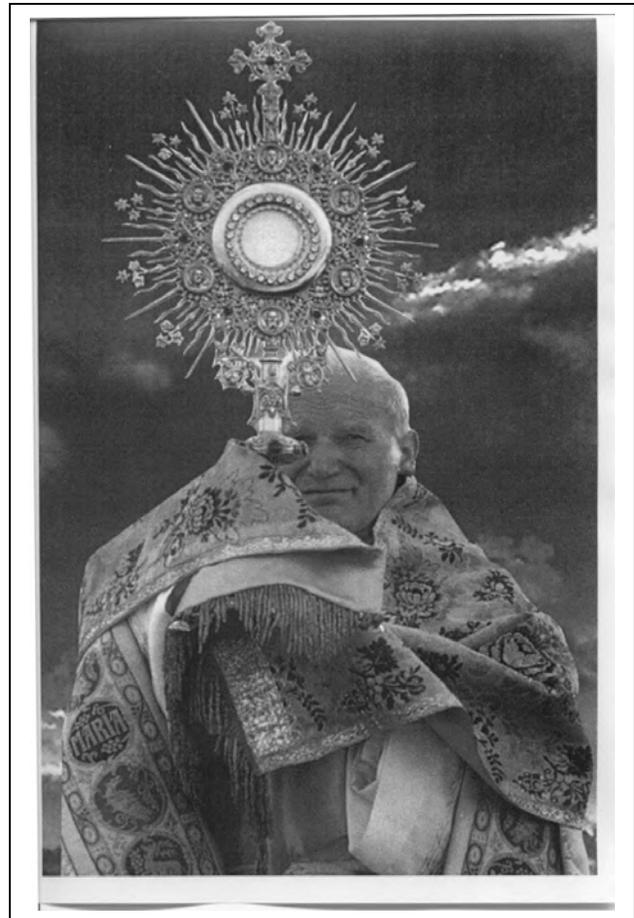
A True Story

Page 8

Paganism, Pantheism, and the True Vine

*There's a right way and a wrong way to
hug a tree, you know.*

Page 13





Cover: Pope John Paul II

Los Pequeños Pepper

Newsletter of Los Pequeños de Cristo

June 2003

Volume 5, Number 6

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

Pope John Paul II's 14th encyclical

Page 4

Catholic Meditation or Occult Meditation?

St. Theresa would not have approved.

Page 6

Eucharistic Healing

Miracles come in many forms.

Page 8

Better than "Nice"

The saints preferred hard truth to soft pleasantries.

Page 12

Paganism, Pantheism, and the True Vine

In God's eyes, human beings aren't parasites on Gaia.

Page 13

Disband or Get Out!

Pius Parents' kids are threatened with expulsion.

Page 15

June Calendar

Page 15

Newsletter of Los Pequeños de Cristo
Stephanie Block-editor, Carol Suhr-copy editor
Correspondence to *The Pequeños Pepper* may be addressed to:
325 Ellen St. NW;
Los Lunas, NM 87031
or phone: 505 866 0977 or www.lospequeños.org
The Pequeños Pepper is published monthly.

We are an Archdiocesan-wide Catholic lay organization committed to a charitable defense of the Catholic Faith by means of education, communication, and prayer. We are devoted to the Roman Catholic Magisterium, the Holy Father, and to the bishops and clergy in union with him. Our members believe what the Church believes and we promote what the Church teaches. To this end, we believe that no individual, whether cleric or lay person, has the right to independently alter the substance of the gospel message or moral truths which have been inerrantly and infallibly held by the Catholic Church since Her founding.



“In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they possess, [lay people] have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard to the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors and consideration for the common good and dignity of persons.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church 907; Code of canon Law Can. 212 §3]

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

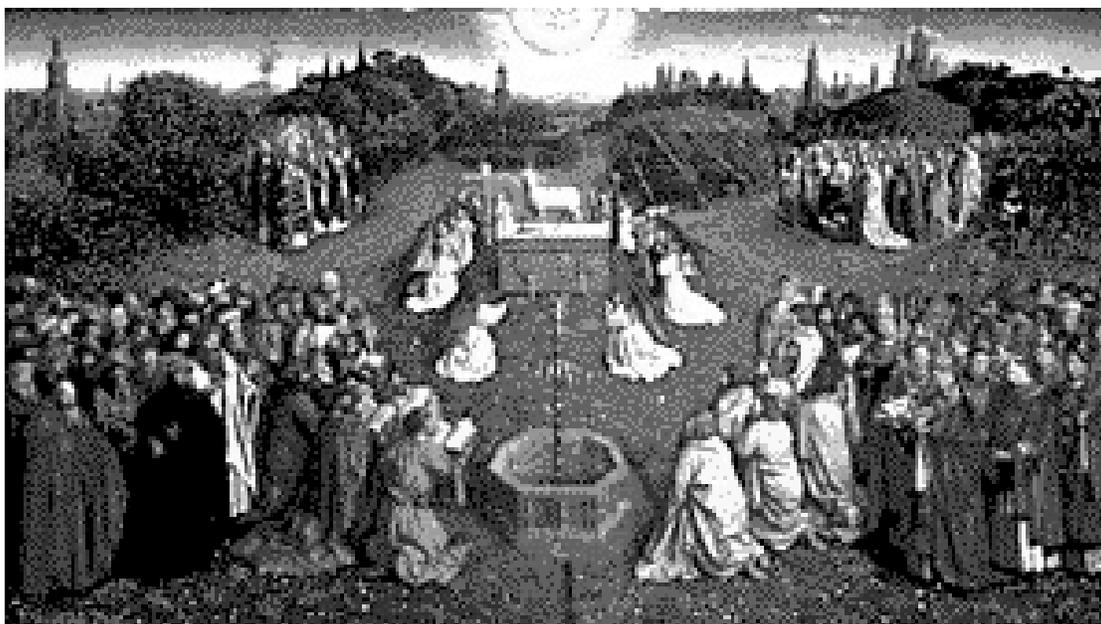
Encyclical on the Eucharist and Its Relationship to the Church

By Stephanie Block

It's a rare diocese that has not been overcast by “dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice” concerning the Eucharist, to use imagery taken from the Introduction to John Paul II's latest encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.

The abandonment of Eucharistic adoration, the misunderstanding of the sacrament as a mere “fraternal banquet,” obfuscation of the ministerial priesthood, and illegitimate ecumenical practices are among the “unacceptable doctrines and practices” examined by the Pope. [EE 10] “It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation there have been a number of *abuses* that have been a source of suffering for many....Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated.” [EE 52, emphasis in original]

The encyclical goes into some detail concerning ecumenism and “ecclesial communion.” “The celebration of the Eucharist...cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists...” [EE 35] In fact, the cause of ecumenism is sabotaged, rather than advanced, the document explains, in Eucharistic concelebration where communion does not, in fact, exist:



Adoration of the Lamb by Van Eyck, Ghent Altarpiece

Precisely because the Church's unity, which the Eucharist brings about through the Lord's sacrifice and by communion in his body and blood, absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully re-established. Any such concelebration would not be a valid means, and might well prove instead to be *an obstacle, to the attainment of full communion*, by weakening the sense of how far we remain from this goal and by introducing or exacerbating ambiguities with regard to one or another truth of the faith. The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth. [EE 44, emphasis in original]

While there are individual situations in which inter-communion is possible with Eastern Christians who share the same Eucharistic understanding as Catholics and have a valid sacrament of Orders, Christians from other confessions simply aren't in communion with one another.

...the denial of one or more truths of the faith regarding these sacraments and, among these, the truth regarding the need of the ministerial priesthood for their validity, renders the person asking improperly disposed to legitimately receiving them. And the opposite is also true: Catholics may not receive communion in those communities which lack a valid sacrament of Orders. [EE 46]

These words have practical application to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe that in 1997 signed A Call to Ecumenical Progress with the Episcopalian Diocese of the Rio Grande. While the document itself vaguely alluded to parish-level or diocesan initiatives, newspaper accounts claimed that inter-communion between members of both churches had been achieved: "The Episcopalian Church encourages everyone who attends a service to partake of Holy Communion. The Catholic Church will now allow nonmembers - on certain occasions - to receive the Holy Eucharist, such as during a wedding ceremony, [Catholic Archbishop Michael] Sheehan said." [Paul Logan, "Two Bishops Endorse Unity of Christians: Catholics, Episcopalians to Worship," *Albuquerque Journal*, November 29, 1997.]

Unlike other sub-groups within the denomination, Bishop Terence Kelshaw's brand of Episcopalian is particularly at odds with Catholicism. At the time of A Call to Ecumenical Progress, Bishop Kelshaw had ordained at least two women priests. Therefore, if for no other reason, his flawed understanding of the nature of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in this instance renders *all* his ordinations invalid.

Without a valid priesthood, there can be no valid consecration of the Eucharist either. Consequently, Bishop Kelshaw is one of a sizable number of Episcopal bishops and priests who are considered by fellow Episcopalians – those retaining a more Catholic understanding of the sacraments – as outside of *their* communion. Ironically, however, it would appear that his diocese is "in communion" with Roman Catholics.

Hopefully, it is this sort of confusion *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* will clarify.

Concerning other liturgical norms, the Holy Father writes that he has "asked the competent offices of the Roman Curia to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature, on this very important subject. No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality." [EE 52]

The problem is desperately serious, for "the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*." [EE 1, emphasis in original] ❀

***The
celebration of
the
Eucharist...
cannot be the
starting-point
for
communion; it
presupposes
that
communion
already
exists...***

-- Pope John Paul II,
Ecclesia de Eucharistia
[35]

Catholic Meditation or Occult Meditation?

A Critique of M. Basil Pennington's article, "Centering Prayer"

By Clare McGrath-Merkle

Fr. Basil Pennington's article "*Centering Prayer*," published in *The Contemplative Prayer Online Magazine* (www.lectiodivina.org), illustrates the typical errors that have entered the Catholic contemplative tradition through various techniques derived, however innocently, from a mixture of Buddhist meditative practice (which ensures dissociation of the spirit from the body in order to achieve enlightenment) and kundalini yogic practice (which unleashes the occult magic of Kali, the destroyer goddess). This technique, known as Centering Prayer, has been in vogue since the 1970's. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian priest, monk, and abbot in Colorado, is the founder of the Centering Prayer Movement. Fr. Pennington, another teacher of this technique, is called a "master of centering prayer" on the web site.

Centering Prayer (CP) devotees claim it to be a revival of ancient meditative practice, referring to it as a new version of the practice of ejaculatory mental prayer wherein contemplatives practiced the presence of God by repeating simple holy words or sentences such as "Jesus, I love you."

Far from simple or sacred, CP is a codified technique which constructs a psychological and spiritual state of awareness designed to unleash unconscious forces and which typically encourages a narcissistic turning-inward and pre-occupation with self awareness, consciousness-raising and the achieving of preternatural experiences.

Following are Father Pennington's statements from "Centering Prayer."

Parentetical comments are mine or attributed:

- "Centering Prayer is a simple method of prayer that sets up the ideal conditions to rest in quite awareness of God's presence. This way of prayer is alluded to in many passages in the Old and New Testaments and probably dates from then." (*Such vague references citing legitimacy of the technique from ancient origins is typical – but unsupported*).
- "The Greek Fathers referred to it as monologion, "one-word" prayer. The desert father, Abba Isaac taught a similar form of prayer to John Cassian who later wrote of it in France, transmitting it to Benedict of Nursia. Unfortunately, by the time of the 16th century, the prayer form largely went out of use in favor of more discursive modes of prayer." (*Cassian is a disturbing source for spiritual guidance. The Catholic Encyclopedia says that he is "regarded as the originator of what, since the Middle Ages, has been known as Semipelagianism... Preoccupied as he was with moral questions he exaggerated the rôle of free will by claiming that the initial steps to salvation were in the power of each individual, unaided by grace... Semipelagianism was finally condemned by the Council of Orange in 529."*)

In the following quote, taken from Pennington's article "Love is God's Being" (03/09/00), at the same web address above, typical buzz words reveal the New Age origins of Centering Prayer.

- "When we go to the **center of our being** and pass through that center into the **very center of God** we get in immediate touch with this divine creating **energy**." (*Typical of New Age prayer techniques, and as in pantheism, God is defined as a universal energy.*)

"Letting go," in this particular technique, does not simply involve a discipline of the will, which is a typical counsel in meditative practice, but a profound distortion of the use of the will to achieve a practiced dissociation from ourselves and a mentalization of prayer that can foster habitual disassociation, fantasies and ego flight.

-- Fr. Basil Pennington,
"Centering Prayer,"

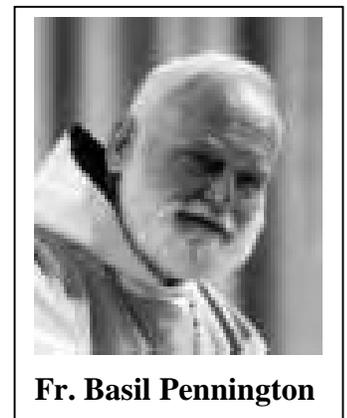
- “This is not a new idea. It is the common teaching of the Christian Fathers of the Greek tradition. When we dare with the full assent of love to **unleash these energies** within us not surprisingly the initial experience is of a flood of **chaotic** thoughts, memories, emotions and feelings.” (*This kind of energy release is sought after in kundalini yoga, where the goddess Kali is said to open up and release all the negative karma in a person’s life. The goal is to speed up the spiritual development of the seeker. Kali is known as the destroyer goddess and is associated with chaos.*)
- “This is why wise spiritual fathers and mothers counsel a gentle entering into this experience. Not too much too fast. But it is this release that allows all of this chaos within us with all its imprisoning stress to be brought into harmony so that not only there might be peace and harmony within but that the **divine energy may have the freedom to forward the evolution of consciousness** in us and through us, **as a part of the whole, in the whole of the creation.**” [Emphasis added] (*Typical of New Age meditative practice, the soul becomes the “center”, energy replaces grace, God actually becomes a pantheistic energy, and the unleashing of this “energy” leads to chaos and then, mysteriously, an evolution of consciousness. Legitimacy of this occult technique is sought in pop-psychology, comparing it to seeking insight through bio-feedback or self-hypnosis.*)

The following excerpt from the web site details the technique-driven method of withdrawal and dissociation derived from Buddhist meditative practice, which posits ultimate withdrawal from all attachments and this “world of illusion” as the means of achieving oneness with and absorption into the primal void, as one’s evolution of consciousness leads to the awakening of the “Self” as God:

- “As you sit comfortably with eyes closed: 1. Let yourself settle down. Let go of all the thoughts, tensions, and sensations you may feel and begin to rest in love of God who dwells within.” (*In Catholic contemplative practice, we bring all of ourselves to God and enter into conversation or communion, bringing everything with us to lay at His feet. All manner of worries, concerns and thoughts are stepping stones to sanctity as we enter into conversation about them with Him. “Letting go,” in this particular technique, does not simply involve a discipline of the will, which is a typical counsel in meditative practice, but a profound distortion of the use of the will to achieve a practiced dissociation from ourselves and a mentalization of prayer that can foster habitual disassociation, fantasies and ego flight.*)
- “Effortlessly, take up a word, the symbol of your intention to surrender to God’s presence, and let the word be gently present.” (*Using any word to “conjure up” the divine opens one to self-hypnosis and the possibility of perseverating on the object of meditation, not on the contemplation of Our Lord or the meditation of the virtues or events of His life. An extreme example of the occult power of visualization and mentalization occurred several years ago. At one New Age workshop given by Robert Munroe where participants were trained to go out of their bodies while they slept, eager students were encouraged to first visualize placing all their distractions and cares into a trunk and then to lock the trunk. This way they would be freed from earthly bonds. One woman attending the workshop, then located in a closed sleeping room nearby, reported repeated nightmarish experiences. She found herself being locked in a trunk and unable to get out during her attempts to go “out-of-body.”*)

CONCLUSION

St. Theresa of Avila lived during a period of intense spiritualism wherein seekers tended to pursue meditative experiences for their own sake and to exaggerate mystical experiences. Well aware of the tendency to go off course, she insisted that meditation *always* be directed to and with Christ. She also warned against attempting to still the mind and achieve deeper prayer states by the misuse of the will. For her, God acts in the soul to draw it into deeper union with Himself – it is not a power or practice we may initiate. This is good advice today, too. ❁



Fr. Basil Pennington

A Eucharistic Healing

The Blessed Sacrament has both spiritual and physical gifts to offer the receptive soul

By Michael Forrest

The following is my personal account of a day I will remember for the rest of my life. It occurred in late spring of 1996.

During my conversion from Baptist Protestantism to Catholicism, I underwent many challenges and welcomed most of them. However, one difficulty I faced was particularly troublesome. In the process of my initial catechesis, I had not been sufficiently instructed in the Sacraments and the nature of such profound mysteries. As a result, I suffered somewhat unnecessarily in trying to fully comprehend what was simply not fully comprehensible for any mere human.

As a Baptist, I had been taught that the Lord's Supper was only symbolic. I was referred to Christ's words: "Do this in *remembrance* of me" (Luke 22:19). I was assured that this Scriptural passage was proof that the purpose of the Lord's Supper was only to remember what Christ had done for us on Calvary. This was my belief for almost 30 years. And as an analytical/rational sort, it certainly made sense. Why would anyone believe differently? I thought it was absolutely bizarre and idolatrous the first time I heard that Catholics believed that the Eucharist is Christ's, body, blood, soul and divinity. I believe we should all frankly admit that this is *very* unusual and hard to accept, at the very least.

A quick reference back to John 6 will prove that the truth of the Eucharist has been hard to accept from the very beginning. Christ said, "Amen, Amen I tell you. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." (John 6:53-56) And afterwards,

all of the people applauded and said, "Yes, of course! Brilliant! We believe, we believe!"

Right?

Not exactly.

In fact what happened is this: "Then many of his disciples who were listening said, 'This saying is hard; who can accept it?'" To which Jesus replied. "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" In essence, I believe he was trying to get them to accept his difficult teaching on the Eucharist by telling them that they would see *other* astounding, miraculous things before their eyes that they could neither explain nor deny (and, in fact, Jesus had already performed miracles previously). As such, he was asking them to suspend their intellectual

disbelief in humble recognition that human beings are not always able to explain everything that God does or asks of us.

Yet, what does Scripture tell us these disciples did? Recall, these were not people who hated Jesus. They were disciples who believed and followed him until this point. "As a result of this, many of his disciples drew back and returned to their former way of life." (John 6:66)

Now, we may want to reassure ourselves thinking, "At least the twelve Apostles understood what Jesus said and were perfectly comfortable with it, right? Or, perhaps Jesus took them aside and said, 'Listen, these people didn't understand that I was speaking in parables! So relax, okay?' Right?" And, actually, this latter point is exactly what Scripture tells us we would expect him to do if he were speaking in parables and the twelve did not understand. St. Mark writes, "With many parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it...but to his own disciples he explained everything in private" (Mark 4:33-34). So, was Jesus speaking a parable in John 6?

Well, fortunately, St. John graciously recorded that private conversation Jesus had with



the Twelve after speaking about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And what did he say? Do we find a comfortable answer or an explanation of a parable? Not nearly! He simply said, "Do you also want to leave?" To which St. Peter replied, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Not exactly a resounding affirmation. In essence, Peter seems to be saying, "Well, I can't tell you that this makes complete sense to me, but we will believe it because we've come to trust you. We've thrown our lot in with you and we have no better place to go."

I could go further, but my intention is only to illustrate that belief in the Eucharist is really not *natural*. It is supernatural. In fact, in John 6, Christ also has this to say, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him." (John 6:44). Even faith is a gift from God (Eph 2:8), and that necessarily includes faith in the Eucharist. The Church has given us noble, useful and error-free explanations of the dynamics between free will and God's Providence, and the reality of the Eucharist.

However, the fact is that no human explanation, even though free from error, can approach the fullness of such realities, because they are divine, infinite mysteries.

Rational explanation alone could never hope to hold a candle to the reality of the Eucharist or Divine Providence any more than it could ever approach the reality of the love between a husband and wife or a parent's love for his or her child. It is a mystery, and we have to disabuse ourselves of the notion that we can understand everything as though it were a math problem. It should also humble us, making us grateful that we have been given the gift of faith.

So, with that as a backdrop, let me return to the story... Although I had officially come into the Church through Confirmation, I was still unsettled regarding the Eucharist (and also Mary, I might add, but that is another story). Yet, I rather "willed" myself to believe because I had done enough self-study to know that the Catholic Church was the only Church that could reasonably say it was established by Christ.

In a nutshell, first, after doing some self study on the earliest years of the Church, I realized that

the Church was very Catholic from the start in her beliefs and practices. The early Church clearly believed that the Eucharist was no mere symbol, but rather, the Real Presence of Christ in her midst. I could not reasonably accept that either the Apostles were incompetent teachers or that the Holy Spirit had so miserably failed in His job within the first generation or two after Jesus (Matt 16:18, John 14:16). Additionally, all of the Protestant Churches were created by self-appointed human leaders between the mid-1500's to the present day. Essentially the Catholic Church *was* Christendom until then. Unless I was prepared to believe that *no one* really got it right until after the Reformation, I knew that Catholicism was the only reasonable option. Catholics can trace every Pope, bishop and priest back through the laying on of hands (Holy Orders) to the Apostles and Christ.

Yet, I admit that I was still torn. Thirty years of reinforced belief do not easily give way. In my "gut," I still struggled. I was told this idea was dangerous in my youth. My heart and my

head were at war with one another. So I prayed for weeks that God would resolve and heal my interior division. My wife, a "cradle Catholic" knew and prayed for me as well.

One Sunday we were preparing for Mass. As my wife was in the rear seat, buckling our youngest child in our Dodge Caravan, I was

buckling our oldest son in the front seat. I was holding on to the center beam of the Caravan in order to balance myself as I leaned over to buckle him in. Unfortunately, my wife didn't see my hand. I suspect you're already cringing, and guessed it...yes, she slammed the heavy sliding door shut across my fingers. And she slammed the door hard enough to lock it in place! (You'd never guess how strong she is by simply looking at her feminine physique!)

I immediately dropped to my knees and began yelling. I can recall almost "hearing myself," thinking "who is yelling like that?" until I realized it was me!

My wife was so distraught that she was unable to open the door from the inside, and so I was forced to pull myself up and open the door off my own hand. The very tip of my pinky had been caught, my "ring finger" was caught about

It is a mystery, and we have to disabuse ourselves of the notion that we can understand everything as though it were a math problem. It should also humble us, making us grateful that we have been given the gift of faith.

halfway to two thirds of the way up and the top quarter of my middle finger had been injured as well. However, my ring finger seemed to have suffered the greatest brunt of the blow.

Blood had been ejected through the skin, without causing any apparent laceration on the “front,” and was dripping down my palm (from both ring and middle finger). All three fingers had been “flattened” from where they had been caught and up to the tips, but the ring finger and middle finger were about twice their normal width and half their normal thickness. Additionally, there was a deep crease on the back of the fingers from edge of the door, and my ring finger, in particular, had been noticeably bent, apparently into the shape of the door jamb.

Being a rational/scientific-minded person, I quickly assessed the damage (amid moans of pain) and asked my wife to call my brother and sister-in-law in order to drop our children off before heading to the emergency room. I am convinced that at least my ring finger was broken and possibly the middle finger as well.

After I had wrapped a paper towel and a red and white-checked face towel around my hand to stop the bleeding, a sudden “peace” and clarity came over me. While I was in great pain, I could still think clearly somehow. I soon felt what I could only describe as a “compulsion” to pray. This may not seem unusual to many of you who pray very easily. But I assure you that at this point in my life, prayer was far from a typical response for me in such an emergency. However, I felt that I needed to ask my wife to come pray with me as well.

When I asked her to pray with me, she gave me a mild look of disbelief and said, “What?” I repeated the request and gently took hold of her arm and knelt to pray in our family room.

I prayed first that God would take away my wife’s agony over causing my injury. As much pain as I was in, I could see that she was suffering tremendously. Then I prayed that God would heal my hand, and to make sure that I could continue to play the piano (I am a professional pianist/keyboardist).

Almost as soon as I stood up, I blurted out, “We’re going to Mass anyway.” I can still

remember thinking to myself, “We are? Okay, fine.” At this point, I remember the look of dismay on my wife’s face. Her expression conveyed that she thought I’d thrown a blood clot from my finger straight to my brain. She said, “Michael, what is *wrong* with you? We have to get you to the hospital. Your fingers are broken!”

I told her that I didn’t really understand either, but that I was convinced that we needed to go to Mass, regardless. After a milder protest, we returned to the car and dropped off the kids at my brother and sister-in-law’s house. (I might add that they held their tongues very well when we told them we were running to Mass...not to the hospital. We didn’t take time to explain, partly because I didn’t understand myself. I’m not sure I would have been as understanding in their place. Sure, dump the kids on us just so you can go to Mass!)

We were the very last people to arrive. We sat at the back of the Church. Keeping mild pressure on the wounds to stop the bleeding, I noticed that the pastor was speaking very forcefully and eloquently on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. (I later asked him for a written copy of the homily). In fact, I recall thinking that he sounded rather “Baptist” in his

passion that day, which was very unusual for him. As I sat there in pain, my wife leaned over and said, “Isn’t this what you’ve been praying about, Michael?”

All of a sudden, I understood why I needed to be at this Mass. Somehow, I understood that God intended me to hear this timely, impassioned homily in order to dispel any lingering doubts and discomfort I suffered. I remember being thankful, telling God that I believed completely now. I also asked forgiveness for my stubborn doubt.

When the time came, Paula and I stood in line for Communion. I was the last person in line, with hand still wrapped up and in pain. As we moved forward, I experienced something I have never experienced before nor since. I “heard”, almost as if the word was implanted in my consciousness, “Kneel.” I remember thinking, “Did I just think that?” At which point, the word repeated more forcefully, “Kneel.” I got goosebumps.



There were no choirs of angels, nor beatific visions, yet, I cannot explain away the experience as self-induced. In fact, I recall that I didn't understand initially. I thought, "Am I supposed to kneel right here?" Finally, I understood somehow that I was to kneel when receiving Communion.

At this point, I leaned forward to my wife and whispered, "I think I'm supposed to kneel." Unfortunately, she thought I had said, "I think I'm supposed to yell." And she responded, "Oh, no, don't yell!" Even in my discomfort, I couldn't help but laugh a bit and said, "No, I said, 'kneel'."

To this, she sighed with relief and said something to the effect of, "Well, hardly anyone kneels, Michael, but you can if you want to." I remember continuing down the aisle nervously.

At this point in time, I really didn't know the people at the parish very well. In all seriousness, Catholics aren't exactly renowned for openness and hospitality when it comes to their faith. So I remember thinking, "I hope no one thinks I'm trying to be 'Mr. Pious and Holy' or something."

When I finally arrived in front of the pastor, he looked down with concern and curiosity at my red and white towel-wrapped hand, as if to say, "What happened to you?" And I sheepishly asked, "Is it okay if I kneel, Father?" He replied, "Sure."

I knelt and received Communion. When I stood, I noticed a vague sensation of warmth, almost as if I had consumed wine. Yet, I had only received the host. On my way back to the pew, I kept my head bowed and eyes down. I assure you it was not out of piety, but rather out of mild embarrassment, not wanting to meet eyes with anyone who might be looking at me in a negative way.

When I arrived at our pew, I slid over and asked my wife for some clean tissues for my wounds. As I was taking the cloth towel and old paper-towel off my hand, I leaned toward her, whispering how strange it was (being told to "kneel") and how it seemed almost unreal.

As I finished speaking, I noticed Paula's jaw drop and eyes grow wide. She quietly

exclaimed, "Oh my God, look at your hand!" I looked down, and to my amazement, my fingers were perfectly back into shape. When I looked over at her again, she said, "Look at the blood. It's disappearing!" Again, I looked down, and the blood that had collected under the surface of my skin appeared to be receding back into my fingers before our eyes, to the point where it was barely visible anymore.

I thought, "this is a miracle!" Then I thought, "If my fingers are really healed, I should be able to bend them without pain." I hesitated very briefly and then bent them. **There was no pain.** I felt only a bit of a strange sensation, as if something had happened, but nothing that could be described as "pain". Looking back, I can't pinpoint exactly when the pain ceased. I didn't really notice that my

fingers weren't hurting anymore until I took the cloths off.

After most everyone had left the Church, the pastor came down toward the rear of the Church and Paula and I walked over to him. As I was explaining what had happened, he commented "I wondered what was going on." When I finished, he said, "You know, before Mass, I had a strong feeling that this homily was very important, and I wasn't exactly sure why. Now I know!" I thought I noticed his eyes watering a bit.

Shortly after, two older women from the parish came toward the three of us, and one

gave me a hug. They said, "That was beautiful dear." Yet, I was relatively sure they hadn't heard what I had said to the pastor, so I asked, "What was beautiful?" One responded, "When you knelt, that touched our hearts."

I told them that I wasn't doing it for show or anything like that, to which the other replied, "Oh, no, dear, we could tell you were quite nervous! But we thought it was a wonderful gesture."

As the two ladies walked away, I noticed the pastor standing in a certain way, looking at me as if something was on his mind. I said, "What?" To which he said, "Don't you see what's going on here?" I said, "I know my hand was healed, Father."

The pastor then asked me if I knew what the day was. I admitted that I didn't other than that



it was Sunday. He said, "This is the feast of Corpus Christi, Michael. It's all about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist!" Then he continued, "What are the chances that you would have this happen right before Mass, that you would be the last one in line so that everyone would see you with that towel around your hand kneeling to receive? And what are the chances that this would all happen on Corpus Christi? This isn't just for you, this is for the Church, Michael."

As a final note, I would like to offer a few comments. I do not assert that everyone *must* kneel to receive Communion. The Church has allowed other choices at this time, and therefore I have no authority to say otherwise. However, I am convinced that God, whether through the intervention of my guardian angel, or whomever, intends for *me* to kneel when receiving. Furthermore, the Church has always taught that physical postures are very important, both in what they convey and in that to which they

predispose the individual. Kneeling (traditionally, either on both knees or on one's right knee) conveys worship and adoration and predisposes one's mind and soul to a spirit of humble thanksgiving, while standing conveys honor and respect. One may honor and respect many things, yet there is only One to Whom worship and adoration are due. The Scriptures tell us, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bend before me" (Rom. 14:11, Is 45:23).

Especially in these days, when belief in Christ's true presence, body, blood, soul and divinity is doubted by so many Catholics, I believe we must all thoughtfully and prayerfully consider our approach to the Eucharist, always reflecting on His infinite generosity to us. It is my fervent desire that we approach all of the Sacraments with a spirit of awe and thanksgiving. Our God is an awesome God, and we are blessed to be called "His children." ❀

Michael Forrest can be reached at
mforrest@ifriendly.com.

Better Than "Nice"

...Not long ago I offered Mass for a Catholic group in New Jersey and preached a homily based on Jesus' saying that he had not come to spread peace but division (see Luke 12:49-53). I mentioned several of the hard truths of the faith such as contraception, abortion, homosexuality, stem cell research, and so forth. I said that these can be a cause of division in families and communities. Also, in the Eighth Beatitude, Jesus tells us that those are blessed who suffer persecution for justice sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. After the Mass I had a long conversation with a woman who was pleased with my remarks and said that she never hears such things in her parish church or in other churches she attends while traveling.

...A curiously related phenomenon is that many Catholics who have left the Catholic Church have gone over to the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals who do preach the hard truths about sin, damnation, and hellfire. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church in this country at the present time, given the publicity in 2002 to scandals among priests and bishops and given the large number of Catholics who contracept and do not attend church regularly, is in the grips of a monumental crisis.

I do not claim to have the recipe for the solution of the problem. But it does seem to me that the Church would be much better off and would be taking steps to turn the situation around if bishops and priests began to oppose and denounce our secular culture rather than trying to accommodate Catholicism to it. For the philosophy and dominant attitudes that govern our secular culture are diametrically opposed to what the Catholic Church teaches. The problem is that not enough Catholics, including some bishops and priests, believe it and practice it.

Perhaps the only real solution to our present problems will be the arrival of some outstanding saints like the great saints of the 16th century. We need saints like Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Philip Neri, Robert Bellarmine, Peter Canisius, and so forth. We should pray that God will raise up more saints like these in our time. We have had two--Padre Pio and Mother Teresa. There is one thing common to all these saints -- they did not live and they did not preach "nice Catholicism." As true followers of Christ they embraced His cross and sought to please Him rather than to win the passing favor of this world.

Paganism, Pantheism, and the True Vine

Are Trees Sacred?

By Marie P. Loehr

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, to the east,...the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

-- Genesis 2:8-10

We hear much these days about the environment, “green” policies, the damage man does to Mother Earth, and the destruction of trees and other natural resources for our selfish use. It is tempting to swallow eco-propaganda without examining it in itself, and without analyzing it in relation to Church teaching. To accept environmentalism uncritically is to embrace false gods unwittingly.

As Catholics loyal to the Magisterium, what should our attitude to environmental issues be? How can we distinguish between a wrong, pagan or pantheistic view of the environment, and a proper Catholic or sacramental view of nature?

Environmentalism resurrects the old pagan vegetation myths in new forms. Most ancient pagan religions are rooted in our need for grain from the field and fruit from the vine to survive. Thus pagan religious rituals were a form of sympathetic magic--fertility rites--to constrain the gods to give good harvests. In modern eco-environmentalism there is more than a hint of pagan worship. The Earth, as Gaia, is seen as goddess by many. Trees have received the status of gods. Nature is exalted over humanity. Some eco-fanatics deliberately booby trap trees to murder loggers. Many eco-fanatics promote all forms of population control, including abortion and euthanasia, as a way of reducing what they see as human parasitism on their idol: Nature, Mother Earth, the virgin forest. This is idolatry, a modern form of paganism. It is always wrong.

Secular environmentalism also revives the heresy of pantheism. Pantheism does not merely look to external gods of fertility and harvest. Pantheism makes no distinction between God the Creator and His Creation. In pantheism, God is Creation; Creation is God. I am god. You are god. The aspen in the yard is god. The pantheist worships everything as god.

We might sum up the slight difference between ancient paganism and pantheism this way. In Greece a grove of trees might be sacred to the goddess Artemis. In Germany a grove of oaks was sacred in itself. The worship of Creation as god, or this confusion of God with His Creation, is-- explicitly or implicitly--at the roots of much secular environmentalism. It is impossible to be Catholic and practice this form of environmentalism, or promote it.

The Church teaches that all Creation is subordinate to God, and separate from God, who created it *ex nihilo*. In the Catholic Tradition, Creation is made for man, as man is made for God. All Creation is summed up in man, given as a gift to man for his service and use, by God.

Beyond this basic statement Creation’s nature as servant and gift, we can see that God Himself must love trees and green growing things. He plants man in a garden. This garden is filled with all manner of good plants for man’s nourishment and pleasure. Scripture is filled with images of trees and their fruit, plants and perfume. Christ Himself uses the images of seed sown, mustard seed grown, lilies of the field, grass and wheat, fig tree and its fruit,



Many eco-fanatics promote all forms of population control, including abortion and euthanasia, as a way of reducing what they see as human parasitism on their idol: Nature, Mother Earth, the virgin forest. This is idolatry, a modern form of paganism.

the harvest and its sorting. He even calls Himself the “true vine” in His Discourse at the Last Supper in the Gospel of John, and says we are His branches.

A tree of knowledge and its fruit are involved in man’s fall into sin. The tree of the cross and its Eucharistic fruit are involved in man’s redemption into grace. The Eucharist itself begins in bread made with wheat from the field and wine made with grapes from the vine. The sacrificial meal that is Mass unites us with the second Person of the Trinity, the only begotten Son of the Father. Yet the matter of the Eucharist, simple unleavened bread and wine used by the priest *in persona Christi* (i.e., in the person of Christ), begins as plant: wheat and its grains--the seed which will fall into the ground and die to produce new wheat, vine and grape--the fruit which contains the seed of new vines. Christ uses these to effect our salvation.

By this we see that God sets a high value on His Creation, including its plants, tree and vine, flower and fruit. St. Bonaventure, Doctor of the Church, along with such Fathers of the Church as St. Augustine, saw Creation as the Book of Nature in which God is revealed indirectly through the reflections of His goodness and beauty in all that He made. This Book of Nature complements the Book of the Word, Scripture itself, and its direct revelation of God. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “because creation comes forth from God’s goodness, it shares in that goodness...” [#299, CCC] God gives it to man, and wills that man exercise dominion over it and participate in the work of Creation, by ordering it, by using it wisely, by discovering God through its power and beauty, by being wise stewards of Creation and its bounty.

Dominion means “lordship.” Sin leads us to act as if this means absolute power and control to do with Creation as we please. But we know from Christ’s example that “lordship” and its authority actually mean humble service to one another. Therefore we know this means we owe wise and prudent stewardship to all that God has entrusted to us. We may use trees and all growing things for our needs, but we must do so with care and reverence, remembering that the Book of Nature reveals the Truth and Goodness and Beauty who is God. Therefore we husband these resources, renew them, and order them in truth, goodness, and beauty.

So, are trees holy? Not in the pagan or pantheistic sense...Not in the eco-fanatic sense that gives them primacy over human need and use and presence. Not in the sense that they are part of a living organism or goddess named Gaia or Mother Earth.

But--trees and plants by their created nature and goodness and beauty give us hints of God’s being. They not only lead us to their Creator in this sense, but God uses them to give us images of His being as true vine and tree of life, to redeem us on the cross, to feed us body and soul in the transubstantiated bread and wine of the Eucharist, to anoint us with oil in Confirmation, Orders and Unction or Healing. Therefore we are to use and reverence trees and all plants as gifts from God, as intimations of God’s nature and work. They provide the valid and necessary matter in four of His sacraments: the wheat and grapes for Eucharist, and the olive oils of Chrismation and Holy Orders and Last Rites. In addition, they provide the incense we use for His adoration, and the altar flowers that remind us of our own, fragil and transitory nature.

We are obliged to conserve them, nurture them, order their growth, and cultivate them. We are obliged to offer them to God in thanksgiving for His providential gift of them to us--in our use of them in the public liturgy and the domestic Church of family. BUT-- we may not worship trees and plants, making them idols, nor give them primacy over human need to the detriment of human welfare and the denial of God’s commandments. ❀

Disband or Get Out!

Parents Group's Kids Threatened with Expulsion

By Stephanie Block

One vehicle for St. Pius X High School parent participation is the Principal's Advisory Council. For the first time, this spring's applications for parents wishing to serve on the council contained questions about the applicant's involvement in various civic, school or church associations. Among the associations listed were the Knights of Columbus, St. Pius Fine Arts or Athletic Boosters, and the **St. Pius Parents for a Roman Catholic Education**. In addition, all applicants were required to interview with Dr. McLeod, the school principal. After voting, ballots were counted behind closed doors. No members of the parents group made it to the council.

In May, members of **Parents for a Roman Catholic Education** were told that they had to quit bringing issues forward or they would be told to withdraw their sons and daughters from the school. With a hefty, *non-refundable* school tuition paid at the beginning of each school year, this threat has teeth. Not many parents can afford to throw away \$6400 on principle and none wish to subject their children to humiliation and retaliation. It will take tremendous courage for the group to hold together.

Meanwhile, one wonders what about the **Parents for a Roman Catholic Education** has elicited such a fierce reaction. The organization has requested that the school present authentic Catholic positions in faith and morals. It has requested that parents have access to the materials, particularly the sex education curriculum, used at Pius. And it has asked for some independent vehicle of accountability for addressing parental concerns. These are temperate requests – in keeping with canonical and natural rights.

A secure, confident administration would welcome such parent involvement. However, the reaction of the St. Pius school administration is disconcertingly like that of dioceses (including our own just ten years ago) faced with abuse allegations. Those bringing forward complaints are intimidated, shuffled from one person to another, made empty promises, and/or vilified. Questionable behavior is rationalized but at the same time tremendous energy is expended to make certain that it is not brought to light.

Los Pequeños applauds the **Parents for a Roman Catholic Education** in what is becoming a truly heroic struggle for parents' rights and Catholic values. *Veritatem dies aperit!* Time discloses the truth! ❀

We are not baptized into the hierarchy; do not receive the Cardinals sacramentally; will not spend an eternity in the beatific vision of the pope. Christ is the point. I, myself, admire the present pope, but even if I criticised him as harshly as some do, even if his successor proved to be as bad as some of those who have gone before, even if I find the Church, as I have to live with it, a pain in the neck, I should still say that nothing that a pope (or a priest) could do or say would make me wish to leave the Church, although I might well wish that they would leave.

-- Frank Sheed, English Catholic writer

Ember Day Prayer Service for Life

Pray before the Blessed Sacrament at the San Mateo Blessed Sacrament Chapel

June 11 (Wednesday): 9 AM – 10:30 AM

June 13 (Friday): 9 AM – 10:30 AM

June 14 (Saturday): 8:30 AM – 10:00 AM, followed by Mass

Call 864-2222 for information

June Calendar

LPC Meeting

June 20, 2003

All welcome

Call (505) 293-8006 for more information

Mark Your Calendars:

September 13: "The Persecuted Church" with Tim Staples, Rev. Chris Zuger, & Geraldine Hemmings. Call (505) 293-8006