



Adsum

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LETTER FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Psalm 132 begins with the verse, “Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum, habitare fratres in unum.” (Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity). Every year our religious priests and secular priests gather for meetings and conferences in order to not only review matters of moral and dogmatic theology, canon law, the liturgy, and pastoral issues, but also and most importantly to maintain a unity among the clergy.

As our numbers have grown, we have divided our meetings. Our religious priests’ meeting takes place in January at Mount St. Michael’s in Spokane, and in July our secular priests meet at Mary Immaculate Catholic Church in Omaha. Those secular priests who are overseas join in on “Skype” to be united with their fellow priests in the conferences and discussions. It is



A visit from Bishop Pio Espina from Argentina



Our secular priests during our annual meeting in July

interesting how modern technology can put our priests on the other side of the world in real time contact with us. Fr. Brendan Legg in New Zealand was one day ahead and several hours behind us, which means he had to rise in the “wee hours of the morning” to attend the meetings. Our priests in Germany, Italy and Scotland are several hours ahead of us, and as we concluded our meetings in the afternoon our time, they would be retiring for the night.

As it has been mentioned so often in the past, it is wonderful but challenging for twenty-two Masses to be offered before starting our meeting at 10:00 a.m. Besides the main altar and two side altars in the sanctuary of the church, there is a private altar in the choir loft and three other altars set up on the church property.

In canon law (Canon 130), newly ordained priests are required to continue their ecclesiastical studies, and thus our priests’ meetings provide this platform for them as well as a necessary review for our older priests.

At the beginning of this month, Bishop Pio Espina traveled from Argentina to Omaha for a wonderful visit in order for us to confer with one another on the mission of the Church, “to teach all nations, all things whatsoever He (Christ) commanded.” (Matt. 28:19)



The clerical tonsure of the future Bishop Pio Espina in the 1990s



The future Bishop Espina after his reception of the Subdiaconate

It is for this reason that during the consecration of a bishop, the book of Gospels is opened and placed on the shoulders of the bishop elect to signify his responsibility to teach the flock of Christ committed to his care.

Bishop Espina brought pictures of the early days in Argentina when I first visited back in the 1990’s. One family photograph showed Bishop Espina as a young teenager. Another photograph taken years later showed his First Tonsure in their beautiful church of St. Joseph in Molinari, Argentina. Also pictured in this photograph are the young priests with dark hair: Fr. Luis Jurado and Fr. Ephrem Cordova, CMRI.

In less than two weeks, Mater Dei Academy will begin classes for our 36th school year, followed by the beginning of our new scholastic year for Mater Dei Seminary, which will be our 34th year of classes here in Nebraska and Iowa. We are forever grateful to Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin Mary for the many blessings bestowed on us over the years and we cannot thank all of you enough for your continued prayers and support for the seminary.

With my prayers and blessing,
Most Rev. Mark A. Pivarunas, CMRI

Father Damien, the Leper Priest

“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13) is the inscription on a large granite cross that can be found on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. It is a fitting tribute to a man who applied to a heroic degree the teaching of Jesus regarding the practice of charity.

Joseph De Veuster was born in Belgium in 1840 of resolute, fervent Catholic parents. Unknown to Joseph, God was silently preparing him, as he grew to manhood, for a unique mission. Both circumstances and the qualities of his character were part of that preparation. His father being a farmer, Joseph gained skill in the many handicrafts a farmer needs to master to be self-sufficient. As a young man, he earned respect in the village on account of his extraordinary strength; as one witness put it, “He lifted, as though they were nothing, bags over two hundred pounds in weight.”

It was during a mission preached by the Redemptorist Fathers that God enlightened him as to the path in life He was calling him to follow. His vocation, after the example of his older brother and sister, is reflective of how God blesses Catholic parents who are fervent in practicing their Faith and who set a good example. His older sister answered God’s call to be a nun; now he chose to follow in the footsteps of his older brother, who was studying for the priesthood as a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In a letter to his parents he expressed his deep convictions: “It

is Providence that has inspired me... In refusing to answer the Divine Call, I shall be exposing myself to eternal ruin. You know that the choice of a state of life determines our eternal happiness.” So, at the age of eighteen he joined his brother, and on February 2, 1859, he took the religious habit, changing his Christian name to Damien.

In 1863, God’s plan for Damien manifested itself even more clearly. Through a set of unforeseen circumstances, Damien was sent, in place of his brother, to do missionary work in the Hawaiian islands. Within two months after his arrival there, he was raised to the priesthood by the local bishop, and set to work to learn the language of the Hawaiian people. In his first assignment he enthusiastically consumed himself in caring for the spiritual need of 350 Catholics living in a vast district that took three days to cross. In 1873, the last stage of God’s plan for Damien unfolded. One day, the bishop was relating to his missionary priests that the Catholic lepers who were

confined in a colony of the island of Molokai had made an urgent plea for a resident priest. As the bishop expressed his concern about the danger of contagion for any such priest, Damien leaped to his feet and exclaimed, “I want to go there! I know many of these unfortunate souls and I ask only to have their lot and their prison.”

When Damien first arrived there by ship, many of the lepers ran to meet him, rosaries around their necks, tears of joy in their eyes. Thus began the sixteen years during which Damien, as their spiritual father, dedicated himself with generous love and zeal to the spiritual and temporal welfare of these forsaken people. Using his God-given strength, the skills he had learned on the farm, and his optimistic,

jovial nature, he provided for the lepers more adequate food, clothing, housing, medicines, and diversion. For them he turned himself into a lawyer, a beggar, a banker, an errand boy, a nurse, a carpenter, a band leader, an undertaker, a policeman, a farmer.

But, like all dedicated priests, he endured trials and repugnances. He was calumniated and opposed by those who were jealous of his zeal and success. He testified regarding his care of the lepers, “The stench of their sweat and their filth was at first insupportable to me. How many times I was forced to hold my nose, and even to run outside for a breath of fresh air.” But he added, “You may think it is distressing to live in the midst of beings so repulsive; really, they spell happiness to me.”

This happiness, from a supernatural view, was increased when Father

Damien found out one day that he was one of them. With joyful resignation he stated, “God is going to give me another body on Resurrection Day.” In a sermon to his fellow lepers he hopefully proclaimed, “We shall be beautiful in Heaven in proportion to our patience in bearing our trials here below.”

After months of physical deterioration and increasing pain, during which time Father Damien persevered courageously in his round of duties, his once robust, manly frame finally collapsed and he was confined to bed. As one aide commented, ‘He became the most repulsive leper there.’ He received the last Sacraments shortly before Easter, 1889, joyfully exclaiming, “The Lord is calling me to keep Easter with Himself.” On Monday, April 15, God’s plan in this life for this martyr of charity ended, as God’s leper priest gently, with a smile, breathed his last breath, a few days before Easter.



Fr. Connell Answers Moral Questions

by Very Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., S.T.D., LL.D., L.H.D.

ADOLESCENT COMPANY KEEPING

Question: It is not unusual for a boy and a girl to associate with each other so frequently and so exclusively, at dances, the movies, etc., that they are regarded as “keeping company.” What statement according to Catholic moral principles can a priest make regarding this situation?

Answer: A priest need not hesitate to state that a boy and a girl who indulge in this type of frequent and exclusive association are running the risk of falling into grave sin and hence are committing sin. It is not indeed wrong for high school boys and girls to associate with each other in decent amusements and social gatherings, as long as these are kept within the bounds of moderation. Boy and girl friendships are perfectly normal and innocent when they are not exclusive or when each associates with the group, not merely the individual. But, surely, there should be no question of “company keeping” in the accepted sense between a boy and a girl in high school grades. For company keeping is a form of association permitted only to those who look forward to marriage within a reasonably short time; it is surely not the proper thing for those who will not ordinarily be ready for marriage for a least five or six years. Furthermore, boys and girls who cultivate this type of intimate friendship cannot devote their time and attention as they should to their studies. Above all, when an adolescent boy and girl are constantly together, fostering an ardent love for each other, their passions are likely to be aroused, and grave sin may follow. Even a friendship begun in perfect innocence may eventuate in most disastrous consequences. Priests having the care of high school boys or girls, as pastors or sodality directors, can enunciate this doctrine—howsoever it may seem in this age of loose morals—with the assurance that it is based on sound Catholic principles of moral theology. It would not be correct to say that there is in all cases a proximate occasion of sin, though this is often present. (I am not considering the case of older boys and girls in high school who are planning marriage in the near future. They can be permitted to keep company, with proper safeguards.)

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