

# A d s u m

*Adsum* is published by **Mater Dei Seminary** for the enjoyment of our families, friends, and benefactors.

## LETTER FROM THE RECTOR

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

How unique is the Holy Season of Lent! Throughout this penitential time, there is a special Lenten Mass for each day and often Holy Mother the Church presents for our reflection the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the sufferings of the future Messias.

Outstanding are the prophecies of Isaias wonderfully expressing Our Lord's Passion and Death:

*“Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity... Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought Him as it were a leper: and as one struck by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed... He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer, and He shall not open His mouth... He shall lay down His life for sin.” (Isaias 53: 3-10)*

The more one reads the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the future Messias, the more one can

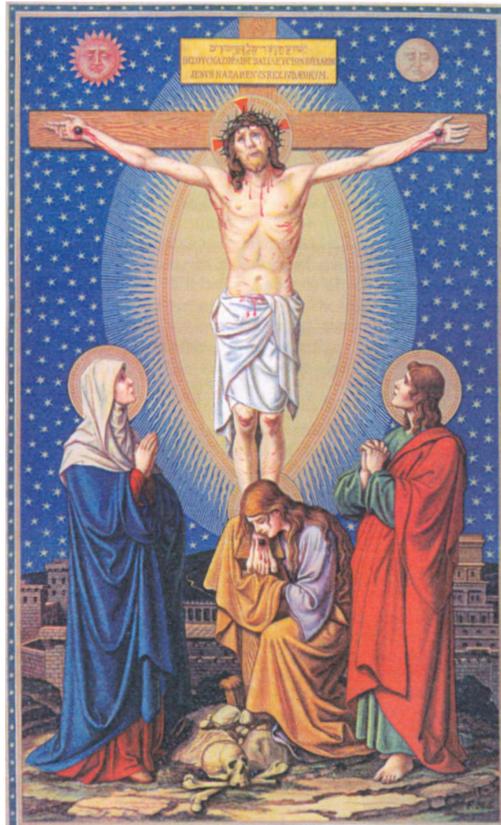
admire the omniscience of God and the love of Our Divine Savior, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us sheep!

The month of March is dedicated to St. Joseph, foster-father of the Son of God and the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He is the patron saint of vocations to the religious life and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the work

accomplished by our priests and religious.

Whenever I call to mind the thought of vocations, I immediately think of the words of Christ, “The harvest is indeed great, but the laborers are few.” This is especially true today when our priests travel frequently great distances to provide the true Mass and Sacraments to the flock of Christ; after the priests, our religious Sisters work tirelessly to instill the faith in the hearts and souls of our youth—the future of the Church.

To truly appreciate Our Lord's words about the great harvest, it is necessary to recall how Jesus, as the greatest Teacher, was wont to take a common occurrence and to draw a profound lesson from it. In Palestine in the time of Christ, the harvesting of wheat at the right time was very critical; nevertheless, it would take a tremendous amount of man-power in those days to accomplish it.





*Fr. Borja in the Solemn Blessing of Ashes*

Our Lord wonderfully applied this image of wheat to the harvest of immortal souls. How many souls like wheat are ready to be “harvested” for the Kingdom of God; yet, how few are the laborers.

This was especially emphasized at Our Lady of Fatima’s apparition, when she lamented the eternal loss of so many souls to Hell. When we think of the priesthood or the religious life, we are reminded that God uses them as His instruments for the salvation of souls.

St. Dionysius expressed this when he said that, of all the works of men here on earth, there is no greater work than to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls.

And Christ gives us the solution to “the laborers are few.” He tells us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into His harvest! Prayers for vocations are first and foremost; after which, vocations will be fostered in good Catholic families where there is the fervent practice of the Catholic Faith by family

prayer and the frequent reception of the sacraments. No greater blessing can come to a Catholic family than to have a son or daughter dedicated to the service of God as a priest or religious.

Please pray for our seminarians in preparation for their ordinations. Rev. Anthony Alley (South Dakota), Rev. Kyle St. Aubin (Canada), and Rev. Lucas Oliveira (Brazil) will be ordained to the holy priesthood; Rev. Thomas Netzel (Washington) and Rev. Richard Lauricella (Washington) will be ordained to the diaconate at the end of April.

All of you, our friends and benefactors, greatly assist us by your prayers, sacrifices and support. For this we are most grateful!

With my prayers and blessing,

Most Rev. Mark A. Pivarunas, CMRI



*Fr. Sandquist chants the Holy Gospel at the Solemn High Mass beginning the Holy Season of Lent*

# A Masterpiece of Craftsmanship

*by a seminarian*

In 1896, when the little Chapel of Our Lady of Light in Santa Fe was almost completed, the architect was murdered. Only then did the people realize that in the plans he had forgotten to include a staircase to the twenty-foot high choir loft. The Sisters of Loretto, for whom the chapel was built, consulted several architects, but all agreed that, since the chapel was so small (only 25 by 60 feet), it would not be possible to use it for group worship if stairs were put in. Faced with this sad situation, the sisters sought refuge in prayer and started a novena to St. Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters.

Just one day after this novena ended, an old man knocked at the door of the convent with a donkey that carried his tools and belongings. Without introducing himself, the old man said he had heard the nuns needed a staircase and that he would like to do the job. But how strange were the conditions under which he wanted to fulfill the task! He asked the sisters who showed him the choir loft that he was to be left alone. He even wanted to lock the chapel, since he didn't need anyone's help. After three months had passed, he called Mother Magdalene to see his work. She was so amazed that she ran to get the other sisters. When they returned to the church together, they found it swept clean and the old man, his donkey and his tools were gone. The sisters tried to find him because he had not been paid for his work. They asked in the city if anyone had seen an old man with a donkey, and even offered a reward for information. But no one had ever seen him, neither three weeks before nor

after. Thus, the question as to who the old man really was will never be answered with certainty. However, if one just looks more closely at the stairs, one can't help but believe that there is something miraculous about them.

The most amazing thing about the staircase is the fact that it has no visible means of support, neither a center pole to wind around, nor a wall to cling to (the connections to the wall, as well as the railing,



have been added afterwards for the sake of security). Also, there is no support from underneath, which spiral staircases usually require. In addition to that, it is to be noticed that the carpenter did not use a single nail or screw, but attached everything by means of wood dowels. The two stringers attached to the thirty-three steps are perfectly matching spirals, which is all the more difficult since the staircase makes two 360 degree turns. If we observe these two stringers a little closer, we can see that they are not just one bent piece of wood, but consist

of several sections of wood spliced together. All this the carpenter did having only, according to Mother Magdalene's diary, a couple of hammers, an ancient and unusual looking saw, a T-Square and a chisel.

The wood he used was hardwood, not native to New Mexico. But he didn't bring wood with him, nor did he buy it from the lumber supplier in Santa Fe. So, the question as to who this carpenter was can never be satisfactorily answered. The whole story, nevertheless, teaches us that fervent and confident prayer is answered, sometimes even in a very extraordinary way, like in the little chapel of Sante Fe.

# Fr. Connell Answers Moral Questions

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

---

## THE ABSOLUTION OF A RECIDIVIST

---

**Question:** On what grounds do some theologians base their teaching that a recidivist may not be absolved unless he manifests extraordinary contrition? Is not the minimum degree of contrition sufficient for the fruitful reception of the sacrament of Penance, as long as it extends to all the penitent's mortal sins and is based on a supernatural motive?

**Answer:** The questioner is perfectly correct in asserting that no extraordinary degree of contrition is required from even the most hardened and most habituated sinner, including the recidivist, the person who has returned to the same habit of sin after previous confessions without any apparent effort at amendment. But the questioner is wrong in saying that some theologians require extraordinary contrition from the (formal) recidivist before absolution may be imparted. What these theologians demand is extraordinary *signs* of contrition. For, since the recidivist has proved by his mere assertion that he is sorry and intends to amend does not give the confessor sufficient moral certainty to justify the conferring of absolution, a more convincing proof of his dispositions is called for, and the signs by which this is manifested are called *extraordinary* signs by some theologians, *special* signs by others. Such signs would be the fact that the penitent is now making a mission or retreat, the fact that he has recently given up an occasion of sin, and above all the candid and sincere statement that he is now more aware than ever before of the necessity of amendment and is resolved to avoid sin in future (*verba cordialia*). It is difficult to see how a priest can continue to absolve a person month after month when this penitent has been committing some grave sins regularly without any apparent manifestation of amendment, unless the confessor obtains more convincing proof of contrition than the mere repetition of the act of contrition.

---

## DISPOSITIONS OF PENITENT

---

**Question:** May a confessor absolve a penitent who states that he is sure he is going to fall into mortal sin again?

**Answer:** Some theologians teach that even one who is certain that he will sin gravely in future may have the purpose of amendment required for the reception of sacramental absolution. For, they argue, the purpose of amendment is an act of the *will* based on the penitent's *present* dispositions; the certainty of a relapse into sin is an act of the *intellect*, judging that at some *future* time there will be a change of dispositions (cf. Noldin, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, III, 261). However, although this view seems theoretically correct, in practice a subjective conviction that one is going to sin gravely in the future would seem to cast very grave doubt on the firmness of the purpose of amendment, so that a confessor would not be justified in absolving a penitent with such a conviction (excluding, of course, extraordinary circumstances, such as danger of death). Such is the solution given by St. Alphonsus (*Theologia Moralis*, LVI, n. 451).

However, the confessor should remember that the firm purpose of amendment is not incompatible with a reasonable fear, or even probable judgment, of a future fall into grave sin. In fact, it not infrequently happens that those who say they are sure they are going to relapse really mean that they fear this will happen. In such a case the confessor should encourage the penitent with the assurance that God's grace will not fail him in time of temptation and impart absolution.

---

*Adsum*, a publication of **MATER DEI SEMINARY** for the reading enjoyment of friends and benefactors, is sent free of charge to all who request it. If you are interested, please provide your name and mailing address to:

**MATER DEI SEMINARY**  
7745 Military Avenue  
Omaha NE 68134-3356  
[www.materdeiseminary.org](http://www.materdeiseminary.org)