

Meditation on Canticle of the Three Young Men

Pope says: God Does Not Abandon Us to Death or Loneliness

VATICAN CITY, FEB. 19, 2003 (Zenit.org).- Here is a translation of John Paul II's address at today's general audience, during which he reflected on Chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel, the canticle of the three young Israelites.

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1. "Then these three [young men] with one voice sang, glorifying and blessing God" (Daniel 3:51). This phrase introduces the famous Canticle that we just heard in its fundamental passage. It is found in the Book of Daniel, in the part that has come down to us only in Greek, intoned by courageous witnesses of the faith, who did not want to bow in adoration of the statue of the king and preferred to face a tragic death, martyrdom in the fiery furnace.

They are three Jewish youths, placed by the sacred author in the historical context of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian sovereign who destroyed the holy city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and deported the Israelites "by the waters of Babylon" (see Psalm 136). Despite the extreme danger, when the flames were already licking their bodies, they found the strength "to praise, glorify and bless God," certain that the Lord of the cosmos and history would not abandon them to death and nothingness.

2. The biblical author, who wrote a few centuries later, evokes this heroic event

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; And blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages.

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praiseworthy and glorious above all forever.

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne upon the cherubim, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

(Daniel 3: 52-55)

to stimulate his contemporaries to hold high the standard of faith during the persecutions of the Syro-Hellenistic kings of the second century B.C. Precisely at this point the courageous reaction of the Maccabees took place, combatants for the freedom of the faith and of Jewish traditions.

The canticle, called traditionally "of the three young men," is similar to a flame that lights up the darkness of the time of oppression and persecution, a time that has often been repeated in the history of Israel and of Christianity itself. And we know that the persecutor does not always assume the violent and macabre countenance of the oppressor, but often is pleased to isolate the righteous with mockery and irony, asking him with sarcasm: "Where is your God?" (Psalm 41[42]:4,11).



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Christ is risen! He is truly risen!

What an incredible message of hope to a world losing hope; what an awesome message of peace to a restless world that speaks of war! Christ is risen! Sin and death are conquered once and for all. You and I have been baptized into this reality—we are the sons and daughters of God, as St. Paul tells us in Rm. 14.8, “we belong to God.”

During the forty days of Lent the Church has stifled her “hallelujahs” to bombastically shout them out at Easter. Do you know what the word “hallelujah” means? God knows we say it enough! It is a combination word derived from the Hebrew verb “hallal” which means “to praise”, and from a part of God’s name, “Yahweh”— so “Hallelujah” means “Praise God!” When we think of the death and resurrection of Jesus and what this means for us, we cannot help but want to praise God.

If we Christians truly understood what has been done for us, our daily lives would be a constant “Hallelujah!” How critical it is for us to appropriate, to own, the truths of our faith. Once internalized they change our lives. We belong to God, we are his sons and daughters, and we are destined for eternity—Hallelujah! No matter what this world dishes out, nothing can take this truth away from me.

This past February (20th through 28th) I was in Austin, Texas (nice town), doing a parish mission with a religious sister friend of mine. It truly was a wonderful experience of God’s grace as He moves among and touches His people. We explored the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to us at Baptism moving us ever forward to discipleship. Apart from the fact that this Rhode Islander brought an ice storm with him—it crippled the city (! I felt right at home)—it was so great to see green grass, blossoming redbud trees, sprouts and robins everywhere—Spring and new birth! Easter always points to new birth and new beginnings. Spring teems with life, Easter teems with eternal life. We can’t help but win!

For us priests this is the busiest time of the year. There is so much going on that very often I miss the beauty of rebirth all around me. I am making a pledge to not let this happen again this year. I want to try to be a living “Hallelujah” and allow the rebirth all around me to remind me that Christ is risen! I’ll let you know later how I make out (pray for me).

The Fraternity of Priests wishes you a blessed and joyful Easter Season. May Christ be truly risen in you and in your loved ones. We truly do praise God for you. Your prayers, your generosity, your belief in us and what we are trying to achieve is heartwarming and encouraging. It amazes me that people I have never met and may never meet pull together every day, every month, every year as the Body of Christ, truly risen, to encourage and



pray for the priesthood. In these troubled times, it warms the heart. I say “Hallelujah!”

Thank you for your vigilance in prayer and your generosity. During this Easter Season I will be offering a Mass for your intentions. Remember to pray for your parish priest—praise God for him and his sacrament! Again, send his name in to us so that we too can join you in prayer for him. God is so good, and He has blessed us in you!

In Christ,

Fr. John

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Please send all articles, comments and photos to the editor, Fr. Cuthbert Alexander, cutfyal@yahoo.com or fax to 868-633-0836.

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Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

Please Help Us!

Several months ago, we added the ability to accept credit card donations through our website at fraternityofpriests.org. We felt the convenience of the online credit card system would be helpful to our donors and friends. We also believed that the costs for having the system would be covered by the donations we hoped to receive. Unfortunately, we have not received many contributions through that online system.

Since we strive to be good stewards of our resources, we are now considering removing this donation option. Please consider using the online donation processing for your monthly gift or tithe. Thank you!

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3. All creatures are involved in the blessing that the three young men raise to the Omnipotent Lord from the crucible of their trial. They weave a sort of multicolored tapestry where the stars shine, the seasons flow, the animals move, angels appear and, above all, the "servants of the Lord" sing, the "holy" and "the humble in heart" (see Daniel 3:85,87).

The passage that was just proclaimed precedes this magnificent evocation of all the creatures. It constitutes the first part of the canticle, which evokes the glorious presence of the Lord, transcendent and yet close. Yes, because God is in heaven, where he "looks into the depths" (see 3:55), but also "in the temple of your holy glory" of Zion (see 3:53). He is seated on the "throne" of his eternal and infinite "kingdom" (see 3:54), but also [the] "throne upon the cherubim" (see 3:55), in the ark of the covenant placed in the Holy of Holies in the temple of Jerusalem.

4. He is a God who is above us, capable of saving us with his power; but also a God close to his People, in

whose midst he willed to dwell in his "glorious holy temple," thus manifesting his love. A love that he will reveal fully in making his Son Jesus Christ, "full of grace and truth," "dwell among us" (John 1:14). He will reveal the fullness of his love in sending his Son among us to share in every way, save sin, our condition marked by trials, oppressions, loneliness and death.

The praise of the three young men to the God Savior continues in various ways in the Church. For example, St. Clement of Rome, at the end of his Letter to the Corinthians," inserts a long prayer of praise and trust, woven throughout of biblical reminiscences and perhaps reechoing the early Roman liturgy. It is a prayer of gratitude to the Lord, who, despite the apparent triumph of evil, guides history to a good end.

5. Here is a passage:
"You enlightened the eyes of our heart(see Ephesians 1:18) so that we would know you the only One (see John 17:3) Highest in the highest heavens, the Holy One who are among the saints, who lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless (see Isaiah 13:11), who frustrates the plans of the peoples (see Psalm 32:10)

who sets on high those who are lowly and those who mourn are lifted to safety (see Job 5:11). You who enrich and impoverish who kill and give life (see Deuteronomy 32:39), the only benefactor of spirits and God of all flesh who fathom the deeps (see Daniel 3:55), who look upon human works, who rescue those who are in danger and save those in despair (see Judith 9:11), creator and custodian of every spirit, who multiply the peoples on earth, and who choose, among all, those who love you through Jesus Christ, your most beloved Son, through whom you have educated, sanctified, and honored us."

(Clement of Rome, "Lettera ai Corinzi" [Letter to the Corinthians], 59, 3:I "Padri Apostolici" [The Apostolic Fathers], Rome, 1976, pp. 88-89). Translation by ZENIT.

IN MEMORIAM

Fr. Richard O’Gorman (NY Fraternity) passed away in his sleep on March 14, 2003. More details will follow in the next issue. Please pray for the repose of the soul of this faithful brother and long-time friend to all of us in the Fraternity of Priests.

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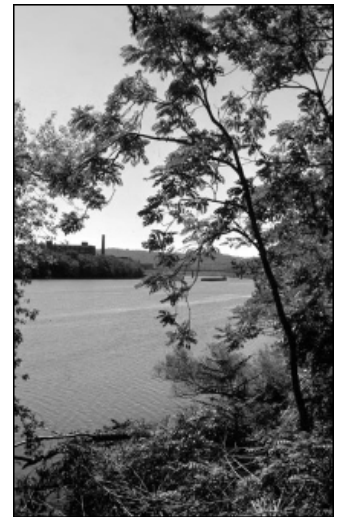
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THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

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