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## To Be Clay in the Hand of the Potter

*By Msgr. Cuthbert Alexander, Trinidad Fraternity of Priests*

Some years ago, sitting with a small group in a cozy room at an all-night vigil in Trinidad, I opened my Bible to Jeremiah 18 and the passage that speaks about the prophet's visit to the potter.

Since that encounter with Jeremiah's allegory, the potter's house has been a defining image of sorts for me—an icon. I claim the teaching Jeremiah received from Yahweh as among my most favorite biblical texts.

It's not the clay that grabs me. I have had only a brief insignificant experience getting my hands dirty with the stuff. It has more to do with the changes I was going through in those years of regular First Friday all-night vigils. I longed for the Lord to do new things with me then. I still long for him to do new things with me today.

It explains, perhaps, why two years ago, approaching my 57th birthday, I left my warm, colorful but troubled homeland for a cold gray New York to do further studies in communication.

One of my seminary professors would ask infuriatingly, after each attempt at giving some response to his question: But why? Why undertake this course of studies? Why at this stage of my life? Why New York?

The last is easiest to answer. New York is not the center of the world, but it is the media capital of the world. If not New York, where else? (I mean that in both senses. It is really the place of media. It is a great place to study communications and media.) But, New York is also, arguably, the home of the arts and a place of continual wonder. So where else?

To parry the next why that could be asked, let me say I chose New York and Fordham University, and deliberately chose a program of studies that was not focused on ecclesiastical issues. My first interest was in the subject of communications and media; media as a tool. I wanted to do research myself and to interact with those who were working in this rapidly changing field in the secular media. If Fordham equipped with me with the tools, I said, I would be able to apply my knowledge in pastoral ministry. Fordham did not disappoint.

By the time I left for New York I had served for 14 years as priest in Trinidad. And although much of my secular working life and training had been in the field of communications, my ministry in most of those years did not bring any engagement in the field of

professional communication. My initial involvement in the field had come in a ten-year hiatus from seminary studies during which time I worked in both the secular press and with government. (I speak of a hiatus only in hindsight. When I left the seminary—for the second time—it was with no intention of returning there.) The mystery of all this is that, regardless of my agenda, the Lord had still set his heart on my becoming His priest. My wanting to engage in media work, at a serious level at this stage, is also about seeking somehow to respond fully to that most certain demonstration of God's mercy and love, with what I hope was generosity.

My return to study was most certainly helped by a bishop who understood the importance of communication, and was willing to speak with the secular media.

The opportunity to go abroad to study, to leave Trinidad for a while, to move into a new space and to find time for reflection, had its own attraction.

I left for New York, dogged by feelings of uncertainty, on 3 January 2004, while considering the prospect of graduate studies at Fordham, especially the university

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# Dear Friends of the Priesthood

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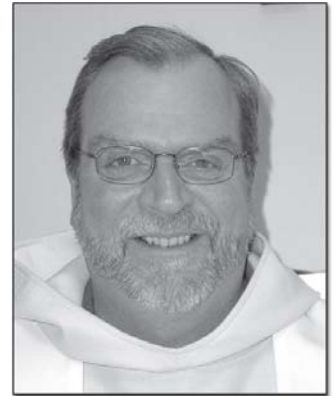
Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

How is your "Ordinary Time" going? Extraordinarily, I hope...It is hard to believe that it is already the end of February and Lent is looming on the horizon. My father used to tell me that the older you get the faster time goes by. Boy, was he right!! How do we slow it all down? We probably can't, but we can make it extraordinary by living each day realizing that this is the day that Christ seeks a relationship with me, and desires intimacy with me. I have to admit that I so often get wrapped up in my work and duties that I forget this life-saving truth. Each day is the Lord's day because each day Jesus desires to be the center of my life.

This does not mean there will be no disappointments, hardships, sickness or sadness; it does mean that in these things I am never alone, Christ is with me. In fact, as St. Paul says in Rm.8. 37, "we are more than conquerors." Doesn't this really make every day special or extraordinary? What a different mind-set we could all have in approaching Lent this year. What a sense of joy and expectancy could be ours. Even in the midst of the "February blahs" (and they are blah in the Northeast) I am living in extraordinary time.

I have to witness about something here. One of my parishes (St. Agatha) is in the middle of a massive capital campaign to raise some significant money to update and refurbish our church—nothing has really been done in 53 years. I personally hate asking for money—I'd rather dig a ditch. I know I can do it and do it well (I've done it before), but I still find it unpalatable. However, knowing Christ is with me every step of the way, and all this is for his glory and the glory of his house, it really isn't so bad. Rather than seeing this whole process as an early start to a long Lent, I'm seeing it as extraordinary time seeking to accomplish an extraordinary goal for the Lord and his people. (I'll let you know how we all made out in a later newsletter. I can't let this experiment fail.)

My wish for you, our intercessors and benefactors, is that all your days this new year really be extraordinary. Just think of our witness to the world.



Once again on behalf of all my Fraternity brothers, thanks for who you are and what you do for us. Your role is critical and we appreciate you. Be assured of our prayers for your intentions. Again, remember to pray for your parish priest. Send his name to us so that we can join you in prayer. May the approaching Lenten Season be a time of extraordinary grace and blessing for you.

In Jesus,

Fr. John

## Fraternity Financial Report

One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We're providing this information to help communicate our specific need and to thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

Monthly Donation Budget:	<b>\$6,300.00</b>
Actual Donations:	<b>\$4,933.00</b>
Budget Surplus (shortage)	<b>(\$ 597.00)</b>

*Current as of December 31, 2005.*

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requirements that I do the GRE before matriculation. The authorities required that I show a satisfactory GRE score and that I do well in two of the program courses before enrolling in the degree program.

Those first five months were nerve-racking, not only because I had to prove myself to the authorities (and I suspect to some extent to myself), but because of the range of new things with which I had to deal. Although my many holiday visits to the United States must have eased the trauma of being remade in a foreign land, it was still a bruising experience. Life meant living with difference.

Something within me is reluctant to consider a complete makeover at this stage of my life. The story of the potter's house, however, suggests that if I want to come into God's promises, then I must be continually open to radical change, regardless. Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? says the Lord. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel (Jeremiah 18:6). The Lord who knows each of his children knows just how much bending and flattening each person can take.

The potter cannot do his work without watering the clay. Prayer and spiritual companions—regular ones back at home but also new ones I made in the US—were “water” for me. In this, the New York Fraternity had a special role.

The group played its part even before I arrived in the Bronx in January 2004. The year before when I met Msgr Leslie Ivers, the leader of the NY Fraternity of Priests for the first time, he warmly welcomed me to stay at St Jane Frances de Chantal for the duration of my time of study. His rectory at 190 Hollywood Avenue in the Bronx was my first “home away from home”. When it became clear that my financial situation would be better served at

another position in the Bronx, Leslie understood that too.

The New York Fraternity brothers with their Tuesday afternoon meetings, as well as the twice-a-month overnight at the parish of another fraternity brother Timothy Graff, in Lodi, New Jersey, have contributed in important ways to my keeping steady on the potter's wheel.

*Cuthbert Alexander is a former member of the Board and a founding member of the Trinidad Fraternity.*

## Prophecies for the Fraternity

### **My Brothers in the Fraternity:**

Give me your pain, your sorrow, your oppression and your stress. Did I not tell you that in the world you will suffer but know that I have overcome the world? This spirit of suffering is a winter pruning; it's rattling your cage, your penchant for complacency and success. I am purifying you like fine gold. Let the dross of your spent energy be evaporated and taken up into my mercy. You are the dispensers of the mystery of my grace. I have carved you out for a deeper compassion and a total surrender of holiness to me. People who come to you in their tears will encounter me. TMY heart overflows with love for all of you. This is the good fruit of discipleship, the produce of my love in you. These are difficult times but I am calling you to the victory of justice. Don't deny or abandon the suffering; embrace it for you will find me with you. I love you so deeply for having responded to my call. I will lead and guide you, Trust in me alone.

*- January 10, 2006 NY Fraternity of Priests*

### **My beloved sons, my little ones:**

Your minds, my brothers, are too small to understand or comprehend all the mysteries and marvels that are being accomplished in your midst through the gift of your priestly ministry. Your hearts are too small to experience the height, length and depth of my love being poured out upon this world through your hands in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Let my Mother help you expand your minds and hearts. In the mystery of her gift of self to me you will find fullness of joy and love and know some of the depth of the mystery of my love in the sacrament. Ask her to help you understand and live the sacrament of your priesthood. I love you, my brothers.

*- December 12, 2005, St. Cloud, MN Fraternity of Priests*

Please send us your prayer intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

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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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Dear Father John Allard,  
This donation is to help the Fraternity of Priests in continuing their work of ministering to priests.  
 \$10  \$25  \$50  \$100  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!**

March 2006						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			Rev. 1 Leonard Kistler <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rt. Rev. 2 Bryan Eyman <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rev. 3 Tom Dunphy <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	4 <b>Pope Benedict XVI</b>
Rev. 5 Robert Franco <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rev. 6 Sean Donnelly <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rev. 7 David Durkee <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rev. 8 James Mazanec <i>Cleveland, OH</i>	Rev. 9 Justin Reis <i>Columbus, OH</i>	Rev. 10 Richard Engle <i>Columbus, OH</i>	Rev. 11 James Kelly <i>Columbus, OH</i>
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Rev. 19 Duaine Cote <i>Fargo, ND</i>	Rev. 20 Robert Laliberte <i>Fargo, ND</i>	Rev. 21 Matt Lanz <i>Fargo, ND</i>	Rev. 22 Charles Antekeier <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 23 Donald Lomasiewicz <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 24 Mark Mitchell <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 25 James Bozung <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>
Rev. 26 Ayub Nasar <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 27 Shamaun Beas <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 28 George Fekete <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 29 Michael Shea <i>Grand Rapids, MI</i>	Rev. 30 Forrest Rouelle <b>R.I.P.</b>	Rev. 31 Patrick O'Donnell <b>R.I.P.</b>	

A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

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