
Dying to Live

By Fr. William Cosgrove, New York Fraternity of Priests

In May 1973 a small but powerful book came out in America that has had a great impact on the lives of all those who have read it. The book's title is "*Hope for the Flowers*" by Trina Paulus. It is a story of two caterpillars, one named Stripe, the other Yellow. Both of these caterpillars were doing what all of us do in life; looking for what we can BECOME. One day Stripe notices this large caterpillar pillar and thousands upon thousands of caterpillars climbing this pillar. As they were climbing the pillar they were stepping over one another and on top of one another. Stripe joined the great caterpillar pillar and started the arduous journey up the pillar.

As he climbed he noticed that there was one caterpillar not going up but climbing down the pillar. Stripe stopped and talked with the caterpillar named Yellow. When Yellow was asked why he was climbing down the pillar he whispered that when you get to the top there's nothing up there. Disillusioned, Stripe descends the caterpillar pillar and with Yellow they both weave a cocoon and complete what nature intended—caterpillars were born to become butterflies.

This story is a powerful reflection for us during this season of Lent. As I meditate on this story

I see how much I am like Stripe—climbing upwards, striving to acquire perfection and my own holiness. In the process I wonder whether I have stepped on or stepped over people's lives. This is not only my story but the story of all of humanity. We are always striving upwards. Yet, the reality is that, like Yellow, God is discovered as ever "descending". What Yellow was teaching Stripe, what God is teaching His people is that there is nothing to be gained or nothing to be discovered by pride, arrogance and self-aggrandizement. What "*Hope for the Flowers*" teaches us is that if we are to truly become what God has intended us to become, we have to start "climbing down". The *process of descent is the way to ascent*. One does not discover this too early in life or too easily. It's often been said that the first half of life is the upward climb and the second half of life is in overcoming the fear of descent. The paradox of Jesus' life is that one discovers that only in dying to our selves can we live to become a "new creation".

In the latest book by Fr. Rainero Cantalamessa "*Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Filled with the Fullness of God*", Fr Cantalamessa writes on the humility of God. He quotes St. Francis of Assisi: "Every day He humbles Himself just as He did

when He came from His heavenly throne (Wis. 18:15) into the Virgin's womb; every day ...he descends from the bosom of the Father onto the altar into the hands of the priest on the altar."

Cantalamessa points out that God cannot go higher. He is the most High God. "When He does something "outside of himself" (ad extra), God can only "lower himself", humble himself. Cantalamessa points out that God's activity from the beginning has always been "condescension"; constantly lowering himself more and more. He humbled Himself to take upon Himself a human nature in the Virgin's womb. He humbled Himself to become a servant who would wash the feet of his disciples. He continued to humble Himself even to death on the cross. That is why the Father highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name that is above every other name. He "descended" again in the form of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and continues to humble Himself on the altar of sacrifice. St. Francis cried out to his brothers as he gazed upon the Eucharist: Look at God's condescension, my brothers."

All of us are called to LIVE the Paschal Mystery. In baptism we were "initiated" into the paschal mystery. But the church's call has always been for God's people to

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Please send all articles, comments and photos to the editor, Fr. Bill Cosgrove via e-mail at frbill@optonline.com or fax to 845-227-3951.

Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

For the past ten years or so I find myself wishing everyone a "Happy Lent!" The looks I get from people are interesting; for the most part I'm looked upon as having three heads. For most people Lent has a negative, dark side about it; so that describing Lent as "happy" sounds like an oxymoron. Lent is a time to give up things, to mortify oneself, and to be somber. And yet, if we could appropriate more deeply what this holy season is all about, we too would be happy in Lent.

Lent recalls and celebrates the price that was paid for our salvation. God held nothing back in seeking to redeem us—he gave away that which was most precious to him, his Son. Jesus paid the price for us to become the sons and daughters of God for all eternity. His suffering, death, and resurrection gave us life. Whatever damage sin had created, Jesus repaired and bridged the gap between us and our Father. We will never fathom our worth in our Father's eyes. We are the children of God. Even the great Easter Proclamation, the Exultet, captures this for us and proclaims:

"O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!"

Lent challenges us to think and reflect on all that was done for us. What wondrous love! When I begin to take this all in, I begin to realize how much I take for granted: how seldom it really effects my life. This should be a daily thought or reflection, yet Mother Church, in her wisdom, understands human nature so well that she sets apart forty days each year to help us recall and enter into this tremendous mystery of love. God knows we need to be reminded!

I once heard a talk on "The Joy of Repentance" (another oxymoron?). Repentance is never easy because it calls for humility and honest admission of our strayings. But it becomes joyful when I begin to understand that it is a process God has given to enable us to return home to our loving Father. It is, especially when celebrated

sacramentally in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the very antidote for the poison of sin, the medicine prescribed by the Divine Physician, to heal the disease of sin. I can be, and am invited to



be restored to spiritual health, and what rejoicing takes place in heaven when this occurs (cf. Lk. 15). Lent challenges us to take all this seriously—by renouncing me so that there may be room for Christ; to say "no" to me so that I can more fully say "yes" to Christ.

During this holy season be assured of our prayers for you, our intercessors and benefactors. May this Lent be a happy and a holy one. May the Lord allow you to plunge deeply into the abyss of his love for you to help you better understand your dignity as a child of God. I will be offering a Mass for all of your intentions during this Lenten Season. Thanks for your prayers and generosity.

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: **\$6,300.00**

Actual Donations: **\$8,149.00**

Budget Surplus (shortage) **\$1,849.00**

Current as of January 31, 2005.

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LIVE this mystery. One of the most basic fears of life is that of DYING. The greatest instinct in the human species is self-preservation. We will always seek to preserve our life and our own interests. The paschal mystery goes against the very nature of human instinct and yet, it is the very reflection of the divine order.

The season of Lent is the time when the church calls her children to "go against the grain". It is a time when we are called to enter the mystery we are most afraid of. It is a time to discover not only that we are called to die, but the means we use to accomplish this task. It is through the activities of intense prayer, fasting and almsgiving that the opportunity for humbling ourselves before God can have its maximum effectiveness.

As you journey again through another season of Lent discover that dying doesn't get easier. AS you journey to the Cross discover for the first time maybe that dying is painful. As you journey to the resurrection recognize that there are no "end-runs" around the cross to the resurrection.

Lord, help us only to climb up on the cross to die to pride and arrogance so that having died to self we may live with you and for you, reflecting the Father's glory.

William Cosgrove is the current editor of The Visitation and a member of the Board for the Fraternity of Priests.

Please feel free to send articles and prophecies for the next issue to
Father Bill Cosgrove at
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MEDITATION ON THE PRIESTHOOD

(Jesus speaks) You will not have the peace I would give you, my peace in all its perfection, until you are transformed into me, until your humanity is one with mine in the Eucharist. This is the gift I would give you. I have shown you all your miseries only to prepare you for that gift, your Eucharistic transformation into myself. That will be the meaning of your priesthood. When you say the words of consecration, "This is my Body", you do not say "This is the Body of Jesus" but "This is MY Body". That is to say, your flesh is my flesh, your human thoughts my thoughts, your heart my heart. Yes, you must love. I made you for love. But you must love with my heart. You must delight to see all Goodness in the Father and to bring all the souls I send you to the Father.

PROPHECY FOR PRIESTS

My brothers, do not think that the gift of the priesthood is insignificant in my plan of salvation. I have called you. I have chosen you. I made the priests to be leaven for the world. Remember brothers, a small portion of yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise. So you my priests, though not great in number, shall make the multitude rise to live and flourish in MY kingdom. I do not ask you to do great things but do all things with my great and everlasting love. Be My love, My light, My leaven for the church and the world.

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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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