

## TUSCON 2002: Listening in the Desert

by Fr. Cuthbert Alexander

The Lord led the Fraternity of Priests to the desert this year for the annual conference. Tucson, which was having its worst drought in one hundred years, home of the saguaro and agaves cacti, provided a unique meeting place.

The words of the prophet Hosea 2:16-17 came alive in the setting at Picture Rocks Retreat Center, on the outskirts of Tucson. In that text, the Lord promises to woo the people of Israel, recalling their onetime faithfulness in the desert: I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart. From there I will give her the vineyards she had, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. She will respond there as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt.

Annual meetings are times of reflection and listening in a particular way to the voice of the Father. The 24 priests who met at Picture Rocks from August 5-9 heard his voice in the five talks and the homilies each day, in our fellowship and in the experience of the desert itself but we heard it too in prophetic words that came during worship, as in this one: As the saguaro draws water from the earth and holds it for its needs in adversity, so I call you to draw life from me.

The conference, not surprisingly, brought into focus the sex abuse scandals which have overshadowed the Church these many months. It considered what all this could mean—the chastening and the challenge, the signs of despair and the call to hope but it also gave us an opportunity to take a fresh look at the priesthood we share and to renew our commitment to it.

In 2003, the annual meeting will be hosted by the Newark and New York Fraternities in the first full week of August. Brothers why not mark your calendars now!

## God Visits His People

What is God asking of the Fraternity today? How have we done over the past 20 years? Fr John Dreher who was there at the start takes a look. In this the first part of a series of articles, Fr John considers the beginnings of Fraternity as a response to God's intervention in the early-80s.

For those who might not know, I was leader of the Steubenville Fraternity team from 1984 through 1988. It was during this time that the visitation message came to

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Cowboys won't be caught dead at Pinnacle Peak Steak House wearing a tie. So when 24 dudes walked into the premises all decked out in ties from the S.V.P.'s outlet, everyone knew there was going to be trouble. John Gordon had his tie cut off and so did the 23 others. Hard work for the lady wielding the scissors, but all part of the fun of Brotherhood Day.

# Dear Friends of the Priesthood

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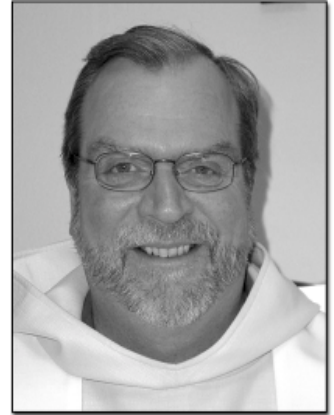
Submissions and articles are always appreciated from members. If you have events that are upcoming, please alert the editors so they can prepare a followup article on the event.

Saguaro cacti, heat, rattlesnakes and brotherhood—all these marked our Annual Meeting at Painted Rock Retreat Center just outside of Tucson, Arizona. Twenty-four brothers from all over came together for worship, business, growth, fellowship and encouragement. It is always a blessing from the Lord to be together. I always capture a glimpse of what can be when priestly brothers come together to share faith and brotherhood. Our theme this year was, "Compete Well for the Faith" taken from 1Tim.6.12a, where Paul is encouraging the discouraged Timothy to keep going, anchored in Christ. This is truly a timely message for us!

Together we shared the trials of the priesthood today. The challenge to us is to rise above the problems we see and to discern what it is that the Lord is telling us. In the midst of all this, what is God saying? For one thing, we are challenged to hope. Like Abraham we hope even when the natural world tells us it is ridiculous, because God is bigger than all of creation. We hope because we cannot see the future, yet we are confident because God will never abandon us. He may purify us, but never abandon us. God is at work configuring our lives to the cross. The "end" of the cross is the reign of God. In the midst of challenge and tragedy, we hope. The Lord calls us to ongoing repentance and conversion. Herein lies our hope.

In hearing God's voice and in seeking to grow as men of hope, we are called to extreme generosity, in utter trust in God and a total commitment to mission. This asks each of us, "What are you willing to do to support the brothers?" We need to support our priests even if they have sinned. We need to pray for the priesthood. We need to see that as much as God hates sin, he is still a merciful Father, and it is this merciful, loving stance that we too must demonstrate with all brother priests. Our fraternities need to become places of welcoming and healing.

In all this we need to become ministers of encouragement. We are encouraged by God so we can encourage one another (see 2Cor.1.3-7). Like water, God's encouragement is overflowing. In this time of "crisis" we are called to a deeper relationship with Christ and a call to personal holiness. One of the most effective ways to proceed is to "live in the light" and not



in darkness. As priests we are called to encourage one another to come out of darkness and into the light. When we live in the light, Satan's weapons are taken away. This means protection for us.

If there was one thing that was evident in the course of the week is that the Fraternity of Priests is needed more now than ever. We have an important role to play in these times. May the Lord continue to bless us and urge us on to be His instruments today!

Again, thank you, our intercessors and benefactors, who make what we are trying to achieve possible. I understand there are some new people receiving this letter—"Welcome aboard!! WE NEED YOU!!! We continue to need all your help. Be assured of our prayers for your intentions. Again, I ask you to continue to pray for your parish priest—encourage him. You may be the only source of encouragement he receives! As we continue to pray for each other, let's seek the Lord's grace for Abraham-like faith. The Lord is still with us, He loves us so!

In Christ,



Fr. John

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have a central place in the Fraternity of Priests. I have been asked to reflect about the message then and now. I offer my reflections as a stimulus to your own thought. Please take them as my opinion and not the position of the Fraternity.

The Fraternity did not originate the term, visitation. In the early 80s, the idea was commonplace in the Charismatic Renewal in the United States. Various other terms were in circulation. Some remain, for example, "Pentecostal revival" and "Charismatic Renewal." Other names have come and gone, for example, "awakening," second or third "wave of the Spirit" and, outside of the Fraternity, "visitation." I think the Fraternity of Priests was wise to choose and to stay with the idea of God's visitation. First of all it is a Scriptural term. Secondly, it situates what God is doing within history.

In the minds of the Fraternity team, the visitation message was patterned on the summary of Jesus' mission and message in Mark 1:15. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

- The Times – a readiness for new developments; in Greek, the *chairis*.
- What God is doing.
- Our response.

**The Times:**

"The Times" is a technical theological term meaning that events are at a stage of readiness for a new development. Christians believe that God prepared for His saving work in Jesus Christ both within His chosen people and, for

the spread of Christianity, in the culture of the Greco-Roman world. The Fraternity team felt that God also prepared for what He was doing in our time both within Christianity and in modern culture.

Preparation within the Church: We focused more on developments within the Church than in the world. As part of that development, we pointed to the extraordinary line of Popes in the last century and a half, from Blessed Pope Pius IX to St. Pius X to the present Pope, John Paul II. We spoke above all of the providence of the Second Vatican Council, a Council called to address the pastoral situation of the Church in the modern world. We saw significance in the fact that Blessed Pope John XXIII, in calling the Council, asked the whole Church to pray for "a New Pentecost." We felt that God had given the Virgin Mary, in her numerous apparitions, a prophetic role for the Church in our time, especially in her call for repentance and prayer at Lourdes and Fatima.

Since it involved a charism of the Fraternity, we put a special emphasis upon God's visitation by means of the Charismatic Renewal. We said, "what we believe God is doing today is visiting His people in a unique outpouring of the Holy Spirit, 'as of a New Pentecost,' calling His people to conversion, in order to establish His Kingdom."

We recounted two events from the Pontificate of Leo XIII: the vision he had of Satan appearing before Christ, challenging Him to give Him a century of freedom to destroy His Church; and the

issuing of *Divinum Munus Illud* in which he called for the Church to conduct an annual novena from Ascension to Pentecost to ask for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century. We recounted the history of the outpouring of the Spirit on January 1, 1901 and the growth of Pentecostal churches from the 1920's to the present; today they are second in numbers only to the Catholic Church. We mentioned the sudden manifestation of the Charismatic Renewal in the mainline Protestant churches beginning in the Fifties and in the Catholic Church in 1967, only two years after the Council.

Preparation in the World: We did not dwell on this aspect of God's preparation, but we felt that the darkness was getting darker so that God's light would be seen. We mentioned the cultural change in the Sixties, the beginning of youth culture, the triumph of the sexual revolution and the disintegration of marriage, family life and moral norms. We now and again alluded to the "turn to the world" within the Church, but did not adequately take it into account.

**God's special intervention:**

We saw the outpouring of the Spirit as a key aspect of God's visitation. We had reference to other renewal movements: the liturgical and catechetical movements, *Cursillo* and *Marriage Encounter*. But we felt at the time that God was supplying the grace for all of the other movements in the outpouring of the Spirit. Why did we feel that way? Along with hundreds of thousands of Catholics, we experienced

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# THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*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.*

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

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