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Could You Not Spend One Hour With Me? MT XXVI – 40

GUARDING THE SOUL III

“Without God There is no virtue because there is no prompting of conscience...without God there is a coarsening of the society; without God democracy will not and cannot long endure...

If we ever forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a Nation gone under.” President Ronald Reagan, August 23, 1984

Events at the Crucifixion of Jesus and Conversion of the Sinner

Fr. James Groenings, S.J. (1)

Let us...cast a retrospective glance upon the wonderful proceedings [of the Crucifixion] which we have considered. Although they were diverse and manifold, still in their successive stages they are a true representation of the entire process of conversion. In order that the sinner may turn to God, it is above all necessary that the earth be wrapped in darkness. As long as the sinner looks complacently upon the world and its sinful pleasures, there can be no thought of serious conversion. The veil which hindered him from looking into his own heart must be torn in pieces: he must know his sins by means of a thorough examen of conscience. The terrible penalties of Divine Justice must move him; his sins must cause him to tremble and quake in disgust, and horror, even to the marrow of his bones. The rocks, furthermore, must be rent; this heart, hard and unyielding until now, must become soft and must open; by a sincere confession, the soul must exhale the fetid odor of the grave. And after the sinner has finally risen from the grave by means of the absolution of the priest, he must, by a Christian life, give testimony everywhere to the Redeemer, risen from the grave.

After the just who had risen from their graves, had accomplished their mission and given testimony unto the risen Saviour, they returned to the sepulchers and died a painless death. Their resurrection from the grave was only a temporary one, wherefore they cannot be our models in our resurrection from the grave of sin. The only model of our spiritual resurrections is, according to Holy Writ, the risen Saviour, Who died no more and Who lives forever. Thus should we, after arising from the grave of *sin*, no more return to it. But rather, like the risen Redeemer, we should begin an entirely new, supernatural, divine life. Then, and only then, can we entertain the hope of taking part forever, after death, in the glory of the Risen Lord.

The Power to Confer the Life of Grace

Saint Bonaventure, bishop, d.1274

Take thought now, redeemed man, and consider how great and worthy is he who hangs on the cross for you. His death brings the dead to life, but at his passing heaven and earth are plunged into mourning and hard rocks are split asunder.

It was a divine decree that permitted one of the soldiers to open his sacred side with a lance. This was done so that the Church might be formed from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death on the cross, and so that the Scripture might be fulfilled: *They shall look on him whom they pierced.* The blood and water which poured out at that moment were the price of our salvation. Flowing from the secret abyss of our Lord's heart as from a fountain, this stream gave the sacraments of the Church the power to confer the life of grace, while for those already living in Christ it became a spring of living water welling up to life everlasting.

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In the Soldier's Hometown

Deacon Bill Crane

In Lanciano, Chieti, Italy the hometown of the centurion who pierced the side and heart of Jesus after his death, one the greatest Eucharistic miracles occurred in the eighth century. A Basilian monk, who had been tortured with doubts regarding the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, was stunned to discover that the host was turned to flesh and the wine to blood when he voiced the words of consecration. This miracle is the first miracle described in Joan Carroll Cruz's *Eucharistic Miracles* [TAN, 1987, page 3].

In the 1970's a detailed scientific and medical examination of both species was undertaken by a commission ordered by the Holy See and headed by Professor Edward Linoli, chief of the medical staff of research and of the board of doctors at the Arezzo General Hospital. The voluminous report concluded in its sixth section: "The Blood of the Eucharistic Miracle is a real blood and the Flesh a real flesh; the Flesh is composed of cardiac muscular tissue; The Blood and the Flesh belong to the human species; both blood groups of the Flesh and of the blood are the same (as they came from the same person)."

In an article *The Miracle of Lanciano* written for the Arlington Catholic Herald, Fr. William Saunders reporting on the same findings stated:

"The Flesh, yellow-brown in color, has the structure of the myocardium (heart wall) and the endocardium, the membrane of fibrous-elastic tissue lining all the cardiac cavities. These have the same appearance as in the human heart. No traces of preservatives were found in the elements. The blood was also of human origin with the type AB."

It is by receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament that we live the life of grace to which Jesus has called us. We are literally sustained by Him. In the Sixth Chapter of John's Gospel, to the protesting Jews, Jesus said: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you, he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*

And in John 14:6 Jesus reminds us: *I am the way, the truth and the life.* We believe Him!

From: “Against Heresies”

Saint Irenaeus

If our flesh is not saved, then the Lord has not redeemed us with his blood, the eucharistic chalice does not make us sharers in his blood, and the bread we break does not make us sharers in his body. There can be no blood without veins, flesh and the rest of the human substance, and this the Word of God actually became: it was with his own blood that he redeemed us. As the Apostle says: *In him, through his blood, we have been redeemed, our sins have been forgiven.*

We are his members and we are nourished by creation, which is his gift to us, for it is he who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall. He declared that the chalice, which comes from his creation, was his blood and he makes it the nourishment of our blood. He affirmed that the bread, which comes from his creation, was his body, and he makes it the nourishment of our body. When the chalice we mix and the bread we bake receive the word of God, the eucharistic elements become the body and blood of Christ, by which our bodies live and grow. How then can it be said that flesh belonging to the Lord’s own body and nourished by his body and blood is incapable of receiving God’s gift of eternal life? Saint Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians that *we are members of his body*, of his flesh and bones. He is not speaking of some spiritual and incorporeal kind of man, *for spirits do not have flesh and bones*. He is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews and bones, nourished by the chalice of Christ’s blood and receiving growth from the bread which is his body.

A Complete Gymnasium for the Soul

St. Ambrose, bishop, d. 397

Though all Scripture is fragrant with God’s grace, the Book of Psalms has a special attractiveness

Moses wrote the history of Israel’s forefathers in prose but after leading the people through the Red Sea—a wonder that remained in their memory—he broke into a song of triumph in praise of God when he saw King Pharaoh drowned along with his forces. His genius soared to a higher level, to match an accomplishment beyond his own powers.

Miriam too raised her timbrel and sang encouragement for the rest of the women, saying: *Let us sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has cast horse and rider into the sea.*

In the Book of Psalms there is profit for all, with healing power for our salvation. There is instruction from history, teaching from the law, prediction from prophecy, chastisement from denunciation, persuasion from moral preaching. All who read it may find the cure for their own individual failings. All with eyes to see can discover in it a complete gymnasium for the soul, a stadium for all the virtues, equipped for every kind of exercise; it is for each to choose the kind he judges best to help him gain the prize.

If you wish to read and imitate the deeds of the past, you will find the whole history of the Israelites in a single psalm: in one short reading you can amass a treasure for the memory. If you want to study the power of the law which is summed up in the bond of charity (*Whoever loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law*), you may read in the psalms of the great love with which one man faced serious dangers singlehandedly in order to remove the shame of the whole people. You will find the glory of charity more than a match for the parade of power.

What am I to say of the grace of prophecy? We see that what others hinted at in riddles was promised openly and clearly to the psalmist alone: the Lord Jesus was to be born of his seed, according to the word of the Lord, *I will place upon your throne one who is the fruit of your flesh.*

In the psalms, then, not only is Jesus born for us, he also undergoes his saving passion in his body, he lies in death, he rises again, he ascends into heaven, he sits at the right hand of the Father. What no man would have dared to say was foretold by the psalmist alone, and afterward proclaimed by the Lord himself in the Gospel.

The Celebration of the Eucharist in the 2nd Century

St. Justin, martyr

No one may share the eucharist with us unless he believes that what we teach is true, unless he is washed in the regenerating waters of baptism for the remission of his sins, and unless he lives in accordance with the principles given us by Christ.

We do not consume the eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving.

The apostles, in their recollections, which are called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks and said: *Do this in memory of me. This is my body.* In the same way he took the cup, he gave thanks and said: *This is my blood.* The Lord gave this command to them alone. Ever since then we have constantly reminded one another of these things. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or in the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray.

On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying, "Amen." The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates and the deacons take it to those who are absent...

We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration.

A Priest Hit By Lightning in Church

Based on: Saint of the Day email from: American Catholic.org 12/18/2008

He was 29 years old and the year was 1621. Fr. Anthony Grassi had developed a devotion to Our Lady of Loreto as a youth following in his father's footsteps. His father died when Anthony was just 10. At 17 after attending the local church of the Oratorian Fathers for years he entered the religious order. Soon he had a reputation in his community as a "walking dictionary" who had a quick grasp of theology and Sacred Scripture.

It was while praying in the Church of the Holy House of Loreto that Fr. Grassi was hit by lightning. He was paralyzed, carried out side and expected to die.

Several days later he recovered however. He soon realized he had been cured of severe indigestion. Being grateful for the second grace of life he donated his scorched clothes to the Loreto shrine church. Thereafter he made a pilgrimage each year to Loreto to give thanks.

Fr. Anthony gave himself to his ministry believing his life belonged entirely to God. He began hearing confessions and was regarded as an outstanding confessor. He had a gift of reading consciences.

He was elected superior of the Fermo Oratory in 1635 and reelected every three years until his death in 1671.

Blessed Anthony Grassi's feast day is December 18th.

My Beloved Ones

Imitation of Christ (2)

I foreknew My beloved ones before the creation; I chose them out of the world; they were not beforehand to choose Me (JN 15:16).

I called them by My grace and drew them by My Mercy.

The Elect: Adopted Children of God

Venerable Louis of Granada, O.P., d. 1588 (3)

What a great blessing it is to be loved and chosen from all eternity, for as long, indeed, as God is God; to be placed in His loving heart for ageless centuries; to be chosen as an adopted son of God when the Word was engendered the natural son of God amidst the splendors of the saints who were even then present to the divine intellect!

Look closely, then, at all the circumstances of this election and you will see that each one of them is a great blessing and also a new obligation. See, how worthy is He who has chosen you: God Himself, infinitely rich and happy, who needs nothing from you nor from any created thing. See also how unworthy is the one chosen, a miserable mortal creature, subject to all the poverty, weaknesses and afflictions of this life, and deserving of eternal punishment in the next life because of his sins. See how lofty is this election, for you were chosen for an end so noble that there could be none greater: to be the son of God, the heir of His kingdom, and a participator in His glory.

See also how gratuitous is this election, for it precedes all merit and is effected only by the decree of the divine will, as the Apostle says: "Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace." (Eph., 1:5-6). And as the benefit is more gratuitous, man is more obliged to the Giver.

Consider also the antiquity of this election, for it did not begin with the world, but was before the world and is as ageless as God Himself. Therefore God, being eternal has loved His chosen ones from all eternity; He keeps them before Him and looks upon them with a paternal and loving gaze.

Where will you find the time to consider such great mercies? What tongue could ever proclaim them? What heart could feel them? By what service could they ever be repaid? What amount of human love could ever correspond to the divine love of God? Who would wait until his old age to love Him who has loved from all eternity? Who would ever exchange this divine Friend for any other friend? If Scripture itself extols old friends, how much more praiseworthy is the Friend who is eternal? And if we should never exchange an old friend for a new, who would ever exchange the possession and tenderness of a Lover so ancient for all the friends in the world? And if, from time immemorial, possession of a thing gives a right over non-possession, what of Him who from all eternity possesses us under the title of this friendship and thus holds us as His own?

Accordingly, what goods in the world are worth exchanging for this divine good? What evils should we not gladly endure for His sake? What man would be so impious that if he could know by a special revelation from God that a certain beggar passing by were one of the elect and predestined, he would not kiss the very earth which that beggar trod? Would he not run after him and, throwing himself on his knees at the beggar's feet, beg a thousand blessings of him and say: "O blessed art thou! O fortunate art thou! Is it possible that thou shalt see God in His very beauty? That thou shalt be a companion and brother of all the elect? That thou shalt be near the choirs of angels? That thou shalt see the resplendent faces of Christ and His Blessed Mother? O blessed be the day on which thou wert born and even more blessed be the day on which thou shalt die, for on that day thou shalt live forever. Blessed be the bread which thou dost eat and the earth thou dost trod. Much more blessed be the works thou dost perform and the afflictions thou dost suffer, for these shall prepare the way for thy eternal rest. What sorrow could be so sad or what affliction so grave that it would not be dispelled by the pledge of this hope?"

Thus would we look upon a predestined soul if we were to know that he is such. From this you can see, Christian reader, the obligation that the chosen ones have to the Lord in return for so great a benefit, and no one should consider himself excluded as long as he is willing to do his part. Rather, each one should work, as St. Peter says, to make sure his election and calling by good works. 2 Pet 1:10 We know that he who acts thus will be saved and we also know that the divine favors and graces will never be lacking to anyone. On the certitude of these two truths, let us persevere in good works and we shall be counted among the glorious number of the elect.

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***It would be easier for the earth to exist without the sun than
without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. St. Padre Pio***

***Woe to those who disdain to humble themselves willingly with little children;
for the low gates of the heavenly Kingdom will not suffer them to enter therein. (4)***

A Soul and God

Saint Anselm, bishop d. 1109, From the Proslogion

My soul, have you found what you are looking for? You were looking for God, and you have discovered that he is the supreme being, and that you could not possibly imagine anything more perfect. You have discovered that this supreme being is life itself, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal blessedness and blessed eternity. He is everywhere, and he is timeless....

....O God, let me know you and love you so that I may find my joy in you, and if I cannot do so fully in this life, let me at least make some progress every day, until at last that knowledge, love and joy come to me in all their plentitude. While I am here on earth let me learn to know you better, so that in heaven I may know you fully; let my love for you grow deeper here, so that there I may love you fully. On earth then I shall have great joy in hope, and in heaven complete joy in the fulfillment of my hope.

The First Seven Deacons

Deacon Bill Crane

And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochours, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. Acts 6:2-6, The Navarre Bible

Most of us are aware of the protomartyr of the Church, **Deacon Saint Stephen** whose feast day is December 26th. We also may be aware that it was the **Deacon Saint Philip** who was the first to preach in Samaria. It was there he converted Simon Magus. On the road from Jerusalem to Gaza he converted a eunuch who was the treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia, where Orthodox tradition has it that he began the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Greeks recognize him as bishop of Tralles in Lydia. According to the Book of the Acts 21:7-9 St. Paul's visit to Philip's home in Caesarea is described: *When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the brethren and stayed with them for one day. On the morrow we departed and came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.* What do we know about the other five of the first seven deacons?

Deacon Saint Prochours In Orthodox iconography he is always depicted as a scribe of John the Evangelist. The Orthodox Church in America notes that *"At first, St Prochorus accompanied the holy Apostle Peter, who made him bishop in the city of Nicomedia. After the Dormition [Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary] of the Most Holy Theotokos [Mother of God], Prochorus was a companion and coworker of the holy Apostle John the Theologian and was banished with him to the island of Patmos. There he wrote down the Book of Revelation concerning the final fate of the world. Upon returning to Nicomedia, St Prochorus converted pagans to Christ in the city of Antioch, where he suffered martyrdom.*

Deacon Saint Nicanor suffered martyrdom in Jerusalem in A.D. 76. He is venerated in both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches as are all the seven first deacons.

Deacon Saint Timon was appointed by the Apostles as bishop of the city of Bostra in Arabia and suffered from the Jews and pagans for preaching the Gospel. The Orthodox tradition states he was thrown into a furnace, but by the power of God he came out of it unharmed. The tradition of the Roman Church says that St. Timon died by crucifixion.

Deacon Saint Parmenas zealously preached Christianity in Macedonia and died after being afflicted with an illness. It is said that St. Parmenas suffered martyrdom under Trajan (98-117) in the final year of his reign.

Deacon Nicolas or Nicolaus was a native of Antioch and a proselyte to the Jewish faith. When the church was still confined to Jerusalem, he became a convert, and “being a man of honest report full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom”, he was chosen by the whole multitude of the disciples to be one of the first seven deacons, and was ordained by the apostles.

The Reason for All Disturbance

Saint Dorotheus, Abbot, d. 620 A.D.

.... (T)he reason for all disturbance, if we look to its roots, is that no one finds fault with himself..... We have seen that this is true in many cases, and, in our laziness and desire for rest, we hope or believe that we have entered upon a straight path when we are impatient with everyone, and yet cannot bear to blame ourselves.

This is the way we are. It does not matter how many virtues a man may have, even if they are beyond number and limit. If he has turned from the path of self-accusation, he will never find peace. He will always be troubled himself, or else he will be a source of trouble for others and all his labors will be wasted.

Patience (5)

The practice of patience consists, first, in receiving all misfortunes as coming from the hand of God; secondly, in bearing all things with resignation; thirdly, in never murmuring under contradictions; fourthly, in believing that, having deserved Hell, no one can do us wrong or injustice; fifthly, in complaining only of ourselves; sixthly, in not speaking when the heart is full; seventhly, in thanking God for evil as well as for good; in a word, in frequently saying with holy Job: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be His holy name.” Such is the practice of patience, which is so necessary for salvation, and yet so rare among Christians: for although there is no one but who suffers much, yet very few suffer as they ought.

Long and constant patience in our trials and difficulties is a penitential and powerful means of effacing sin, which when God punishes in this life we may hope He will not punish in the next.

Crucifix of Our Lord of the Poison

Joan Carroll Cruz (6)

The almost life-size figure of the crucified Saviour which was enshrined above an altar in the Dominican church named Porta Coeli was customarily visited by a holy priest whose name has been lost to us. After praying before the seventeenth-century image, the priest always finished his devotions by reverently kissing the feet of the Crucified.

One day, while an enemy of Christianity prowled about the church, he saw the priest devoutly kissing the feet of the image of Our Lord. After learning that it was the custom of the holy priest to visit the crucifix each day and kiss it, the scoundrel devised a sacrilegious plan. When the church was empty, the enemy stole inside and approached the crucifix. Taking from his clothing a bottle and a small cloth, he carefully poured a liquid onto the cloth and then rubbed the cloth on the feet of the Crucified. The liquid was a deadly poison whose effects had been proven to be almost instantaneous.

When the cleric next visited his beloved Crucifix he prayed, as was his custom, and then approached the feet for the usual kiss. But, as he prepared to kiss the image, the Crucified, always a flesh color, turned immediately to jet black. Horror-stricken at the sudden change, the priest stood motionless while the witnesses thoroughly terrified at what they had seen, rushed outside to notify the people in the street.

When word of the miracle reached the ears of the would-be-assassin, he hurried to the church in disbelief. Upon seeing the image he fell to his knees beside the priest, and with tears or repentance told the priest of his actions. He asked forgiveness, received absolution and thereafter led a virtuous and holy life.

As a result of the miracle, the people had an even greater devotion to the image. Not only did it receive the homage of the people in the city, but it especially attracts the attention of countless pilgrims who visit it after acknowledging their love and devotion to the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The miraculous image of Our Lord of the Poison is found in a beautiful side chapel in the Cathedral Metropolitana De Mexico in Mexico City.

Golden Spiritual Nuggets from *Imitation of Christ* (7)

*What a man cannot amend in himself or others he must bear with patience,
until God ordains otherwise.*

*Thus it is evident how seldom we weigh our neighbor in the same balance
as ourselves.*

*But how great each one's virtue is best appears by occasions of adversity:
for occasions do not make a man frail, but show what he is.*

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*I say that we are wound
with mercy round and round
as if with air: the same
is Mary, more by name.
She, wild web, wondrous robe
Mantles the guilty globe.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Hail Mary, hope of the world,
Hail thou, meek and mild!
Hail thou pious one,
Hail, Thou fullness of love,
Thou sweet Virgin serene!

In death's hour may the strong angel that watches over me
lead me to where the just abide with you.
When this body death destroys may that other death
not assail me, but with thee may there find
repose for my soul everlasting.

*Prayer said by Pope Saint John XIII at his death;
from an old hymn composed by Pope Innocent II,
Ave Mundi Spes-Maria. (8)*



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Virgin Most Powerful

If the prayers of the saints are powerful with God, how great must be the power of those of Mary! The former are the prayers of servants; the latter are the prayers of a mother.
St. Alphonsus de Liguori

O search me, God, and know my heart.
O test me and know my thoughts.
See that I follow not the wrong path
and lead me in the path of life eternal.
Psalm 139:23-24

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1. Groenings, Fr. James, S.J., *The Passion of Jesus*, pp 386-388, Rockford, 1987, TAN.
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 3. Granada, Ven. Louis, O.P., *Summa of the Christian Life, Vol I*, pp 89-91, Rockford, 1979, TAN.
 4. Thomas a Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, p 323, Rockford, IL, 1989, TAN.
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 6. Joan Carroll Cruz, *Miraculous Images of Our Lord*, pp 83-84, Rockford, IL, 1995, TAN.
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