

FROM THE PASTOR'S



20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 20, 2006 B

EARLY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH - WHO WERE THEY? WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Last weekend I made reference to the Early Fathers of the Church and how the reading of the writings of the Early Fathers were very key to most, if not all, of the Protestant Ministers who were led into Full Communion with the Catholic church.

The Early Fathers of the church are not only our ancestors in the faith, but men who lived close to the time of the Apostles. As a result their writings are very important to all involved in knowing the truth that Jesus came to teach and knowing about the church during a period that was close to the time of Jesus and the Apostles. The Early Fathers were preachers, popes, bishops, orators, lawyers, theologians, monks and hermits. Some engaged in defending the faith against hostile forces inside and outside the church. Some spent their time seeking to explain and interpret the gospel and church teachings to inquirers.

If interested in an easy to read introductory book on the Early Fathers, I recommend *The Fathers of the Church—An Introduction to the First Christian Teachers*, by Mike Aquilina, Cost \$11.00. Or you can order it through Amazon.com and pay no fees for postage and handling. Our Sunday Visitor telephone number 1-800-348-2440. Speaking about the book, the editors at Our Sunday Visitor write:

Catholic tradition calls them “The Fathers.” They were the leaders and teachers of the Christian community during the first Christian millennium, the faith’s most formative period. Their judgments and insights gave us the creeds, the liturgies, the customs, and even the Bible as we know it today. Now, their stories and their writings are brought together in this vivid overview of the history of the early Church.

Learn how the Fathers endured persecution from pagan governments and Christian heretics. Watch as bishops and emperors battle over lines of the creed. Follow the intrigue, the quarrels, the brilliance, and the heroism as Christianity struggles to establish a permanent presence in the world.

I am very much hoping that those of you who have had adult children leave the church and join other Christian church’s will consider sharing with them some of the CD’s that were available last weekend and the book *Surprised by the Truth*. So often Catholics raised in the post Vatican II have come to believe that ‘one church is as good as another’. While I seek to be very respectful of each person’s spiritual journey and church we, as Roman

Catholics, simply do not believe that one Christian church is as good as another. For example could we as Catholics believe that a church that pays very little attention to the Eucharist is just as good as one that makes the Eucharist the front and center of all that it is. And while I very much understand that some, if not many, non-denominational and non-Eucharistic churches can be very spiritually alive, evangelistic, caring and wonderful at leading people to a personal relationship with Christ, I also believe that they are missing out big time when they do not have the Eucharist and an authority structure like the Papacy that helps to keep unity when problems arise.

Ideally, every church family should be centered around the Eucharist. In today’s gospel, Jesus repeats *several times* the importance of partaking in the Eucharist. Also, ideally, every church family should be spiritually alive, hospitable, caring and one that reaches out to those in need.

The Journey Home - Mondays 8 PM

I don’t know if any of you saw last Monday’s *Journey Home* program, which featured an Irish couple from Belfast. If you did, I am sure that you struggled a bit to understand the heavy Northern Ireland accent. That’s the way Sr. Immaculata spoke 45 years ago when she came here from the same part of Ireland. Anyway, I was very moved by how Joe and Patricia McKeown witnessed to the power of prayer in their lives. The previous week, the guest was Mike Cumbie, former Baptist Minister. Since then I have checked out his extensive website which some of you may be interested in. It is www.mikecumbie.org. Mike was hilarious on the *Journey Home* program. Hopefully he has injected some of that humor in his CD’s and DVD’s.

Bookmark

I mentioned in last week’s column that *The Journey Home* is my favorite program on EWTN (Monday’s, 8 PM). At this time my second favorite program is *Bookmark*. It airs on Sunday mornings. I tape it and listen to it later. As you might guess, in this program the author of some book is interviewed. Sometimes I am not interested in the book but most of the time I am. In a recent program, Thomas Lickona, the author of *Character Matters* was interviewed. Lickona, a practicing Catholic, is a developmental psychologist and professor of education at the State University of New York at Cortland. *Character Matters* is about helping children develop good judgment, integrity and other essential virtues. In the opening pages of the book, Lickona shares the following marvelous quote by Abraham Lincoln.

A child is a person who is going to carry on what you

have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands. This book offers:

- 14 strategies that help kids succeed academically while building character
- More than a dozen character-building discipline strategies
- 20 ways to prevent peer cruelty and promote kindness
- 10 ways to talk to teens about sex, love, and character

While talking about books, I'd like to mention the two other books I got to read on my travels this summer:

***Excuse Me Your Life is Waiting* — Lynn Grabhorn**

This is a self-help New York Times best seller. I recommend it especially for all of you involved in sales and all who have a tendency to be negative in their thinking. You might want to spend a half hour in Books-A-Million store, looking at the contents of the book and take time to read one of the chapters. While I don't agree with everything in the book, it is indeed a wonderful reinforcement of the philosophy that believes in the *Power of Positive Thinking*.

***Soul Survivor* — Philip Yancey**

This was by far my favorite book from my summer reading. It is a story of how the faith and lives of thirteen mentors helped Yancey (a non-Catholic) to keep his faith—especially faith in the church. Some of the people interviewed he knew, most of them he did not. Some of Yancey's mentors are "Mahatma Gandhi, Henri Nouwen, John Donne, Annie Dillard, G.K. Chesterton, Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. Everett Koop and Tolstoy. This was the kind of book that frequently caused me to stop reading while I reflected on some of the spiritual gems found in the book. It's available on Amazon.com for \$4. Speaking about books, please remember that we have many wonderful books in our parish library that we loan out free after Masses on the weekends.

Sr. Immaculata to Visit Homes and Meet with Newcomers to our Parish.

Some of you may be wondering what Sr. Immaculata is going to be doing now that she has retired from teaching school. I will have no problem finding work for her. Every month we have about 30 new people register in our parish. I try to call all of them on the phone to welcome them. But my desire would be to meet them personally. I am hoping Sr. Immaculata can do that. Also, I have a great desire to

reach out to our non-church-going parishioners especially those who may be discouraged or hurting in some way and those who would return with a little encouragement.

Most of us may not give much thought to the fact that every parish has thousands of non-church going Catholics. How wonderful if we could put together an effective outreach ministry to these brothers and sisters. Obviously Sr. Immaculata will not be able to visit all of these people but she will, with your cooperation, visit some of them and more of them will be visited by other parishioners whom the Holy Spirit will give a passion for this work. If the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses can have people knocking at doors, so can we. If interested in this ministry contact me or Sr. Immaculata. Needless to say on the job training will be provided.

Update on Kim Doyle

Kim Doyle is a parishioner in her forties fighting lung cancer. July 2005 she was given 6-9 months to live. All of you who attended our Good Friday Service this past Spring will, no doubt, remember the awesome witness Kim gave.

Recently Kim sent me the following email, which I want to share with you. She titled her email ***The Gift That Keeps Giving***. Kim writes:

I just wanted to let you know that your Good Friday "gift" just keeps on giving. Through sharing with the Ascension Community the story of my "cross" and the lessons learned on this journey with cancer, I've received the gift of prayers from so many good people. After nearly every Mass, one or two people greet Jim and I and say that they are still praying for me. Several folks have made reference to the Good Friday service and how meaningful the message was. Last Sunday, a parishioner stopped to tell me that I've been a real inspiration. After Sister Melanie's talk, a sweet woman whom I'd never met, told me she prays for me every day, and said that she has "changed her life" as a result of Good Friday. What a special gift, for her and for me. I'm so thankful!

We recently celebrated my one-year anniversary of living with lung cancer. When diagnosed, the doctors said I had 6-9 months to live, so this extra time is an unexpected, but very appreciated gift. Three months ago, things weren't looking so good. I was on oxygen 24/7 and very weak following surgery. However, in the last few weeks, I've experienced an amazing turnaround. Through the grace of God (thanks to all those prayers), and lots of hard work at the gym, my strength has been almost completely restored. While the CT scans indicate the cancer is still progressing in my chest and bones, tumors in my brain and liver are stable. I'm on a new chemotherapy cocktail of three different cancer drugs and have been blessed with few side effects

*(I need a nap now and then, but that is not so bad).
Despite what the scans show, I feel great!*

What a blessing, to have been given yet another respite from this cancer. And how much more appreciative I am just to wake up each day. Rain or shine, every day's a good day! I'm back to my mission... trying to bring a bit of hope and sunshine to my fellow cancer patients and "waking up" some of those healthy people around me who have forgotten what a precious gift life is. Thanks be to God, to you and to the many people who have prayed for me.

Sincerely, Kim Doyle

P.S. Perhaps the sharing of my experiences in living with terminal cancer would be helpful to other cancer patients, or those diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Anyone wishing to contact me may send email to kdoyle@cfl.rr.com.

I thank Kim for being such an inspiration to all of us. Please keep up the prayer for her and all fighting a destructive disease.

Tracy Swift a mother of two teenagers, has had a recurrence of cancer after spending months in Shands Hospital last year. Tracy is now back in Shands. She and her family are very concerned and very much in need of our prayers. Also, continue to pray for the **Baker Family** with two little girls in our school, both with serious health problems. Also, **Doris Brown** an active member of Ascension for 40 years. Doris is also in Shands Hospital in Gainesville.

Please Pass the Bread

Reflecting on today's Gospel, Jay Cormier tells the following story and then connects it to the gospel.

There is a Jewish folktale about a man named Shalom Aleichem, one of the accursed of the earth. Every misfortune imaginable befell him" He lost his wife, his children abandoned him, his house burned down, his job disappeared - everything he touched turned to dust. Yet through it all, Shalom kept returning good for evil everywhere he could until the day he died.

When the angels heard that Shalom was arriving at heaven's gate, they hurried to greet him. Even God himself was there, so great was this man's fame for goodness and humility. It was the custom in heaven that every newcomer was interrogated by a prosecuting angel, to assure that all sins on earth had been atoned for. But when Shalom appeared before him, the prosecuting angel arose, and for the first time in the memory of heaven, said, "There are no charges." Then the angel for the defense rose and spoke eloquently and movingly about the hardships this man had endured and recounted how in all the difficult circumstances of his life. Shalom had remained true to

himself and returned good for evil.

When the angel had finished, God said, "not since our beloved Job have we heard of a life such as this one." And then, turning to Shalom, the Lord said, "Ask, Shalom, and it shall be given to you."

The old man raised his eyes to God and said, "Well, if I could start ever day with a hot buttered roll..."

The angels and even God himself wept at the beauty of the simplicity and preciousness of his humble request.

PBS' Bill Moyers told this story in his commencement address this spring at Hamilton College. He told the graduates that Shalom understood that "bread is the great re-enforcer of the reality principle. Bread is life. But if you're like me you have a thousand or more times repeated the ordinary experience of eating bread without a thought for the process that brings it to your table. The reality is physical: I need this bread to live. But the reality is also social: I need others to provide the bread. I depend for bread on hundreds of people I don't know and will never meet. If they fail me, I go hungry. If I offer nothing of value in exchange for their loaf, I betray them. The people who grow the wheat, process and store the grain, and transport it from farm to city, who bake it, package it, and market it—these people and I are bound together in an intricate reciprocal bargain."

In calling himself the "living bread," Jesus offers himself to us both as the life of God that animates us with compassion and righteousness and the love of God that binds us to the Father and to one another as brothers and sisters. As Jesus gave "life" to the world through his selfless compassion and humble servanthood to others we, too, can give "life to the world" when we embrace the same giving spirit of Jesus—looking beyond our own needs and security to the good of others, giving not from our treasure but from our poverty, nourishing one another in the love, compassion and selflessness of the Gospel.

Have a blessed week,

