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Mary Immaculate College – Pilgrimage Archive: Have you ever gone on pilgrimage? Would you like to share this memory? We are both recording people's memories through oral interviews and collecting written memories for preservation in a special archive in Mary Immaculate College.

If you prefer you may write some brief answers to the following questions (please include your name, age and address):

- Which pilgrimages have you done?
- When did you first go?
- How did you get there?
- Who went with you?
- Why did you go?
- What is your most vivid memory of pilgrimage?

Please send information to:

Justin FitzGerald,
History Department,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road,
Limerick City

Knock Marriage Introduction Bureau: The aim of the Bureau is to introduce people considering marriage to a suitable marriage partner. Over 800 marriages have taken place as a result of these introductions. If you are searching for a suitable partner, why not consider applying? For further information contact the Bureau at Knock, Co. Mayo. Phone 00353 94937 5960 or visit our website at www.knockmarriagebureau.com and read about the workings of the Bureau.

Study Theology From Home: The Dominicans are offering a theology programme specifically for lay people, offered by distance learning. This means that one can study for a certificate, diploma or degree in theology, and even more importantly, become more educated in the Faith, all from the comfort of home. For more information contact The Priory Institute, Tallaght Village, Dublin 24, Tel: 00353 1404 8124/7 or email enquiries@prioryinstitute.com Visit our website www.prioryinstitute.com

Lenten Messages

Lenten sacrifice: Fridays in Lent are days of abstinence from meat for those of 14 years of age or older. Good Friday (2nd April) this year is also a day of fasting for those aged between 18 and 59, who are limited to one full meatless meal that day. Lent is also a time for voluntary acts of self-denial and acts of prayer and charity, which can include attending daily Mass, Scripture study, Stations of the Cross, almsgiving and showing mercy and kindness to others.

Lent is the season of grace and conversion, of penance and reconciliation, of renewal of our baptismal promises. Lent is marked with seriousness, consciousness of the poorest of the poor, attention to prayer and liturgy, attentive listening to the word of God, and "with the gladness spiritual desire await holy Easter".

Holy Rule of St. Benedict (Chapter XLIX [49])

Lenten Guidelines: Fasting is to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday by everyone aged 18 years of age and older, who has not yet celebrated their 59th birthday. On a fast day, one full meal is allowed. Two other meals, enough to maintain strength, may be taken, according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted, but consuming liquids, including milk and juices is allowed. **Abstinence** is observed by everyone 14 years of age and older. On days of abstinence no meat is allowed. Note that when health or the ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige. Ash Wednesday, all the Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday are days of abstinence. If a person is unable to observe the above regulations due to ill health or other serious reasons, other suitable forms of self-denial are encouraged.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread – Trócaire's Lenten theme for 2010: Please give the Trócaire box a prominent place in your home. Make this Lent another record breaker for your generosity. Thank you for everything you have given to previous Lenten campaigns, first established in 1973. Please check out trocaire.org

PAPAL MESSAGE FOR LENT 2010 VATICAN CITY, 4 FEB 2010 (VIS)

Made public today was the 2010 Lenten Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI. The text, dated 30th October, 2009, has as its title a passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans: "The justice of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ". The full English-language translation of the document is given below:

"Each year, on the occasion of Lent, the Church invites us to a sincere review of our life in light of the teachings of the Gospel. This year, I would like to offer you some reflections on the great theme of justice, beginning from the Pauline affirmation: 'The justice of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ'.

"First of all, I want to consider the meaning of the term 'justice', which in common usage implies 'to render to every man his due', according to the famous expression of Ulpian, a Roman jurist of the third century. In reality, however, this classical definition does not specify what 'due' is to be rendered to each person. What man needs most cannot be guaranteed to him by law. In order to live life to the full, something more intimate is necessary that can be granted only as a gift: we could say that man lives by that love which only God can communicate since He created the human person in His image and likeness. Material goods are certainly useful and required - indeed Jesus Himself was concerned to heal the sick, feed the crowds that followed Him and surely condemns the indifference that even today forces hundreds of millions into death through lack of food, water and medicine - yet 'distributive' justice does not render to the human being the totality of his 'due'. Just as man needs bread, so does man have even more need of God. St. Augustine notes: if 'justice is that virtue which gives everyone his due ... where, then, is the justice of man, when he deserts the true God?'

"The Evangelist Mark reports the following words of Jesus, which are inserted within the debate at that time regarding what is pure and impure: 'There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him. ... What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts'. Beyond the immediate question concerning food, we can detect in the reaction of the Pharisees a permanent temptation within man: to situate the origin of evil in an exterior cause. Many modern ideologies deep down have this presupposition: since injustice comes 'from outside', in order for justice to reign, it is sufficient to remove the exterior causes that prevent it being achieved. This way of thinking - Jesus warns - is ingenuous and short-sighted. Injustice, the fruit of evil, does not have exclusively external roots; its origin lies in the human heart, where the seeds are found of a mysterious co-operation with evil. With bitterness the Psalmist recognises this: 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me'. Indeed, man is weakened by an intense influence, which wounds his capacity to enter into communion with the other. By nature, he is open to sharing freely, but he finds in his being a strange force of gravity that makes him turn in and affirm himself above and against others: this is egoism, the result of original sin. Adam and Eve, seduced by Satan's lie, snatching the mysterious fruit against the divine command, replaced the logic of trusting in Love with that of suspicion and competition; the logic of receiving and trustfully expecting from the Other with anxiously seizing and doing on one's own, experiencing, as a consequence, a sense of disquiet and uncertainty. How can man free himself from this selfish influence and open himself to love?

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"At the heart of the wisdom of Israel, we find a profound link between faith in God who 'lifts the needy from the ash heap' and justice towards one's neighbour. The Hebrew word itself that indicates the virtue of justice, 'sedaqah', expresses this well. 'Sedaqah', in fact, signifies on the one hand full acceptance of the will of the God of Israel; on the other hand, equity in relation to one's neighbour, especially the poor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. But the two meanings are linked because giving to the poor for the Israelite is none other than restoring what is owed to God, who had pity on the misery of His people. It was not by chance that the gift to Moses of the tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai took place after the crossing of the Red Sea. Listening to the Law presupposes faith in God who first 'heard the cry' of His people and 'came down to deliver them out of hand of the Egyptians'. God is attentive to the cry of the poor and in return asks to be listened to: He asks for justice towards the poor, the stranger, the slave. In order to enter into justice, it is thus necessary to leave that illusion of self-sufficiency, the profound state of closure, which is the very origin of injustice. In other words, what is needed is an even deeper 'exodus' than that accomplished by God with Moses, a liberation of the heart, which the Law on its own is powerless to realise. Does man have any hope of justice then?

"The Christian Good News responds positively to man's thirst for justice, as St. Paul affirms in the Letter to the Romans: 'But now the justice of God has been manifested apart from law ... the justice of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood, to be received by faith'.

"What then is the justice of Christ? Above all, it is the justice that comes from grace, where it is not man who makes amends, heals himself and others. The fact that 'expiation' flows from the 'blood' of Christ signifies that it is not man's sacrifices that free him from the weight of his faults, but the loving act of God Who opens Himself in the extreme, even to the point of bearing in Himself the 'curse' due to man so as to give in return the 'blessing' due to God. But this raises an immediate objection: what kind of justice is this where the just man dies for the guilty and the guilty receives in return the blessing due to the just one? Would this not mean that each one receives the contrary of his 'due'? In reality, here we discover divine justice, which is so profoundly different from its human counterpart. God has paid for us the price of the exchange in His Son, a price that is truly exorbitant. Before the justice of the Cross, man may rebel for this reveals how man is not a self-sufficient being, but in need of Another in order to realize himself fully. Conversion to Christ, believing in the Gospel, ultimately means this: to exit the illusion of self-sufficiency in order to discover and accept one's own need - the need of others and God, the need of His forgiveness and His friendship.

"So we understand how faith is altogether different from a natural, good-feeling, obvious fact: humility is required to accept that I need Another to free me from 'what is mine', to give me gratuitously 'what is His'. This happens especially in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Thanks to Christ's action, we may enter into the 'greatest' justice, which is that of love, the justice that recognises itself in every case more a debtor than a creditor, because it has received more than could ever have been expected.

Strengthened by this very experience, the Christian is moved to contribute to creating just societies, where all receive what is necessary to live according to the dignity proper to the human person and where justice is enlivened by love.

"Dear brothers and sisters, Lent culminates in the Paschal Triduum, in which this year, too, we shall celebrate divine justice - the fullness of charity, gift, salvation. May this penitential season be for every Christian a time of authentic conversion and intense knowledge of the mystery of Christ, who came to fulfil every justice. With these sentiments, I cordially impart to all of you my apostolic blessing".

MESS/LENT 2010/...

VIS 100204 (1480)

"We need a little bit of silence. We need a space without the constant bombardment of images."

Pope Benedict XVI encouraging the priests of the Rome diocese in fasting from words and images this Lent

Workout for the Soul in Search of God

Interview with Official from Ignatian Exercises Federation

By Antonio Gaspari

ROME, FEB. 5, 2010 (Zenit.org) Every year, a countless number of Catholics escape from their typical activities and take days to retreat into prayer following the system of the Ignatian spiritual exercises.

The Pope himself is one of these Catholics; Benedict XVI's annual spiritual exercises with the Roman Curia begin Feb. 21.

Just prior to the Holy Father's retreat, the Italian Federation of Spiritual Exercises will hold their annual assembly. The president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, will be one of the participants in the three-day meeting to discuss the relationship between spiritual exercises and the people of the Church.

In order to understand better the history, timeliness and modern practice of spiritual exercises, ZENIT spoke with Passionist Father Stanislao Renzi, national secretary of the federation.

ZENIT: Many young people don't even know what the spiritual exercises are or why they are done. Can you explain them briefly?

Father Renzi: It's true that many young people no longer even know what the spiritual exercises are or why they are practiced: Today youth live in a world that loves noise, not silence and recollection, and many want to be free of laws and discipline. It is difficult to speak to them of the "search for the will of God in deciding their own life." However, there are many [young adults] -- between 20 and 30 years old -- who do the spiritual exercises by assiduously attending courses in retreat houses, at times on weekends. The representatives [of these retreats] offer the young people the possibility to pray and to reflect individually or in community, so that they discern their choices in life and make their own spiritual journey in the Church. The courses are open to all young people who wish to make their own lives mature according to God's plan.

It should also be remembered that, according to St. Ignatius, the spiritual exercises are not a time of study or of simple recollection and prayer. They are a search: "As walking and running are physical exercises, so any form of preparing and disposing the soul to get rid of all disordered affections and, after being rid of them, to seek the will of God in deciding on one's own life, for the salvation of one's soul, is called spiritual exercises." (Es. Sp. Ann.1).

ZENIT: Can you tell us the history of the spiritual exercises? When did they begin? What does the Bible say in this respect? Who are the saints who practiced the spiritual exercises?

Father Renzi: Spiritual exercises were already done by the Desert Fathers, but those we call the classic exercises go back to St. Ignatius of Loyola, who began to write them in a book in 1522 and perfected them in 1548. The book by posing first fundamental questions: For what has God created us?

The object of the exercises, in St. Ignatius' thought, is to order one's life according to God's plan, as man was created to serve God and only through this can he attain salvation.

He recommended that the exercises be done in a place other than one's usual environment. There were in fact "houses of exercises," where silence and stillness helped the exercises to be made.

St. Ignatius took from the Bible the ideas for the gradual composition of the book of spiritual exercises, in which are reflected his feelings when finding the secret to discern the will of God. Hence the Bible is a fundamental text for all types of spiritual exercises.

It would take a long time to find all the passages of the Bible that [could be referred] to the exercises. I find one concretely in Psalm 118:47-64. The Psalmist tells the Lord he has scrutinized his ways and will direct his steps to the Commandments; he says he is prepared to keep the secrets of the Lord. Finally he asks the Lord to show him his will, given that the earth is full of the Lord's love. Analogous is the itinerary of the one doing the exercises, who revises his own life to direct it in the sense of the will of God.

Other references might be the Virgin Mary, who meditated in her heart everything that happened around her. Mary, in fact, listened to and meditated the Scriptures, linking them to Jesus' words and to the events she went discovering in her history in relation with her Son. Another is Jesus' invitation to the disciples to withdraw in solitude to rest, which is spiritually salutary. Finally, the reference to the Scriptures in the conversation with the disciples of Emmaus, so that they understand what happened in his Death and Resurrection. St. Ignatius' exercises go over the whole life of Jesus as it is narrated in the Gospels.

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ZENIT: In a world such as today's which is so secularised, what reasons do you give to promote and practice spiritual exercises?
 Father Renzi: [Citing Benedict XVI] secularization, which often becomes secularism, abandoning the positive meaning of the secular, harshly tests the Christian life of the faithful and pastors. ... Today it is a providential challenge to which convincing answers must be given to man's questions and hopes. Spiritual exercises, insofar as [they are a time of] listening to the Word of God dwelled upon for a long time, allow one to discern the will of God and, conforming oneself to it, to overcome the mentality in which God is absent and, at the same time, to apply oneself to living in communion with God and with neighbor. For this reason the Federation of Spiritual Exercises promotes the exercises and urges those in charge to plan exercises every year for each category of persons: priests, religious, laity, young people, the elderly, with a view to the renewal of Christian life, to give an answer to the serious challenges posed by secularised society and religious indifference.

"Don't ever forget that the exercises are an insistent petition, which the Church addresses not only to its sacred ministers, to men and women religious, to all consecrated persons, but also to those who wish to enter into themselves, to dedicate time to God with their soul open to the hope of finding him on their way, to love him and follow him more" (John Paul II, Audience to FIES on the 25th anniversary of its foundation). In regard to the present importance of the exercises, Paul VI expressed it thus: "The practice of the exercises constitutes an invigorating and restorative pause for the spirit, in the midst of the dissipations of chaotic modern life, but also a school that even today is irreplaceable to introduce souls to greater intimacy with God, to the love of virtue and to the science of life, as gift of God and as response to his call." In 1967 the bishops of Triveneto, Italy, wrote a letter on the "Validity of the Spiritual Exercises," and they recommended "perseverance in this apostolate, which day by day shows itself to be more important." Without excluding the determination to experience ways that are adapted to our times, we insist "on the classic structure of the Ignatian Exercises, so valid and providential in their climate of reflection and profound silence"

Pietro Schiavone, S.J., "Il Progetto del Padre," pp. 12-13

This Week's Calendar of Saints:

- Monday 8th March – St. Senan (bishop)** Was born near Kilrush, Co. Clare. His family were prosperous farmers. His vocation seems to have resulted from an experience of danger from the sea. His early studies were mainly made at the monastery of Kilnahanagh. His principal monastic foundation was on Scattery Island, near Kilrush, in the Shannon estuary. He was anam chara (soul friend) to St. Ciarán of Clonmacnois and Brendan and died in 544.
- St. John of God (religious) (1495 – 1550)** Devoted his life to the care of the poor and the sick. He is patron saint of nurses, the sick, heart patients, printers and booksellers.
- Tuesday 9th March – St. Frances of Rome (religious)** Lived a happily married life in Rome where she was especially concerned for the poor. Died in 1440.
- Thursday 11th March – St. Aengus (Oengus) (bishop and abbot)** A monk in Clonenagh, Co. Laois, who came to the monastery at Tallaght at the end of the 8th century during the abbacy of Maelruain to spend a period under his direction. He was renowned for his devotion to both foreign and native saints and composed two martyrologies. He returned to Clonenagh where he became abbot and bishop. He died around 830.

Questions people ask:

- Q. When people have a run of accidents or bad luck is it a sign of God punishing them for past sins?
 A. The notion that God punishes us with misfortunes is not what Jesus taught. See his response to your question in today's gospel. The victims of Pilate's savage reprisal and those who were crushed when a tower collapsed at Siloam were no worse than other people. God might permit something to happen to bring people to their senses in an act of loving correction. But God is not in the business of dishing out punishment. As today's psalm puts it, the Lord is compassion and love.

Fr. Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap (silvesteroflynn@gmail.com)

Seeing your life through the lens of the gospels – Luke 13:1-9:

1. Jesus rejects the idea that personal misfortune is God's punishment for sin. Yet a serious illness or accident can serve as a wake-up call about how we live our lives. How have such experiences given you a greater appreciation of the value of your life and relationships, and of the time and opportunities at your disposal?
2. 'I'll wait 'til tomorrow to do that.' Have you ever said that and then found the chance is gone the next day? In the story we are called to recognise God at work in our lives and respond to Him. NOW is the opportune moment. When have you been glad you did not put off action to the following day?
3. Perhaps there have been times when you saw yourself like the tree in the parable – useless, merely a waste of space. Think of friends who came to you at such a time, people who saw your potential and were prepared to give you another chance, people who also dug the oil around you and gave you the help you needed to grow. Perhaps in your turn you have been able to do this for others.

John Byrne OSA (john@orlagh.ie)

The Deep End – Googling is Good for You:

A Google a day keeps the doctor away, researchers have found. Surfing the net, even more than reading, boosts the brain. And its effects last long after the surfing stops. One theory holds that surfing stretches the brain by making it perform multiple tasks simultaneously. Fine! But let's not forget what drives the search in the first place. And I don't mean the hard drive. I mean curiosity. Were this lacking there would be no activity. Curiosity stimulates the search. It's what puts Moses in touch with God in our First Reading today. (Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15) He sees something that arouses his curiosity: a burning bush that's not consumed. His curiosity gets the better of him and because it does we discover two very important things; about God: he cares for us; about human beings: we're holy. God tells Moses to come no closer and to take off his sandals because he's on holy ground – God's turf. I used to think that he was letting Moses know how unworthy he was to approach him. How wrong I was! God is saying the exact opposite. Not being gods we must maintain some distance from him, yet nothing should come between us, not even a pair of sandals. Only what comes directly from the hand of God is worthy to be near him – hence the naked sole.

Moses is a murderer. Yet God calls him. It's easy to see God through goodness. But can we see him when evil blocks the view? If not, then let's remember a murderer and a burning bush.

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