

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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## A RECENT PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

*Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.*

This past spring I once again accompanied members of the Order of Malta on their annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Ours is part of an international gathering that takes place at the same time each year, and this year it was scheduled to begin on the Wednesday after Easter.

Because things need to be set up to welcome the infirm individuals and their care-givers, a few member of the Order of Malta always arrive early in Lourdes, and this year I volunteered to join them, which meant taking off my vestments after Easter morning Mass, and dashing to the airport for an early afternoon flight to Paris.

I was very sorry to miss Easter dinner with my Dominican brothers, of course, but I was altogether unprepared for the pleasure of having Lourdes pretty much to myself for two days before the crowds began to arrive from all over the world. Once our work was completed in the morning, we had the rest of the day to ourselves, so I was free to go to confession without waiting in line, and – best of all – to visit the baths, something I've never done, as I've never wanted to take the time or place that could be given to someone with a serious illness.

Everyone has heard of the waters of Lourdes – especially their chilliness – so I'll admit I sat there somewhat apprehensively, as I awaited my turn. I tried to collect my wits, and to think of all the individuals I knew who would gladly have been in my place. Needless to say, our ill friends from the Rosary Center were at the top of my list.

Before long, the attendant called me and I walked past the curtain into the small pool area, where I descended two or three steps to stand waist-deep in water that was just as cold as everyone had warned me. The attendants, who spoke no English, silently encouraged me to take my time, to pray, to consider my weakness, and to ponder the powerful presence of Mary's love in a place that has drawn her children for more than



a century and a half. When I nodded, to indicate my readiness to leave, one of the attendants handed me a small picture of Mary so I could offer a farewell prayer.

The next day trains and buses began to unload the thousands of pilgrims who make up the annual Order of Malta event. I was delighted to stand with others in the welcoming committee to help the weaker folks into their wheelchairs, and point them toward the elevators that would take them to their rooms in the very simple hotel where we stayed.

The rest of the week unfolded as it always does, with Masses, processions, homilies and blessings by bishops from here and there in the United States. No one came away unmoved by the event, but I shall never forget

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Part III

### Piety

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

#### GOD'S GIFTS: SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

In our previous reflections we have observed that each of us receives sanctifying grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. However, these immense benefits are much like the gospel treasure a man entrusted to his servants. (Mt. 25:14) If we invest them, they yield great spiritual dividends; if we do nothing with them, they lie dormant, and our spiritual lives wither.

The graces we receive at Baptism are the spiritual principle God gives us when we are reborn in the sacrament. The gifts of His Spirit are the "interest" on that principle, which brings the initial gift to its perfection.

#### THE GIFT OF FEAR

The first of the Spirit's Gifts we considered was that of Fear of the Lord. This, we saw, is not the servant's fear of offending a master (and, thereby, meriting a punishment) but a child's fear of offending a loving parent. In the here and now reality of everyday life, families may suffer any number of dysfunctions, but each of us knows instinctively what life would be like if our parents loved us as they ought – and what love we would give in return. This is the human paradigm by which we may grasp the spiritual reality of Fear of the Lord: the loving desire to do our Father's will, for no other reason than our wish to show our devotion by pleasing Him.

#### THE NOBILITY OF FEAR

Jesus' love for God is the model for our loving fear of the Lord. His willingness to die for us is the paramount example of single-minded devotion to God's will, and if we find our fervor growing weak, we need look no further than the crucifix to see what nobility Fear of the Lord can call forth.

#### PIETY: A COMPANION TO FEAR

Closely allied with the gift of filial fear is that of Piety, which we commonly consider to be the respect we show God, the Church, and the articles and elements associated with our religious life. This is certainly true, but the Spirit's gift of Piety is a great deal more than mere respect. It is the love that underlies the respect. To understand this more clearly, we should consider St. Paul's consoling words to the Romans

*...you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba!" "Father!" it is*

*the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

By introducing the all-important element of love into our relations with God, the gift of Piety altogether transforms those relations. We can draw a contrast here between Piety and the virtue of Justice, which obliges us to give each person her or his due. Therefore, the virtue of Justice not only governs our relations with one another, but also our dealings with God. This may seem no more than common sense, but any of us who has paid taxes or answered the summons for jury duty knows that while justice must be served, it may be served grudgingly, unwillingly, and altogether without joy. Piety, on the other hand, is service rendered eagerly, spontaneously, and lovingly. Piety is, one spiritual writer terms it, "religion with a heart."

This reflects St. Thomas Aquinas' thought on the gift of Piety. He writes that "*to worship God as Father is yet more excellent than to pay worship to God as Creator and Lord.*" (II-II, 121:1, ad 2)

Catholics are occasionally called superstitious for genuflecting in the presence of the Eucharist, kissing a Rosary, or bowing their heads at the name of Jesus or Mary. If these gestures are mere rote, they may, indeed, be empty and superstitious. If, however, they represent (as they ought to) the love and reverence we have for God, then these gestures take on a great significance.

#### PIETY: EXTENDING OUR LOVE TO THE CHURCH

When we considered the Fear of the Lord, we considered principally our relations with God, and the means by which we strengthen and maintain them. The gift of Piety keeps God at the forefront of our love, but encourages us to identify other objects of our Piety. Not surprisingly, the first of these is Jesus Christ, God's Son. Our love for Him expresses itself in two principle ways – our devotion to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and our love for the Church.

Our love for the Church is not simply a love for its sacraments and institutions, but a particular love for the individuals who make up the Body of Christ. This list is endless, but it begins with those who share Christ's life in heaven, the saints whose intercession is so powerful a source of our strength. St. Thomas writes,

*As by the virtue of piety man pays duty and worship not only to his father in the flesh but also to all*

*his kindred on account of their being related to his father, so by the gift of piety he pays worship and duty not only to God, but also to all men on account of their relationship to God. Hence it belongs to piety to honor the saints.... (II-II, 121:1, ad 2)*

## **EXTENDING OUR LOVE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER**

In our temporal life, we turn our hearts toward our Holy Father, who in our day holds the keys of the kingdom Christ entrusted to St. Peter. Piety also turns our hearts toward one another, and it should especially commend the poor, the sick, priests and other missionaries, particularly those who even in these so-called enlightened times are called to suffer for their witness to the faith. One writer describes the relation of Piety to the Communion of Saints in these words,

*It is a circle whose circumference is the world in which we live; it is a sun whose rays penetrate the remotest corner of the globe; it is a fire that quickens with its heat the extremities of creation; it is a cool fountain that sends its sparkling waters to the uttermost ends of the earth.*

*The spiritual and corporal works of mercy are naught else than the communication of our filial love of God to creatures destitute thereof...or deprived of it. Different indeed they are, e.g., to give counsel to the doubtful, or to admonish sinners, to clothe the naked, visit the sick or bury the dead; but they all derive from the one source...the honor, the love of God, by Whom, for Whom, and in Whom all...are loved: these all spring from Piety. (James F. Carroll, C.S.S.Sp., *God the Holy Ghost*, p. 104)*

## **EXTENDING OUR LOVE TOWARD GOD'S WORD**

Jesus is God's Word – unwritten, because He took on our flesh to show us what nobility our flesh is capable of. But we also have the written Word of God, the Scripture, and this, too, should be an object of our Piety. At first this may seem odd, as all the other objects of our Piety are individual persons, but nonetheless “*an object to which the Divine Fatherhood extends: Holy Scripture*” (H.D. Gardeil, O.P., *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life*, p. 59)

*It comes to us with the authority of the rule of our faith, especially the New Testament, and indeed it nourishes us as a father. In the scriptures we are touched by a paternal goodness. God the father has put something of himself into it. We should therefore have the greatest love and respect for the Bible, not so much by exterior marks, such as kissing the page before and after reading it, as by a filial docility to follow its guidance. (Ibid.)*

St. Thomas says that Piety should move us “...*not to contradict the Scriptures, whether one understands them or not.*” (II-II, 121:1, ad 2) To be sure, God's Word must be taken as our guide in all things, but in these days of easily-accessible Scripture commentary, our love for God's written Word should lead us to

study it, to learn its true meaning, to shun erroneous interpretations, and to do whatever we prudently can to correct those who may have embraced them.

## **EXTENDING OUR LOVE TOWARD GOD'S MOTHER**

No one will be surprised that if the gift of Piety turns our hearts in love toward Christ, it must also turn our hearts toward His mother. This is not mere sentiment. Mary is an essential part of our salvation, for if we believe that Jesus is truly God's Word Incarnate, we must acknowledge Mary's place in God's plan. In the 19th Century, Cardinal Manning combined the doctrinal and devotional and commanded us to

*...lay these things to heart. She is the Mother of the Divine Redeemer of the world; she is the Mother of [our] Divine Lord and Master; she is the Mother of the Saviour Who shed His Precious Blood for [us] on Calvary – is it possible, I ask, for any man to believe these things and not at once to regard her, next to her Divine Son, Who is God, with all the piety of his heart? (The Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost)*

He continues,

*Let him look at the example of Jesus Himself. Next after His Heavenly Father there was no one whom He venerated and loved as He loved and venerated His Blessed Mother. But the example of Jesus Christ is the law of our life. We are bound to imitate it; we are bound to be like Him.*

These words may sound excessive, but if we place them in our modern idiom, they call to mind the simple admonition of Pope John Paul II, reflecting on Mary's words to the servants at Cana, “*Do whatever he tells you.*” This simple direction, the Pontiff wrote, “*becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses the Church of every age.*” Jesus silently responded to Mary at Cana; her words – and His example – call us to do the same.

## **EXTENDING OUR LOVE TOWARD THE DEAD**

Although the objects of our Piety are legion, let us consider only one more, and that is the souls of the dead. The virtue of Hope teaches each of us to look forward to heaven at the end of our life's journey, and our faith teaches that Purgatory will probably be a part of that pilgrimage. Many non-Catholics disparage belief in Purgatory, and Catholics themselves are often ill-informed about the Church's teaching. In fact, what Catholics are obliged to believe about Purgatory is briefly stated: “*The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins, enter Purgatory.*” (A Summary of the Dogmas and Teachings of the Catholic Church. Taken from *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* by Ludwig Ott. #417)

Whatever else may be taught about Purgatory is derived mainly from reflections of early Church writers. Cardinal Manning relies on these and observes that Purgatory is a place where – no matter how active individuals may have been in life – souls in Purgatory are forced to be passive.

*They can do nothing now for themselves: they have no longer any sacraments; they do not even pray for themselves. They are so conformed to the will of God, that they suffer there in submission and silence. They desire nothing except that His will should be accomplished. Therefore it is our duty to help them – to help them by our prayers, our penances, our mortifications, our alms, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar...If no one remembers them now, you, at least, if you have in your hearts the gift of piety, will pray for them.*

*Scripture instructs us in the words this marvelous and perfect bridegroom uses toward the soul or the Church that has been united with Him. (Origen, 217)*

Origen read the Song primarily as an allegory of “*the soul or the Church*” united in love with Christ the Bridegroom. The Church in general has agreed with Origen in this, and when the Song is referenced in official documents it is usually read in the symbolic sense of relating to Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church.

## THE COMPASS-EFFECT OF PIETY

In our last reflection, when we investigated the inferior types of fear, we considered “worldly” fear, the dread that we might lose material goods, social position, or the regard of our friends. These same goods – and we must admit that in their proper place and in proper proportion, each of these things is good and makes life pleasant – can draw us away from piety to its opposite: impiety.

In common terms we may think of impiety as lack of regard for sacred things, and so it is. But it springs from a misplaced love for ourselves that cannot lead us to the goal for which we were created. The Psalmist says, “*One thing I ask; for this I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.*” (Ps. 25:4) Manning asks, “*If this be the reward of piety, while we are wayfarers on earth, what will be its reward when we shall see God face to face?*” What, indeed. And, we might ask, what will be its opposite if we misdirect our love toward some lesser good? ■

## GREGORY THE GREAT

The other example of patristic commentary comes three centuries later from the pen of Pope St. Gregory the Great in his Exposition of the Song of Songs:

*May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. To her [the Old Testament Church] the Lord had sent angels, patriarchs and prophets, bringing gifts of the spirit; but she wishes to take those gifts not from the hands of the Bridegroom's servants but now from the Bridegroom himself. The whole human race, from the origins of the world to its end, that is to say, the whole Church, we now represent one single Bride, who in the Law had received a pledge of the spiritual gift; but now she seeks the presence of the Bridegroom himself and says, May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For the holy Church, sighing for the coming of the Mediator between God and man, for the coming of its redeemer, addresses the words of its prayer to the Father, that he may send the Son, that he may illuminate her with his presence that he may speak to this same Church no longer through prophets, but by his own mouth.*

Many patristic as well as later monastic commentators have a similar understanding of this first verse as referring to Israel's longing for the Messiah. From the perspective of the coming of Jesus, and in light of the Gospel, this is seen as yearning for a grasp of the full revelation of God's will after the partial gifts that were available before Christ. ■

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## THE SONG OF SONGS

**Who Wrote the Book of Love?  
*The Song of Songs for Catholics*  
Fr. James Thompson, O.P.**

### PART 6: Concise Commentary 1:1-2, Continued

In the introductory installments of this study, we learned how the Church Fathers used various allegorical methods of interpretation in their commentaries on the Song of Songs. To give you a direct feel for how the Fathers read this book, here are a couple of samples.

## ORIGEN

The first is from Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs. Origen wrote in the third century. Although later enemies unfairly condemned and destroyed many of his works, he remained one of the most influential theologians and mystics of the eastern Church in those early centuries, and his influence continues to this day. He summarized his whole approach to the Song in the first sentences of his Prologue:

*This book seems to me an epithalmium, that is, a wedding song, written by Solomon in the form of a play, which he recited in the character of a bride who was being married and burned with a heavenly love for her bridegroom, who is the Word of God. For whether she is the soul made after His image or the Church, she has fallen deeply in love with Him. Moreover, this book of*

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## PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

*(Continued from page 1)*

the few moments I spent in that chilly water, praying for you, asking God's mother to intercede for you in all your needs, and to ask her Son to heal your illnesses and to mend your wounds.

By a wonderful coincidence, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes is February 11th. The following day is the feast of Reginald of Orleans, a Dominican Blessed. This year my feast day falls on a Sunday, so it will not get much attention. That day we will be starting the second of our novenas of Masses to honor Mary as Our Lady of Lourdes, and I will be praying for you and your intentions. I hope you will offer a small prayer for me and mine.

