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

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A JOURNEY TO LOURDES

I made my first trip to Lourdes in 1987. A friend and I were planning to drive through France, and I had my mind filled with ancient churches, castles and famous works of art. My friend's goals were much simpler, and during one of our planning sessions, he said, "There are only two things I really want to see. One is the Normandy beaches, the other is Lourdes."

I replied, "Do you realize how far those spots are from one another? They're at opposite ends of a country the size of Texas!"

One of my Dominican brothers described his visit to Lourdes by saying, "I arrived as a sight-seer; I left as a pilgrim." This is the most profound description I know of the experience of a visit to Lourdes. And as I look back on the two decades since my first visit, I embrace its truth whole-heartedly. No one is unchanged by a visit to Lourdes, and although the realization may be slow to dawn, few who make the journey remain mere tourists.

Part of this is due to the lack of anything really remarkable to see in Lourdes. The permanent population of Lourdes is about 20,000. The Upper Town looks exactly like any other small European city, but as one strolls downhill toward the sanctuary, though, the stores change, and religious goods begin to appear in shop windows. For those who like violets and lavender, vendors sell lavender sachet, lavender-scented soap, and even violet-flavored ice cream – which, I confess, I enjoyed a great deal.

But commerce ceases once we cross the road and enter the Domain. A short downhill walk leads to a huge field. The 19th century basilica dominates one end, its front doors crowned by a carved relief of St. Dominic receiving the Rosary from the hands of the Blessed Virgin. But what is astounding is the sense of awe that pervades the space. Individuals talk and laugh with their friends, of course, but everyone has a purpose for being there.

Masses are celebrated throughout the day at the Grotto where the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette,



*The Entrance To
THE BASILICA OF THE ROSARY
at LOURDES*

and a small chapel – opposite the spot where Bernadette and her friends were gathering drift-wood, when Mary appeared – offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in various languages, all day long. Individuals flock to Lourdes for physical healing, but this small, unassuming place is a powerful reminder of another remedy – namely, Mary's command to Bernadette: "*Penance!*"

Lourdes is a place renowned for cures that restore physical health. But in the twenty-eight apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, she never once told Bernadette that Lourdes would become renowned for physical healing. What she did say – and what we ought to remember – was "*Penance! Penance! Penance! You will pray for sinners. Go and kiss the ground for the conversion of sinners. Go and drink at the spring and wash yourself in it....*"

When I was very young the sacrament of Reconciliation frightened me. By the time I was in high school, I took it for granted. But as I grew older I realized that although I may forget I am created in God's image when I sin, God never forgets what I ought to look like.

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

THE CHURCH II, The Marks of the Church: One

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

No one will deny the importance of prayer in the life of an individual. Our *Catechism* quotes two saints – one quite ancient, the other modern – to define prayer (CCC, 2558). The older definition, expressed by St. John Damascene (676-749) describes prayer as “...the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) wrote

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy.

THE EFFECTS OF PRAYER

Common to both expressions is the belief that prayer elevates the senses and unites an individual to God. This union is both a reward in itself and the means by which one may beg God for His gifts and favors. Most of us, when we were young, used the word “ACTS” to remind ourselves of the ends, or purposes, of prayer: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication.

GOD, THE SOURCE OF PRAYER

Essential to prayer is an acknowledgment of our utter dependence on God. This is the true meaning of humility: recognizing God as the source of everything we have and everything we are. We gain nothing if we deny the gifts and talents God has given us, but we deny an essential truth if we fail to identify God as the source of our being and, indeed, the very inspiration for our prayer. The *Catechism* continues,

Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. “Man is a beggar before God” (CCC, 2559).

THE RESPONSE OF THE HEART

“Where does prayer come from?” the *Catechism* asks. The text replies, “Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or spirit, but most often of the heart...According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.” (CCC, 2562).

Depending on the Concordance one consults, we find the word “heart” 990 times in Shakespeare. The Bible uses the word “heart” 865 times, but that is the unmodified noun. Concordances to the Scripture identify separate listings for “broken hearted,” “faint hearted,” “hard hearted,” “merry hearted,” “stiff hearted,” “stout hearted,” and “tender hearted.”

The word “heart” occurs frequently in our literature because our hearts are so important to us. They represent what is most valuable in us, and they tell us what we

value most in the world. Where we find our treasure, Jesus says, there we will find our hearts (Lk. 12:34). That can be a very frightening thought when we consider many of the things that make our hearts beat faster.

Fortunately for us, we make God’s heart beat faster. The prophet Hosea reminds us that when we lost our hearts in Egypt, God’s heart went out to us: “I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheek...” (Hos. 11:4)

Of all the prophets, Hosea, perhaps, consistently gives us the clearest picture of God’s heart, and it is always open to us.

THE “HEART” OF THE INCARNATION

At Christmas we celebrate God’s heart clothing itself in our flesh, and St. Paul tells us what this means: God didn’t become mortal so that we could escape our flesh; He clothed himself with our humanity to fulfill its promise, so that our hearts, which are so prone to skipping beats, might beat aright. “May Christ dwell in your hearts... and may love be the root and foundation of your life.... so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself.” (Eph. 3:17-19)

These reflections give us a notion of the value the Church places on prayer. It is so basic that we still profess an ancient maxim, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. “The law of prayer is the law of faith; the Church believes as she prays” (CCC, 1124).

PRAYER AND THEOLOGY: A CALL TO UNITY

Two things are important to consider here. The first is how utterly serious the Church is when it makes this statement. This concept is so essential a part of our Christian life that if we ever wonder what the Church teaches on a matter of faith, we need look no further than the Church’s official prayers.

The second thing we must remember is “The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it” (*Ibid.*). The Church believes as she prays; as members of the Church, we are called to pray as the Church prays. To state this does not diminish the value of our personal prayer, which is, necessarily, an expression in our own words of who we are. To insist on the precedence given the Church’s prayer is simply to acknowledge the normative, teaching value of the Church’s belief. The *Catechism* is quite clear:

Whoever says “I believe” says “I pledge myself to what we believe.” Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith.” (CCC, 185)

The purpose of this reflection is to consider what we mean when we profess our faith that the Church is “one.” To answer this question, let us consider the prayer – or prayers – that make up the source of our belief.

OUR PROFESSION OF FAITH

Not surprisingly, we find the earliest professions of faith in the Scripture. St. Paul provides many of these fundamental statements. The briefest is “...if you confess with your lips the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom. 10:9). However, as the Church developed and spread throughout the known world, the statements became more sophisticated. They did not go beyond the Church’s basic, scriptural traditions, but they became more complete summaries of the Church’s traditional Scriptural beliefs. Initially, these so-called “professions of faith” were composed for the benefit of catechumens, so that those approaching Baptism might have a concise expression of the truths they were preparing to embrace.

THE APOSTLES’ CREED

The earliest of these creedal statements is what we call today “*The Apostles’ Creed*” because, the *Catechism* reminds us, “it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles’ faith. It is the ancient baptismal symbol of the Church of Rome” (CCC, 194). The *Catechism* calls the Apostles’ Creed “the oldest Roman Catechism,” (CCC, 196), a wonderful description of its place of honor in the history of the profession of our faith and a splendid illustration of the intimate relation between the Church’s life of faith and its life of prayer.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

The next important profession of faith is what we know as the Nicene Creed. Most of us are familiar, at least vaguely, with the Council of Nicaea, which took place in A.D. 325. What may come as a surprise is that the profession of faith we make at Mass on Sunday and special feast days is actually the work of two Church councils – Nicaea, of course, and a later Council, which gathered at Constantinople in A.D. 381 and sought to explicate and expand even further the truths that had been recorded at Nicaea. Among these amplifications is the identification of the “marks” or “signs” of the Church, which we shall consider in this and the following three reflections, namely, that the Church is “*One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*” (CCC, 195).

BECOMING ONE IN CHRIST

When we say the Church is “one,” we mean she has but one founder, Jesus Christ, who took on our flesh to reunite and make us one again in our relations with God. In St. John’s account of the gospel, the prayer of Jesus for his disciples after their Last Supper is a breath-taking promise and a life-changing invitation. Jesus has told His companions that their words and mission will be fruitful if they remain faithful to Him (Jn. 15).

This fidelity comes at a cost, of course, and they must be willing to undergo a pruning away of unproductive

habits and modes of thought, a process that parallels the pruning grape vines must undergo if they are to bear more fruit. The process is painful, of course, but the result is immense. “*I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be filled*”

THE JOY OF UNITY WITH JESUS

We may think of joy as the happiness we feel when we gather with our families, or even the awe we experience as we consider some manifestation of nature’s magnificence. These and other events that bring us happiness are certainly related to the theological notion of joy, but they pale in comparison to the wealth Jesus offers when He promises that we may experience His own joy.

Our theology tells us that joy is the satisfaction we experience as a result of doing some good work, or possessing some good thing. When we consider the unity of the Church, we realize that this unity is the source of the profound joy we experience in Christ because we are a part of this unity: Christ living in us, and we living in God, through Him (Jn. 17:21).

“*What an astonishing mystery,*” St. Cyril of Alexandria (380-444) wrote,

There is one Father of the universe, one Logos [Word] of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her “Church.” (CCC, 813).

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Although we find great diversity among the individual members of the church, the Church remains one in its profession of the one faith, received from the Apostles, in its liturgical celebrations and in its apostolic succession. We will have more to say on this last point, but for now, let us consider “apostolic succession” the unbroken tradition of Church teaching we have received from the Apostles, through the Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the declarations of the successive Councils that have drawn together the Church’s finest minds to reflect and explain what the Church believes.

This unity of belief is essential to our understanding of the “oneness” of the Church. The original edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states

Some give assent to truths which others know nothing of...[so] there may be as many habits of faith numerically distinct as there are different individuals possessing the habit, but it is not possible that there be a diversity in the objective truths of faith. All admit that God, the Supreme Truth, is the primary author of their faith...all are prepared to believe whatever God has revealed and the Church teaches...All are expressive of the one doctrine and subject to the same authority. (Vol. 15. p.180).

THE EUCHARIST: SOURCE OF UNITY

We may look about and see cultural differences in the liturgical celebrations of Church members, but

these do not affect the common belief in the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist or the common understanding of the theological content of the other sacraments. In fact, St. Paul employs the early Church's faith in the Eucharist as a symbol for the Church itself: "*The cup of blessing which we bless, ...the bread, which we break, is it not the partaking in the body of the Lord? For we, though many, are one bread, one body.*" (1 Cor 10. 16, 17).

From its earliest days, the Church was aware that its unique character depended on the unity of its faith, worship, and discipline. For the early Church, the divisions that we call heresy and schism were the worst evils that could befall the Church because they attacked the all-important unity of the Christian community. These divisions remain a sad reality today, and for the same reason. The Church's theology states this clearly and expresses the hope that divisions may be overcome. One document states

Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time (CCC, 820).

OUR MINISTRY OF UNITY

We, of course, are the instruments by which this unity grows among Christ's flock. We must continually renew our lives by drawing our hearts closer to the example of Christ in the gospel. We must remain faithful to the Church's tradition of common prayer, and although we may individually lack the intellectual gifts that enable theologians to dialog with one another, we must never fail to pray for the education and training of holy priests, and the success of collaborative and ecumenical dialog among those Christians with whom we hold a common belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

But we must realize "*this holy objective – the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ – transcends human powers and gifts.*" That is why we place all our hope "*in the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit*" (CCC, 822). ■

JOURNEY TO LOURDES

(Continued from page 1)

The physical healings recorded in the gospel are signs of the deeper, spiritual healing Christ accomplished on the cross and which he offers us every day in the sacraments. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, instituted to restore the image of God we have lost to sin, is a sign of the power of the cross. Once again we should think of the Blessed Virgin's command to Bernadette, "*Penance! Penance! Penance!*"

When I was a student in the seminary, a fellow Dominican, considerably older than I but several classes behind me, told me he had taken a nephew to Lourdes, seeking a cure for the young man's paralysis. "Was he healed?" I asked. "No," came the reply. "But I was. Here I am, at last!"

This spring I will once again accompany members of the Order of Malta to Lourdes. Our pilgrimage will begin the Wednesday after Easter, and we will bring with us about

fifty invalids. Each will have a number of assigned caregivers, but I, as a chaplain, will have responsibility for no particular individual. This gives me the freedom – and the immense gift – of bringing with me all the concerns and hopes of each of the many friends of the Rosary Center. You may be certain I will carry with me all your prayers for spiritual and physical healing. But Easter is some weeks away, and we have no need to wait that long before we begin our healing journey. As we approach the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, let us begin our pilgrimage by seeking God's sacramental reconciliation.

A WORD OF THANKS

Friends of the Rosary Center know that Fr. Paul Duffner, who guided the Rosary Center for so many years, celebrated the 70th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on December 19th. This was a splendid occasion to honor a splendid, creative, and deeply spiritual man. Fr. Duffner has served ministries of the Western Dominican Province, from Anchorage, Alaska, to the Mexican border of Guatemala, but he will be primarily remembered for two things: serving as the Western Province's novice master and directing the Rosary Center for twenty years.

Fr. Duffner's novices remember him for many things – among them his patience in giving singing lessons to a novice who was (and is) hopelessly tone-deaf. He has been a pastor, a builder, and a sought-out confessor. But the intensity of his love for the Blessed Virgin sets him apart and makes him a model for all who turn to Mary for "life, sweetness, and hope."

Although Fr. Duffner resigned as director of the Rosary Center five years ago, he remains a fixture in our ministry. He comes to the Center every day and helps with whatever tasks need to be done, often the most menial. He celebrates Mass each day for our tiny staff, and he is the first to announce, "It's time to say the Rosary!"

Each of us at the Rosary Center – and chiefly Fr. Duffner – expresses our thanks for the many notes, congratulatory letters and promises of prayers our friends sent to make this anniversary so special an occasion. You may be sure we will remember you and your kindness in the prayers we offer each day for our friends and those close to them.

A NEW EDITION OF "WITHOUT DISTRACTIONS"

Praying the Rosary without Distractions is, by far, the most popular of the Rosary Center's printed offerings. It has been unavailable for some time, while we made improvements to the text, adding new reflections for the Luminous Mysteries and upgrading the graphics. We are proud to announce the return of this popular devotional manual, and we are certain it will continue to inspire all those who turn to it for their spiritual direction. The new edition is available for \$2.00.

