

Sorsum Corda

St. Augustine and the Jolly Beggar

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

Editor, The Catholic World

I used to give a lecture on "The Philosophy of Life." The title was perhaps pretentious and I had a fear that it might frighten away those who didn't care for anything didactic or academic...

Of course I did worm in a few ideas from Schopenhauer and from Shakespeare this play of course was packed with fragments sometimes not so very fragmentary—on the meaning of life and from the Greek dramatists bringing up the question whether they were fatalists but all in all the lecture was "popular," taken from whatever happened to appear in newspapers and magazines and movies...

As a matter of fact philosophies of life are popping out at you every day from all corners. Just as likely as not, a philosophy will be flung at you by your taxi driver in the ten minutes it takes to drive to the railroad station. We used to have a taxi driver on our corner who was a poet as well as a philosopher. He would recite his latest effusions as he doled the "L" pillars thrived by way of stalling...

Perhaps the best natural philosopher I ever met was a cook in a number 10 up in the deep forests of the State of Washington. He was out of the woods when I met him. We spent eleven weeks together in the desert among rattlesnakes, sage brush and sand. He read all the books I could feed to him. But he didn't need books. He was a philosopher in his own right.

Still stranger was the fact that when I was a young priest gathering impressions on my first assignment in Chicago I had occasion to listen to many an impromptu lecture from fellows called "Bums" on how to live and how to get the best out of this terrestrial existence. We were on Wabash Avenue they were on that part of South State Street which corresponds to the Bowery in New York. We were neighbors if not exactly buddies. We used to give them sermons in a store in the

midst of an entertainment once a week. We got in return their point of view, and in some cases their philosophy of life.

Yes "Bums" have a philosophy of life and so do hoboes or "gentlemen of the road" as they prefer to be called. They tell you that their way of life is that of Abraham, they are nomads who abhor the slavery of being always in one place and doing always the same monotonous round of duties. They think that we are "kaps." They consider it slavery to be tied down to a regular schedule. They wouldn't submit to it not on a bet. As for priests who lived by a religious rule one of those State Street cast-aways actually quoted Lord Byron's "Slaves to a rule and vows to a bell." Yes they had had education, some of them. One who used to come down with the query "Who is your favorite lexicographer?" It came to light that he had been turned out by Trinity College, Dublin. He was very much the gentleman even when in his cups, though often to outward appearances he was battered and bruised.

These memories came back to me when I happened for the tenth time upon the famous chapter on the Jolly Beggar in the CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE. Read it Book VI, chapter 6. It's good for a laugh as well as for a thought.

"My heart," he says, "was set on promotion, gain, and the married life, but Thou O Lord wast laughing me to scorn. I was preparing a panegyric to be delivered in the presence of the emperor in which I was to utter many an untruth and to be applauded by those who well knew that they were untruths. When as I walked through one of the streets of Milan I observed a poor beggar I suppose he had had a good meal (what he had had as appears later was too many drinks) and he was joking and laughing. At this I sighed and spoke to my companions of the many sorrows that attend our insane pursuits, how that all our labors such as that which I was then engaged in, tugging at the load of my misery, and making it heavier by tugging had no other aim than the attainment of peevish enjoyment which the beggar had found before us, and we perhaps should never find at all. For what he had already secured at the cost of a few pence tossed to him in alms, the joy that is to say of temporal felicity, I was still pursuing through long and weary byways."

I must not quote the whole chapter. But you see St. Augustine was in the process of getting a philosophy of life, he finally arrived at the noblest and divinest of all philosophies. But on the way he could muse over the apparently superior wisdom of a beggar in comparison with the way of life at that time followed to his misery by the panegyrist of an emperor.

St. Augustine came by his final philosophy "the hard way." Perhaps that is why it rings so true, why it is so human and so real. With passages just as indelicate as that one, he leads you on to the ultimate "Thou hast made us for Thyself O God and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." A far cry from a drunkard's jolly beggar!

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EDITORIALS

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The Faithful Departed

"May the Angels lead thee into paradise, may the martyrs receive thee at thy rising, and lead thee into the Holy City of Jerusalem; may the choir of Angels be on hand to greet thee; and mayst thou with the once poor Lazarus have rest everlasting." As the body of a loved one is borne out of the church after the funeral Mass, Holy Mother Church chants this consoling prayer. It is a prayer she continues to place before God in the Mass on the 7th Day, the 30th Day, the Anniversary Days in the subsequent years. Her prayers, her good works, her indulgences, go with the soul of the departed one, and continue with that soul. Holy Mother Church can never be satisfied till the soul is delivered from Purgatory, and accordingly intercedes for that soul day after day. God hides from her the actual time of deliverance, but encourages her to offer her suffrages for the dead without ceasing.

Loving sons and daughters care for the memory of their parents for the years immediately following their death by their prayers and by the Masses they have said for them. Friends and neighbors remember their deceased companions for a time. The Church never for a moment forgets them. She includes in each Mass the Memorials for the Dead, praying for all the poor souls. She includes in her calendar the annual Day for the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, known as All Souls Day. She empowers her priests to say three Masses on this day, one according to the intention of the Holy Father, one for All the Faithful Departed, one according to the intention of the celebrant. An age old custom leads parishioners to ask their Pastor to include in the Mass intention for All Souls Day their parents, relatives, clergy, friends, departed. The intention of the Holy Father includes all those who die in the war.

All Souls Day on next Monday should find us assisting at Mass and praying for the Poor Souls in Purgatory. They have preceded us with the sign of faith and sleep the sleep of peace. Our prayers and Masses will hasten the day when God's Angels may lead them into Paradise, that there they may have rest everlasting.

They Took Counsel

The Pharisees were never careless of any task they had to perform. They looked for efficiency in the deed and effectiveness in the deed. On one point they were more than usually united, and that was hatred for Jesus, for His doctrine, for His standing with the people. They wanted to destroy Him, His teaching, His reputation. Therefore, they took counsel; they talked the matter over, they discussed ways and means, they determined to entrap Jesus in His speech. The Jews hated their Roman Masters, hated their exactions, their taxes. The Pharisees shared this feeling. What a wily piece of business it would be to put a trick question to Jesus, a question about the lawfulness of the Roman tax! If He said "Yes, the tax is lawful," the people would turn from Him; if He said "No, it is not lawful," He would incur the penalty of the Roman law. Either way, He was bound to lose. It was a wonderful find, a proper outcome of earnest discussion, this trick question that would surely ruin Christ with His followers.

"They took counsel." The enemies of Christ and of His Church actually enter into secret session that they may destroy them. They have been taking counsel for two thousand years; their counsels failed in the beginning, they have failed through the years; they fail today. God's wisdom is at hand to meet all the wiles of their counsels. God's answer can avoid the dangers of an impudently responsive that leads to only one aspect of the question. God's justice remains as a power today even as it was when enunciated in the words of Christ's reply to the Pharisees: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's!"

Why Do Catholics Pray To Mary?

Catholic devotion to the Mother of God has been the custom in the Church from the earliest days of Christianity. This is proved by the writings of the early Fathers and by the still extant relics in the Vatican Museums.

But remember all our prayers to the Blessed Virgin have just two purposes: First, pleasing Almighty God by honoring, revering and praising His mother, upon whom He conferred the highest of honors. Second, to plead for her intercession before the throne of God for our worthy needs.

This is typified by our great and most frequently used prayer to Mary, the Ave Maria.

Had Mary full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. (These are words of honor, praise and exaltation, spoken by the Angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth, as shown in your own Bible, Luke 1, 28-42.)

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." (These words are a plea for our Blessed Mother's prayers "now and just before we are to meet our God.")

The Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin is so beautiful so inspiring so well understood, that we cannot understand why the Republics Revolutionists of the extreme century, could with any animosity throw out the Queen of Heaven from their churches, disavowing the Catholic Church alone to fulfill Mary's own prophecy. From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Luke 1:48.

Mary the Mother of God has been immortalized by poem and prose by painting and sculpture, by song and by prayer down through the ages. Would you like to hear more about Mary her Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Birth, her sinless life and the Assumption of her body as well as soul to heaven? Write us for details of this beautiful and helpful devotion or for information on any Catholic subject. (Catholic Information Society of Northampton, Pa.)

Library Signpost

Autumn's Great Holyday

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

"I believe in the Communion of Saints."

Thus our Credo on the great holiday of the head of November. The fall meaning of it is the fulfillment of Christ's Body down the arcades of the years.

Mary Peter, Paul, Augustine, Patrick, Boniface, Gregory, Anselm, Bernard, Dominic, Francis, Aquinas, Catherine, Clare, Francis Xavier, Peter, Clara, Margaret, Mary, Theresa.

O quam gloriosum est regnum... sings the Church at Vespers tomorrow.

Our joy will be greater in the marvelous mystery of the Kingdom, the more we meditate on it.

Karl Adam writes:

"Communion of Saints, what a glad and blessed light illumines it! It is the hidden treasure of the secret joy of the Catholic. When he thinks on the Communion of Saints his heart is enlarged. He passes out of the selfishness of here and there of yesterday and tomorrow of I and thou, and he is enfolded in an unselfish, intimate communion of spirit and life. Far surpassing his needs and dearest wishes with all those great ones whom the grace of God has forged from the refractory stuff of our humanity and raised to His height to participation in His Being."

Here are no limitations of space and time. From out of the remote ages of the past, from civilizations and countries of which the memory is now only faintly echoed in legend, the saints pass into his presence, and call him brother and enfold him with their love. The Catholic never alone. Christ, the Head is ever with him, and along with Christ all the holy members of His Body in heaven and on earth.

"Streams of invisible, mysterious life flow thence through the Catholic fellowship, forces of fertilizing, beneficent life, forces of renewal of a youthfulness that is ever flowering anew. They pass into the natural visible for us of the Catholic fellowship, especially to pope and bishop, completing and perfecting them. He who does not see and appreciate these forces, cannot fully understand and expound the nature and working of Catholicism."

"And, indeed, it is simple, child-like faith alone which perceives these forces, and therefore that faith alone discovers the road to sanctity. For such is the prayer of Jesus. I praise thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight" (Luke x: 21).

(This beautiful selection is the last section of chapter 8 of The Spirit of Catholicism. All of chapters 7 and 8 is on the Communion of Saints. You would do well to read them this week-end to inspire your holy-day observance. You might then be carried along to read the whole book. It will give you wide new vistas on your Catholic faith. I know of one local teacher who was converted to the Church by it, after all other books had left her still seeking. You may find it at the Catholic Evidence Library, in the lobby of the Columbus Civic Centre.)

Every serious and studious Catholic, even though he has never gotten to reading Dante's Divine Com-

media, ought to know about the magnificent finale of the Paradise with its incomparable picture of the Communion of Saints. There Dante's grace-blessed eyes behold the multitude of the elect like a rich and many-petalled rose whose center is the unfathomable light of the Blessed Trinity.

"In form of a white rose displayed itself to me that sacred soldiery which in his blood Christ made his spouse."

"As the pilgrim who doth draw fresh life in the temple of his vow as he gazeth..."

"So, traversing the living light, I led mine eyes along the ranks, now up, now down, and now round circling."

"I saw countenances, supple of love, illumined by another's light and their own smile, and gestures graced with every dignity."

At the midpoint of the celestial rose whose million petals are the Saints, Dante saw "more than a thousand Angels making festival, with outstretched wings." And most beautiful petal of all, at the very brink of the flaming center is Mary, "smiling to their sports and to their songs, a beauty which is gladness in the eyes of all the other saints."

Through Bernard's intercession Mary prays that Dante's sight may be purged enough to let him gaze briefly into the divine light in the center of the rose. Bernard's address to Mary is one of the grandest pages of Christian literature. The whole work comes with Dante's apostrophe to the Blessed Trinity as an ocean of light in the center of the holy rose.

"Within its depths I saw ingathered, bounded by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe."

"All suspended did my mind gaze fixed, immovable, intent, ever enkindled by its gazing."

"In the profound and shining Being of the deep light appeared to me three circles, of three colors and one magnitude;

"one by the second, as Irish by Iris, seemed reflected, and the third seemed a fire breathed equally from one and from the other."

"O Light eternal who only in thyself abidest, only thyself dost understand, and to thyself, self-understood, self-understanding, turnest love and smiling;

"To the high fantasy here power failed; but already my desire and will were rolled—even as a wheel that moveth equally—by the Love that moves the sun and all the stars."

(These excerpts are selections from the Carlyle-Wicksteed translation of Dante's Divine Comedy, cantos 31 and 33 of the Paradiso. A copy is soon being placed in the Catholic Evidence Library.)

Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Oct. 29, 1936, Edition

Transported by a chartered plane, His Eminence Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, Papal Secretary of State, sped across the United States on a mission from the Holy Father of peace and good will. Visit of His Eminence at key points in the nation were marked by cordial receptions.

Creation of a National Catholic Theater to project the Catholic way of life and to preserve good drama generally was proposed by Emmet Lavery, distinguished author of "The First Legion," in a Los Angeles address.

Christ Our King

By Dolores Hoffman

O Jesus look down from on high From Thy great white throne in the sky Take over and rule this weary, war-torn world Once again let Thy flag of peace be unfurled. May we who belong to Thee fight the good fight Persevere in the right instead of in might Until we are called to face Thee, our King Forever Thy glorious praises to sing. Then Thou will heal every ill, every ache Reward every soldier who fought for Thy sake Eye hath never seen such beauty as this Prepared for His own in heavenly bliss.