

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Holy Spirit's Gifts: Discoveries in Discipleship

KNOWLEDGE

[The sixth in a series of eight meditations for the Resurrection-Pentecost season.]

Last week we discussed the Holy Spirit's gift of Counsel. We saw it as a divine prudence which blends faith and freedom in practice: the first an approach to God beyond mere logic, the other a capacity to make decisions about life's many options. We further described Counsel as a seeking of the Father's will and a putting on of the mind of Christ, insofar as it involves making right judgments about basic issues. Counsel, therefore, is a special instinct by which Spirit-guided choices are made and the commitment to ultimate values is carried out.

This week our reflection centers on the gift of Knowledge.

Next to free choice, man's most precious possession is the capacity to know. To know means to make persons and things part of our personal experience, to welcome them into our very being. In fact, from earliest times man has been regarded as a "small world," an "idea-maker." Even Shakespeare saw man as paragon and king of creation because of his power to know. In our own day there is a strong recognition of knowledge-power.

Not only philosophy and sociology, but also Scripture testifies to the value of knowledge. The Psalms have much to say about knowledge, whether possessed by God (e.g., Psalm 139) or by man (e.g., Psalm 119). Most of the old Testament sees knowledge as related to the Law of God. The New Testament sees knowledge as related to Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life." (John 14:6) On at least one occasion Paul becomes ecstatic over the unfathomable power of God's knowledge. (Romans 11:33)

When Scripture talks about knowledge, however, it understands more than a cluster of ideas or an intellectual experience. The Bible does not see truth as conceptual, but as a total experience touching the deepest fiber of a person. To know is, biblically speaking, to become one with the object known. That is why the Scriptures understand man's knowledge of God as an ultimate experience.

Paul differentiates two types of knowledge. One he calls human foolishness because it puffs up and leads to self-exaggeration. The other is divinely fruitful because it leads to the discovery of God's purpose. Paul's conviction is that our hidden self unfolds only as we discover more fully the divine plan for our lives. For him human knowledge is worthless until it makes life-giving contact with God's great secret hidden from ages past. And that great mystery is Christ Jesus — the Beginning, End and Absolute Norm of the Father's love, for all men. Indeed, for Paul, to live is Christ and to know Christ is to experience life's truest meaning. (See Philippians 1:21) And that knowledge does not come by mere accident or hidden formula. It is open to all men who are open to God, that is to say, who possess the grace of God.

By human knowledge one interiorizes his world through sight, sound, touch. By the Spirit's gift of Knowledge one comes to interiorize his world from God's perspective. Prompted and guided by the Spirit, one skirts the ordinary processes of knowledge. The Knowledge which the Spirit offers empowers man to see directly how Creator and creature interrelate, offers assurance of life's deepest meaning, suggests how life's basic values are to be realized.

Human knowledge searches, labels, correlates. The gift of Knowledge searches the whole range of creation to ask what it can speak to man's quest for meaning. The gift of Knowledge labels all of reality "a reflection of the divine goodness, a luminous ladder by which we climb to God." The gift of Knowledge penetrates beyond appearances and sees the breadth and depth of our world in relation to God's over-all purpose.

Considered in this way, the Knowledge offered by the Spirit unlocks the world of God that lies hidden beyond the world of man. Here lies the reality beyond the appearances of our realities. Called by the Spirit, the Christian is invited to explore this mystery world which faith discovers, hope covets, and love possesses.

Knowledge achieves its deepest impact, therefore, when we look at our beautiful yet garish world and note its two basic characteristics: that it is nothing in itself, and yet that it bears the stamp of divine worth. To take our world as an end in itself is to idolize its nothingness. To forget the stamp of divinity is to miss the message projected by God through nature and history.

Knowledge is power because it affirms our humanness. The gift of Knowledge is power because it testifies to the presence of the Spirit in our lives. It has often been said that self-knowledge is the beginning of a genuine life. It is perhaps more true to remark that Knowledge given by the Spirit is the end and purpose of a genuine life. And this special gift of the Spirit is what the Good Shepherd came to give, since He came that "men might have life and have it in its fullness." (John 10:10)

We must never confuse Knowledge with catechetical information or theological learning. **These things can fill the head without ever reaching the heart.** Too many Christians in the past, and there are many more still with us, believe they will be able to think their way to Heaven. The Knowledge we speak of is integrated: it perceives as well as appreciates, it probes as well as understands, it gropes as well as grasps. To know in the Spirit, is to see life in its broadest dimensions, to yearn for the source of truth. Not without reason did Jesus identify the Paraclete as the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13).

One of the deepest statements in the Gospel writings equates eternal life with knowledge. "Now this is eternal life, that they (all believers) may know you, the only true God, and him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) In other terms, to place God at the very center of our experience, and to accept the divine mission of Jesus is already to have gained eternal life. Only death is needed to make that a "forever and ever" condition.

All of us, I believe, recall the first time we held a giant seashell to our ear and listened intently. And then, for at least a fraction of a moment, we believed we heard the pounding of the ocean on a distant shore. On growing up, we learned we were listening to the rhythm of our own pulse. The childish belief had become an adult truth.

Here lies a valuable comparison. The Knowledge given by the Spirit enables us to hear the echoes of an infinite world beyond our own. The gift of Knowledge poises us on the brink of eternal realities. Even if, on growing up, some of our childhood concepts of God needed recasting, Knowledge assures us we have been listening all along to a divine rhythm that pulsates deep within our being. Either in the world beyond ourself or in the world within ourself, the Spirit's gift guarantees we have come to know the God of truth and the truth of God.

vatican news

Pope Urges World Aid For Drought-Hit Nations

Vatican City [RNS] Pope Paul has called on the world's Catholics to make the "greatest possible commitment" to help the starving populations in drought-stricken countries bordering the Sahara.

He said, however, that the magnitude of the disaster facing those countries was such as to require the "mobilization of all the world's wealthier nations at a government level" to tackle the problem.

According to a recent United Nations survey of conditions in Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger and Chad, nomads are streaming southward in search of food. Grain supplies have reportedly been exhausted and 40 to 80 per cent of the livestock has died.

The pontiff made his appeal in a letter to Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican secretary of state and president of the Vatican's relief-coordinating agency, Cor Unum (One Heart).

Cardinal Villot is due to preside at a June 6 conference of

representatives of major Catholic charity organizations throughout the world. The conference also will be attended by superiors of many Catholic religious orders and officials of various Vatican departments in a major effort to coordinate assistance to the African countries.

The U.S. Catholic Relief Service and the West German counterpart, Caritas, have already been providing emergency aid to the disaster areas, but have been running into trouble at distribution points because there are not enough aircraft to carry food and medical supplies to the interior.

The need for immediate action by the international community was also underscored recently by U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, who warned that the next few weeks would be crucial for the six African countries.

In his letter to Cardinal Villot, Pope Paul said that private charity "on that organized on a limited basis" is not sufficient to meet the problems "which face

wide sections of the population or rather a large part of mankind."

"People must help other people," he went on. "Everyone without exception belongs to the great human family, and that is why everyone without exception must contribute to the solution of the problems of other members of the same family."

Alluding to the situation in the six African nations, the Pope said: "Faced with the tremendous expansion of the calamity, charity must assume new dimensions; it must spread among the nations on a universal scale."

It was the pontiff's second appeal for the famine-threatened African peoples. He first called for world-wide mobilization to aid them at his Sunday noon address May 27 to the crowd in St. Peter's Square.

Earlier, Addeke H. Boerma, the head of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), announced that the agency was trying to get a vast relief airlift operating.



Pontiff Receives Romanian President

Pope Paul VI greets Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu during an audience in the Vatican. The pontiff and Ceausescu conferred privately for 25 minutes and were then joined by Romanian Foreign Minister Gheorghe Mascovescu and Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, secretary of the Vatican Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, the Pope's "foreign minister." All told, the audience lasted 50 minutes, and was held, according to a Vatican communique, "in an atmosphere of sincere cordiality." It marked the third time Pope Paul had met with the head of state of a Communist country. [RNS]