

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Holy Spirit's Gifts: Discoveries in Discipleship

UNDERSTANDING

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

The Holy Spirit's gift of Knowledge was the subject last considered in this column. The capacity to know, coupled with freedom of choice, we explained, makes man "a little less than the angels" (Psalm 8:5) — indeed stamps him with the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26)

On the other hand, the Spirit's gift of Knowledge opens new horizons for man, his world, his destiny, now seen in the light of God's revealed purpose. Such Knowledge empowers man to know "the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him." (I Corinthians 2:9) The gift of Knowledge is a sort of visa unlocking God's mystery world to the faith-illuminated gaze of man.

The present meditation considers the gift of Understanding.

To know is to see the rim of reality; to understand is to get to the heart of the matter. Knowledge is recognition; understanding is comprehension. To know, for example, a chemical formula or a person's mannerisms is one thing; to understand them is something else again.

Many persons came to know Jesus during His earthly mission. Very few came to understand Him. This distinction is highlighted when one recalls Judas' betrayal, Peter's testiness and denial, the disciples' naive questions, the crowds' short-lived acclamation. In fact, for all their hearing His words and studying His ways, those who moved in the inner circle of Jesus' acquaintance only came to understand Him in the light of the Resurrection experience.

Knowledge is concerned with features; understanding puzzles over the mystery of a person.

Often and bluntly Jesus spoke of His followers' limited insights. For this reason He guaranteed, "another Advocate who will be with you forever, the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16) When sent by the Father, this Consoler "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you." (John 14:26) At his coming, Jesus continued, "the Spirit of truth will lead you to the complete truth . . . On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you." (John 16:13, 14:20)

Jesus further explained: since the Spirit's highest function is "to be my witness," so he will make all followers of the Way "to be my witnesses too, because you have been with me from the outset." (John 15:26-27)

A trinity of truths emerges from these statements of the Savior.

First, to fully understand Jesus results from a Spirit-impelled process of witness. A First Communicant can "Come to the Father," but only a mature Christian, after years of loyalty, can go forth from the Father with a message and a mission. Knowledge deals with simple truths; Understanding seeks after appropriated values and tested truths. Many claim to know the truth about God, but only he who has paid the price of witnessing understands the deep Truth which is God.

Second, to fully understand Jesus is guaranteed only by an effective openness to His presence. Too many of us think of Jesus as an historical figure, thus reducing Him to the limitations of time and space. In order to experience the full reality of Jesus as Savior and Lord, we must welcome Him into our lives in all of His Good Friday ordeal and His Easter Sunday glory. Only then can it be said, "Of His fullness we have all received." (John 1:16) Knowledge perceives that Jesus lived "Once upon a time"; Understanding experiences Him alive "forever and ever." A Christian's Credo is not so much a proclamation of "I know" as a commitment, "I believe in order that I might understand!" (St. Augustine) It is not so much the process that counts, as the presence. In the words of the great Cardinal Newman, "Heart speaks to heart." And within the intimacy of our presence to His presence, Understanding takes place. Understanding, unlike knowledge, is not an abstraction from life,

but a full exposure to life — indeed, an experience of "the fullness of life." (John 10:10)

Third, to fully understand Jesus results only from grasping the network of relationships that link Father, Son, Spirit and Christian in an intimacy of mutual love and concern. In a word, the gift of Understanding girds the Christian to a glorious quest: a life-long search for the fullest meaning of "Abba! (Beloved Father!)" on the lips of Jesus as Son, Sharer of the Spirit, Brother. In the final analysis, Jesus learned, lived and loved the Fatherhood of God, in the mysteries of His own Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. The compassionate love of God as Father and Forgiver is Jesus' greatest legacy to us. For a Christian there is no higher goal to attain, no deeper mystery to understand. No wonder great theologians have spoken of the "Our Father" as the "compendium of the Gospel."

There is only one tragedy in life for a Christian: to have said the Lord's Prayer thousands of times, but never to have prayed it once!

The gift of Understanding, to sum up, teaches restlessness with an incomplete Christ, a Christ not taken seriously as a challenge and a commitment. One need only look around to see dozens of "counterfeit Christs," dozens of multitudes of the glorious figure of Christ. The mystery of Christ is not easy to come by. There is a price to pay, and the gift of Understanding makes it somewhat easier to grasp what "life in Christ" truly and thoroughly means. Witness, experience, sonship enrich this gift offered by the Holy Spirit, the Perfect Giver.

The two Emmaus disciples, on leaving Jerusalem, were doubt-ridden and discouraged. The mission of Jesus remained a veritable enigma. The Ethiopian official in the Book of Acts, on leaving Jerusalem, was deeply perplexed. He found the prophecy of Isaiah a veritable enigma. In both cases knowledge meant an initial discovery of God. One thing more was necessary: the gift of Understanding. (See Lk. 24:45 and Acts 8:30) Only when the gift of Understanding graced their earnest search did the discovery of the Jesus as Resurrected Lord and Savior become a complete truth — a veritable delight of the spirit given by the Spirit. Only then had knowledge become transfigured into understanding.

vatican news

Charismatic Groups Cautioned by Pope

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul VI has warned against Roman Catholics belonging to "charismatic renewal" groups which loosen ties with the hierarchy and official Church structures. He urged them to make sure they are "on the right road."

At his weekly public audience, the Pope called on all Catholics to "open themselves to the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit," especially in relation to the forthcoming 1975 Holy Year, the preparations for which begin Pentecost Sunday (June 10).

Obviously referring to Catholics in the Charismatic Renewal, he said a condition for being receptive to the Holy Spirit is communion with the whole Church — "adherence to the Mystical Body, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, which has its Pentecostal cenacle in the community of the faithful, hierarchically united."

"We should reflect on whether certain groups in search of the Holy Spirit, that prefer to isolate themselves to avoid both the directing ministry of the Church and the anonymous crown of the unknown brothers, are on the

right road."

The Pope, whose remarks came after Belgium's Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, strongly endorsing the American-born, Catholic Pentecostal movement, asked rhetorically: "A selfish communion, which were it to originate from an escape from the true communion of ecclesial charity, what spirit may it encounter? What experiences, what charisms, may fill the vacuum of unity and ultimate encounter with God?"

(Cardinal Suenens, who attended the international conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the University of Notre Dame (June 1-3) and preached during the closing liturgy, had told the press there: "It's important that we keep open the doors to this spontaneity. It's bringing Christians together in a very, very close way.")

(The cardinal also said during that gathering of some 22,000 charismatic Catholics that he had recently discussed the Charismatic Renewal with Pope Paul who, he said, listened "openly" but expressed no opinion.)

Follow Francis Pontiff Urges Friars Minor

Madrid [RNS] — Pope Paul VI has urged members of the men's religious Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) to be "faithful to Christ and to the Church" in keeping with the example of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi.

In a special message to delegates at a General Chapter, which opened here May 31, the pontiff urged all Franciscans to be "witnesses, transmitters, and defenders of the Gospel," without letting themselves be influenced by a spirit of secularization which is so fashionable today.

After pointing out the importance of the Franciscan Chapter—a canonical meeting of the heads and representatives of the Order from various parts of the world to deal with matters affecting the organization as a whole—the Pope said he asked himself what the Franciscan family vocation should be today.

In reply to his own question, the pontiff said: "In these times of perplexity and confusion it is more than ever necessary that religious institutes grow and flourish in keeping with the spirit of their founder."

"Therefore, the Church asks Franciscans to follow in the footsteps of Christ."

Keep Devotion to Mary, Pope Paul Urges Order

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul VI urged members of the Marian Fathers religious congregation to maintain "special devotion" to the Virgin Mary "in keeping with the original spirit" of the 300-year-old institute.

The papal urging was expressed in a letter to the Very Rev. Joseph Sielski, Superior General of the congregation in Rome, on the occasion of the third centenary of its foundation.

The congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (MIC) was founded in Poland in 1673 by Stanislaus Papczynski to honor the mother of Jesus, to teach the poor, and to pray for the souls in Purgatory.

In his letter, the Pope observed that, if the Marian Fathers have encountered many difficulties in spreading throughout Poland and other regions of eastern Europe, they should never forget "the great favors" which divine Providence "has always bestowed" on the order.

The pontiff exhorted the Marian Fathers "to preserve their spiritual heritage and to give new

vigor to it, in the light of the teachings of Vatican II and of other documents of the Church on religious life."

Affirming that the world cannot be changed "without the spirit of the Beatitudes," Pope Paul recommended in particular to the members of the order that they maintain special devotion to Mary in keeping with the original spirit of the Marians.

CATHOLIC-U. CHAIRMAN

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of New Orleans was elected chairman of the board of trustees of the Catholic University of America here at a recent quarterly board meeting. A native of Washington, D.C., Archbishop Hannan served for 14 years as editor of the Catholic Standard, Washington's archdiocesan newspaper, which he helped establish. As part of his community work in New Orleans, the archbishop founded the Human Relations Commission and the Archdiocesan Social Apostolate Program which focuses on educational, recreational and social activities.