



## The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada

## L'Église Catholique Anglicane du Canada

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### DIOCESAN CIRCULAR – August 2011

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#### Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804)

*‘Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.’*

Kant's ‘Critique of Practical Reason’. (the conclusion)

Immanuel Kant was born at Königsberg (then the capital of Prussia) on April 22, 1724, of an Artisan family which had its roots originally in Scotland. He was the fourth of the nine (or perhaps eleven) children, who were born to Johann Georg Kant and his wife Regina Anna, or perhaps Dorothea, (nee Reuter). His father was a skilled harness and saddle - maker. Immanuel's education, both at school and at university, was obtained in his own home town. His formal studies were in mathematics, philosophy and theology. He was described by his contemporaries as a ‘solid’ student but not as being especially brilliant.

At the university he registered as a student of divinity, because enrolment with one of the higher faculties was demanded by the authorities. It was never his intention to devote himself entirely to theology, however; indeed his first true love seems to have been Newtonian physics. He was raised by his parents in the strict pietistic Lutheran tradition but later became more liberal in his theological views. He remained, throughout his life-time, a man of the most regular habits. We read that his fellow citizens of Königsberg could have set their clocks by him as he passed their windows on his daily walks.

He never married, nor sought or held any public office. It has been said that the history of Immanuel Kant's life was the history of ideas. He left his early junior academic position because of what he considered to be discouraging future prospects, and served instead as a private tutor for several years in various families. In 1747, however, he declared his natural quiescent talent quite openly to the world - in his work *‘Thoughts upon the True Estimation of Living Force’*. Therein, he stated that: ‘where two opposing views of the truth exist, it must be presumed to lie in an intermediate position’. In 1755 he obtained his master's degree and in 1770 he was appointed Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Königsberg.

His entrance into philosophical writing was cautious and conventional. His reputation as the greatest philosopher of the modern period began when he published his masterpiece *‘The Critique of Pure Reason’*. This did not appear until 1781, by which time Kant was already fifty-seven years of age. He was to revise this work significantly six years later. Two other major works followed quite quickly: *‘The Critique of Practical Reason’*, in 1788; and *‘The Critique of Judgement’* in 1790.

The notable modern English agnostic philosopher, Sir Anthony Kenny (who had initially trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome, and who, having been ordained in 1955, was to marry Nancy Gayley ten years later) has proclaimed with considerable authority that Kant's primary aim was to place philosophy, for the first time, on a truly scientific foundation. Kant proposed a ‘Copernicus-like’ revolutionary change which demanded that the objects of our thought must conform to our knowledge - rather than the other way round. This allowed for *a priori* knowledge of objects in advance of experience.

Despite the fact that Kant's thinking has played such an important role in the overall development of modern philosophy, his life otherwise remained singularly uneventful and was devoid of any dramatic incident. During his entire life-time he never travelled further afield than one hundred kilometres from his place of birth. Nevertheless, Kant was not at all reclusive, indeed his interests are now considered to have been very wide. He was fond of company and good conversation but always remained a truly humble and gentle man. He was an exemplary professor, who was perfectly content to remain in the same, not very distinguished university, in what was a small provincial town.

He adhered faithfully to a personal rule of life which allowed him to husband his time most precisely and profitably. He arose shortly before five each morning and spent the next hour meticulously planning his day - while drinking tea and smoking his pipe. A further hour was dedicated to preparing the lecture which he would then deliver in the forenoon on most days. He then wrote until it was time for his luncheon, which he always shared with companions or visitors - and which was often quite prolonged. Afterwards he took a daily walk of an hour or two - and the rest of his evening was given to contemplation, reflection, and reading. He regularly retired to bed at ten o'clock.

Once only do we know that Kant came into collision with political authority. This was occasioned, in 1792, by the second part of his work '*Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*' in which he addressed the 'Conflict of the Good Principle with the Evil'. The official censors held that he had attacked 'biblical theology' in this work - although the theological faculties of both the Universities of Konigsberg and Jena disagreed. The work was published in its entirety a year later.

In 1794, Frederick William II, successor to Frederick the Great of Prussia, expressed his own strong displeasure with the book, claiming that it depreciated and misrepresented many fundamental Christian principles. Kant stoutly declined to retract his expressed opinions but he did agree not to make further public pronouncements on religion. Upon the king's death, however, he considered that he was released from this undertaking and, in 1798, his detailed discussion on the relationship between biblical theology and critical reason was successfully published as: '*The Conflict of the Faculties*'.

Immanuel Kant, who measured barely five feet in height, was extremely thin and had suffered chronically from generally fragile health. Towards the end of his life he became increasingly antisocial and bitter, particularly over his failing memory and a reduced capacity for work. He finally became totally blind - and he died on 12 February, 1804. The cause of death is officially recorded as 'unspecified'. He was laid to rest in the Konigsberg Cemetery (now known as Kaliningrad: Russia).

German philosophy reached its pinnacle in the work of this genius, and Immanuel Kant continues to be regarded, to this day, as one of the greatest philosophical system builders of all time. It appears that most of the important questions that occupied him had their origin in an attempt to answer the problems: What is knowledge; how is it possible; what can we really know - and how? He would have maintained that it is through my sensations that I am now able to see my little dog 'Goonie' and my big cat 'Barney' playing happily together in the garden - and so - because my mind and the integration of my various neurological systems are such as they are, I can be completely sure that I have received these sensations in a distinct and definable way. Nevertheless, he would also insist that I cannot 'know' the cause of those sensations.

On the basis of such reasoning as this we cannot actually 'know' the universe that exists outside of our thinking mind. Although our minds do indeed receive sensations, and then proceed to shape them into ideas, it still remains impossible for us to know precisely what the world is - on the outside of our minds. By the use of our ability to reason, however, we can form an Idea of the universe - but this can have no distinct beginning in time. Furthermore, the bodies which the universe contains cannot be divided infinitely, and everything that happens in it must take place strictly in accordance with the rules of nature.

There is no absolutely necessary 'Being' who caused the world to be. Logically we must accept this theory of the world of experience - because we cannot experience it otherwise. Kant pointed out, however, that we can construct a world of 'Idea' which, although it has no beginning in time, yet may contain bodies that are infinitely divisible and which can be completely free - all the while having an absolutely necessary Being (God), who is the cause of everything. Although we cannot know such a universe through direct experience we are able to reason its existence - and act as though it were real.

He went even further than this and stated that man must act as though this kind of world existed if he would preserve his moral integrity. Indeed, it was only upon this basis that Kant was able to reason in favour of God, freedom, and immortality - and he argued that all goodness and morality depend on acting as if this kind of world actually existed. The 'Idea' of this world was, in his philosophy, to be considered as regulative - which by directing man towards certain goals causes him to strive to be good. He postulated that there were two universes: (i) the 'phenomenal' - the universe of experience, and (ii) the 'noumenal' - that of reason.

The fundamental principal of Kant's 'practical' world he considered to be the moral law which, he maintained, can be stated as: 'always act in such a way that you can 'will' the determining principle of your action to become a universal law, and, that everybody shall follow the principle of your action as a **categorical imperative**. In order to act so that the principle of your action shall become a law for all men, all men must be free to act in this way'. Kant placed this freedom at the centre of his practical world.

Immanuel Kant, in striving to restore man to his dominant place in the universe, had to limit the scepticism of David Hume on the one hand, and refute and destroy the atheism, fatalism, materialism, sentimentalism, and superstition that are so commonly preached and practiced in the world, on the other hand. Man himself is, however, part of the universe of objects and things. It should be clear to you already that Kant's views are, at least to a certain degree, in agreement with those of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume - for they too held knowledge to be confined to ideas. Man, however, should not be thought of as being permanently imprisoned in the clutches of his own ideas, because he can stand up and face the universe, confident in his power to understand it - and so to control it.

Through his strong and appealing arguments he gave to his contemporary world of philosophy the notion that there is a higher truth than that offered by mere human intelligence and reason. There is, he maintained, the moral law which resides within each one of us and which serves to guarantee true values in the world around us. This would bring him directly face to face with our old nemesis in this series - the problem of good and bad, of right and wrong, and the definition of duty.

A moral act, Kant defined, as being one done out of respect for the moral law, and not for any selfish gain, or out of pure sympathy. Consequences, therefore, should not be employed when determining the rightness or wrongness of an action. Any happiness or pain, which might arise from an act are not themselves matters of the greatest concern - for every act, undertaken with good intentions, out of respect for the moral law, is necessarily good. According to the thinking of Immanuel Kant, moral law is inherent in reason. Thus, he claimed it to be in the very nature of human thinking itself, that is to say it is *a priori*, or 'before experience'. If all of this has been thoroughly and correctly understood, what Kant's philosophy says, in this respect is that: if each individual measures a proposed action by the categorical imperative, he will be able to say without question whether it is right or wrong.

What can be said about God in Kant's thinking? Most importantly that He is the highest Idea which a man can have of the One - of the all encompassing Absolute Whole. This notion of God is the result of Kant's reasoning which brought together all happenings - and which transcends all experience. Kant attacked all of the arguments for the existence of God that had been advanced by the philosophers who preceded him, on the grounds of their inherent inconsistencies and logical fallacies.

Kant, nevertheless, continued to insist upon the impossibility of proving the existence of God by reason alone, but insisted that having faith in His existence is necessary if we are to lead the desired moral life. In other words, Kant argued, we need this Idea of God if we are to constitute the sound foundation upon which to build a transcendent theology that will, in turn, facilitate all of our moral and ethical principles. There must, therefore, be a God who is perfectly good, all powerful, and completely wise. He is the One who will be able to join happiness and virtue together in the world. Kant called his idea of God 'transcendent'. Reason is thus able to bring God back, as 'a necessary unknown', from the oblivion into which former philosophers had striven so imaginatively to force Him.

Kant maintained that it is the faculty of Reason which exists in the human mind that forms Ideas, by bringing together, into discrete entities, the various processes, events, and occurrences in the universe. Such Ideas are not derived directly from experience. They do, however, form the legitimate basis for a man's reason, belief, and action. The idea of 'freedom', for example, is not to be found in experience alone, but we do come to see it is a

practical idea, a necessary belief, if man is to live a truly moral life. Freedom of the will is, therefore, an idea which men erect because of the demands of their moral nature. It is necessary, and legitimate, even though it cannot be proved by experience.

Man is a free agent, according to Kant, because he is capable of acting voluntarily - and his actions are not merely links in an external chain of natural causes. He is able to initiate an action which, when envisioned in his own mind, is part of an intricate unique web of causes and effects. Each human being is thus capable of being held responsible individually for his actions - because he is able to strive personally for a better life. Such a man is not doomed to drown in total moral despair, having been caught fast in a web of causes and effects that are characteristic of the world of nature. Life becomes meaningful for us as human beings when we believe that what we do is the result of making our own free choices that have a moral meaning.

Under-girding Kant's whole position is the thesis that there exists a higher truth than that established by the sciences alone - and this is the 'truth' of the moral nature of man. The moral law within man is a guarantee of the world that lies beyond his senses, and this is a world in which freedom applies. His faith in such a world was Kant's own way of escape from the numbing world of experience.

Immanuel Kant's system of philosophy drew many strands of thought together and proved to be one of the most important accomplishments in the history of human thought. Reason, by rising above experience gives rise to transcendent principles. It is reason that gave man an idea of the soul - as the summation of all mental processes. Although we can never experience the soul, the idea of the soul has a value - and therefore it is legitimate for us to think of it. Despite not being able to prove the existence of an immortal soul we can, nevertheless, act as though it existed - and there is a distinct value in doing so. For as Kant suggests this idea is regulative in that it assists us in unifying and systematizing all of our other concepts and ideas. The Idea of the Soul, therefore, becomes a focal point to which we may safely and confidently refer all of our conscious experiences.

The idea of the Soul thus has the most profound ethical value. As a result of the moral law it provides the sure basis for moral living. The moral law demands good will; that is, a will so regulated that it might become universal in principle. This good will must be realizable (although no man can become absolutely good at any single moment during his mortal life). It is because of this principle that the immortality of the Soul is necessary - so that the moral law may be fulfilled: during this endless time the human soul goes onward to perfection and thus to the complete realization of the demands of the moral law.

Kant saw the mind as being the only source of knowledge. He did admit the existence of a world other than the mind, from which it received its impressions, but he maintained that the mind can know nothing of that world - as a thing in itself. Impressions are received by the mind in accordance with its inherent nature (or categories). These it then shapes into patterns which conform, not to the world outside of the mind, but to the very nature of the mind itself. It is entirely because of the necessities of the moral nature that we can come to 'believe' in the existence of a thing 'in itself' - but the mind can never prove it (nor can the mind prove what 'it' would be without the mind).

The mind is of such a nature that it shapes the impressions it receives into ideas - much as water or hot wax, when poured into a complex bowl having many crevices and depressions, will exactly assume the inner contour of the container. However, because knowledge is universal, and since all minds are fundamentally alike (each possessing the same basic categories: totality, unity, plurality, reality, etc), all human beings think very much alike. All of the ideas produced are strictly of the mind, but we can nevertheless act as though the world outside of the mind does exist - and we can adjust our ideas of it based upon any additional impressions that our mind might receive. In order to satisfy our moral natures as human beings we must bring our ideas together into larger general ideas - and then act as though these generalizations were true. This obviously still leaves us dealing only with judgements, and not provable ideas.

Kant's philosophy leaves us shut up in our minds where everything must be interpreted in terms that are established by our minds. Time and Space (and my little dog Goonie and my big cat Barney) are not 'realities' existing by themselves but are ways our minds have of receiving and shaping sensations. Kant argued that: 'without the thinking subject the entire corporeal world would vanish'. It was from this philosophical position that the great German Idealistic movement of the eighteenth century arose.

In my next contribution to the Diocesan Circular I will move on to consider the thought of the colourful philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who was a friend of Goethe and Schiller, and one of the first teachers of philosophy at the new University of Berlin.

Until then may God bless you and keep you all safely in His loving care.

Fr. David Skelton. C.S.W.G. Life Associate.



## **DIOCESAN NOTES AND NEWS**

- Father Jim Corps of Victoria died on Tuesday, July 12. Bishop Peter Wilkinson's sermon, preached at Fr Jim's Requiem, is also included in this issue. Fr Jim and his wife, Hettie, were among the founding members of our first Vancouver area parish, which initially met in Fr Edward Gale's house chapel in Kerrisdale. Soon after, larger space was required, and Fr Jim Penrice of the Anglican Church of Canada permitted the parish of St Mary & St Martha of Bethany (with St James of Jerusalem) to use St David's church in East Vancouver at the corner of Franklin and Kamloops Streets. Hettie, absolutely tirelessly, did all of the altar guild work, and Fr Jim, a layman at the time, lead the singing, read lessons (impeccably!), and assisted in training servers before Keith Kirkwood joined the parish. He was ordained years later, after he and Hettie had "retired" to Ladysmith where they became the same sort of stalwarts for Bishop Crawley's parish of Holy Cross. More recently, as the house in Ladysmith became too much work for them, they had moved to Victoria. Together, as Bishop Wilkinson alludes to, Fr Jim and Hettie were given to very many selfless acts of kindness and hospitality, especially to those who had no immediate family. May he rest in peace.
- The Rev. Dr. Henry Stauffenberg, who has been blessing us for the past few months with some splendid book reviews, has had another fall. He broke the same shoulder and arm, and thus will be unable to provide his musings until he has sufficiently regained mobility. In the meantime, prayers please.
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### **Irish priests must break seal of confession or face prison: new legislation introduced**

by Hilary White, Rome Correspondent

Tue Jul 19, 2011 12:30 EST

DUBLIN, July 19, 2011 (LifeSiteNews.com) – A group of Irish priests has announced that the country's Catholic clergy will refuse to comply with any law requiring them to break the seal of the confession. The statement of defiance comes in response to proposed legislation announced by the government late last week, under which priests could face up to five years in prison for failure to disclose sexual crimes against minors admitted by penitents.

The Irish government said that under the legislation confessions would not be exempt from rules on mandatory reporting of child abuse, claiming that the move is a response to Ireland's clerical abuse crisis. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny said that the Catholic Church's canon law would not be allowed to supersede state law.

However, Fr. PJ Madden, a spokesman for the Association of Catholic Priests, told the UK's Catholic Herald that priests will urge a penitent who confesses to a crime to go to police, but said that the sacramental seal of confession is "above and beyond all else."

"If I'm breaking the law then somebody has to find a way to address that for me. But in my own right as a priest what I understand is the seal of confession is above and beyond all else," he said.

David Quinn, a popular Irish columnist and commentator on religion and director of the think-tank the Iona Institute, wrote that such a law would be "unprecedented." It would, "make us the one and only country in the Western world to have such a law," he said.

Quinn also pointed to a practical consequence of mandating that priests break the seal of confession: "No child abuser will go to a priest in confession knowing the priest is required to inform the police. But cutting off the

avenue of confession to a child abuser makes it less likely that he will talk to someone who can persuade him to take the next step.”

But on Friday, Irish Children’s Minister Frances Fitzgerald said the issue was “non-negotiable” and that the sacrament of confession could not be used as a defense to claim exemption from the new rules.

“If there is a law in the land, it has to be followed by everybody. There are no exceptions, there are no exemptions,” she said. “I’m not concerned, neither is the Government, about the internal laws or rules governing any body.”

She added, “The point is, if there is a law in the land, it has to be followed by everybody. There are no exceptions, there are no exemptions.”

As of this writing, there has been no response from the Irish Catholic bishops; however, an inside source told LSN that the Vatican is gravely concerned with the proposal. In addition to concerns over the damage to the practice of the faith in Ireland, questions are being raised in Rome about enforcement and possible entrapment of priests.

“The only way to enforce this law would be to have people go into confessionals carrying a voice recorder and make false confessions of criminal abuse of minors,” said the source.

The source, an expert in canon law, said that even if Ireland’s anti-clericalist government does not resort to such measures, the country’s tabloid press, looking for sensational news stories, “certainly will.” Under the Church’s canon law, any priest who breaks the seal of confession is subject to automatic excommunication, the Church’s heaviest penalty.

In civil law, the source said, priests are at a great disadvantage when accused of crimes that involve the confessional. Not only can a priest not disclose criminal acts, in most circumstances he is bound not to mention to anyone, including the penitent, any part of anything he has heard in confession. The prohibition is so all-encompassing that a priest may not even reveal whether has heard a particular person’s confession.

This, the source said, leaves the priest in a nearly impossible position when called as a witness in courts. “A priest in such a situation can say only, ‘I can’t say.’”

Legislation to force priests to break the seal would be “unenforceable,” “impractical,” and “a distraction from the main issue,” said the chief executive of the Catholic Church’s child protection watchdog, the National Board for Safeguarding Children, Ian Elliott.

Since the rise of Christian civilization after the fall of the Roman Empire, western jurisprudence has recognized the futility of demanding that priests break the seal. Currently, in the U.S. the seal of confession is specifically protected under two constitutional amendments. In Ireland, the seal has been protected by centuries-old legal custom and precedent.

The Irish Times quoted Dr. Gerard Whyte, associate professor of law at Trinity College Dublin, who said that the seal enjoys a measure of protection under civil law.

It is “well settled in Irish common law that a member of the clergy of any denomination may not be compelled in law to disclose the content of any conversation between him/her and a parishioner unless the parishioner agrees to such disclosure,” he said.

Popular UK priest-blogger, Fr. Ray Blake, wrote that such a law would effectively make it impossible for Catholics in Ireland to practice their faith.

“Ireland will be the only non-totalitarian state to attack the Church in such a way,” Fr. Blake wrote. “Now we can look forward to priest martyrs to the confessional.”

“The problem is of course that only the truly repentant are likely to confess directly to such a sin, the unrepentant stay away from the confessional.”

Fr. Blake also brought up the issue of enforcement, saying, “Do they really expect the priest sitting in a dark Dublin confessional listening to an anonymous voice, who hears such a confession, to run round to the penitents

side of the confessional and photograph the anonymous penitent on their iPhone and text the photograph to the authorities?”

He added, “How far is a priest supposed to enquire into people’s sexual proclivities? Will the State take control and issue guidelines?”

The Code of Canon Law, paragraphs 983 and 983 say, “The sacramental seal is inviolable. Accordingly, it is absolutely wrong for a confessor in any way to betray the penitent, for any reason whatsoever, whether by word or in any other fashion.

“The confessor is wholly forbidden to use knowledge acquired in confession to the detriment of the penitent, even when all danger of disclosure is excluded.

“A person who is in authority may not in any way, for the purpose of external governance, use knowledge about sins which has at any time come to him from the hearing of confession.”



### FROM MAGGIE’S KITCHEN



My husband and grandson are off to town to pick up some more “product” -- i.e., building materials -- for the now nearly-completed new house. James is here for the bulk of the summer to help with the final push toward occupancy, and we’re all on what others might think of as a normal schedule, like meals on time and a five o’clock end to the work day.

In addition to the construction work, James is also faced with a fairly heavy over-the-summer workload from the International Baccalaureate program he’s in, so he spends his evenings at the kitchen table. A well-worked kitchen indeed! Last night

we were discussing the steps necessary to completing his “extended essay” for physics, a 4000-word affair, due a week before he returns to school. His habit is to formulate everything in his head before sitting down to write, unlike mine, which is to sit down at the keyboard and wonder where this will take me. We both, however, procrastinate, so I guess he’s my grandson after all, even if I can’t understand a word or formula of what he writes.

After James had departed across the driveway for bed (he has a temporary setup in what will be the north bedroom), dear husband and I were sitting for a few minutes on the couch. When I admitted that I had no idea what I was going to write about this month, he suggested the Dormition (a.k.a. Falling Asleep or Assumption of the Blessed Virgin). I have no idea why that is one of the landmark feasts of the year for me, but it is, as he knows. There is something about the very name “Dormition” which moves me, though I couldn’t tell you what it is. Even now, as I try out one explanation or another, none is entirely satisfactory. So I’ll leave it at memories and associations which are precious to me. One is talking to a Russian Orthodox nun in the leafy shade in front of her Sonoma Valley convent the summer after I graduated from high school, too shy to ask if I could come into the grounds. What that has to do with the Dormition is convoluted: it was a Russian Orthodox icon which introduced me to the Feast, and in turn, along with the icon of the Theotokos of the Sign, to Mary Queen of Heaven. Nothing logical in the process, only in the outcome.

Again, and more directly, when we were in Vancouver one August, we were able to attend the Dormition Mass and procession in Victoria. Fr. Shier was there, adorning with flowers the litter for the statue of Our Lady (I don’t remember that Beryl was with him, though we did see her in Vancouver on this trip or another). Now, so many years later, the feast itself presents the tender love of the Virgin’s Son, receiving His own Mother to Himself. Writing this, I realize that it is that very tenderness which so moves me, the same tenderness we encounter in His resurrection appearances to His disciples at Emmaus and Galilee and again to Peter on the road to Rome.

And now I’m going to resort to some words from my beloved *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*: “There are some who, concentrating their hearts and minds on our Lady in her glorified state as queen of Heaven, or as participating in the chief mysteries of the life of her Son, lose all memory of her day by day life as a woman in this world. . .The



Lily of Israel, the Daughter of the Princes of Judah, the Mother of all Living, was also a peasant-woman, a Jewish peasant-woman, the wife of a working-man. Her hands were scored with labour, her bare feet dusty, not with the perfumed powder of romance but with the hard stinging grit of Nazareth. . .” A real woman, a real mother, ministering to her Son and suffering along with Him, and in that a real Icon of the Church -- the Church which is even now, with the same tenderness, being received into glory.

Butler goes on: “Whilst we contemplate the glory to which Mary is raised on this day, we ought to consider how she arrived at this honour and happiness, that we may walk in her steps.”

The Orthodox precede the Dormition with a fast from August 1-14, excluding the Transfiguration on August 6. It being melon season, you might want to try this -- for either feast or fast. It comes from *The Festive Fast*, a Greek Orthodox publication.

#### MELON SHERBET

Mash very ripe melons (cantaloupe will do, but there are better ones out there) to obtain 4 cups pulp. Purée with 2 cups water; strain. Add 2 more cups water to the liquid along with 1-1/2 cups sugar and 1/3 cup fresh lemon juice. Stir until sugar is completely dissolved. Place mixture in a tin in the freezer until it begins to harden; whip in blender (or with egg beater) till smooth and freeze again. Just before serving, whip it to a froth. Serve in tall glasses with a straw. (Or you might prefer just to scoop it out!)

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#### Homily for Fr James Corps’ Requiem -- July 19, 2011

As you may have gathered over the years, we do not give what is called a ‘eulogy’ at a Requiem. Why? At one time it was customary at a priest’s Requiem Mass for the Bishop to deliver an address (called a panegyric), full of praise for the deceased. The story has it that at one of those Masses, after the Bishop had been extolling the virtues of the dead priest for quite some time, a priest who had had enough whispered loudly to the priest beside

him: “There’s a priest lying in the coffin, and there’s a bishop lying in the pulpit!”



Without a word of a lie, this Bishop can say that there are many of us here who have benefited not only from the wonderful -- not to say at times extravagant hospitality -- of Fr Jim and Hettie, available at any time of the day or night, for any group of men and women who happened to need it, but also from their hidden acts of charity to the indigent not excluding some of us priests, -- practical charity that went way beyond cups of tea and slabs of cake, acts befitting a priest and his wife. There is a time and place for telling such stories and that is later on.

Now is the time for remembering what we are doing here at Mass. The first action we are doing in offering the Holy Sacrifice is to give glory to God the Holy Trinity who created us, who redeemed us, and who is sanctifying us. Second, we are commending the body and soul of Fr James Corps to the same merciful God. Third, we hope this Mass will comfort those who mourn, because as Christians we are not to be sorry as men without hope for those who die in Jesus, and we can all receive a timely reminder that one day we too shall depart this life and have to give an account to the Risen Lord who comes to meet us.

It is the second point I want to enlarge upon – what is this Requiem for?

From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of her dead and offered prayers for them, especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the vision of God. Do you remember the request of St Monnica, the mother of St Augustine? She told her son that he should not bother taking her body back to North Africa if she died in Italy, “All I ask of you,” she said, “is that wherever you may be, you will always remember me at the Altar of God.”

In the **porch** we received Fr Jim’s body, sprinkled the coffin with holy water in remembrance of his baptism into the death of Christ in which he was sacramentally buried with Christ, so that just as Christ was raised from



the dead by the glory of the Father, so he too may come to a joyful resurrection. His white baptismal robe has now become the purple pall of penitence.

In the **Collect** the Church prays that the faithful departed may receive “all the unsearchable benefits of [Christ’s] Passion” – everything Christ died to give us – forgiveness of sins, sonship with Christ, and the promise of the Resurrection to eternal life in the Communion of Saints.

In the **Epistle** St Paul teaches us that nothing -- certainly not death -- can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And in the **Gospel** our Lord tells us why – He is the Bread of Life, and those who eat Him sacramentally, and who therefore have the Risen Christ living in them He will raise up at the last day. The Eucharist is the very seed of the resurrection.

In the **Eucharistic Prayer** when the sacramental body and blood of Christ are on the corporal the celebrant prays “that we and all Thy whole Church [and here he pauses to remember the faithful departed] may receive remission of our sins, and all other benefits of [Christ’s] passion” -- just as in the Collect.

Last Tuesday evening as Fr Jim was dying the **Commendation of the Soul** as it departs from the body was read. It commended his soul into the hands of God, the hands of a faithful Creator and merciful Saviour, and the prayer continued, “Wash *him*, we pray Thee, in the blood of the immaculate Lamb, that was slain to take away the sin of the world; that whatsoever defilements *he* may have contracted in the midst of this wicked world, through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, *he* may be presented pure and without spot before Thee.”

Later in the **Farewell Prayers** at the end of Mass we shall pray that “the good work which Thou didst begin in him *may be perfected* unto the day of Jesus Christ” [# 3, p. 600]; and another prays, “in Thy loving wisdom and almighty power, work in him the good purpose of Thy perfect will” [#1, p. 601].

So you can now understand what the Church is asking for when she prays to our heavenly Father on behalf of her beloved dying and dead -- “please forgive their sins, cleanse and purify them until they are absolutely holy, and so ready for the open vision of Thy Face.”

But how is such a request even possible? It is only possible because the sacrifice of Christ the Eternal Priest and the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Church are one” [cp. *Saepius officio*, p. 15]. At the altar, heaven and earth meet; the earthly altar and the heavenly altar are one. In *Heaven*, Christ is presenting Himself to the Father pleading the Atonement once finished in act, but ever living in operation in the midst of the “Angels and Archangels and all the company of Heaven” --- and on *earth*, Christ is doing the same thing, presenting Himself at our altar through his earthly priest for all those for whom He once offered Himself upon the Cross. This is the very heart of the Church’s life, the central act of the Church on earth: Christ’s Sacrifice offered by His own members, united with Him, and then receiving Him in all His heavenly glory in Holy Communion.

It is impossible for us to imagine a Church in which the faithful departed – a beloved priest and father for instance -- are *not* prayerfully remembered. Love forbids it. The interrelationship of human beings with and for one another does not end with death: *it is precisely that which death cannot destroy.*” [Card. Ratzinger].

Death cannot destroy this relationship among Christians living and departed? Why not? Because Christ the Conqueror of death says so: “I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever; and the Bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. [St John, 6:51]. So “Those who feed on Christ receive eternal life, and need not wait for it until the hereafter; they already possess it on earth...We digest -- as it were -- His glorious, risen Body as ‘a medicine of immortality and antidote to death’ [John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 18, and quoting St Ignatius of Antioch].” Those last words were written by St Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of St John (it was said).

So what then should we do? Let us hold fast to Christ: He will carry us through the night of death that He Himself has suffered and overcome, and death itself will become a way of hope, for our life is already hidden with Christ in God the Father, who with the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

+Peter Wilkinson, O.S.G.



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