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HUMOR AND THE SAINTS

John Kenneth Weiskittel

When we reflect on the countless valiant men and women who are canonized saints, there is so much that we can learn from them to strengthen us on the road to Heaven. We rightly recount their heroic virtue, read their writings, marvel at their miracles and react with hushed awe at their sufferings and martyrdoms. At Mass we sing their praises and pause prayerfully before their statues; at home we cherish their relics and prayer cards.

All of this is what we, as faithful Catholics, do as a matter of course and in no way would think of neglecting—nor should we. And yet our veneration of the saints usually is of the sort that overlooks a facet of their personalities that could bring them even closer to us, for the *humor* we encounter in their lives shows them in one of the most characteristic human activities.

Humor and the saints? Some Catholics want to place the two in separate compartments, holding that, because humor tends to trivialize life, witticisms, practical jokes and the like are beneath the dignity of God's servants. This attitude, however well-intentioned, does justice to neither humor nor the saints but rather approximates attitudes expressed in some of the more dour forms of Protestantism.

In individuals we see a wide spectrum of outlooks on life, from the outgoing and lighthearted to the introspective and serious. Is there one correct nature to have? No, our natures are as different as our physical appearances and Catholic philosophers and theologians have always taught that sanctity does not come from the destruction of our nature but from its *perfection*. When nature is left unchecked it will lead to laxness and frivolity in the former types mentioned above or to despair and severity in the latter. So, humor does have its place if used properly, even in the pilgrimage of the saint. It is worth our while, then, to pause for a time to enjoy and *learn* from some of our heavenly friends' lighter moments, not only because wholesome and edifying humor is in such short supply these days but also because seeing this down-to-earth side of the saints can increase our familiarity with them and make them even more approachable for us in prayer.

The Bible On Humor

A good deal of the misconceptions certain Catholics and others have about humor in regard to piety comes from their reading of Scripture. They note that it is seldom mentioned in the Bible (and, then, usually in a poor light), that the life of Christ is presented therein as one of deep sobriety and that modern "pop" theology has attacked the Divine Person of Our Lord by attempting to turn Him into a quipster or a "Laughing Jesus" (a painting with this title has been sold in recent years by religious supply shops). As far as they take this kind of thinking, they are correct.

Certainly there are passages in the Bible that take a dim view of those who are addicted to amusement. "Laughter I counted error," writes Solomon, "and to mirth I said: Why art thou vainly deceived?" (Ecclesiastes 2:2) In the same book we read: "The heart of the wise is where there is mourning: and the heart of fools where there is mirth." (7:5) Christ warns "...of every idle word men speak, they shall give account on the day of judgment. For by thy words thou wilt be justified, and by thy words thou wilt be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37) To the Ephesians (and to us) the Apostle Paul instructs against "...obscenity or foolish talk or scurrility, which are out of place." (Ephesians 5:4) And Saint James writes: "Be sorrowful and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into sadness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (Saint James 4:9-10; see also Proverbs 14:9, 13, Ecclesiasticus 27:14)

It is truly bizarre that Our Redeemer has been cast in the role of a Hebraic comedian (an entire book has been written to show His purported humorous sayings). Nowhere in the gospels do we ever find Christ saying anything purely in jest. True, He does make use of exaggerated illustrations in His discourses, such as "strain out the gnat but swallow the camel" (Matthew 23:23-24) and "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle" (Mark 10:25), but the first instance comes in His stern and lengthy censure of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees (verses 13-39), while the second treats the equally serious subject of the danger of riches. Possibly the incident where a short tax collector named Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree in order to see over a crowd as Christ passed by in the streets of Jericho (Luke 19:1-10) comes as close to humor as the Evangelists ever get. But, again, a careful reading of the passage dispels the slightest notion that the sacred writer was trying to elicit laughter (though certainly a smile might be a reasonable response). Of all the attributes of Our Lord

we find in the gospels, humor is one that is not in great evidence. Clearly He possessed it, for the Church teaches that He was like us in all ways except sin, but He chose to keep it hidden as part of His divine mission.

For that mission was such—the salvation of the human race from eternal ruin by means of His passion and death—that He was prophetically called "a man of sorrows" (Isaias 53:3) and He preached at the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh...Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." (Luke 6:21, 25)

Likewise, it is helpful to remember that the Bible's underlying message throughout is humanity's spiritual sickness and the consequent need for a divine remedy. We would hardly expect a doctor to crack jokes with a patient who has a deadly illness and who must be carefully instructed on what is to be done to regain health. And so it is with Holy Writ, which calls us to a close examination of our relationships to God and bids us to do what is required to put them in order. And now, as we turn our attention to the saints, we shall see how, by gently (and sometimes not so gently) tweaking the foibles of themselves and others, they help us to order our relationships in a delightful way.

Franciscan Follies

There surely can be no better place to begin our trip than by taking a look at some of the madcap capers of Saint Francis of Assisi and members of his Order. Francis was called "court fool of the King of Paradise" by G. K. Chesterton, and his simplicity, along with his renunciation of all earthly goods in order to serve God, helped form in him a carefree spirit that has ever since been a prominent feature of the traditional Franciscan Order.

Familiar to all Catholics are the tales of Saint Francis preaching to the birds, and Saint Anthony of Padua to a school of fish, after *people* refused to listen to them. Then there was the time Francis and Brother Masseo came to crossroads leading to three cities and were uncertain which to take. Our saint solved the dilemma by instructing his companion to spin around like a top until told to stop. Masseo obeyed, turning faster and faster until he fell from dizziness and, hearing no further command, staggered to his feet and continued revolving, falling, regaining his feet, over and over until, finally, Francis cried "Stop!" Brother Masseo faced Siena and the two followed the road there, where the preaching of Saint Francis ended a vicious fight in which two people had already died.

(When messengers of Pope Gregory X visited the Seraphic Doctor, Saint Bonaventure, to inform him that the pontiff had made him a cardinal, the saint, who had hid himself in a convent of the Order near Florence to escape the dignity, was washing dishes. What an odd sight it must have seemed to them, finding one of the Church's loftiest thinkers busy himself in a menial task but they must have been even more surprised by his reply. Yes, the pope must be obeyed, he sighed, but first I must finish these dishes; while I work you may hang the cardinal's hat on that bush and take a walk in the garden.)

Two of the more amusing stories that appear in the *Fioretti* (the *Little Flowers* of Saint Francis) involve episodes featuring the saint's beloved friar, Brother Leo. Once, in the course of a long winter's walk to Our Lady of the Angels Chapel, Francis told Leo to take down his words as they went along. Perfect joy is not to be found in the performing of miracles, he observed, listing several from healing the sick to raising the dead. Neither is it to be found in living a life of sanctity and edification nor in being a scholar of Scripture or of all learning. This went on and on, with Francis supplying details in every case. Finally, becoming impatient, Leo exclaimed, "Father, I beg you in the name of God, tell me where perfect joy is to be found." Saint Francis' reply has a bit of slapstick for, he told Leo, perfect joy would come if they reached their destination only to find that the doorkeeper refused them, mistaking them for robbers, and when, after they continued to implore him to let them in from the freezing cold, he came out and worked them over with a club. If they could endure this with love and with thoughts centered on Our Lord's sufferings they will have true happiness since, said he, "the highest gift and grace of the Holy Ghost that Christ concedes to his friends is to conquer one's self and, out of love of Christ, to endure willingly sufferings, injuries, insults and discomfort."

On another occasion, finding themselves in a place without breviaries, Francis suggested to Leo that for Matins he would speak and Leo was to respond by saying the same thing. "O Brother Francis," our saint began, "you committed so many sins in the world that you are worthy of hell." To which Leo replied: "Through you God will do so much good that you will go to Heaven." Each time Francis would say a similar form of humble self-abasement, Leo would reply to the contrary. Finally, it was Francis' turn to be exasperated and he questioned his friend on why he was being disobedient by answering directly opposite to the way he had been instructed. An embarrassed and confused Leo exclaimed: "God knows, my father, that each time I resolved in my heart to answer as you directed me but God made me speak as it pleased Him." They spent the remainder of their time in prayerful praise of God.

Even in his dealings with the devil, Saint Francis could strike a humorous chord. When he was tempted to leave the religious life in search of a bride, Francis, as Chesterton mentions in his biography of the saint, "defied the devil by making images in the snow and crying out that these sufficed him for wife and family." When he had difficulty casting out demons, Francis would threaten to get Brother Juniper, the most innocent and childlike friar, if they did not leave at once. This method never seemed to fail, the fallen spirits having a horror of Juniper.

Much could be written regarding Brother Juniper as well. When put in charge of things at the convent while the brothers were gone, Juniper decided to surprise them by preparing a big meal. Unfortunately, he didn't wash the vegetables

and he threw various game and fowl into one big pot, *none of which was plucked.* When some rich curiosity seekers came to meet him he joined some children playing on a teeter-totter, and continued to do so until they left, disappointed to see such an "uncouth" fellow—exactly the response for which Juniper had hoped. And to defuse the anger of a superior who had earlier in the day upbraided him for excessive almsgiving, Brother Juniper went that night to the superior's room with some hot porridge he had prepared. The scene, as retold by Johannes Jorgensen in his biography of Saint Francis, continues:

> "Father," said Brother Juniper as he stood before his door with the plate of porridge in one hand and a lighted candle in the other, "today when you reprimanded me for my fault I noticed that you were very hoarse from excitement. Now I have prepared this porridge for you and beg you to eat it; it is good for the throat and the chest!" The superior, who understood the meaning of this untimely attention, harshly told Brother Juniper to go away with his foolish tricks.
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> "Well," said Brother Juniper, "the porridge is cooked and has to be eaten, so you hold the light while I do the eating."

This innocent boldness softened the superior so that he relented and, in true Franciscan fashion, sat down to share the meal with his guileless charge. Saint Francis said of Brother Juniper, "I wish we had a whole grove of such juniper trees," and the modern Franciscan, Father Justin McCarthy, used him as a model for the chubby little friar in the comic strip of the same name.

Saints Philip Neri and Thomas More

Two of the great saints of the sixteenth century also provided some of the lighter moments of that troubled time. Saint Philip Neri, a devoted child of Mary, was a priest of the highest ability and bears the grand title of Apostle of Rome. Saint Philip earned that title by his wondrous conversion of many souls who had been trapped in the snare of worldliness. This he did to a large degree by means of his sunny disposition through which his love of God was so clear for all to see. It was said that he could lift the hearts of men by simply tugging at their ear or hair. And, notes the *Little Pictorial Lives of the Saints,* "(a) gentle jest would convey his rebukes and veil his miracles."

Saint Thomas More was one of the greatest minds of his age and gained the crown of martyrdom by resisting the Anglican heresy. Best known for his book, *Utopia,* Saint Thomas was a prominent English statesman who became his nation's lord chancellor during the turbulent reign of Henry VIII. His sense of humor manifested itself at an early age. As a teen Thomas thought he might have a religious vocation. His father was angry when he revealed his plan to enter a Carthusian monastery but Thomas wryly noted an obvious benefit: expenses would be much less than ordinary lodgings and he certainly didn't expect his father to raise his allowance after he moved from home. Saint Thomas would write witty poems in Latin to fellow students at Oxford and could scarcely keep himself from adding some well-placed clowning to parts of *Utopia.* Erasmus, the influential Dutch philosopher who was More's friend, wrote that he had "from earliest childhood such a passion for jokes, that one might almost suppose he had been born for them." Paul Turner, in the introduction to his translation of *Utopia* (from More's Latin), writes that More "even enjoyed jokes against himself." At his first meeting as a member of the king's council, Saint Thomas heard the group's head, Cardinal Wolsey, outline a certain plan. The council members unanimously approved it—except More. Wolsey, flustered at the thought that anyone would challenge his wisdom, upbraided him as a fool. "Sir," our saint calmly replied, "if His Grace, the King, has only *one* fool on his council he's very fortunate!" When his defense of the Roman Catholic Church caused him to be thrown into the Tower of London, More retained his sense of humor. In her biography, *Saint Thomas More of London,* Elizabeth Ince, a Catholic descendant of the saint, tells of the time the prison's lieutenant, a friend of the More family, apologized to Thomas for not being able to give him better food, cell and bedding. Smiling, More dismissed this, saying, "Well, I've got nothing to grumble about. If ever I do grumble, just throw me out!" Even as he met the executioner his spirits were high. "Cheer up, man," he told him, "and don't mind doing your job. My neck is short, so see you aim straight. You wouldn't want to spoil your reputation." Then, as the ax was raised, Saint Thomas cried, "Stop! I must put my beard aside. It would be a shame to chop it off. After all, my poor beard is not accused of treason."

Three Modern Saints

Saint Jean Vianney, Curé of Ars, patron saint of parish priests; Saint Bernadette Soubirous, the seer at Lourdes; Pope Saint Pius X, defender of the Church against Modernism—each an important saint in modern times and each with a flair for the comical as the occasion presented itself.

There was something close to the Franciscan in the simple, gentle humor of Saint Jean Vianney. As a boy growing up in Napoleonic France, he often missed school to help on the family farm. Once, boys from the village hid his tools while he was at church to see whether they could anger him. When he returned, he had only to look them in the eyes to tell which of them had done the deed and, upon discovering the culprit's identity, thanked him in a kindly and amusing manner for taking such good care of the tools. This eye for the ridiculous aided Saint Jean when he became pastor of the church in the tiny town of Ars. In those days, many women wore hoop skirts known as crinolines to church. Of this the Curé remarked: "The Emperor has done some fine things but he's forgotten one. He should have enlarged all of the doors to let the crinolines pass." Biographer Margaret Trouncer writes that "he could be sarcastic if he chose, yet without breaking the laws of charity," and that his sermons could make parishioners "blush by gentle ridicule." But his wit had bite when needed. Preaching on the rich who sought even more land instead of helping the poor, he said: "You

are afraid you won't have enough land? Ah, my friend, Wait until you have three or four feet of earth on your head, then you'll be satisfied."

The Curé also had his surprises. When two devout parish ladies chided him for never having them over for dinner, he invited them to one they would not soon forget. They arrived to find a table spread with a basket of the bread of the poor, a pail of water with a wooden cup and a volume of the lives of the saints—Father Vianney's usual repast! To a woman who brought him to the end of his patience with her non-stop talking, he asked, "My daughter, in what month of the year do you talk the least?" Then he quickly answered his own question with a smile: "It must be February because there are three days less that month." As often as not, however, the Curé's humor was aimed towards himself. He was known to describe his appearance as like a Mardi Gras dummy or as a cross between a goose and a turkey. Of the grotesque pictures of him sold in Ars, he exclaimed, "Do look! Wouldn't you say I was on my way out of a tavern?" or "Yes, it's me all right. See how stupid I look!" Even illness didn't dampen his spirits. In 1843, at the age of 58, he had a collapse as a result of his tireless work for souls and was bedridden for a time. One day during the recovery he whispered to an attendant: "I am engaged at this moment in a great combat." "Against whom, Monsieur le Curé?" "Against four doctors. If a fifth one appears—I'm dead." Perhaps his funniest spoof came at the expense of his undeserved reputation as being nearly feebleminded. Margaret Trouncer writes:

> Some priests who had wholly accepted the legend of his ignorance wrote to the bishop denouncing him for undertaking spiritual direction in cases where his theological training was inadequate. The letter came into the Curé's hands and he added his own signature to the others in his best handwriting.

The examples of this wonderful saint's humor are so plentiful that an article would be needed to cover them all. The biography cited here or others may be consulted to fully appreciate Saint Jean Vianney's rich store of wit and his truly angelic sanctity.

Saint Bernadette was something of a comedienne during her years as Sister Marie-Bernard at Saint-Gildard convent in Nevers, France. As an aide in the infirmary, writes Monsignor Francis Trochu in his biography of her, she helped numerous patients with her skill at "finding a friendly and often witty word to get them to take their medicines." A postulant looked all about the convent, trying to discern which nun was the Lourdes seer. She expected to find, in her own words, someone "with something solemn about her, a serious look, sedate movements, dignified speech and a stature appropriate to great deeds." She asked the mother superior, only to learn that that little, unassuming Sister Marie-Bernard was standing next to her. Shocked, the postulant cried, "What, *that*!" Bernadette smiled, took her hand and merrily replied, "Yes, mademoiselle, only *that*." An almost identical incident took place in the Curé of Ars' life and, interestingly, both saints also shared the art of mimicry. One sister, Elizabeth Meyrignac, who later became superior of an English convent, recalled:

> Her mimicry was brilliant, full of delicate touches of wit and sometimes sly roguishness. But I must say that there was never anything unkind. It was good genial fun that used to leave us under the charm of her saintliness...When recreation was ended, the dear Sister got up, bowed to us graciously and immediately resumed her grave demeanor to bring home to us that we young novices had also to return to the silence that was our rule.

Julienne Capmartin, a sixteen-year-old postulant, had such pangs of homesickness that she wept bitterly at her arrival. Bernadette eased the crisis by saying that this was "watering" her vocation. Julienne, who also became a mother superior, remembered that "I even laughed so much afterwards that our Mistress told me several times: 'You'll have to do some Purgatory later on, my dear; you're not serious enough.'"

When he wasn't defending the Faith, promoting frequent Communion and reforming liturgical music (among many other things), Pope Saint Pius X found time, now and then, for a good joke. Young Giuseppe Sarto loved to mischievously pull on the long tails of his grandfather's coat and, after he grew up to become successor to Saint Peter, he still enjoyed occasional fun. To lift the strain of his duties, Saint Pius liked to gently tease children who had audiences with him. When a little boy with long curls named Giulio met him, the pope pretended not to understand. "What a pretty name—Giulia," he said. The boy grew indignant at supposedly being mistaken for a girl and corrected him but Pius patted his locks and continued, smiling, "It is really a very pretty name—Giulia." With that the lad shouted, "Can't you see I'm not a little girl?...Don't you see I have knickers on?" Many people were miraculously cured during audiences with Pius X and word of his holiness was passed on. One lady rather tactlessly blurted, "They tell us that you are a saint." "You have made a mistake in a consonant," he replied, "My name is Sarto—not Santo." And to a man who asked that his friend be made a cardinal, he answered, "I cannot give him a hat. I am not a hatter. I am only a tailor." (A pun: *Sarto* means tailor in Italian. Examples taken from Katherine Burton's biography of Pius, *The Great Mantle*.)

Smiling With The Saints

Angels can fly, the saying goes, because they take themselves lightly. If there is any common thread that runs throughout this article, it is that the humor of the saints is built on *humility*. Dying to self (a trait of all saints), when blended with a certain personality, produces an irresistible cheerfulness that brightens all those who open themselves to its charms.

In contrast, the humor of the world is the offspring of pride.

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SAINT EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Jill Wiesner

In recent years Americans have been faced with the bad example of candidates for public office who call themselves Catholic, yet boast that they will not allow the Church to influence their political decisions. Just as their rejection of the guidance of the Church brings America ever closer to the brink of disaster, the loyalty over the centuries of true Catholic rulers to the one, true Faith has often saved their nations from a similar fate.

Saint Edward, King of England in the eleventh century, was born in a time of turmoil. Grasping nobles were too busy conspiring against one another to defend England against the rapacious Danes. Immorality and treachery were rampant and brutality was commonplace.

Edward was born in 1003 and named after his martyred grandfather. His father, Ethelred II, was constantly at war, as England was divided into factions vying for power. Taking advantage of the disorder, Canute, the Danish invader, launched a major assault and gained much English territory. When Edward was ten, the royal court itself having come under attack, he and his older brother Alfred were sent across the English channel to the care of their maternal uncle, the Duke of Normandy. Edward was not to see his homeland again for 30 years.

Growing up in exile, away from the worldly distractions of the English court, Edward found solace in prayer. He sought the company of religious and, under their influence, grew in the virtues of prudence, humility and angelic purity. Assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass was his greatest pleasure.

Like his brother, Edward enjoyed the royal sport of falconry as well as the hunt, but he never allowed his fondness for sport to prevent him from being present at Mass each morning.

As the two young English princes lived in exile, the Danes were successful in their conquest of England. Their leader, Canute, ruled as king until his death in 1036. Soon after the death of Canute, a group of English nobles approached Alfred and asked him to return home to claim the throne. Persuaded that he had the support of the English people, Alfred agreed. Upon arrival in England he was captured by a faction of nobles who supported Harold, Canute's illegitimate son, and Alfred was brutally murdered.

The rivalry continued until 1042 when, the last of Canute's sons having died, the Danish settlers as well as the English people petitioned Edward to return as their king. Though aware that his fate could be the same as his brother's, Edward returned to England. The people were anxious to see their new king whom they had not seen since childhood. Though he was just forty years old, Edward's hair and beard were white. He was tall, with a ruddy complexion and regal bearing. His appearance inspired confidence but his manner impressed his subjects most of all. He was gentle, quiet and kind, and radiant purity shone from his face.

Unlike his immediate predecessors, Edward had only one ambition: to serve God to the best of his ability. He met the crafty plots of the nobles with quiet determination and ruled the people with fairness. Though constant warfare had greatly reduced the royal treasury, Edward abolished the "Dane-geld," the onerous tax which had been imposed by the Danish kings. Some of the nobles, in an attempt to gain the king's favor, continued to collect the tax and presented it to him to replenish the treasury. Edward commanded that the money be returned to the people.

King Edward was generous to those in need but his donations to the poor came from his personal funds, not from the royal treasury. His reputation for fairness caused some of his subjects to appeal to him directly when they had been wronged. The king was always willing to give an impartial hearing to anyone, regardless of rank. Often lepers crowded about him, asking for his prayers. Miraculous cures were reported, which many attributed to the prayers of their saintly king.

Though Edward was firm when necessary in his duties as king, in his personal life he was always meek and gentle. When he discovered a servant repeatedly stealing from his private treasury, he allowed the man to escape, saying that the "poor fellow" needed the gold more than he did.

As king, Edward also had to contend with a legal system in shambles. The code of English law, established by King Alfred the Great in the tenth century, had become so disorganized during the years of warfare that there were three systems of law operating in England instead of one. King Edward studied the three systems and then combined them into one, to be binding throughout the kingdom. Because of the just laws promulgated by Edward, for hundreds of years after his death the English people appealed to the "laws of good Saint Edward" whenever they were oppressed by rulers.

Because King Edward did not allow himself to be drawn into the factional quarrels of the nobles and did not enter into foreign wars for personal glory, for the first time in many years England was at peace. Only once did he send troops onto foreign soil. At the request of Malcolm of Scotland, whose father, Duncan, had been murdered by Macbeth, Edward sent 40,000 men to defeat the usurper and to restore the rightful king to the throne.

As a Christian ruler Edward constantly turned to the Church for guidance. He sent a bishop and two abbots to Pope Leo IX to obtain the Pope's decrees "for the welfare of Christendom." When a Council was held in Rome, Edward sent two bishops to bring back the rulings of the Church.

Much of Edward's private treasury was used for the building of churches. In the year 1050, he introduced the Norman Romanesque style of architecture into England with the church he built at Canterbury. His greatest project, however, was the restoration of the abbey at Westminster which he dedicated to Saint Peter.

The English people, happy under the rule of King Edward, were concerned that their monarch had not married and so they prevailed upon him to choose a wife. Edward, however, had made a vow of virginity while in his youth. After much prayer he decided that, if he could find a lady "like-minded with himself" who would be willing to live with him in continence, he would marry to please his subjects. He chose the beautiful and virtuous Editha "whose mind was a school of all the liberal arts." Married on January 23, 1045, Edward and Editha led pure and holy lives.

In December of 1065, King Edward fell ill. Though he continued in his duties he knew he was dying. By Holy Innocents Day he was unable to get out of bed. In early January, surrounded by the queen, the archbishop of Canterbury and Harold, his successor to the throne, he had a prophetic vision in which he was told:

> The extreme corruption and wickedness of the English nation has provoked the just anger of God. When malice shall have reached the fulness of its measure, God will, in His wrath, send to the English people wicked spirits who will punish and afflict them with great severity by separating the green tree from its parent stem the length of three furlongs. But at last this same tree, through the compassionate mercy of God and without any national (governmental) assistance, shall return to its original root, reflourish and bear abundant fruit.

The interpretation which was given to this prophecy was that the "wicked spirits" were the "Protestant innovators who pretended, in the sixteenth century, to reform the Catholic Church in England." For three hundred years the Church in England would be without a hierarchy but they would be restored at the end of that time. The English people were reminded of this prophecy at the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England by Pope Pius IX in 1850.

On January 5, 1066, King Edward died at the age of 63. In 1161, he was canonized by Pope Alexander II and, on October 13, 1163, his incorrupt body was translated by Saint Thomas à Becket to a beautiful shrine in Westminster Abbey. The anniversary of the translation of his relics, October 13, is the day fixed by the Church for Saint Edward's feast.

Throughout the years pilgrims have flocked to Saint Edward's tomb, including Richard I of England after his release from captivity. After the depredations of Henry VIII the relics of most of the English saints had been destroyed but Saint Edward's were unharmed.

Saint Edward the Confessor (he was called "Confessor" because of his piety) restored order and prosperity to England through his heroic devotion to God. Through his intercession and his example, may we be inspired with equal love for God and led to heroic virtue. †

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION PRICE TO BE RAISED

For the past six years the cost of a one-year subscription to *The Athanasian* has been $8.00 for eight issues. Although it has been suggested to me from time to time that I would be perfectly justified in raising the subscription rate, I have always been reluctant to do so. However, a recent check on the cost of producing a single issue of *The Athanasian* has convinced me that I should, however reluctantly, increase the annual subscription price.

While it is probably unnecessary, I would prefer to give a few figures to explain why a subscription rate increase is in order. In round numbers we presently have some 950 paid newsletter subscriptions and so are receiving approximately that amount ($950.00) for each issue. (A number of subscribers send us a bit extra when they renew their subscriptions each year and so that boosts our income per issue to some small extent). On the other hand, the cost to the TCA of publishing a single issue of this newsletter is about $1,700.00. Our expenses, then, for each issue are nearly double the amount we receive for paid subscriptions. On a yearly basis this figures out to about $6,000.00 that we are paying out of the TCA over and above the income derived from paid subscriptions. Such being the case, I guess that I need not apologize for raising the subscription rate.

And so, starting with the next (April, 1988) issue of *The Athanasian*, the annual subscription price for the eight issues published each year will be $12.00 for the USA, Canada and Mexico and $16.00 (via Air Mail) for all other countries. The cost for bulk orders of additional copies of particular issues will also be increased. All the necessary newsletter price information is found elsewhere in these pages. Actually, even with this increase in the subscription price, the newsletter will still fall short of paying for itself. (In recent weeks, incidentally, we have received a rather encouraging number of new subscriptions.) While *The Athanasian* was never intended to be a money-making project, it would be nice if it were one day to become financially self-sustaining.

Fr. F. Fenton

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH—WHY, OF COURSE!

Fr. Francis E. Fenton

This newsletter is now in its ninth year of publication. Of the numerous articles of mine which have appeared therein during that period of time, so many of them have dealt with the Church and civil government and with various moral issues. For the most part these articles have been of the negative, pessimistic, doom-and-gloom variety—and increasingly so with the passage of time. Certainly I do not write in this vein because I enjoy discussing how bad things are but rather because honesty compels me to do so. To ignore or to gloss over tragic realities of such magnitude as the Conciliar Church and the state of the nation for whatever reason simply cannot be warranted on any score. While situations do occur from time to time wherein it is morally permissible to conceal the truth (though never by falsehood), it is the height of folly and is playing into the hands of the enemy to attempt to do so in the present circumstances. However unpleasant or distasteful, then, the truth may be as it relates both to the Conciliar Church and the American government, that truth must be stated loud and clear.

It is impossible effectively to counteract and to oppose an enemy unless the identity of that enemy is first plainly recognized. But, you say, are not Communism and Freemasonry the major threats to the survival of the USA and what's left of the free world? Yes they are and, hopefully, an increasing number of people are at least beginning to realize that. But how many of the American people are even remotely aware of the vital part played in, say, the steady advance of Communism by the Conciliar Church and the American government (the two principal allies, I firmly believe, of the Communist conspiracy)? Yet such is the stark reality. (Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and his Pax Christi would be an example of the former.)

While it is not a purpose of this article to prove this contention—nor is it possible in the space available—I would briefly discuss one case in point relating to the American government:

(It is a fact beyond dispute that the American government has supported Communism in myriad and diverse ways for the past several decades. Indeed, as one Robert Welch declared a number of years ago (and often repeated in the ensuing years), "the most powerful single force promoting the worldwide advance of the Communist conspiracy is the government of the United States." While knowledge of this support was kept from the rank and file of the American people, it was no secret to those who made it their business to ferret out the truth in such matters. And so the utterly repugnant spectacle of camaraderie some months ago between the "conservative" Mr. Reagan and the head of the "evil empire" of Communism, Mr. Gorbachev, was not particularly surprising—and especially not to those of us who have long since been convinced that "our" president is not at all (perhaps never was) what he has appeared to be. A superb actor, yes. A patriotic American, by no means. The only element of surprise really, to me and to many, was the *forthright* display of the American government's pro-Communism. Apparently the powers that be no longer feel it necessary to conceal the fact—and that's a very ominous sign indeed. The sellout of the USA to atheistic Communism may now be moving into high gear with the "anti-Communist" Ronald Reagan playing a leading role in that sellout. And, if America goes down, freedom will perish for all mankind.)

Surely our day is without parallel in history in the extent and in the perversity of the immorality and amorality that are poisoning and destroying our nation. Because God has been abandoned and His moral law ignored by multitudes of Americans, the satanic forces of evil have been unleashed on a massive scale and are bringing the USA to the brink of disaster. Abortion, euthanasia, contraception, active homosexuality, drug abuse, pornography, blasphemy, dishonesty-all of these and so much more have one thing in common: all are violations of the divine law. But God will not be endlessly mocked. There will come a day of reckoning. What form that reckoning will take, I do not know. Could it be AIDS? I think it could well be. But whatever, there is but one answer to the overwhelming evil that presently contaminates this country and the world—and that is the humble acknowledgment both by individuals and by nations of the absolute supremacy of God and their consequent unreserved submission to His will through the observance of His eternal law.

But, while the above is undoubtedly true, at this late date is it possible—in view of the rampant godlessness and unprecedented immorality of our day—is it possible of realization? With God, all things are possible. And how would this come about? What would be, what alone can be, the instrument whereby this return to God can be achieved and the sinful multitudes converted to virtue and holiness and to the way of divine truth. Why, the Roman Catholic Church, of course. What else? Founded by the Son of God to continue His work of teaching and ruling and sanctifying mankind until the end of time, the Roman Catholic Church (the real thing, that is, not the counterfeit Conciliar Church) is the one and only means on the face of this earth for the salvation of man. Among all religious bodies, it is unique and not merely one of many. It alone possesses and teaches the entire body of divine truth and code of morality. It alone possesses the means established by Christ whereby God is properly worshiped (primarily the Mass) and whereby the individual may live and progress in virtue and sanctity (primarily the Sacraments). It is the mystical Body of Christ, the ark of salvation, the gateway to Heaven.

If, then, in the eternal and mysterious plan of God, the world is to be saved from the darkness and devastation that ever more threaten to engulf it, this can only come about through the restoration of God to His rightful place of supremacy in the minds and hearts and souls of men and in the councils

and deliberations of the nations. Unless the Kingship of Christ is at long last acknowledged and proclaimed by man and unless the divine law is respected and obeyed by him, the future is bleak indeed. And if, in turn, this is to be accomplished, there is but one means on earth by and through which this is possible—and that is the Roman Catholic Church. This I *know* beyond all shadow of doubt. In view of the seemingly forlorn human condition of that Church at the present time, my emphatic certainty here may appear to be but the consequence of wishful thinking. Not so. Either the Roman Catholic Church, through the sanctification of the individual, will ultimately bring about the salvation of the nations or else that salvation is but a pipe dream.†

Pray the Rosary Daily

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It often makes sport of others with malice and bitterness and its practitioners are sometimes humorless when the gibes are directed at them. At the other end of the spectrum, among the worldly we see those who take themselves so deadly serious that any jest their way is seen as an attack. Humor is in short supply among fanatics of any sort and a hallmark of the totalitarian state is the banishment of jokes aimed at it...satirical humor must be done *underground.*

So let's put to rest the fallacy that sanctity is a gloomy affair. It needn't be. One thing, and one thing only, should make us truly grieve—and that is *sin.*†

Pray for me as I will pray for thee that we may merrily meet in heaven.

(Saint Thomas More, Martyr)

Humility is to the various virtues what the chain is to the Rosary; take away the chain and the beads are scattered, remove humility and all virtues vanish.

(Saint Jean Vianney, Curé of Ars)

A good Religious complained one day: "O Lord, what have I done to be treated thus?" Our Lord answered him: "And I, what had I done when I was led to Calvary?"

(Saint Jean Vianney, Curé of Ars)

Even if Catholics faithful to Tradition are reduced to a handful, they are the ones who are the true Church of Jesus Christ.

(Saint Athanasius, Champion of Orthodoxy)

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