

Homily for October 6, 2002
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 4:6-9
Matthew 21:33-3

Our thoughts control our spirits.

“Think about these things,” says Saint Paul to the Philippians in chapter 4. Think about “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious...think about these things,” says Saint Paul.

That’s wise advice. Isn’t it true that where our minds wander, there our souls follow – our spirits, our energy? A great discoverer of this connection of thought and spirituality was none other than Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. Saint Ignatius spent his youth as a maverick, a soldier and a courtier – a knight. He was, in his words, “a man given to the vanities of the world.” His shin shattered by a cannonball at the battle of Pamplona in the year 1521, Ignatius was confined to a lengthy bed stay, during which time he read a great deal. His taste ran to romance novels, but his sister-in-law gave him a book on the lives of the saints. In reading those vastly different materials, Ignatius made a discovery: while he enjoyed the romance novels, afterwards they left him rather empty and downcast. But when he read the lives of the saints, he found himself afterwards the exact opposite –

uplifted and even joyful. This eventually led Ignatius to formulate his famous Spiritual Exercises, in which he took seriously the thoughts and feelings a person has as the key to their spiritual life. He encouraged his disciples to pay careful attention to their thoughts and feelings and to use these in prayer as vehicles, gateways, points of contact with the holy. Parallel to today might be the contemporary emphasis upon our own humanity and connecting that with the humanity of Jesus Christ – acknowledging that we share the same feelings, emotions, needs, hopes, dreams.

In other words, Ignatius and contemporary spiritual writers take to heart Saint Paul’s admonition in Philippians chapter 4: “Think about these things: whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious.”

But it is often difficult to focus our minds consistently along these lines. There are so many distractions. That’s why there are aids to prayer, means of assistance to help us focus. This weekend we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary – certainly our parish patronal feast, but more importantly we commemorate what has come to be a marvelous tool for thought – for uplifting thought, noble thought. The mysteries of the rosary are none other than contemplative exercises about our

redemption – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To contemplate the mysteries of the rosary is to reflect on whatever is true, honorable, pure, just. Furthermore, the holding of the beads and the movement of them through our fingers enable us to focus. It is a marvelous prayer. The mantra-like quality of repetition can lead to contemplation, wherein the beads fall from our hands and we simply reflect upon the mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this way, Mary, the mother of God, does what she does best: leads us to her Son.

After Mass today, weather permitting, we'll journey to the grotto reciting and reflecting upon all that is true and honorable, just and pure, lovely and gracious.

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