

Love your
neighbor as
yourself

-Jesus



I want to
accustom
all the
inhabitants
...to look on me
as their brother

-Br. Charles de
Foucauld

To my brothers and sisters in Christ,

Did you have a peaceful and prayerful Christmas and New Year? So many people look forward to the time *after* the holidays as one of rest. For them, the holidays are filled with frantic activity and constant running. I decided to release this newsletter after the holidays, just in case you are one of those whose holidays were more hectic than restful!

Honestly, after all of the encouragement to prayer and charity, the endless repetitions of “don't forget Christ in Christmas!”, are we different? What might encourage us to take our faith journey a bit more seriously? I have included a meditation with this letter that seeks to help us answer this question.

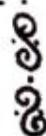
Life in Biloxi continues. There is much hustle and bustle during the holidays, and some sadness, too. I ask your prayers for a man who committed suicide at my workplace by jumping off of the hotel. He is not the first suicide we've had, and may God prevent anyone else from doing the same. Events like this only reinforce that we must pray for all who are troubled, and be aware of the needs of others.

In other news, Fr. Nelson of my home parish of Monticello, IL informed me that Fr. Charles de Foucauld will be beatified in the near future! In case you weren't aware, Fr. Charles is the man whose spirituality I am attempting to follow here in Mississippi, and more specifically in the casinos. He preached a life in imitation of Jesus living in Nazareth—work, poverty, and being hidden in the world. This is an exciting moment in the process of canonization, and is further evidence that he lived a life of heroic holiness and is worthy of imitation. His example of quiet presence in the midst of the world can speak to all of us. One suggestion is to think of ways in which you project either peace or turmoil to others around you, especially when the sea gets rough. Are there areas for improvement?

I pray that 2005 will be your most joyful and peace-filled year yet! Always draw near to God and bring to mind the words of Dante—”In His will is our peace.”

In peace and love,
Matthew

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Prayers are needed and appreciated!
(no postal fee required)



meditation

January 2005

After hearing of Christ and of salvation so many times, why do we fail to change and convert our hearts? Have we forgotten what salvation means? Have we fallen into the rut of viewing the Christian life as merely a label, and lost its significance?

Perhaps the most powerful incentive to “arise from sleep”, to use the beautiful words of St. Paul, is to meditate on the indwelling--the presence of God Himself, the Blessed Trinity, in the soul of the believer. When we are in the state of grace, the Uncreated Godhead dwells within us, purifying our poor souls and serving as our compass in this stormy world. When God dwells in us, He is deeper and knows more of us than we do ourselves. He is striving to convert us, to draw us near, and He even takes the initiative by loving us first, unworthy as we are. When we are troubled, we can descend in our heart and take warmth from the Living Flame. We turn inwards, seek him in prayer, and find him. Like the lover in the Song of Songs, we cry out, “Let me see your face, let me hear your voice!” God, the Hunter of our souls, allows Himself to be caught by our love, embraced in our hearts, and adored.

For Fr. Charles de Foucauld, the image of the Virgin Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth was a frequent topic of meditation. The indwelling Son of God, deep in the womb, illuminated Mary with grace, causing the unborn John to leap in exultation. We, too, when the Trinity dwells within, radiate God's wonder to the world around us--not in a physical way, of course, but supernaturally. Only God may see the result of our presence, but His knowledge is enough.

If God will dwell within us and make us His own, then why are we so slow to respond? God, Love itself, seeks to fill us with love, with grace. Yet, the amount He can pour out is the same as the amount of room that we provide. Love will never force Himself on us. He respects our choice, our free will. But if we respond with full readiness and the sincerity to tackle our sins and weaknesses, He will not fail to take us beyond our deepest yearnings. What holds us back? Is it the opinion of others? We will love them better if we first love God! Is it the fear of giving up our “pet sins”? Sin never satisfies completely, but God will never leave us wanting! Now, at the New Year, is the time to begin! Today is the day of salvation! Let us make the first bold step, and we will find endless delights and joy at the right hand of God, forever.