



THE PASTOR'S DESK

December 13, 2009 - The Fallen Away

Dear Parishioners,

This is from an article written by Fr. Wojciech Giertych, O.P. to commemorate the opening of the new Academic Center at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. Fr. Giertych is the Theologian of the Papal Household. The article is found in the January, 2009 issue of *The Thomist*. Fr. Giertych is speaking about the preaching mission of the Dominicans. But, his comments are worthwhile for all of us to consider, especially if you know someone who has fallen away from the Church:

The Dominicans reaching out to those who are on the frontiers of the Church needs to take into account the reality and the process of the genesis of faith. 'Faith comes from hearing' (Rom 10:17), but the preacher does not infuse the grace of faith. It is a gift of God. The preacher therefore in his ministry has to invite the grace of preaching through his own life of faith, truly believing in the work of the Holy Spirit in the souls of those to whom he is speaking. [St. Thomas] Aquinas, as he studied the New Law of the gospel that represents the summit of the new disposition made possible by the [saving] work of Christ, said that its primary element consists in the grace of the Holy Spirit that is given to those who believe in Christ. The secondary element of the New Law is composed of all the teaching that is imparted in the Church, whether orally or in writing, concerning that which is to be believed in [faith] and that which is to be done [morals].

This teaching disposes towards the reception of the grace of the Holy Spirit and orders its application into all walks of life. Preaching and teaching in the Church are therefore a constituent of the New Law that specifies the Christian dispensation. Without attributing a sacramental dimension to preaching, [St. Thomas] Aquinas insisted in this way on the spiritual disposition of the preacher that is essential for the [fruitfulness] of his ministry. It is in the context of this truth that Aquinas made the strong observation that even the letter of the gospel will kill, if the interior healing grace of faith is lacking. Christian teaching that is imparted without a simultaneous moment of faith on the part of both the preacher and the listener is frustrating, and will be interpreted by the listeners as such.

In the light of this teaching of [St. Thomas Aquinas], questions concerning the Order's mission towards those who are on the fringes of the Church may be answered. The Dominican Order is certainly to reach out towards those who are far away, whether geographically or culturally, but without empty hands. The word of the preacher, even though it may be well attuned to the cultural and intellectual resistances of his listeners, will never be an attempt to convince, coax or

manipulate nonbelievers towards belief, nor will it be a retreat to the positions of the unbelievers. The preached word of the gospel will always come as a surprise and as a countercultural sign of contradiction. It may nevertheless, be pronounced because the underlying disposition of the preacher is his faith in the concomitant power of divine grace, which alone can infuse in the minds of the listeners the primary intuition of faith, leading towards the living God.

What can we take from this? We need to remember that faith is a gift from God. It is not the result of being convinced that it is true, the way we can be convinced of the truth of math or history. Saying that "Jesus is Lord" is not the same as saying that two plus two equals four or that Columbus discovered America in 1492. **Whenever we teach or pass on the faith, we are not passing on information, we are sharing the life of God.** If we have faith ourselves and the person listening is disposed to receive the faith, our witness will be effective.

One of the biggest issues for parents today is the concern about their children. It seems we can send our children to Catholic School or CCD but they can fall away from the faith. Schools can pass on the content of faith (what we believe), but this does not guarantee that the children will embrace the faith themselves. Parents need to create an atmosphere of faith in their homes. Children need to see the faith at work in their parents. Their innocence needs to be safeguarded. Parents "preach" the faith by the way they live. The "atmosphere" of faith you have in your home will continually dispose your children to persevere in the faith and to live in the sanctifying grace they received in baptism.

Remember, too, that mortal sins kill the life of grace. Someone may seem to "fall away" from the faith. In fact, sin may have killed sanctifying grace in him or her. No amount of scolding or nagging can turn this around. What is needed is the grace of repentance within the sinner. Many times the best (and only) thing we can do is to offer prayers and sacrifices for the fallen away, that they may receive the grace to repent.

During Advent offer up prayers and sacrifices for those who have fallen away. Christmas can be a time of great time of grace. Remembrances of childhood can bring up remembrances of a life with sanctifying grace. Never despair for anyone's salvation. Consider your desire for someone's salvation the highest expression of love you can have for that person. Then, put your love into action by confident and persistent prayers for those who are in most need of the grace of repentance.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**