



Letter to friends and Benefactors

October / November 2009

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Dear Faithful,

Wherever there is a belief in the continued existence of man through and after death, religion naturally concerns itself with the relations between the living and the dead. And where the idea of a future judgment or of Purgatory exists, prayers are often offered on behalf of the dead to God.

Prayer for the dead appears in the second book of the Maccabees. “The most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened, because of the sins of those that were slain. And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection; (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead); And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them.” (2 Macc. 12:42-44) Judas Maccabeus offers a sacrifice as a propitiatory sin-offering and a memorial thank-offering. These prayers and sacrifices were intended to improve the standing of the dead during the resurrection.

A passage in the New Testament which refers to a prayer for the dead is found in 2 Timothy 1:16-18, which reads as follows: “The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus: because he hath often refreshed me, and hath not been ashamed of my chain: But when he was come to Rome, he carefully sought me, and found me. The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day.” As with the verses from Maccabees, these verses refer to prayers that will help the deceased “on that day” i.e. the Judgement Day.

In the Christian tradition Prayer for the dead is well-documented. Christians pray for “such souls as have departed with faith, but without having had time to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance”. In the Catholic Church the assistance that the dead receive by prayer on their behalf is linked with the process of purification which we call the purgatory. While prayer for the dead continues in all the early Christian traditions many Protestant groups reject the practice. Among Church writers Tertullian († 230) is the first to mention prayers for the dead, and not as a concession to natural sentiment, but as a duty: The widow who does not pray for her dead husband has as good as divorced him.

In Western Christianity there is ample evidence of the custom of praying for the dead in the inscriptions of the catacombs, with their constant prayers for the peace and refreshment of the souls of the departed. The faithful felt that it was inappropriate to pray “for” the martyrs, since they were believed to be in no need of such prayers. Also prayer for those in hell would be useless, but since there is no certainty that any particular person is in hell, prayers were and are offered for all the dead.

The various prayers for the departed have as their purpose to pray for the repose of the departed, to comfort the living, and to remind those who remain of their own mortality. For this reason, memorial services have an air of penitence about them.

Limits were placed on public offering of Mass for the unbaptised and notorious sinners, but prayers and even Mass in private could be said for them. The present Code of Canon Law states that, unless the person concerned gave some signs of repentance before death, no form of funeral Mass may be offered for notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics.

This year again, following Christian Tradition, I would particularly ask you to pray for the repose of the souls of the departed. During the first week of November you may visit a cemetery every day in order to obtain the plenary indulgence to free a soul out of purgatory. You should say some special prayers every day during this month for departed family members or friends; you could take the resolution to assist at Mass during the week and to offer your Communion for the poor souls; and, as you already did in past years, you may write the names of the departed in the enclosed envelope provided. This will be placed on the altar. Whenever the priest will say Mass in the month of November, he will remember the dead and pray for them; he will ask for the graces necessary to purify the souls from sin and to prepare them to be united with God and to enjoy eternal life.

May I ask you to be generous and to practice charity towards the poor souls?

In my last letter I announced the changes of priests which would take place in our District during this summer. Meanwhile the new Fathers came over to Canada and are settled in. They all enjoy their new nomination and are adjusting to their new duties.

In Calgary new portable classrooms had to be purchased. The growing number of pupils made it necessary to extend the number of classrooms. Apart from this, one of the older buildings being no longer safe to house the children, had to be replaced. Meanwhile the General House in Menzingen gave the permission to acquire four new classrooms. Soon the children will be happy to move into their "new school"!

Fathers Scott and May were challenged by the miraculous increase of children in our school in Wilmot. Last year Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy started up with 14 pupils. For a long while it seemed as if there wouldn't be many more pupils this year. But suddenly the parents seemed to wake up and start to inscribe their children for the school. The numbers went up to twenty, thirty, forty and finally to fifty-six pupils. Twenty of them are boarders. You can imagine the amount needed to be done at the 'last-minute'! Where to find the teachers, how to arrange the classrooms, where to put the boarders...? We ask all future parents to think already now about their plans for next year. When they let us know early enough how many and which children they want to inscribe for the next school year, we can take the time to prepare on time all that will be needed for your children.

On the contrary, our school in Lévis is still suffering. Father d'André had a hard time to find certified teachers willing to work in our school and willing to provide a teaching which agrees with the Church's teaching. During the vacation period much work had to be done: fixing up different classrooms, refectories and workspaces for teachers. In spite of all the efforts the number of pupils stagnates and makes it very arduous to run the school. For next year, we will reopen the boarding facilities. Thus, even pupils coming from the furthest corners of Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia can be received.

Saint Joseph's Bursary will continue the collections on the 2nd Sunday of every month in order to help families. Many of them are in the very difficult - sometimes even impossible - situation to pay the tuition fees for one, two, three or even more children. Be generous and help with the important school apostolate. Our future is in the education of our children! Be also aware of the necessity of your prayers, for the priests, the teachers, the children, for our schools. It will be God's grace which illuminates the minds, which strengthens the wills and which opens the hearts for the faith.

The priests in British Columbia have planned for many years to move the priory from Vernon to Langley. From the beginning, the Church in Langley attracted more and more faithful coming from the great Vancouver area to assist at Mass, to receive the Sacraments, to follow up catechism classes, to be members of the Eucharistic Crusade, the Legion of Mary or to participate in all kinds of parish activities. From the parishioners' commitments resulted a growing need of the priest's presence. So finally this year the moving-plan will be realized. Initially the date should have been October 25th, the Feast of Christ the King. But construction works progressed slower than the Fathers hoped, and so the date had to be postponed to a later date this year. You can imagine that this move will make it necessary to reorganize the priests work. Especially community-life will become much easier and much more regular for the two priests, they will be closer to their work, and they will have less travelling... For sure, our faithful in Vernon will be sad. They suffer from these changes losing the daily presence of their dear priests. But the good of the priests and the good of the larger number of the faithful in Langley made this decision necessary. We apologize for this inconvenience and we assure the faithful in Vernon of our entire support in the future. There is no doubt that a priest will be at their disposition for all the weekends.

In Shawinigan we have the project to subdivide our property to create residential lots in order to sell them. A first phase will concern the southern part of our property close to the city of Shawinigan. A road will be opened by the city of Shawinigan and forty lots will come open for building of residential housing. This first part of the work is to be started in the spring of 2010. It will not concern our retreat house since several rows of trees will protect the priory from the developing work. Once we have an idea how the properties are selling we will decide on the next steps. For certain, it will take several years before the developing of our land will also have an impact on the priory. Nevertheless, we are already inquiring into the most diverse possibilities for the future. The goals of all the future changes are to maintain a retreat house for Quebec, the Mass for Shawinigan and a priory for Montreal.

I will close this letter with positive news concerning the Canadian vocations. This year two young men entered into our seminaries. One of them coming from the province of Saskatchewan entered at Winona and started there his formation to the priesthood. The second coming from Ottawa entered the seminary in Zaizkofen, Germany. He had already passed a time in the Society's St. John Bosco school and decided for this reason to do his formation in Germany.

May I ask your prayers and your generous aid for them, for more future vocations and for all the projects of Tradition in Canada,

Yours in Christ,

Father Jürgen Wegner, District Superior