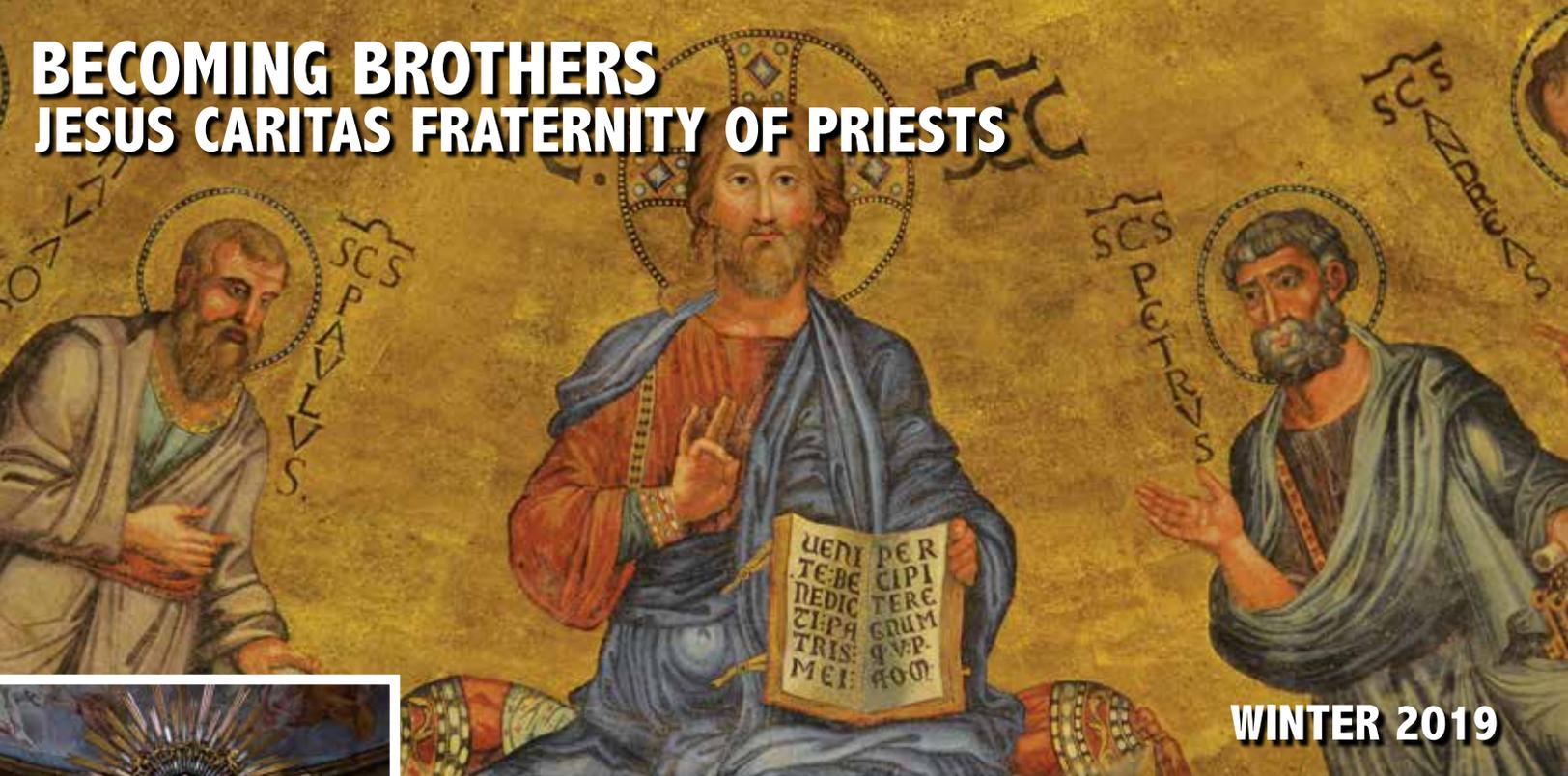


BECOMING BROTHERS JESUS CARITAS FRATERNITY OF PRIESTS



WINTER 2019



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From the Responsible

Dear Brothers and Friends of the Fraternity,

The National Fraternity needs your help in promoting the Month of Nazareth. In the Southern Hemisphere the Fraternity is growing, but it has been a struggle to attract our membership here in the States to the Month, which offers a solid foundation in the spiritual charisms of the Fraternity. Yes, a month seems like a long commitment these days. Can one even find the coverage to be away for such a long period of time? But there are other programs of priestly renewal that are a month or longer that have had little trouble in attracting participants.

I have selfish reasons for promoting the Month. One needs to have made a Month of Nazareth in order to serve in National Leadership. With a year and a half left in my six-year commitment of service to the Fraternity, this old horse is starting to look towards “the barn.”

And while there are a few good folks who can take up the reins, the truth is we could use a few more young “stallions” to bring new energy to our greying herd.

Forgive me for horsing around a little too much with a lousy metaphor. On a more

serious note, forgive me if I've implied in past letters that something is lacking in the spiritual development of diocesan priests. Who am I to judge? Early on in my priesthood, my spiritual director, Fr. Chuck Gallagher SJ guided me to a deeper passion for the priesthood. Chuck was the “Apostle of Marriage” but he was also a prophet of a healthy and loving priestly ministry.

One of the sins that Chuck warned me to avoid was a sense of pride or superiority in comparing my spiritual life with that of other priests.

Yes, those of us who serve in the Leadership of the Fraternity have a passionate desire to promote a healthy interior life among our brothers. Mea culpa for the times that a good passion has warped into judgmental attitudes. One of the glories of my Month of Nazareth was that we formed a wonderful fraternal bond among a very diverse group of men. One of the strengths of our fraternal life is that we accept our brothers even though they might be quite different from us. In this acceptance we find support and encouragement as together we explore our love for Jesus.

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Chief Promoters of Confession

Taken from *Apostles of Mercy*

A Pastoral Letter by Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted

We priests have the privilege and duty of promoting the sacrament of Reconciliation. Not only are we ministers of God's mercy in the confessional, we are also called to be its chief promoters and catechists. Like St. John Vianney, Christ charges us to bring the good news of God's infinite mercy to His people. Regular preaching and systematic catechesis about the sacrament is valuable, even essential today, for a number of reasons:

- First, by encouraging the sacrament of Penance, we promote authentic faith in Christ's power to forgive, heal and renew His people. Jesus inaugurated his public ministry with a public call to conversion by crying out, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel!" This call to conversion reverberates whenever priests encourage the celebration of this sacrament.

- Second, promotion of Confession requires proper formation of the faithful about the reality of sin. "Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity." The consequences of this proclamation are truly serious since "ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the area of education, politics, social action and morals."

- Third, preaching on the sacrament of Penance allows us to put forth an understanding of the sacramental economy in the life of the Church. By way of the sacraments, Christ reveals Himself to us and communicates the fruits of His paschal mystery along with the sacramental signs. Often we hear comments such as, "I can just go right to God without a priest;" or "Well, His love is unconditional, so I don't need to go to confession;" or "The offer of forgiveness is not dependent on whether I confess to a priest, so it is an unnecessary step." While these ideas may be well-intended, they are nonetheless incomplete ideas that disregard the loving plan of conversion and transformation that Jesus Himself has given us. Clear catechesis and personal invitation can inspire many to move beyond these false ideas to the firsthand experience of God's infinite love.

- Fourth, promoting the sacrament of Penance helps to avoid two common misunderstandings. The first is the minimization of sin to such an extent that the faithful become unconcerned or unaware of the need to approach His mercy. The second is an exaggeration of sin's power such that it hinders belief in the infinitely greater power of Christ's love. Both of these errors discourage frequent confession. Only by proclaiming the reality of sin and the power of God's mercy will we authentically invite the faithful to approach this sacrament with honesty, humility and confidence.

- Fifth, promoting the sacrament includes fostering frequent confession. This has long been "strongly recommended by the Church" and attested to by the lives of the saints. Frequent confession allows the Holy Spirit to inform us of areas of weakness that need particular attention. Over time, with conformity to the grace of Confession, we are able to see virtue increase and vice decrease.

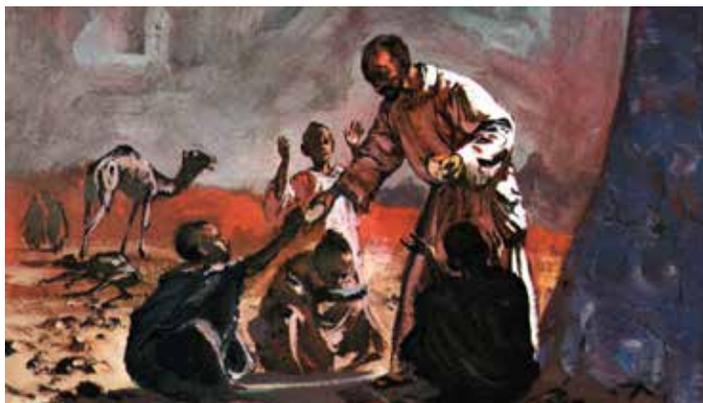
[Editor's Note: Reverend Thomas J. Olmsted was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Lincoln, Neb., July 2, 1973. He was installed as the fourth Bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix December 20, 2003. Since 1974, Bishop Olmsted has been a member of the Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests, and thus has been deeply influenced by the witness and wisdom of Charles de Foucauld and by the prayers and encouragement of many brother priests.]



Fraternity as a Place of *Welcome*

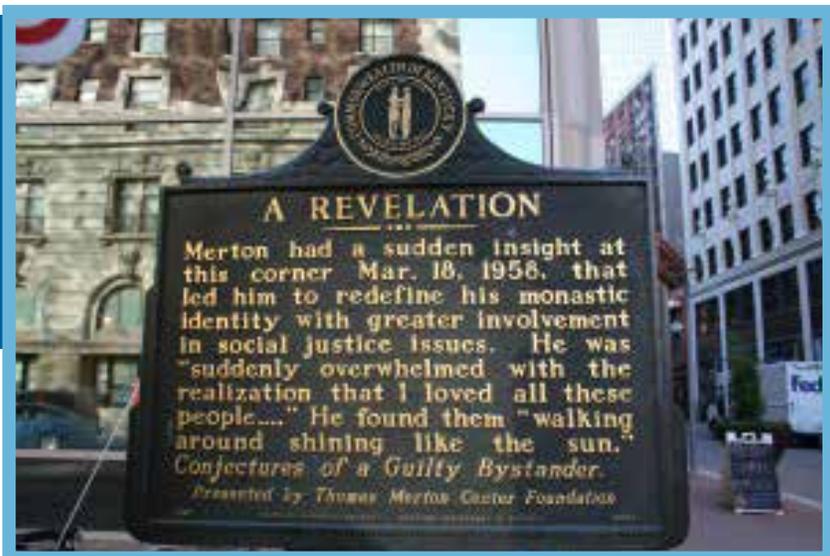
“Charles was one who gave a fraternal welcome to the poorest and most unknown and undeserving of neighbors, who never let it be suspected that he was put out and was willing to waste his time for talking with God upon unreliable nomads, corrupt slaves, beggars and bores.

“Every minute somebody would come and open the door, and Brother Charles appeared with his beautiful eyes full of serenity, his head bent forward a little, and his hand already held out...



— René Bazin, *Charles de Foucauld: Hermit and Explorer*, published in 1923 in English

“He wrote: ‘I wish to accustom all the inhabitants, Christians, Muslims, Jews and idolaters, to look upon me as their brother, the universal brother... They begin to call the house the Fraternity (the Khaua, in Arabic), and I am delighted.’”



Marker in downtown Louisville marking Merton's insight (Lori Erickson photo)

Thomas Merton's Mystical Vision in Louisville

Thomas Merton's famous revelation in downtown Louisville is described this way in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine

and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

THE MONTH OF NAZARETH

September 23 — October 18, 2019

Tybee Island, Georgia (Adjacent to Savannah, GA)
Director for the Month is Msgr. Bob Amundsen (Archdiocese of Denver)

Sometime in your life as a priest in Jesus Caritas it is important to set aside an extended time to pray, study, and devote oneself to the charisms of the Fraternity. The Month of Nazareth presents an excellent opportunity to step back, evaluate, and prioritize anew the practices and principles to which we have all made a commitment.

The daily rhythm of fraternity life deepens our appreciation for the:

- Spirituality of Nazareth
- Life and Faith Journey of Brother Charles
- The spirit and structures of Jesus Caritas Priests' Fraternity
- The gifts of the Fraternity

Such an endeavor takes time and freedom from the distractions, preoccupations, and energy draining tasks with which we are bombarded in our everyday ministry.

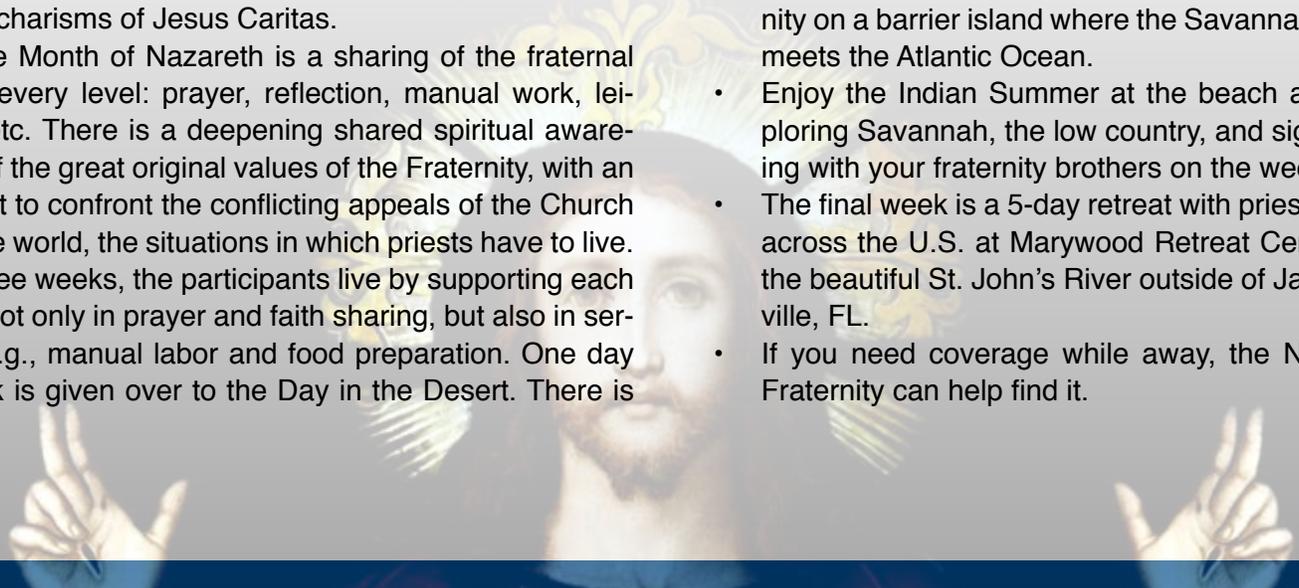
For some, the Month of Nazareth has been a life-changing event. For others, it has been a month of much-needed rest. For many, it is an immersion in the mystery of their own priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus Christ. For all, it is an opportunity to grow more deeply in the experience and in an understanding of Fraternity and supports our successfully living out the particular charisms of Jesus Caritas.

The Month of Nazareth is a sharing of the fraternal life at every level: prayer, reflection, manual work, leisure, etc. There is a deepening shared spiritual awareness of the great original values of the Fraternity, with an attempt to confront the conflicting appeals of the Church and the world, the situations in which priests have to live. For three weeks, the participants live by supporting each other not only in prayer and faith sharing, but also in service, e.g., manual labor and food preparation. One day a week is given over to the Day in the Desert. There is

also the challenge of living with and valuing the disparate personalities, temperaments, ages and experiences, strengths and weaknesses which such close living affords. Forming a fraternity for these weeks is critical in order to experience the benefits that can be received by living out the Jesus Caritas way of life. The fourth week will be a five-day retreat to be held at Marywood Retreat Center in St. Johns, Florida. The retreat week is open to all priests from throughout the country.

Now is the time to plan for the Month of Nazareth. It may seem very challenging to take an entire month away from our everyday duties. And finding someone to cover while you are away may be difficult. There are Caritas priests around the country who would be willing to help out. And many times, our brother priests are willing to give us support when they know what we are doing. For more information about this or any aspect of the Month, please email Shannon at jesus.caritas.usa@gmail.com. Sign-up early. The Month will be limited to 8 priests.

- Use one or two years of your continued time and allowance for this Month. The cost of the Month is \$1500 including the retreat.
- The Fraternity at Tybee is the place of the Month. It is in the midst of the St. Michael Faith Community on a barrier island where the Savannah River meets the Atlantic Ocean.
- Enjoy the Indian Summer at the beach and exploring Savannah, the low country, and sightseeing with your fraternity brothers on the weekend.
- The final week is a 5-day retreat with priests from across the U.S. at Marywood Retreat Center on the beautiful St. John's River outside of Jacksonville, FL.
- If you need coverage while away, the National Fraternity can help find it.



Jesus Caritas *National Retreat*

October 13 – 18, 2019

Marywood Retreat Center
St. John's, Florida

Jesus Caritas Gatherings are always affirming of the Diocesan Priesthood. All priests are welcome to experience the support of our fraternal spirituality whether or not you belong to a local fraternity. If you do belong to a fraternity, encourage your brothers to come as a group.

Many years ago, Msgr. Phil Murnion expressed the concern that “the diocesan priesthood has become an individuated life. It is up to the priest to develop his own understanding of priesthood, his own spirituality (there is no agreed diocesan priest spirituality), his own mission focus, even his own community (we wind up alone or with a priest from another culture). Priests of the Fraternity try to encourage each other in a spirituality that is life giving. **Come and see. Join us in October.**

- Cost of the Retreat is \$500. for those who can afford it. Please don't let that prevent you from coming. The facility has been recently renovated.
- Jacksonville Airport is the nearest airport.
- Please email Shannon at jesus.caritas.usa@gmail.com to register.

Day in the Desert

The Fraternity asks each man to factor into his month a “Day in the Desert”. The idea is to deliberately to separate yourself from the active side of priesthood, and to submit to God, welcome God in to your life in a prolonged way. This monthly day of quiet also enables us to think through the way our life is going, to look compassionately but critically at our successes and failures, to thank God for his perpetual presence in our lives, and to prepare what we shall say in the “Review of Life” when next our Fraternity meets. — Tony Philpot



An Examination of Conscience

The questions that aren't asked but should be about our priesthood:

- 1) Why aren't we kinder — to our people and to one another and to ourselves?
- 2) Are we more strangers to each other rather than a fraternity of brothers.
- 3) How much integrity are we living with? What have we compromised away?
- 4) Have we turned into old fart bachelors?
- 5) Are we still able to laugh when we minister? Cry?

— Fr. Dominic Grassi

Bishop Robert E. Barron points out how we can head in the wrong direction in the Spiritual Life. "One of the most fundamental problems in the spiritual order is that we sense within ourselves the hunger for God, but we attempt to satisfy it with some created good that is less than God. Thomas Aquinas said that the four typical substitutes for God are wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. Sensing the void within, we attempt to fill it up with some combination of these four things, but only by emptying out the self in love can we make the space for God to fill us.



When we try to satisfy the hunger for God with something less than God, we will naturally be frustrated, and then in our frustration, we will convince ourselves that we need more of that finite good, so we will struggle to achieve it, only to find ourselves again, necessarily, dissatisfied. At this point, a sort of spiritual panic sets in, and we can find ourselves turning obsessively around this creaturely good that can never in principle make us happy."

The four typical substitutes for God according to Thomas Aquinas:

1. Wealth
2. Pleasure
3. Power
4. Honor



For Reflection:

- Where am I lacking in kindness, love, charity, fraternity?
- Am I living authentically or am I living a "double" life?
- What am I substituting for my God "hunger"?
- In what ways do I fail to live a simple life?
- Where is my trust in God's love lacking?

From the Responsible *continued from front cover*

Another glory of my Month is that it led to a deeper appreciation of contemplative prayer. Before the Month, I rarely gave myself to the practice of a Desert Day and the few times I did, they were generally restless experiences. After the Month and over the years, I've become much more consistent in making a monthly Desert Day. This spiritual practice has become a great blessing in my life as it has led to a greater intimacy with the Lord.

I like to take long walks on my desert days, either on the beach or on a hiking trail, but on December 26th, I decided to walk the streets of nearby Savannah. As far as contemplative settings go, it probably wasn't my

best choice. I spent some time praying in the Cathedral, which is always busy with tourist but especially during the Christmas Season.

Naturally, I was distracted in my prayer. I noticed the great diversity of people who came to view the beautiful nativity scene. Some would stop to pray but most did not. I began to notice those who paid to light a votive candle and those who lit a candle without paying. Then I turned my gaze back to the tabernacle and had a little bit of a "Merton/Louisville" experience. There was our Eucharistic Lord in the midst of the busyness of the Cathedral, mostly ignored but present, nevertheless. Loving us. Loving all of us. The Creator of

the Universe who had become creature for love of us. Emmanuel. God with us in our humanity.

Lord, help me to see the light of your love shining on all these people. In the midst of my own frail humanity, help me to share your love. This is the gift of Blessed Charles de Foucauld. This is the gift of our Incarnational Spirituality. This is the gift of our Fraternity. Share the love my brothers. Share the love!

Fraternally,



Fr. Jerry "Hap" Ragan

National Fraternity

National Responsible

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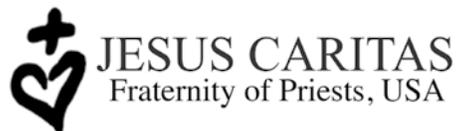
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UPCOMING DATES

February 4-6, 2019

Mini Retreat – Open to all Priests, Atlanta, GA

September 23 – October 13

Month of Nazareth, Tybee Island, GA

October 14-18

Jesus Caritas Retreat, Switzerland, FL

A large, 3D white number "2019" is displayed on a dark wooden surface. The numbers are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The background is a blurred wooden floor with some light flares.