A Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

“Grace to you, and peace from Him Who is, Who was, and Who is to come” (Rev. 1:4).

I hope and pray all of you are well. Our last issue of Lay Witness was mailed at the beginning of the COVID crisis. Since that time, much has happened in the Church; too much to address here. As with so many others, the crisis impacted my ability to travel and stay personally connected with our Chapters and Members. My own mother has also been ill, though not with COVID, and hospitalized twice over the past two months. Because of the shutdowns, I was not able to see her either. I know that many of you have had similar experiences with loved ones being sick, and I have often worried about each of you and kept you in prayer. Please let me know if you or a loved one is ill. We would gladly have Mass offered for anyone’s recovery.

As you know, the last issue of Lay Witness was a “special edition.” It was devoted to an analysis of a pastoral crisis caused by responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that issue was distributed, a lot has happened both in our secular society and within the Church. We continue to monitor situations within the dioceses across the United States. While we are encouraged that many bishops have corrected the harm initially caused by unnecessary prohibitions, others have continued to prohibit the reception of the sacraments by the Faithful in violation of doctrine and discipline. Our offices are in the beginning stage of developing resources for the Faithful to use in order to be united in the Faith on the issue, and properly formed to defend the Faith in this unprecedented time.

I recognize that the crisis has raised a lot of questions and fears. It has polarized otherwise united Catholics. If anyone has concerns or questions about CUF’s position or how to address situations in your diocese or parish, please call us at 1-800-MY FAITH (693-2484).

Because of the COVID crisis, I know that many people are concerned about the possibility of death. For that reason, I wrote the lead article as a reflection on preparing for death. It takes a different perspective than most articles I have read on the topic, and I hope the presentation is encouraging for you. The enclosed prayer card is a summary of the article and the fruit of research for the article. It contains an Act of Contrition that is intended to express the necessary elements to develop perfect contrition. When you read the article, you will understand what I mean. If you would like

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additional copies of the prayer card, please call us. We will gladly send them to you.

Just before the COVID shutdown occurred, Brian Richards, our Information Specialist, put in a two-week notice and moved to a job in higher education. We have already begun the hiring process to fill the vacant position. Please pray that we will fill the position soon. For now, Brandon O’Nan, who served as an intern last summer and over the Christmas holiday, has been helping fill the requests we receive in Information Services. If we are delayed somewhat in answering questions or mailing material, you now know why. Please be patient.

I would like to leave you with one final thought. St. Augustine famously wrote, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.”

His personal reflection and prayer sum up the words of Psalm 42. In this unprecedented time of fear and unrest, I urge each of you to take time each day and reflect on your life. Are you restless for God? Does your life reflect a strategy to win Heaven? Have you let the unrest of our culture distract you from your race? In this difficult time, I urge you, remain steadfast in your Faith. Do not be distracted by the signs of the times. Stay focused on the finish line God sets before you and honor God in all things (1 Sam. 2:30).

God bless you; St. Joseph keep you.

Peace,
Philip C. L. Gray,
President

Sirach 28:6
Do You Remember?

By: Philip C. L. Gray

For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8; RSVCE).

Have you ever thought about what constitutes a good and happy death? Heroic martyrdom? Bravery in battle? Illness caused by dedication to the poor and vulnerable? Quiet death at home surrounded by loved ones? Men have discussed the question for millennia and expressed countless different opinions, many of which focus on external circumstances. What is clear from all the opinions is that the valuing of one death over another is a result of cultural context and personal preference.

In this well-known passage from his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul reminds us of the only essential element expected by God for a truly happy death: fidelity to Christ and His Gospel to the end. The Apostle to the Gentiles is one of many in a long tradition of prophets and saints whom the Holy Spirit has inspired to exhort us to die well. In our Catholic tradition, death is not something to be feared. It is a painful but necessary step to our ultimate and eternal happiness, union with God in Heaven.

With the recent circumstances and events that have swept the world in recent months, the reality of death has developed an impulse of fear within our world. Fear of death can be paralyzing. Because love of God fills us with Hope (c.f. 1 Jn. 4:16), it doesn't have to be that way.

Running the Good Race

The passage from 2 Timothy cited above is only one of the many places in Sacred Scripture where life on Earth is likened to a race. I was a long-distance runner in high-school, and I can attest to the fittingness of the image. During a long race, a strong, disciplined pace is essential. The runner who aims to be a contender must maintain a pace that keeps him in range of a competitive finish; at the same time, he must save enough strength for a final surge in the last lap. An inexperienced runner who focuses on maintaining an early lead can overexert himself and flame out, potentially losing whatever lead his early efforts established. In every race, I was not focused on the start or the first lap, but on the finish line. My strategy during the race had but one purpose, to finish well.

Another thing I learned during my short years of competitive running is that an excellent runner doesn't compete against another person; he competes against himself. To be an effective runner, you must be keenly aware of what your body is saying. If you push too hard, injuries and delays occur. If the body is not challenged to endure a bit more than it has before, you never improve. To endure the physical and mental challenges, you must learn how

God bless you; St. Joseph keep you.

Peace,
Philip C. L. Gray,
President
to stretch, warm-up, listen to your body, and gain mastery over your mind.

Contrary to popular belief, running is a team sport. On the track, my teammates and I would stay aware of where each was during a race. We developed strategies to urge each other on by how we ran. Oftentimes, I was encouraged by runners from other schools. I doubt they intended to encourage me, but their examples taught me how to run well.

A personal competition, but a team sport; that is our life on Earth. We have free will and we are self-determining, but we are made for unity with each other and with God (Jn. 17:20-21). Our focus should be on that intended unity, which is determined at the time of our death on Earth. Our short time on this Earth should not be used accomplishing our secular bucket list but executing a well-planned race for the finish line. We must live well and persevere to the end. If we do, we will die well (c.f. 2 Mac. 6:18-31).

How do we train so as to ensure a happy death? I would like to offer a simple suggestion: Condition yourself to run by developing perfect contrition and recognize your place in Heaven as the finish line.

Training for the Finish Line

In its discourse on penance, the Council of Trent recognized that contrition is at the heart of the spiritual life. A person who intentionally develops contrition for his sins will witness his efforts bear fruit in his entire spiritual life. It will naturally encourage the development of so many virtues, including discipline, Hope, patience, and especially Love.

To develop contrition, it helps to know the elements that form it as well as how contrition matures. While others may take a different approach, I believe there are only three essential elements to developing proper contrition in our lives: faith, sorrow, and desire.

It Begins with the Gift of Faith

The supernatural gift of Faith provides the essential foundation for true contrition. As Catholics, we believe in a Triune God Whose Second Person took human flesh and died for our sins. He rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and has prepared a place for us in Heaven (Jn.14:3).

Because we believe these truths, we act in Faith to pursue that place in Heaven. Put another way, union with God in Heaven is the goal of a life lived with Catholic Faith. It is by Faith that we believe in God, in His works, in His mercy, and in His desire for union with us. Faith gives us a reason to be sorrowful for our sins and pursue Heaven. Because we believe in a loving God Who wants us to live with Him, we are sorry for our sins and want to do better.

This supernatural Faith is infused at Baptism and fostered by right formation in knowledge of God. A very important distinction must be made here; Faith is not mere knowledge or belief. It is not a passive virtue. Rather, action is intrinsic to the Virtue of Faith. As God puts it, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:17). It’s like speech without words. It just doesn’t work.

What is the work of Faith? Simply put, it is the pursuit of what is believed. If one does not pursue the truths that Faith reveals, then what good are those truths? The pursuit of truths revealed by Faith involves pursuing a personal relationship with God. He wants union with us as our final end (Jn. 17:20-21). That’s pretty personal! The entire sacramental system given by Jesus Christ is intended to provide us ordinary means to have an intimate relationship with God while on Earth. What a beautiful gift! He gives us Himself; we give ourselves to Him.

God’s Plan for Relationships

At a human level, in the development of any mutually intimate relationship, persons reveal themselves to each other. This dynamic is not limited to couples but is also true for groups of people. As this personal revelation unfolds in time, mistakes are made. If the people involved remain sincere in their desire to develop intimacy, they begin to recognize personal faults and repair them. The recognition of faults and the repair of those faults flows from their growing knowledge of the other person and how their behavior affects the relationship. Oftentimes, one’s personal faults remain unchanged until they negatively affect a relationship. It is the relationship that drives personal change.

Mutual desires in a relationship determine what is a fault and what is not. If the relationship itself is founded on immorality or personal subjectivity, the faults identified will be very different than those identified in a relationship founded on godliness and objective morality. Only the latter has the potential to grow and mature to the flourishing that God intends for personal relationships.

The natural progression of relationship was designed by God to gradually call man out of himself for the good of the other. More often than not, it is easiest to be motivated
by selfishness in the early stages of a relationship. The more deeply we come to know each other by self-revelation, and the more of ourselves we entrust to each other, the more we find ourselves motivated by a desire for the other’s good. By growing in knowledge and love of others we mature from selfishness to selflessness. This dynamic plays out in myriad ways within the context of human relationships. For our purposes, we will consider how it effects our contrition for wrongs done to the other.

In my personal experiences, I’ve often seen that the willingness to express remorse early in a relationship often comes from a selfish motive. A person wants the relationship to continue, not for the good of the other person, but for his or her own good. People often apologize, not out of a deeply felt recognition of the hurt they have caused the other, but because an apology will bring an end to conflict. As the relationship develops further, the selfishness gives way to a second stage marked by personal guilt. It’s an intermediate stage that most relationships get stuck in. One or the other is motivate more by guilt than by love. Selfishness remains in that the removal of guilt is the primary motivator for being sorry or acting in charity. Selflessness begins to develop because personal guilt is the first step toward authentic Love. This feeling of guilt is necessary to develop true remorse and a desire to repair harm. It is essential that guilt serves its proper purpose and motivates us to love rather than become an end in itself. It is a sad reality that we often have relationships where we choose to remain either selfish or motivated by guilt. Unless we make a conscious effort to develop authentic selfless Love, our relationships will never mature into the fullness of grace that God intends.

God intends all of our human relationships to develop into the intimacy of authentic Love. That is not to say that the intimacy we develop with everyone will be an experience of married love. On the contrary, the intimacy of authentic Love recognizes and respects the proper boundaries of the relationship set by Divine Moral Law. Respecting the morality of a relationship as intended by God provides strong evidence of authentic Love. It also prepares us for the union we will share with everyone in Heaven (c.f. Jn. 17:21).

To grow in authentic love, we must allow the growth in intimacy to motivate our growth in selflessness. We begin to see the “person” of the other; the heart of who the other person is. This only happens when we recognize the spiritual realities reflecting the image of God within the other that transcend their physical presentation. Sometimes this happens early in a relationship, sometimes late, sometimes never at all. When it does happen, correction of faults becomes motivated by concern and love for the other person rather than by selfish motives. When this happens, the sorrow for failures matures and the changes made become willing sacrifices for the other person. The desire shifts from whatever is best for me to fulfillment of the other, and contrition matures from imperfect to perfect.

The same is true in our relationship with God. Usually, our first experience of contrition is imperfect. That is, it is motivated for selfish reasons or guilt. We want to avoid the unpleasant experience of the tensions our sin causes in our relationship with Him. We want to avoid the consequences of our bad acts. We want to avoid Hell. That is a normal and expected beginning point, but if we want our relationship to mature, we must develop perfect contrition.

In some ways, our relationship with God is simpler than our relationships with others. We must understand that He is perfect Love. As such, He is not the one who needs to change; we are. Any faults in the relationship are not His, but ours. Regrettably, we often make the mistake of blaming God. That is very human, but it should be recognized as just another step in the maturing process. When we stop blaming God and realize that we are the ones who must change if the relationship is to continue, then we become sorry for our faults. This is the experience of contrition. We admit our fault, we ask forgiveness, and we resolve not to make the same mistake again. The greater our sorrow and resolve to do better, the more likely we will be to avoid the occasion of that sin again.

As we cultivate a deeper, more sincere contrition for our own sins, we must learn to forgive the sins of others freely. Forgiveness of others is an essential element to our spiritual life that makes us fertile ground for perfect contrition to grow. Our Lord tell us that we are forgiven in
the measure that we forgive (Mt. 6:15; Mk. 11:25; et al.). When we forgive others, that simple act of the will helps us avoid bitterness and blame. Forgiveness opens the door of Divine Mercy we begin to see others as Jesus saw us from the Cross (Lk. 23:34). We begin to love.

An act of perfect contrition is not based on words but on the disposition of the heart. It is an act of Faith motivated primarily by Love for God and desire for union with Him (c.f. Jn. 17:20-26; Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, ch. iv de Contrizione). It does not exclude a desire to avoid the consequences of our sin, but this desire must be secondary. If the desire to avoid consequences is the primary motivation for contrition, the act is imperfect. It is not fully matured. An imperfect act will benefit a soul to avoid Hell, but an act of perfect contrition, at the point of death, assures one of full reparation and gains one a plenary indulgence to enter Heaven (c.f. Enchiridion indulgentiarum, no. 12; Decree of Apostolic Penitentiary, 19 March 2020).

A Vision of Heaven

To develop perfect contrition, we must fall in love with Jesus and pursue a vision of Heaven. Pray daily, especially reading and meditating on the Word of God. Reading daily from the Psalms and Gospels is a good place to start. As you read Sacred Scripture, pay attention to how every word is directed towards God’s desire to have you in Heaven. As Jesus promised, He has prepared a place for you, we only have to accept His invitation and come (c.f. Lk. 10:12). Herein lies the key to developing perfect contrition.

Every day, begin and end your day by asking God to give you a vision of Heaven. Throughout the day, thank Him for preparing a place for you in Heaven. As you go through your day, look for the simple signs of God’s love and care for you; and see them as pledges of how beautiful your place in Heaven will be. Foster within your heart a true desire to be one with God. If you develop a personal relationship with Jesus, you will be motivated to change because of your love for Him and not for fear of punishment. Your contrition will be perfect.

Despite claims in story books and movies, the development from acquaintance to intimacy in human relationships never happens overnight. Because of concupiscence and the effects of time, our human relationships develop within the circumstances of time and space. The success of these relationships directly depends on mutual sincerity and a movement from selfish motives to selfless sacrifice. If even one person in the relationship does not make this movement, the relationship will never mature into the beauty and intimacy intended by God. In our relationship with God, He is perfect. We are the only ones that must change. The sooner we realize that and develop a desire to change for love of Him, the sooner our relationship with God will mature into an experience of perfect trust and a contentment that cannot be explained.

Run the Race

Considering all this, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 quoted above must be understood in the context provided in the preceding verses:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

St. Paul is passing the torch to Timothy. As a good runner, St. Paul recognizes that the individual race is a team event; that we must urge each other on. The exhortations he makes to St. Timothy are likened to stretch exercises and a strategy in running the race. He also recognizes that he must have a strong finish; he must not weaken and risk not finishing the race. And, his exhortations must help St. Timothy do the same thing.

In our own lives, if we develop perfect contrition by pursuing a personal, intimate relationship with God founded on Catholic Faith, this perfect contrition will encourage us to meditate on death as part of our vision of Heaven. Because the very nature of perfect contrition sets our hearts on union with God, the sting of death is removed from our minds and hearts. Death will become a welcome event that is anticipated with Hope, no matter how it comes. In addition, developing perfect contrition will naturally encourage the development of so many virtues, including the virtues of discipline, Hope, patience, and especially Mercy and Love. While this occurs, our human relationships will be transformed. This development of Love allows us to accept death with grace and gratitude, seeing it as a welcome finish line of a race to take our rightful place in Heaven.
Morsels of Mirth

Is it divine humor that St. Corona is considered by some to be a patroness against pandemics?
No. It is actually pop-culture humor. Whisperers allege the claim was started by the brewers of Corona beer. Kidding aside, while she is properly recognized as the patroness of treasure hunters, her increased popularity today may solidify this greater patronage among rank and file Catholics. Other saints to rely on in time of plague include St. Gregory the Great, St. Edmund, St. Roch, and St. Sebastian. All you holy men and women, Pray for us!

St. John the Baptist

St. John the Baptist cuts an impressive figure as the last of the Old Testament prophets, preparing the way for Christ. Wearing camel’s hair and eating locusts and honey, it is tempting to imagine St. John as a kind of wild man (Mt. 3:4). We often forget that, as the son of Zechariah, John was of the high priestly class (Lk. 3:2). This means he was given the best education available and raised in a position of material and social privilege. And yet, upon adulthood, instead of living in the temple precincts and assuming his priestly ministry for the people of Israel within the temple, John freely abandoned all that that life offered. He sacrificed his cultural identity and family heritage to serve as the prophet and precursor of the coming Messiah, even to death. His entire life is a witness of the radical conversion we are each called to as disciples of Jesus Christ. We must pray for the grace to follow St. John the Baptist’s example and say as he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30).

FAITH FACTS
THE ANSWERS YOU NEED:

Spiritual Communion

ISSUE
What is a spiritual communion? How does one make a spiritual communion?

RESPONSE
A spiritual communion is made when we fervently desire to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and lovingly embrace Him in prayer as if we had received Him.

DISCUSSION
A spiritual communion is made when we fervently desire to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and lovingly embrace Him as if we had actually done so. This can be done at Mass when for some reason we are not able to receive the Sacrament or at any time during the day. It is especially recommended when we visit Jesus in the tabernacle or at Eucharistic adoration.

In his encyclical letter, Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Pope John Paul II wrote: In the Eucharist, “unlike any other sacrament, the mystery [of communion] is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing: Here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union.”

Regarding prayers for spiritual communion, this “Act of Spiritual Communion” is found in the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary’s Enchiridion of Indulgences:

My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

According to the Enchiridion of Indulgences, one gains a partial indulgence by making an act of spiritual communion.
We regret that the You are Called to Holiness Conference scheduled for Saturday, April 4th in Philadelphia was canceled due to public health concerns surrounding the spread of Coronavirus. The organizers are working to bring the spiritual wisdom of His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke, Bishop Joseph Strickland, and Reverend Gerald Gill to the Faithful by a live stream of their scheduled talks. Please pray for the success of this effort and visit stjohnneumannchapter.org often to check for updates on this initiative.

In February, Our Lady of Peace Chapter of Newark, Delaware held an evening of prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for our country. The event closed with dinner at a local restaurant. We are praying that in God’s providential care this and all our chapters will be able to meet together again soon.

Wish there was a vibrant Catholic community in your area? That desire is a call to action! Contact our office to learn more about how you can charter a CUF chapter or visit cuf.org to find the chapter nearest you!

We want to feature your chapter’s activities and pictures! Keep us up to date by emailing administrativeassistant@cuf.org.

Information Services

We regret to announce that CUF’s Research Specialist, Brian Richards, has answered his last question for us. Brian began a new position in higher education administration at the end of February. We are so grateful for his years of work on behalf of CUF members and those wanting to learn more about the history, discipline, and doctrines of the Catholic Faith. Rest assured that CUF’s staff will continue to provide Faith Facts, resources, and tailored research to members and nonmembers alike as we fill the open position.

Recent Topics you may be curious about:

CUFs Position Papers: “Pastoral Remedies in Time of Crisis” and “Response to Crisis in the Church: Necessary Corrections will be lost if Sensationalism Drives the Response”.

Call CUF today to request these and more at 1(800) MY FAITH

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Hello ‘brave new world.’ As the country begins to reopen from the pandemic lockdowns, so too are the Catholic churches. The COVID-19 restrictions in relation to the administration of sacraments has sparked much controversy in more than a few dioceses. The bulk of inquiries to the Foundation stem from the restrictions as violations against the Faithful’s right to seek the sacraments, and the Church’s obligation to provide them. In attempt “to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s,” some ecclesiastical authorities have given all to Caesar. Many dioceses are requiring the laity to make reservations for Sunday Mass, while others prohibit reception of Holy Communion on the tongue. A sacred minister cannot deny the sacraments based on the capacity of a church nor the posture assumed to receive the Eucharist (cf. c. 843 §1), even to avoid the risk of contagion, post-pandemic. Please visit stjosephcanonlaw.com to view the position paper, “Pastoral Remedies in Time of Crisis.” -Natasha

The Knights of Columbus have released an inspiring new 12-episode video series on men’s spirituality. Inspired by Bishop Olmstead’s Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men, Into the Breach seeks to provide compelling and challenging answers to the question of what it means to be a man and how to live as a man in today’s world. Watch for free at kofc.org/intothebreach.

Have you invited a family member or friend to become a CUF member? Let’s grow the ranks!

We want to showcase the spiritual life of our members in Lay Witness! Submit your original prayers, meditations, and articles with your reply card or email administrativeassistant@cuf.org. Thank you for sharing!

On February 12, in South Bend, Indiana, mourners gathered for the funeral of 2,411 unborn children who died at the hand of an Indiana abortionist. These little ones join the Holy Innocence who gave their lives for Christ. These tragic deaths serve as a testament to the preciousness of every human life and offer an unanswerable rebuke to the culture of death that pervades the U.S. We extend our gratitude to those who attended the funeral and pray for the mothers, fathers, and children in danger of abortion.

Got an announcement? If your event is CUF friendly, and we have space to spare, we will gladly post it here!