

DISTRICT OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Society of Saint Pius X

Saint Mary's House
13 William Street
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6 November 2023

Dear Friends,

I must begin by apologizing that it has been so long since my last letter. It had been my intention to write to you several times during the year, but amidst my other work, I have not made the time to write as I should have. My sincere apologies for that. To make up for this delay, I want to explain, in this letter, something essential for our spiritual lives – indeed, even for a balanced natural life. I admit that many things could be considered “fundamental” or “essential”, but I strongly believe that what we will discuss here is truly the starting point for most of us. If we could get this right, we would avoid very, very many mistakes and snares and also escape much useless suffering.

Archbishop Lefebvre used to point out that it is possible to *believe* as a Catholic and yet not to *think* like one. It is not a question of insincerity or bad will but the extent to which a deep understanding of the Catholic religion – already something which cannot be taken for granted – has *shaped the thought patterns and perspectives* of a person. Even if a person was born into a Catholic home, received a thoroughly Catholic education, and profited from a balanced home life – a very rare combination of blessings – this person would still grow up in a “post-Christian” world surrounded by perspectives and attitudes which are not Catholic at all. In the English-speaking world, we suffer under an additional disadvantage. Whatever traces of Christianity still linger in our culture are mostly vestiges of a Protestant Christianity rather than a Catholic one, with all of the distortions which this implies. This letter will explain a key component of an authentically Catholic mindset and will, therefore, help us to align our thinking to a Catholic pattern in a fundamental way.

A Catholic should see himself as being completely surrounded by and nourished by a benevolent order of things established by God. The Catholic rightly takes for granted that God always does things in a reasonable and ordered way. The Catholic knows that he lives within both a natural order and a supernatural order which were both established by God and which, although they are distinct, operate simultaneously and harmoniously. The natural order consists of everything from the laws of nature to the laws of human nature to the Natural Law of morality. The supernatural order consists of all those things which God has freely decided to do for us, out of the abundance of His love, which are beyond nature. We can only come to know about these things through God’s revelation. This includes the Incarnation of Our Lord, the Catholic Church, the sacraments, sanctifying grace, the theological virtues, the principles of the spiritual life, etc.

It is so important *and so fundamental* to realize that God has – as it were – embedded or incarnated His wisdom and His goodness into this order of things which surrounds us and from which we are meant to draw spiritual life and so reach our potential. We may live in a time of crisis; we may live in a society increasingly indifferent to God and even hostile to human nature and common sense – but God’s order which surrounds us remains present and powerful and life-giving. This order of things is not a static and oppressive system. God’s order is benevolent. *It has a direction and a momentum* – towards God and towards our happiness. As we learn on Ignatian retreats: firstly, man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God and thereby to save his soul; secondly, *all other things have been made to help man* to praise reverence, and serve God and thereby to save his soul.

Therefore, *everything around us and within us* – the powers of our own body and soul, the family order, the social order of church and school and civic community, the laws of human nature, science and art when properly done, education and professions, the sacraments, the duties of our state in life, the principles of the spiritual life, and the almost infinite Providential circumstances that surround us at every moment – all of this has been created and ordered by God to give life to our soul and to help us achieve the purpose of our existence. *All that is required of us is that we make the reasonable choices which will engage us with this order and so leverage it for our good.*

As incredibly consoling as this truth is, there is an even better one. **The benevolent order of God is indestructible.** It is not going anywhere. The “*common enemy of man*” as Shakespeare called the devil, may do much harm. Evil people – indeed, even good but imprudent people – can do much harm. But they cannot touch God’s order. It will always be there, ready to nourish and develop our lives. To see that this is true, consider the most destructive *disorder* in the world – sin. A sinner does terrible harm to his own soul and may do more to the bodies and souls of others. But what do his sins do to the order of things established by God? Nothing. Nothing at all.

The moral order remains intact. A sin committed a million times by a million men remains a sin. Men may decide to ignore morality completely, but the moral order does not move.

The sacramental order remains intact. When a sinner goes to confession properly, *all of his sins* are forgiven. The sacraments *always* “work” when received as God designed them.

The order of grace remains intact. If a sinner goes to confession, it is only because a carefully ordered chain of graces brought him to the point of repentance. The sinner has just to follow each link of the chain, one-by-one, and sanctifying grace will inevitably be restored to his soul.

The order of Providence remains intact. Even if a sinner chooses not to repent and lets fall the chain of grace, God’s infallible Providence will make sure that his very sins benefit *other souls* in some way because, “*for those who love God, all things work together for the good.*”

We would be shocked to see a man who was starving within easy reach of food laying all around him. Angels must marvel to see so many Catholics surrounded by God’s indestructible, benevolent order but who do not reach out with their free will to connect with it. **Many traditional Catholics lack confidence in God’s order of things. Many others lack the humility to engage with it because, in practice, a soul only connects and engages with God’s order by submitting to it.**

We all know of people who have fallen away from tradition altogether or suffered some other spiritual shipwreck. In most cases, I think we will notice that the cause of their misfortune was either *fear* or *pride* (or both). These two things kept them aloof from God’s benevolent order when a confident and humble submission would have brought them peace and moved them forward along the road to holiness. This is why we so badly need an *enlightened virtue of hope and a practical humility*. God has, as it were, embedded His mercy, His wisdom, and His saving power into an order which is waiting to communicate divine life to us at every moment *through every prudent choice we make*. Our hope must be fixed, not only upon God Himself, but must also extend to His order which brings His mercy and power into contact with our souls. If we had this hope and humility, we would avoid so many mistakes. We would stop exhausting ourselves on disconnected religious practices. We would stop trying to do the duties of *other people’s states* because we would see that *his* duty, *her* duty, and *my* duty are actually *all distinct parts of the order of things*. We would stop being so engrossed in matters of secondary importance because we would see that Providence has already accounted for the solution of these secondary issues, insofar as God *wants* them solved, by people simply working *within* His order – and not by trying to out-think God!

May we all reflect on these beautiful truths and think more like Catholics everyday. God bless you!



Fr Daniel Themann, District Superior