

Blessings

SACRAMENTORS®: A Process of Sanctification for Catholic Men and Women

September, 2004

AM I WORTHY TO SERVE GOD?

by Fr. Bob Camuso

Upcoming Events

Summer Sacramentum

Wednesday,
September 1, 2004
Summer campfire
featuring SacraMentor
founders Fr. Bob Camuso
and Lory Misel
7:30pm outdoors at
St. Stephen the Martyr
Church in Renton.
Details page 4.

3rd Annual Leadership Retreat

September 11, 2004
9:00 to 5:00
Palisade Retreat Center

Community Meeting Schedule

on website
www.sacramentors.org

The question of worthiness is a question I often hear from Catholics in spiritual counseling. And the answer I give is difficult for many to accept. The answer is that, at the same time, you are both *unworthy* and *worthy*! This is a paradox. The word, “paradox” means that two things are true at the same time.

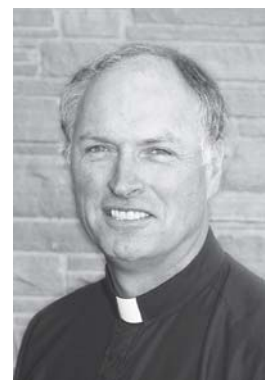
Perhaps the greatest paradox for Christians is that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. That paradox became Christian doctrine at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. Yet, there is still tension in our Church over this issue. Many of us prefer the humanity of Jesus over his divine nature, while others prefer to see Jesus as mostly divine. For example, some of us prefer a vertical relationship with the Son of God, and so we call him Christ (from the Greek word, *christos*, meaning “the anointed one”) and see him as having transcended earth. He is not of this world. Instead, he is somewhere out there, in Heaven, sitting at the right hand of the Father, beyond our reach. We like to kneel in awe with reverence for him. Saying the name, “Jesus,” makes us a little uncomfortable, especially when we are among other Christians. We do not prefer so much a personal relationship with the Son of God as we do a transcendent relationship with the divine mystery of God, known as the Christ.

Now others prefer the Son of God to be called “Jesus” instead of “Christ.” Those of us that like to call him “Jesus” say this name because, after all, that was his human name. And because we prefer his human nature it is natural that we would call him by his human name. The term, “Christ,” seems to us to be too abstract. We find it difficult to have a personal relationship with an abstract idea, such as the idea of “the anointed one.” After all, we have relationships with people, not ideas.

As Christians, it can be a challenge for us to surrender to the idea of paradox in our spiritual lives. Yet, if we accept our Church teaching, we are called to accept the truth that Jesus was both fully human (Jesus the man) and fully divine (Christ the anointed one).

In the same way that the Son of God was both fully human and fully divine, we are both fully unworthy and fully worthy to serve God.

The truth is that none of us is worthy, including the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, all the bishops and priests of the Church and all the saints that have gone before us. No one is worthy to serve God. Serving God is a privilege and a



Father Bob Camuso

(cont. page 2)

calling. We should never presume that it is an entitlement, a right or a possession. Yet, on the other hand, we are *totally worthy* to serve God. In the second Eucharistic Prayer used at Mass, the priest says, “We thank you [Father] for *counting us worthy* to stand in your presence and serve you.” God counts us worthy because if God were to answer only the prayers of those who were without sin, there would be no prayers answered. God demonstrated to us how worthy we are when God paid a huge price for our redemption through the loss of His only Son on a cross. If we are unworthy, why did Jesus die for us?

When faced with paradox, we can be confused and our confusion can become a reason for not responding to God’s call to serve. But there is no confusion about God’s call for us to serve. For instance, Jesus sums up the Ten Commandments into two: Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Mt 22:27. How can we love God and our neighbor without serving them? The author of the Letter of James put it this way: “Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James 2:17.

As Christians, it is clear to us that we are called to serve God. But I wonder if we use the idea that we are unworthy as an excuse to avoid service? As long as I focus on my unworthiness to serve, then I have good reason not to serve. But the fact is that God knows we are unworthy and wants to use us anyway for His work. God does not appear to care if we are worthy. Jesus said it this way: “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Mk 2:17 Here Jesus tells us that our unworthiness actually makes us worthy. Yet another paradox!

To use unworthiness as an excuse not to serve God reveals false pride in us. False pride is to believe that we know better than God. “God might think I’m worthy to serve, but I know my sins and thus I cannot possibly serve!” This is false pride because when we say we know better than God we are saying that we are greater than God. Of course, no one is greater than God. Only the ego could be so presumptuous!

Finally, the question about worthiness is really a false question. Instead of asking whether we are worthy, we should be asking how we can serve God. That question is a direct response to the Ten Commandments and to what Jesus taught. In other words, “How can I help my parish? How can I love my neighbor through acts of service? How can I do something for the SacraMentors movement, which needs my time, talent and treasure?”

Without your support, SacraMentors cannot survive. We need you to help as a trainer, parish coordinator, grant writer, general volunteer (*e.g.*, give a witness talk, provide support for a series, help with mailings, *etc.*) or even a member of the Board of Directors. In that regard, I encourage each of you to attend the Leadership Retreat on September 11th, where we will use a discernment process to allow the Holy Spirit to select a new Board of Directors. God needs you to serve as a 100% *unworthy* and 100% *worthy* Christian. Think of this as divine math, God-math, which we discover really does add up when we subtract our egos and multiply by God’s grace.

FR. BOG

MISSION STATEMENT

“To create in parishes
small faith communities
of men and of women
committed to supporting
each other in living
a Christian life
characterized by
acts of love, kindness,
appreciation, and
forgiveness.”

SACRAMENTOR BOARD MEMBERS

Jeff Smith

Executive Director

Frank Frey

Expansion & Development

Ron Reiersen

Financial Advisor

Series Coordinator

Frank Pease

Denise Smith

Senior Parish Coordinators

Bill Wiebe

Mary Anne Reynolds

Senior Trainers

Michael Ulrich

Spiritual Development

Coordinator

Cyndie Ulrich

Marketing & Communications

Fr. Bob Camuso

Spiritual Advisor



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have now had the privilege of serving as your Executive Director for two years. During that time, God has brought healing in my own life and taught me many lessons through the SacraMentors process and through many of you. One of the lessons God has been teaching me recently is the power and importance of prayer. Like all of you, I have repeatedly heard that prayer must occupy a central role in our lives if we want to live a Christ-centered life and fulfill our calling “to be a blessing and to

bless.” Yet, for too long the daily challenges of life interfered with my prayer life and there were days where I felt pressed to follow my pastor’s advice to start and end each day with five minutes of prayer.

All of that changed, however, after I attended Fr. John Madigan’s pre-Lent Sacramentum this past February. At the Sacramentum, Fr. John talked about the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting and alms giving. In discussing prayer, Fr. John stated that we need to make prayer part of the flow of our daily living and it must have a primary place in our lives. He challenged each of us to start each day with prayer, to include time set aside listening to God, and not merely bombarding God with our requests. Recognizing the need in my own life for more meaningful time alone with God each day, I made a commitment that I would begin each day with an hour of time alone with God listening, praying and studying.

That decision has had a profound impact on my spiritual life and development. As SacraMentors, we talk about our need to ask the Holy Spirit to allow us to see people, places, and situations through the eyes of Christ. By starting each day focusing on God and my relationship with Him, I find it much easier to turn to the Holy Spirit for help throughout the day, rather than listening to my ego and answering the red telephone! Additionally, the sense of God’s presence and peace I experience seem to stay with me throughout the day, helping me to stay calm even in the midst of chaos. Are there mornings where I don’t want to get out of bed to spend time praying and studying? Of course! But even on those days where I almost have to force myself out of bed, I am always rewarded and blessed from spending an hour alone with my Father listening, praying, and reading the Bible.

I would encourage all of you to make the commitment to spend time alone with God each day listening, praying, and studying. Like any relationship, our relationship with our Heavenly Father will develop and grow only if we spend time with God daily, listening to His voice, sharing what is on our hearts and allowing Him to teach us through the Scriptures.

May God’s peace and blessings be with each of you,

Jeff

SACRAMENTORS To Hold 3rd Annual Leadership Retreat

By Jeff Smith, Executive Director

On Saturday, September 11th, SacraMentors will hold our 3rd Annual Leadership Retreat at the Palisades Retreat Center in Federal Way. On that day, we will gather together as a community to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to discern the board of directors that will serve from September 2004 to September 2006. Leigh Stringfellow, the Assistant Director for Leadership Services for our Archdiocese, will be the facilitator for the retreat. The day will begin with time alone for each participant to reflect on their relationship with God, to experience His presence and grace, and to identify their God-given talents and gifts. We will then spend the remainder of the day in prayer, song, reflection and discussion, following the Holy Spirit's lead as He discerns the board.

The discernment process is a community process and everyone is invited to attend the retreat so that we have participation from each Apostles Group in our Archdiocese. Those of you who have served in a leadership position (i.e., parish coordinators, trainers and the current board) received a written invitation in July. If you did not receive a written invitation and would like to attend, please email me at JeffSmith@Sacramentors.org. Even if you think you don't have the time or the gifts needed to serve on the board, you are encouraged to attend and participate in the discernment process that will select the brothers and sisters who will lead the SacraMentors movement for the next two years. Just come with an open heart and mind and the willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and work through you. Those who have attended one of the past Leadership Retreats know that this will be a Spirit-filled day that will leave you feeling closer to God and to your brothers and sisters.

It is important that all of us begin to pray daily for the success of the retreat. In your prayers, please ask the Holy Spirit to speak to each of us and to open our minds and hearts to His guidance and direction. Also, offer prayers of thanks for the leadership provided by the outgoing board and ask God to bless them for their willingness to serve others. If you are unable to attend the retreat, please spend time on September 11th praying for your brothers and sisters at the retreat.

I look forward to spending September 11th with many of you.



Summer Sacramentum on Wednesday, September 1st

By Michael Ulrich, Spiritual Development Coordinator

Just Imagine...

A dusky summer evening, you, close friends and a flickering campfire.

There's nothing better unless. . .

...it's a summer Sacramentum campfire featuring SacraMentor founders Fr. Bob Camuso and Lory Misel!

Bring your family and friends to a special evening of warm conversation with Fr. Bob and Lory, September 1st, 7:30pm outdoors at St. Stephen the Martyr Church in Renton.

Fr. Bob and Lory will talk about the SacraMentor concepts and how we can enrich our spiritual lives. They'll share with us their faith journeys, life experiences, and their wisdom and friendship on the beautiful and relaxed grounds of St. Stephen's. Plenty of time will be allowed for questions from us all during the evening.

Bring your own lawn chairs and a piece of wood for the fire. And be ready for a simply wonderful time with your brothers and sisters, Lory and Fr. Bob!

St. Stephen's is located at 13055 SE 192nd St. in Renton.

- From north- or southbound SR 167 (Valley Freeway), take the South 43rd St. exit and proceed eastbound on South 43rd St to 116th Ave SE.
- Note: SE 43rd Street's name changes to SE 179th Street just east of the Valley Freeway and changes again to Carr Road, then again to SE 176th Street. Don't worry, just continue on your way eastbound until you get to 116th SE.
- Go right (south) on 116th Ave. SE.
- Turn left on SE 192nd.
- Go several miles to St Stephens. The church property is clearly marked on the south side of SE 192nd St.

See you there!

Meet the Board: Bill Wiebe, Men's Senior Trainer

By Cyndie Ulrich. Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Bill Wiebe is a quiet, thoughtful gentleman whose philosophy of life is shown through his actions. Like John Wayne, Bill is always ready to step up to the plate, roll up his shirtsleeves, and help somebody in need of a friend. His personal creed is "Jesus is My Boss" and he knows there's no better boss to work for.

Drawn to Catholicism by the spiritual role model of his wife, June, Bill also had a promise to keep - a promise he made to God. Bill says that not too long before he began RCIA, he'd asked God to heal some pretty important matters in his life. He says he promised God that if those problems were healed, he would commit his life to God and Catholicism. God granted Bill's request for healing and, true to his word, Bill committed his life to God and Catholicism.

Surprisingly, Bill became a SacraMentor *before* his confirmation. Only two months into RCIA, Bill came across a stack of SacraMentor brochures at a coffee break during RCIA class. He says the lead line on the brochure stopped him in his tracks - "*Is there more to life than money, power and sex?*"

Says Bill, "The brochure's message and its invitation to participate in SacraMentors struck a chord deep within me. I signed up for the very next program in my area."

Bill is sure that SacraMentors is perfect for his faith journey. He admits he lived primarily in his head before his conversion. To Bill, "head stuff" is drawing on what he already knows. He's learned through SacraMentors to have a "heart" relationship with God, his brothers and his sisters. Bill laughs, "It's not always easy for me to stay in my heart, but when I don't, I get into trouble. I've learned to use my head in my work, and use my heart all the time with everyone around me."

When is the Holy Spirit with him the most? Bill's answer is quick and confident. "When I'm in the presence of others and have the opportunity to share Jesus with them." And how does he share Jesus? "I live in Jesus and share Him with others through my words, my thoughts and my actions." He continues, "I often remind myself to stay open as a conduit of Christ. When I am open, the person I'm with becomes a conduit of Christ for me. I make sure I'm in my heart mode when I'm with anyone and everyone."

His favorite quotation from Book of Kindness II is Day 16: "I am here now. Jesus is with me and all is well." Bill says this belief turns off his ego and reminds him he is never alone. "When I fight an ego battle all alone, the problem always becomes a crisis. But when I allow 'Day 16' to remind me of my true identity and that Christ is always with me, then everything becomes peaceful and I'm ok."

Bill's been a trainer for the last several years. He felt called by the Holy Spirit to serve on the organization's board. In so doing, he feels he receives far more from his SacraMentor brothers and sisters than he gives. "SacraMentors has a never ending supply of spiritual rewards, I found that the more I give, the more I learn and grow."

Bill feels the program is still in its infancy. Smiling with certainty he says, "There are thousands, if not millions, of men and women who need this program." To share SacraMentors' benefits with others, Bill believes it will take energy from lots of current SacraMentors.



"Considering the problems in our world - hate, war, abuse, starvation, illness and more - members of SacraMentors have an excellent opportunity to help significantly to heal these difficulties. I want my brothers and sisters to know that contributing in a leadership position is not a hard thing to do. Decide on a service. Maybe it's managing your weekly Apostles meeting; maybe it's volunteering as a Parish Coordinator or for a board position."

He continues, "I encourage every SacraMentor to help the organization grow. Whatever your contribution, it is *very* valuable. If every SacraMentor picks up Christ's Cross and contributes some amount of time, talent or treasure, then, without a doubt, SacraMentors will grow and many more people will be positively affected by the blessings of this program. Indeed, when I changed my mind and got more involved in SacraMentors, it literally changed my world. This is a blessing available to everyone."

SacraMentors is truly a family affair in the Wiebe home. Bill's wife, June, is a "Lady SacraMentor" as Bill puts it. Together, June and Bill work to reflect the Love of Christ, the Power of God and the Blessings of the Holy Spirit.

Positively beaming as the thought suddenly strikes him, Bill adds, "And, you betcha! SacraMentors proves there's *so very much more* to life than money, power and sex! Jesus Christ is where it's at!"

RETREAT *within the retreat*

by Bruce Jaeger, St. John Vianney

On June 5th, SacraMentors sponsored an all-day retreat with Fr. Jim Northrop at Holy Family in Kirkland. It was only fitting for me that the retreat was held in the same room as my original SacraMentors series I attended in 1998. It reminded me of how much God has been working in my life since that time and how much I still needed to follow the SacraMentor concepts.

In 1998, I attended the series with two goals: one, to get closer to God and two, to avoid talking to other people at all costs. This time I also came with expectations. I met Fr. Jim Northrop when he attended the SacraMentor series at his parish in Enumclaw. Fr. Jim is a very gifted speaker who mixes knowledge, passion, humility and humor to inspire those who listen to him speak. My boss had agreed to work for me that day and I had already brought enough lunch for sixty people, so I figured everything was set.

But God had other plans.

Nearly one hundred people showed up for the retreat! This is a wonderful thing. But my reaction for the first five minutes was anger. I was responsible for the food and I was now going to miss the first hour of the retreat to make another run to Costco. I didn't want to do "Martha" work, I just wanted to be a disciple, like Mary.

I quickly realized that holding a grudge wasn't the best course of action and I was going to learn whatever God wanted me to learn that day whether it was from Fr. Jim or from someone else. The next hour was enjoyable because I was able to spend it with Dan Walker, my SacraMentor brother who helped me on my grocery store run.

I was able to still hear most of Fr. Jim's talk and he was wonderful, but the biggest lesson I learned was how wrong I was six years ago when I wanted to avoid contact with other people.

I saw SacraMentor brothers and sisters there who have had a great impact on my spiritual life and have brought me closer to God. We are not in this alone! I've learned from them and become closer to them.

There were men there who were on the training team from 1998, parishioners from Holy Family, people I met when I was on training teams, and the wives of men who I met in SacraMentors.

I'm looking forward to the next SacraMentor event. I want to get closer to God and to my SacraMentor brothers and sisters. But I really want to find out what plan God has for me today and tomorrow.

From A Grudge To A Blessing

By Don Grainer, All Saints

There are those among us who have had the good fortune of never having a grudge. Then there are those who have dealt with them and let them go. And lastly, there are those few who hold onto them with all their strength, never letting a slight or hurt, real or imagined, slip by. Their tremendous ego refuses to release them.

Unfortunately I am among those who fall into the last category. However, I am blessed to be a SacraMentor and have a way to deal with grudges.

To refresh your memories, in the last newsletter I related to you that I am gay. When I came to realize that it was not a stage I was passing through, but that was what I would be, I accepted that. It was not anything really troubling at the time.

But that would not be the case for very long.

As time passed and my hopes for an education and career started to unravel I began to get frustrated and angry. My health began to suffer because of the anxiety I was undergoing.

Over time, little by little, my frustrations festered and grew, eventually coalescing into one big grudge under the heading, "Gay." It was the only thing that mattered in my life, it overshadowed everything; my entire being was defined by that one word.

(cont. page 7)

I began to distance myself from the church and God. For weeks and months I would not attend Mass, would not pray, just be angry. If I talked to God at all it was to curse Him or belligerently ask Him, "Why." (We all know how well He responds to that kind of attitude.) Whenever I sought counseling and guidance from a priest and related to him how I was angry with God he would chuckle and ask, "How can you be angry with such a good and loving God?"

Eventually things would settle for a time and I would return to church and God until I found myself frustrated again. The cycle would be repeated.

Finally I left the church all together. The pastor I had at the time said a few unfriendly remarks about gays and that was the end of it.

My anger grew, knowing no bounds. The simplest things would set it off. Only one thread held me together and kept me from going over the edge all together and that was Mary, our wonderful mother, Mary. When I prayed about anything during those years it was to her.

Four years ago a series of events occurred that would change everything.

By sheer coincidence, I attended mass one Sunday and in the bulletin was an announcement about a new class forming for returning Catholics. At last, I felt there would be a place for me to vent my anger and resolve it.

I signed up and began attending only to stop after two months. My frustrations had gotten to me and I was not yet ready to go back. God was still an abusive father to me. Why would a "loving and caring" father allow some of His children to be gay and then dump a lot of "No's" on them?

In time I mellowed and rejoined the group. As I was searching the internet for information on a subject I would talk about in the class, I came across SacraMentors. It struck me that that would be a great organization for the parish I was in. A few weeks later, attending Mass for the first time in a while, I was jolted out of my stupor upon hearing that a representative from SacraMentors would be speaking. Jeff Smith gave his talk and after Mass I approached him, spoke for a time and signed up for the series that would be given in a few weeks.

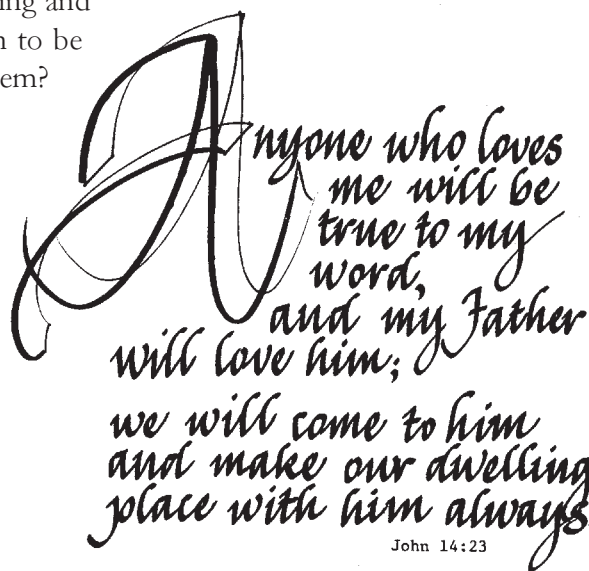
But becoming a SacraMentor did not change everything for me overnight. I still had to struggle for a time. You will recall from my previous article what happened over the next few months. I drifted away from the church again and SacraMentors only to return because of an inspiration. The rest you know, except that it doesn't end there.

My image of God had begun to change and I was able to pray humbly and without demands about resolving the issue of my being gay. One Monday morning – Mondays seem to be the day for revelations in my life – I was thinking about two individuals who have grudges and thinking about how they could turn those into blessings. And suddenly I found myself saying, "You want these fellows to turn their grudges into blessings, what about yourself?"

Almost immediately the chip on my shoulder fell away and I saw that God was not pushing me away, He was not the abusive father who was the butt of so much of my anger, my being gay was not a cause for the rage and frustration and the great chasm that existed between us; rather it should be a bridge to span that gap. God wanted me to come to Him not only so He could be my Lover but also so I could have my broken spirit healed.

I rarely refer to Him simply as "God" now. And He is no longer the abusive father, the butt of my anger. Rather he is the Father on whose lap I can sit and take my rest, wrapped in His strong, protective arms, my head lying against His compassionate and all-encompassing heart. My grudge has become a blessing and without hesitation I can cry out to Him, **"ABBA, FATHER."**

May all your grudges be blessings in disguise!



Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him always.

John 14:23

SPIRITUALITY SERIES SCHEDULE

SacraMentor Series

All Series are held on:
Sundays, 2:00 to 5:00 pm
(unless otherwise indicated)

■ MEN'S SERIES

- St. Frances Cabrini, Lakewood (*concurrent with women*)
Oct. 3, 10 & 17
- St. Joseph, Vancouver (*concurrent with women*)
Oct. 31 and Nov. 7 & 14
- St. Olaf, Poulsbo (*concurrent with women*)
Jan 30, Feb 6 & 13 from 1 to 4 PM
- St. John Vianney
Apr. 10, 17 & 24

■ WOMEN'S SERIES

- St. Frances Cabrini, Lakewood (*concurrent with men*)
Oct. 3, 10 & 17
- St. Francis of Assisi, Burien
Oct. 17, 24 & 31
- St. Joseph, Vancouver (*concurrent with men*)
Oct. 31 and Nov. 7 & 14
- Sacred Heart, Enumclaw
Jan. 23, 30 and Feb. 6
- St. Olaf, Poulsbo (*concurrent with men*)
Jan 30, Feb 6 & 13 from 1 to 4 PM

Saturday Sanctum

All Sanctums are held on:
Saturdays, 9:00 am to 7:30 pm

■ MEN'S SANCTUM

- St. Frances Cabrini, Lakewood (*concurrent with women*)
Oct. 23
- St. Joseph, Vancouver (*concurrent with women*)
Nov. 20
- St. Olaf, Poulsbo (*concurrent with women*)
Feb 19
- St. John Vianney
May 1

■ WOMEN'S SANCTUM

- St. Frances Cabrini, Lakewood (*concurrent with men*)
Oct. 23
- St. Francis of Assisi, Burien
Nov. 6
- St. Joseph, Vancouver (*concurrent with men*)
Nov. 20
- Sacred Heart, Enumclaw
Feb. 12
- St. Olaf, Poulsbo (*concurrent with men*)
Feb 19

SacraMentors®

c/o Jeff Smith, Executive Director
1904 Kempton Street SE
Olympia, WA 98501