

# The Glorious Truth About Power

BY MARY BETH NEWKUMET

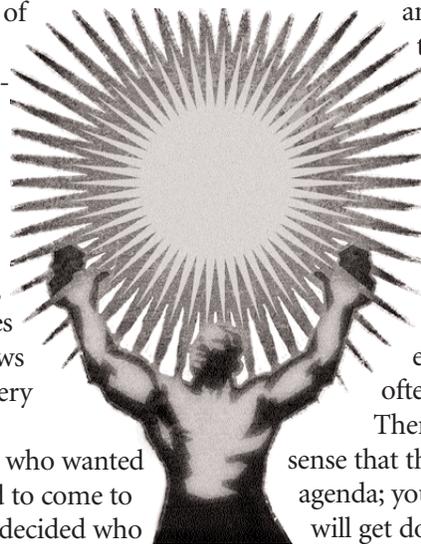
Many years ago, I was in charge of all the media relations for the opening of a national memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Because the new monument and the group it honored were of interest to people all over the world, the event was big news. During the week of the dedication, the story was in the top ten minutes of most major broadcast news shows and on the front page of almost every newspaper.

Any member of the press corps who wanted more information on the story had to come to me. I had, ahem, *ultimate power!* I decided who got the interview and when. I decided how the schedule would go and where the major media would sit. I will readily admit that at times, this power went to my head. When everyone around you acts like you have a superior place in the universe, you can begin to think you're a god!

Yet, I quickly learned a great truth about this kind of power. The moment the event was over, I was literally yesterday's news. One week, I had power over the woman who books interviews and guests at CNN; the following week, she couldn't remember who I was!

## ABSOLUTE MASTERS

This good lesson taught me that power is always given. I did not create my own ability to be the media gatekeeper. That bit of power was *given to me* by my client. Yet, our most human temptation is to think that power is something we do for ourselves, as the result of our own merits and efforts. "Different philosophical systems have lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master," says Pope John Paul II, "able to decide their own destiny



and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers" (*Faith and Reason* #107).

In the culture, those who have the most "power" often use their God-given intelligence, talents, access and money to create their own personal kingdom. In this self-made universe, they are usually treated as superior to everyone else—and often start believing it is true.

There is nothing more attractive than the sense that the world is yours! You get to set the agenda; you get to oversee how and when things will get done. No one can deny the allure of shaping the world according to your own vision. So why does the culture's proposal for personal power still remain so unsatisfying?

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*Mary, the first  
Steward of Christ*

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## A SELFISH ISOLATION

The problem with the cultural vision is that it breeds an escalation of selfishness, competition—and anxiety. Power goes to the one who has the most cash, moxie, brains, etc., until someone else comes along who has more. (How unsettling, and ultimately, unsatisfying!)

Thus, “entitled” men and women try to grab as much power as they can, while those with less talent, intelligence, money and resources are pushed to the margins, increasingly invisible to those who drive the culture. Inevitably, powerful people can become truly blind to the unique dignity and talents of the “support staff” around them. The more preoccupied you become with your self—your needs, your desires, your thoughts—the more isolated you become from the interior beauty of the other.

## A HUMBLE STANCE

Contrast this cultural model of personal power with that of Jesus of Nazareth. Christ’s teaching about power turns the cultural model on its ear: “The one among you who is greatest shall behave like the least, and the one who leads like one who serves” (Luke 22:25-7).

What could be the reasoning behind such a proposal? Isn’t this humble stance the proven path to allowing what little power we have to be usurped by someone richer, stronger, and more intelligent? How can such a stance reasonably make sense in this dog-eat-dog world?

## POWER FROM ABOVE

Jesus Christ “did not consider his equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself becoming obedient unto death,

even death on the Cross,” declared St. Paul (Phil 2:6-8). Read that passage again carefully. Jesus Christ, second Person of the Blessed Trinity, did not embrace the trappings of a god! He sought out the powerless and lowly and treated *them* like kings and queens. He humbly washed the feet of the men who looked to him for every necessity in life. He loved women with such a startling new dignity that righteous men were moved to drop their killing stones.

In all of this, the Lord showed us true power in action. In every word and act, Christ pursued a life dedicated to *servicing every person*. With the power of his love for his Father, Jesus showed his disciples how to unite any personal power he had given them back to the One who had sent him.

## POWER TRANSFORMED

The decision to *defer all personal power back to the Father* is a momentous event in the life of a person. It is the decision of a disciple. “Conversion is the change from a hope in the results of my own power, to a new hope reposing entirely in the fact of the living Christ, of the Christ who lives in me,” says Msgr. Luigi Giussani. By surrendering ourselves completely to Christ in the life of his Church, we can ensure that any personal power we have been given always rests in *his hands*. This radical dependence allows us true freedom from the anxiety inherent in both competition and powerlessness.

United with Christ, we become his powerful Presence in the world. We can steward the gifts we have been given, knowing that we only have dominion over Someone else’s creation. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels,” says St.

Paul, “to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor 4:7).

How blessed we are to share in his power and his glory! A power that can not be usurped by a CNN “booker”; a glory that leaves no one we encounter out of a passionate, gloriously human worldview. ❖

## Life After Sunday

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# The Power of Heaven and Earth

The Old Testament passages we hear in the first reading on Sunday tell the wonderful story of how the ancient Israelites grew in relationship with the one true God. As Yahweh slowly revealed himself to them, they saw the wonder of his all-encompassing love and care. But the trait that really seemed to capture their attention (especially when they had strayed) was his earth-shaking, almighty power.

This power caused two reactions in the hearts of Moses and his people: a spine-tingling fear of the Lord and an inherent security knowing that this all-powerful Presence had chosen them above all others. This was the Power who gave them the rule for how they would live. This was the Power to whom they clung in countless occasions of adversity and confrontation. By clinging to this Power, the Israelites tried to live in

the hostile desert without anxiety or fear, sustained by the almighty Presence who dwelled with them. “In the daytime the cloud of the Lord was seen over the Dwelling;” recorded an ancient scribe, “whereas at night, fire was seen in the cloud by the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey” (Ex 40:38).

## POWER IN THE TABERNACLE

Now many of you may be thinking: how blessed our ancient brothers and sisters were to have such tangible evidence of an amazing Power right in their midst. If only we had the benefit of this same Power, too.

We do. The Power of heaven and earth is in our tabernacles. The Power of heaven and earth is received into our mere mortal bodies during Mass on Sunday. As Christ so ardently asked St. Martha in the Gospel: “*Do you believe this?*” (Jn 11:26). Do you accept Communion casually or are you blown away by the magnitude of the One you

receive? Do you allow that power to work within you after you walk out the church doors?

If you crave the power to shape the world according to a fully human vision, open your heart and allow the Lord to use you as his instrument.

Through the gift of the Blessed Sacrament, the Lord has

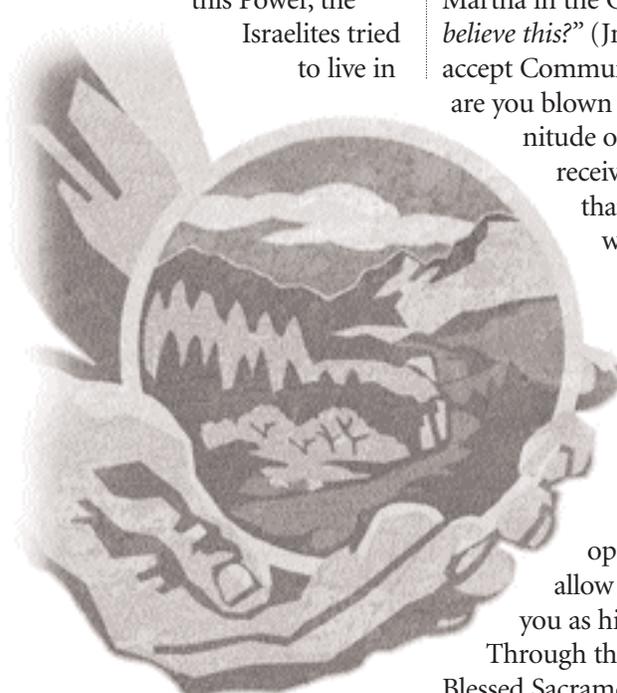
## Getting There

A few years ago on a diocesan retreat for priests, the retreat master—a priest noted for his significant skills as a psychologist/counselor—told us of the power of the Blessed Sacrament. He said that it was his practice to require his clients to agree to spend an hour in Jesus’ Eucharistic presence. They were to sit quietly before the tabernacle and quiet their minds. The whole idea was to be still, not talking to Jesus, but creating the quiet necessary to listen to him, to hear what he wanted to say. He claimed that Jesus is still the best counselor.

And he went on to note that it made no difference at all whether the counseling client even believed in Jesus. He told the story of one man—not a Christian—who wanted him to take him on for counseling. He told the man he would, but as a condition for doing so, the man must agree to spend an hour in silence in a Catholic Church in front of the tabernacle every week. The man resisted the idea and pooh-poohed the entire idea of religion, but since this was a condition for being accepted for counseling, he finally agreed.

The priest noted that the man continued to honor this requirement, but after a few weeks of doing so and unable to contain himself any longer, finally came out and asked, “*Just what are you doing to me anyway? Something’s going on there that I can’t understand.*” Lack of faith—or even belief—in Jesus does not in any way limit his power, authority or ability to affect our lives.—Fr. Peter Reynierse, Rockville, Maryland ❖

provided the same tangible evidence of his Presence today in all stages of our desert journey. ❖



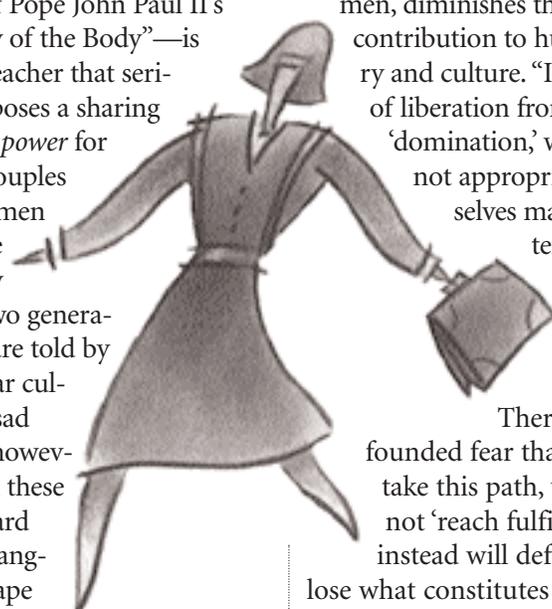
# Mutual Power!

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

As far as I can tell, the Catholic Church—though the teachings of Pope John Paul II’s “Theology of the Body”—is the only teacher that seriously proposes a sharing of *mutual power* for married couples today. Women have come a long way the past two generations, we are told by the popular culture. The sad reality is, however, after all these years of hard work—changing the shape of the culture, opening up doors once closed, seeking equal pay for equal work, achieving access to the power structures of society—when all is said and done, it still remains only a man’s world. Today, women are asked to rely on medical technology to help them experience sexual freedom *like a man* so they can enjoy his power. But in the end, according to this cultural model, the male still remains the paradigm of power. Women are just asked to make his paradigm theirs and surgically, or chemically, or prophylactically deny their own femininity. He never has to put his body, his career, his craving on the line. Yet with all the effort, she still carries the burden. He still remains free. While you have to give the culture lots of credit for trying, this is hardly mutual power!

Pope John Paul II recognizes that this effort, far from truly lib-

erating women and satisfying the deepest longings in the heart of men, diminishes the feminine contribution to human history and culture. “In the name of liberation from male ‘domination,’ women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality.’



There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfillment,’ but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness. It is indeed an enormous richness. In the biblical description, the words of the first man at the sight of the woman who had been created are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth,” says JP II in *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (#10).

## A POWERFUL UNION

The Church proposes a way to retain the “enormous richness” of the feminine gift for a couple, and therefore shape a more human family, a less male dominated work-world, a more just culture. She proposes a mutual power of male and female that is caught up into the very power of God’s divine love. It’s a proposal that fully embraces the feminine and allows her “originality” to blossom in our world. It requires a man to embrace the feminine body of his

## Getting There

Need a fresh new resource to help you gain more insight into the Church’s teachings on married love? Try Christopher West’s excellent book, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, published by Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI. To order, call 1-800-307-SOUL. ❖

spouse *as his own*. It demands that he take her seriously and not try to technically alter her to perform like him. You won’t find this proposal in many magazines or on TV. It’s a *paradigm of union* not backed by the promotional power of Madison Avenue, so it may take some sleuthing to discover, learn and master. But it’s well worth the effort. It’s called *Natural Family Planning* and it’s the only cultural proposal that fully enhances the way men love women and women appreciate their men. NFP is mutual power where it counts most, beginning in the home where it can change the world.

If you think this doesn’t work, I invite you to rediscover the original beauty and wisdom of the female body. If you think this is the Rhythm Method, I ask you, Sherlock, to join the Third Millennium. Rhythm is a Second Millennium family planning tool based on counting days. NFP is simply the studied joy of being able to read a woman’s body and acting accordingly. It requires men to respect the full power, dignity and originality of women. Unlike the technological fix where his body and desire dominates,

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# Parental Power

BY PATRICK A. LOVE

I never really minded when I wasn't allowed to do all of the things that my friends could. Besides, if I wasn't allowed to do it, I knew my oldest sister didn't even think about doing it, but I guess that's how it is when you're the oldest. While everyone else was out ice-skating or seeing movies, I was at home playing any random game that my four brothers and I could dream up. From King of the Couch to basement roller hockey (although Mom didn't like that one very much), we always found something to do to keep us happy and together. I even remember praying the rosary as a family some nights. I didn't understand why we did, but if our father could do it, then the rest of us would prove ourselves manly enough to kneel for a half an hour, too. Since the first time Dad introduced us to Playskool Power Tools, we learned by imitating him.

As we grew up, we learned that there are certain unalienable truths to life. First, there is a creator with greater power than ours. When we were young, we understood this to mean, "you can never beat up your older brother, so don't try!" Secondly, we learned that family is a place of respect, pride, and forgiveness. This way, if someone is picking on you at school, you have four brothers watching your back. And last, but not least: Honor your father and mother. They decide the amount of time you spend outside of your room! I followed all of these truths without question, until that one New Year's Eve when, as a 17-year old senior in high school, I was convinced that, like the rest of my friends, I should be allowed to

stay out all night. I even convinced myself, that if my Dad came to pick me up, I would stand up to him, and tell him that I was staying at the party. Well, that idea left my head about the same time Dad stepped foot in the door, and I left the party mad at the world and continued to my room without uttering a word. I had just become mature enough to realize that for 17 years my parents had been sculpting me into who I am today.

## A POWERFUL LOVE

One year later, I have finally figured everything out. My parents introduced me to the same kind of love that their parents showed them; a love that has the power to raise six children, and teach this love without taking credit for it. This love taught us God's great plan for us; this love taught us respect, pride, and justice; and this same love taught us about reconciliation and forgiveness. For "without love, the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons," says Pope John Paul II! Love in this way, is manifested through life. My mother taught us how to live by modeling Mary, and my father taught us love by modeling Jesus, and that was as much power as I needed. The "power" of the culture lies in its ability to distort our image of God's love in its empty promises. Because I have learned Christ's love, I am not attracted to the instant empty gratifications offered by the culture. The culture's temptations are



reality, but when parents show their children the true fullness of God's love, society's feeble temptations are easily ignored.

All children are born with the capacity to love and the capability to understand and produce Jesus' love. The culture distorts this love, and parents are called to instill it in their children. The power of a parent begins with the greatest power in this world, the power to produce a life through love. This power ends with the greatest power out of this world, to meet God in heaven with generations of children to follow. ❖

## Getting There

The dinner table is always a great place to discuss secular culture and the power of the media to foster a "common mentality" about human life. Don't be afraid to tackle anything! If your kids don't talk about current events, politics, music, television and other aspects of the culture with you, they are probably discussing it with their friends. Without a parent's love and guidance, the "common mentality" can take root. A life with Christ in his Church does not shirk from any aspect of humanity, but shows the path to the most glorious life humanly possible. Engage kids with the power of Christ's love in you!

Show them how cultural proposals outside of Christ's truths about human life can never fully satisfy the passionate desires of their young hearts. ❖



# Powerful Parishioners

The parish is the place where the truth of humble power in action takes place. Here, those in leadership positions are called to steward their gifts to serve the rest of the community, adhering to Christ's power structure. "We all are stewards of the Church," said the U.S. Bishops in their 1993 pastoral letter on stewardship. "As 'to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit' (1 Cor 12:7), so stewardship in an ecclesial setting means cherishing and fostering the gifts of all, while using one's own gifts to serve the community of faith."

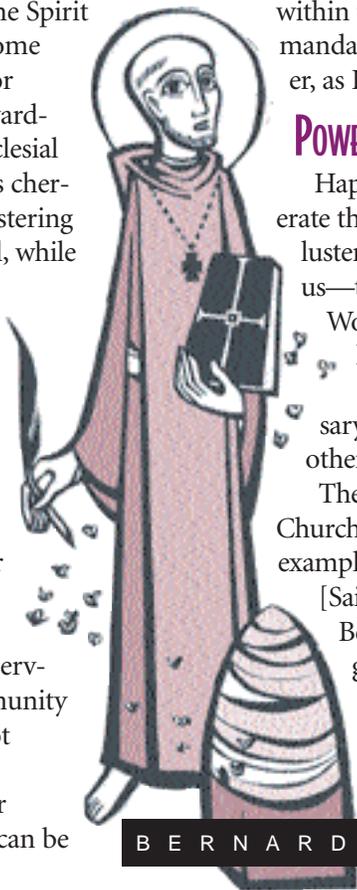
Anyone who has ever held a position of power on a parish committee knows that "serving the community of faith" is not always easy! Leading other parishioners can be

frustrating when you have so many "good Christians" looking at a task from different, narrow perspectives. Yet, in the midst of this frustration is the glory of the truth given to us by Christ. The way we serve each other on committees and within organizations, the way we work out differences of opinion and even genuine rifts—all of these challenges must be tackled within the framework of Christ's mandate that we "love one another, as I have loved you."

## POWERFUL VESSELS OF LOVE

Happily, we don't have to generate this love out of our own lackluster hearts. Christ living in us—through the power of his Word, his Sacraments and the life of his Church—provides the divine love necessary to care for and serve each other well.

The greatest leaders the Church has known are shining examples of this truth. "Consider [Saints] Paul, Augustine, Bernard, Teresa," says theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. "All the power and energy of their personalities we see developed far beyond their natural potential." Because they



**B E R N A R D**

## GETTING THERE...

In the *New York Times* magazine last year, various writers were asked to profile "people of excellence." The writer who was assigned the "best manager" piece chose—not Bill Gates—but St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus! "One of Ignatius' gifts as a leader," she wrote, "was to envision a ministry wide enough to exploit the various talents of the group's members." With Christ's love, St. Ignatius Loyola was able to see the unique gifts of each Jesuit and then used the Lord's power to steward those gifts according to the Father's will. This is the same task we face in the parish. By attentively considering the talents of the people in our care, the Lord will help us determine the way he wants to inspire them to benefit the whole community—and ultimately the world. ❖

fully surrendered to Christ, these great saints were given the power to lead the communities that surrounded them with an amazing wisdom and strength. This same capability is available to every consecrated or lay parish leader who clings to the Lord. ❖



**P A U L**

## The Power is the Lord's

"All I am is the Lord's instrument; my job is to lead others to him. When I see that this is not happening because interest is focused on me personally, I can't serve as his instrument any longer, and have to ask him to help some other way. Fortunately, he's not restricted to one." —St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) ❖

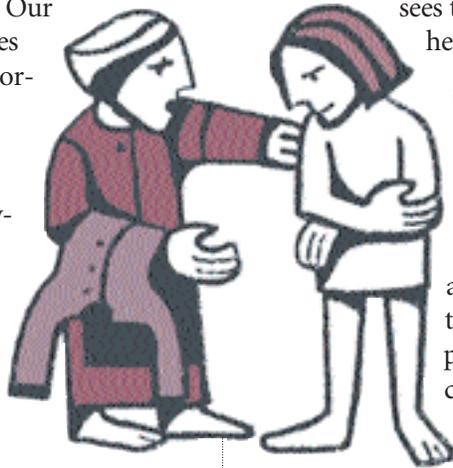
# Caring for the Powerless

When Pope John Paul II rose to the papacy in 1978, he reminded Catholics in his first encyclical of their baptismal call to be a “kingly people.” What defines a “kingly people,” according to the Pope? Our kingship provides us with an extraordinary power to serve.

Sustained by the glory of a living Presence, believers can bring his power to the culturally powerless. “Interest yourself in the most wretched people, in the homeless, the destitute, orphans, prisoners,” says Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare movement in Italy. “Neglect no one. You can make them generous promises, for you come in the name of the Omnipotent.”

Even when the Church is publicly criticized for what the secular culture sees as just a “strong political stand,” she insistently continues to work for and serve people who are considered unimportant in society: the sickly, elderly, handicapped and lonely people without shelter or resources, and

especially the most powerless unborn child. The Church does not take this stand just to “do good,” but to ceaselessly proclaim the beauty and dignity of each human person. In every face, she sees the Presence of her Lord.



## THE DUTY OF POWER

The Church has always taught that the duty of power is to take care of every member of society, says Pope John Paul

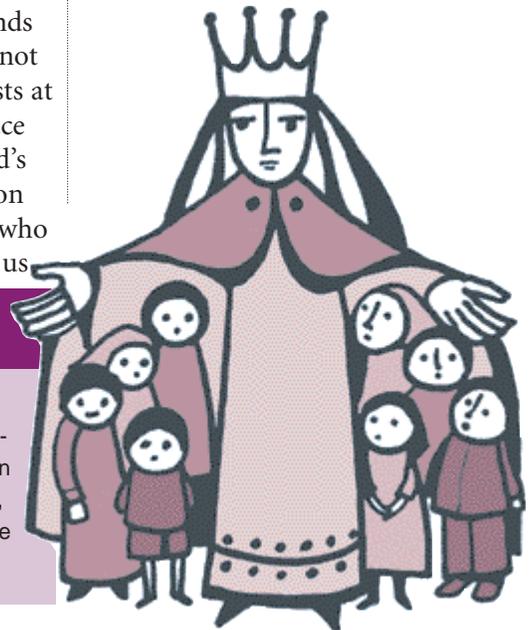
II. “The rights of power can only be understood on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of man” (*Redeemer of Man*, #17).

If believers do not insistently make this stand in the public square, the people we are called to serve will always be in the hands of powerful people who may not always have their best interests at heart. Let us pray for the grace to continue to bring the Lord’s truth about the human person to the people in our culture who hold positions of power. Let us

## GETTING THERE...

You can help transform the culture’s false concepts of power by your presence in the workplace. How do you serve “subordinates” and “support staff”? How do you react to the threat of competition or an unforeseen organizational restructuring? By standing with Jesus Christ, the source of all power, you can manage and serve without fear. After all, you don’t have to worry about “watching your back” when you are in the companionship of the King of heaven and earth! By bringing Christ’s “management model” of humble power into offices and organizations, you can begin to create camaraderie and a unity of purpose among your co-workers, and therefore, real success in your accomplishments. ❖

never forget our mission as a “kingly people.” By clinging to his Presence, we will have not only the words, but also his almighty strength and creative power to build up the kingdom of God. ❖



## Prayer for Power in the World

“O Mary, powerful Virgin, you are the mighty and glorious protector of the Church; you are the marvelous help of Christians; you are terrible as an army set in battle array; you alone have destroyed every heresy in the whole world. In the midst of our anguish, our struggles and our distress, defend us from the power of the enemy and at the hour of our death receive our souls in paradise. Amen.” —St. John Bosco ❖

# Power

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## FROM THE MYSTICAL MONSIGNOR

**P**ower is force applied for a particular purpose. It was given to man to build up the world: to create a communion of persons in love. This reflects man's truth. The problem comes when you detach the truth of man's purpose from the force of power. The force is now available for other purposes such as separation and destruction, instead of building and affirmation.

Power separated from its original purpose of building a human world embraces itself as its new purpose: to remain, to always be power. When power is separated from its original purpose in the area of human relations, all human relations will be motivated by the desire for power. When that happens, power makes you incapable of love.

In order to love, you must lose that power. That is the mystery of the cross.—*Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete* ❖

## MUTUAL POWER!

continued from page 4

with NFP her body becomes the locus of power that binds a couple together, so together they can touch the infinite power of God. Anything less is not mutual. It sounds downright Sacramental, doesn't it? If you need a technological name, maybe we should call it "The 3% Fix." Three percent: that is the divorce rate of couples who practice Natural Family Planning. What is the divorce rate of those other cultural proposals that make such a claim to promote equal power? ❖

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## Ponder In Your Heart

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*This feature of Life After Sunday has been developed at the request of small groups that want to explore the theme of each issue. —The Editor*

What does personal power mean to you? (p. 1 and 2)

- Have you ever been treated like a god?
- Discuss a time when competition or powerlessness caused anxiety in your life.

Do you experience the power of the Lord's presence at Mass? (p. 3)

- How does the life of the Church manifest the Lord's power?
- How does this power become misunderstood by the culture and many Christians?

Is mutual power possible in marriage? (p. 4)

- How do Christ's teachings propose mutual power?
- How have your relationships been affected by the culture's "teachings" on the power grab between men and women?

As a parent, do you feel powerful or powerless? (p. 5)

- Is Christ present in the power struggles within your family?
- Discuss ways that adults can best offer the power of the Church's teachings to young people?

Do you see any models of "humble power" in your parish? (p. 6)

- Read and reflect on 1Peter 5:1-7.
- Discuss events in the history of your parish community when Christ called members forward to use their leadership gifts.

How are we called to bring the power of Christ's Presence out into the world? (p.7)

- Is the Church's care of the powerless any different from the philanthropist's?
- What more can you do personally to serve Christ in those who have no power?

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