

Dear Wright, dear:

Easter 1973

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Herewith, as promised, is Easter epistle #2. It may (?) surprise you to know that I've done no preparatory planning on this. I have merely sat down & asked myself - "What do I ~~think~~ ^{have} to say right now - but I think might be of most future importance to my loved ones?" The only other preliminary thought I had was whether I should first review epistle #1 & see what if anything I might want to add or change. I rejected this approach in favor of the first mentioned query. So this will be an "off the top of the head" print out of the cumulative memory bank on what I think - right now - might be of some possible value to you. Four items jumped into my mind, & so that's what I'll be addressing, & in no particular order of priority. The first item is "books". Books are (or ought to be) a major source of our life-long commitment to personal growth. Our first-hand experience is otherwise extremely limited - even when augmented by the multiple first-hand experiences of our immediate circle of personal acquaintances, of varying degrees of competence as counselors in any event. But books make immediately available to us the best thought / ideas of all human history... The author of the "Sark Pebbles" conveys what I mean, thus: "Suddenly it seemed to me that a library was like a town with thousands of movies all showing at once, & you could go to anyone you wished at any time or place that pleased you ... & best of all, it did not cost anything. I felt suddenly free & wealthy, as if I had found my way into a cave full of treasure." Mc Kenzie (that's his name - he's dead now) went on to say - "any book, however trashy & ephemeral, is good for a child if he finds pleasure in reading it. Any book that helps him to form a habit of reading, ~~that~~ that helps to make reading one of his deep & continuing needs, is good for him. Discrimination will come naturally in time, perhaps in college years. An attempt to install it too early in life may well put a youngster's off books altogether & rob him of one of the chief advantages of being human." (Times, you can see my pressing of "Tarzan" upon John was sound per this guy's view, & I'd wager that John would second the motion - & Convinces isn't trash, either!)

So - secret word #1 is "read!" - or better yet - "READ!!!" Eventually, (2)
you'll learn to discriminate yourself, as Mr Keown says, but I would
still venture a few further words, e.g. - be balanced & catholic in your
taste, & by "catholic" I don't mean P.C. but universal or broadranged.
Dr John Courtney Murray, S.S. (he's now dead, too) gives a hint "why" in
the forward to one of his books when he says something to the effect that - it
would be impossible for me to credit all the people to whom I'm indebted for
this work, since, after a while, it is virtually impossible for one who reads
a lot to know which thoughts are truly his own. In other words, the authors
we read eventually constitute a major source of our thought, & our minds are
a conglomerate of all the many influences to which we have exposed
ourselves. We usually learn more from books than from personal contacts
merely because we ascribe more authority to authors than we're willing
to confer on most of our personal acquaintances. So - it is important
what we read - after first accepting the more vital imperative that we
read first of all. This importance of reading & importance of what we read
was underscored in my personal experience by Adm Peckover. When he
interviewed candidates for his programs one of his first questions
invariably was - "Name the last 3 fiction & the last three non-
fiction books you've read!" I can't personally imagine an easier or
quicker way to get a valid insight into one's state of development
& value system than to know the answer to such a question. (+,
yes, he always added - "excluding prescribed text book reading").
Amaze ~~thru~~ yourself by formulating your answers to the question, &
evaluating what it tells you about yourself. C.S. Lewis, in the
preface to one of his books asks - what is one to read - the presses turn
out so much, etc - & he concluded that it was always a good rule to
read authors whose names was preceded by the letters S & T, i.e. -
saint. (He elaborated that the fact that they were saints testified
to their having an insight, simplicity, & lucidity or "life"
that made them the easiest to understand authors rather than the

most complex. My limited experience indicates this is very true, i.e. -
St Thomas is easier to understand than his many interpreters. Others
would suggest that one had best avoid doubt or heresy by reading
only that which bears the imprimatur of some Bishop. Now, I
think these are all valuable thoughts & should be considered in
making your ultimate evaluations & judgments. However, I would
say - not only read, but strive for BALANCE, i.e. - read
old & new, saint & sinner, catholic & non-catholic. I don't mean
go out of your way to read both extremes, but rather - don't read
as though non-catholics don't exist, or have no truth, or are all
wrong, or have no truth, or have no saints. And, of course, how
do we know who the current saints are, & there are situations we face
today which Sts Paul - Augustine - Thomas never imagined &
therefore didn't specifically address - so we do need contemporary
authors. So - the questions persist - which modern authors do
we read. My answer is - where you want to an expert - seek
an expert. Thus, I rely on a composite of the book reviews
in the Std, the "Sign", & "America" - & I especially follow
the issuances of our Bishops (Did you know you can place a "standing
order" with "United States Catholic Conference Publications, 1312 Mass Ave,
NW, Wash DC 20005 for automatic copies of all new printing issued
by them? This order stands til you cancel it, at any time, & you're
billed at the end of each year (not to exceed \$18.) You can
hardly get all the timely church issuances - which I have found
to be superb.) Now, I know you don't want or need a strict diet of
religious oriented reading - but I'm certain you need no encouragement
or advice re secular reading, & tastes vary widely - hence my
prescription here with religious oriented reading. All I'm saying
is - do some religious oriented reading as a matter of habit.
After all - reading is an element of education, & what is the purpose
or profit of education in the ultimate sense if not mental to cure

alterable destiny? There's an awful lot of good stuff going on re the educational mission of the church: faith/creed, cult/worship, & service/community. That's where it's all at in the end. You believe! And because you believe, you worship. But to efficaciously worship, you must serve your neighbors. These are the three legs of the stool we still label "heaven". Now, I've been lucky in my reading. When I was off China after the war, I had plenty of time for it - as some people may have in the B.I. & M.I. (that's the Philippines & Guam). In the fiction field (as you must know) I prefer Graham Greene & J.F. Powers. In the non-fiction field I think C.S. Lewis is tops! And he's ^{was} an episcopalian! As a primer of lasting value & spectacular lucidity I recommend his paper book (MacMillan Co, 866-3rd Ave NY NY 10022) - "Mere Christianity" at \$1.45+ postage! It comprises 3 of his short books & is, I think, a classic. So, there (at too much length) you have 2 of my ideas - well, really 3 - i.e. - books, balance (in all things, not just re books), & simplicity - "openness". Don't "set yourself" in your thinking. Stay loose - flexible - be cool - allow yourself to grow - stay open - open to the Holy Spirit, of course! So that leaves only the 4th point - "babies". We have found the "experience" of grandchildren - that is, having them, seeing them, enjoying them, & reflecting on the ~~extension~~ ^{potential} of the citizenship of heaven - an extremely generous reward for a largely misspent life. That goes without saying. But there is one other thing in this area which should not go unremarked, i.e. Mary's experience certainly has to be the major event in our family life since our last Easter letter. For what they're worth, I think you're entitled to my reflections on the matter. First of all - I feel this is not just Mary's business (& therefore none of ours); rather, I feel it is most especially our family business. This is precisely of the essence of what we mean by Christian community. The second point I would make is this - do not judge her,

However much you may properly deplore evident realities (i.e. - we
can deplore communism (& I'm not sure I really do just as, as much,
as certain atheistic distortions - & certainly I don't find capitalism to
be an unalloyed virtue by comparison) but we must love communism.)
Sin is a complex & utterly personal thing - i.e. - Christ Himself said
only the Father knows - & He withholds judgment til after death. This is
what underlies all the ramifications of the so-called new morality + i.e.
much less frequent confession, the possibility (?) of some new insights
re so-called birth-control (a "code" - red flag word) & broken marriages,
& missing mass on Sunday, etc. The point is there are, first of all,
degrees (as between stealing a paper clip & a man's fortune or
his wife or his life). Surely, there are motives & intent, etc, etc.
But the main point - we who would be prone to judge are more surely
sinning than perhaps those we would presume to convict of sin.
Furthermore, there is the obligation of Christian charity. Charity isn't
merely easy when all goes well, it is impossible. Charity is only
possible when things don't go well. And surely charity must begin at home.
As for those who might feel that unquestioning charity equates with
condoning - they are the ones drawing the dirty plectrums. Even as we
have no right to condemn, we have no right to condone. Did anyone think
Christ's acceptance of Myrdalene condoned her past? ~~It is precisely~~
the message of Christ that we show love where love is not forthcoming.
The point is - we just aren't in the condoning/condemning business, we
simply try to live as Christ taught us to live, & let our example (&
our prayers) do the rest. Somewhere I read (yes, friends, read) that
the more we serve our neighbors, the more we become like Christ, & the
more those around us become like Christ, i.e. - our faith is or ought to
be a living faith - a faith that binds us all together in joy & in
stress, & if our so-called faith is just some personal hot line
between us & our God - then it is barren - dead - no faith at
all. So, I guess the cumulative impact of this Easter message

is evolving into a plea to read - reflect - & then execute! - i.e. -
serve - interact in the community - approach God horizontally,
via our family - our neighbors - rather than vertically, as
though we were independent islands among humanity. As
someone has said - the Christian's job is to transform himself,
& society, with God's help - i.e. we have the dual mission of
personal sanctification & social reform. Proceed from doctrine
to community - to service. Live it - share it. I recognize this
has been a rather long & boring polemic of sorts - poorly done, &
according to age & personal development you will each
react variously according to your own lights. And nothing
is so worthless as advice - especially gratuitous advice.
Nevertheless, I feel the potential stakes warrant the
effort. I can only put it down. It's up to each of
you to pick up what you want or can. And I do
seem to recall that epistle #1 did reserve the right
to preach this "one time during the year". But seriously,
folks, Easter is the season of rebirth - of renewal - so -
let's resolve this coming year to renew ourselves - to
transform ourselves. The "Transfiguration" should be our personal
venture. Let our bodies (temples, if you will, of the
Holy Spirit) be among the "booths" or Tabernacles (this world)
which lovingly commemorate the Transfiguration of us all
that the supreme redemptive act of Christ was designed
to enable. So - read - pray - reflect - then strive to translate
into action. when & where you are - with those you love
with & daily encounters. Don't just preach or think.
Love & service, but strive to live it. It will demand
a whole lifetime of effort, but it is the only worthwhile
lifetime endeavor. Strive to create & generate & sustain real
Christian community wherever you happen to be. Stay here & open -
strive to balance. Be the best possible son - brother - friend - Dad