

March 28, 1980

- *Search for identity: for individuals, for the church, for Jesus' disciples*
- *Parenting*
- *Being one with God*

God blesses each of you with the warmth of God's light and the comfort of God's love.

This is an important time for each of you as individuals. You are aware of additional concerns, of particular worries and challenges which face you now, but whose intensity is not typical as you view your lives normally on a daily basis. The concerns which you have are part of the growth process, which ultimately elevates your souls to a higher plane of awareness. The process of this development requires a steady effort in response to particular challenges.

The church, in a worldwide sense, faces difficulties at this time which in many ways transcend its past challenges. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of this challenge is the question of identity. What is the church? What are its responsibilities? What are its responses to attacks on ideological fronts from many directions? In the past there has always been a need for a recognition of identity, but in recent months many manifestations of faith, both Christian and non-Christian, have been forced to reexamine their true identity.

Each of you as individuals will find that the problems which confront you can be generally brought into the arena of a search for identity. This search may be expressed through the compassionate desire to help another or to bring another to a greater faith. It may be a search for an identity of where one truly belongs in life. It may be a search for a true identity of one's responsibility to another. Each of these concerns is ultimately related to the question of identity.

In the history of the Christian church, the fact that Jesus' disciples refused to identify themselves as partakers in his faith at the time of his execution is a graphic illustration of the difficulty which all humans face in coming to terms with the reality of their own identity. Even in the passion which Jesus suffered, he alone in his agony proclaimed his identity. His sense of self was measured by his relationship to God. He asserted the truthfulness of this relationship throughout his ministry, and he called for all to achieve a sense of identity by relating their existence to God. And yet, when the chips are down, when the pressure is on, when danger lurks near, the proclamation of one's identity with God is often weak or even non-existent. By developing a strong commitment or sense of life being centered on God, the question of identity becomes less pressing.

The importance of achieving an identity related to God can be illustrated at a more fundamental level when you realize that each of you is more capable of reaching outward during times when you feel confident. You cannot teach unless you know.

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When you fully understand your subject, you feel more at ease in explaining it to another. When you are fully aware and committed to your relationship with God, you will find it easy to respond to others and to times of crisis with the illumination of God's presence. Identity, then, is crucial to your successfully meeting the challenges of your lives. It is the foundation. It is the knowledge of your subject. It is the belief in its importance.

It is one thing to believe in God and to be well grounded in scriptural studies. It is something else to be convinced of this essential identity. When that element is firmly in place, one feels confident of reaching out to accept what God places before. Such a self-awareness, such a complete affirmation may take a long time. None of you has totally arrived at this state of your spiritual development, but each of you may be assured that progress is assured through prayer, and we see each of you involved in growth and development toward such awareness.

The question of identity involves parenting as another of your concerns. The question of what to do, what not to do, when, how much, is a constantly changing set of problems, and perfect balance is never achieved. There is no such thing as the perfect father or the perfect mother. Good parenting, however, evolves from a certain sense of sureness, of a commitment to an objective soundly based on love. It is easy to lose sight of love in the daily responsibilities of being a parent, whether you are tired or frustrated or worried. Each of these feelings can stand like a barrier between you and a child. The problem becomes one of lifting that barrier and letting your perspective, centered with God and therefore with love, move forward.

Again, it is a question of identity. When you feel at one with God, it does not simply mean that you agree with God's teachings. It means you *are* God's teachings and there is a great difference between the two. If you truly are God's teachings, you will instinctively know the correct responses to whatever challenges face you. We said earlier that no one has a perfectly clear identity with God. Manifestation of that statement can be recognized if we see no one clearly is God's teachings. There is a degree of failure for all humans. The greater the gap between being God's teachings, the greater the difficulty of dealing with challenges in life, be they questions of a career, of a family, of national policies or religious positions.

To aid the directions toward a more effective response, therefore, each of you must strive to become more and more unified with God's teaching. It is a difficult challenge. It is a life-long challenge, as you will only fully succeed during your spiritual life. This is not to diminish either the effort in human life or the purpose of human life, for the progress you make has an enormous effect on the progress you shall make during your spiritual existence.

We pray that as you study what God has provided you through us, you will slowly become more a part of God's teachings and not merely in agreement with them.

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God bestows blessings on each of you and welcomes every effort that you make to live your lives in God's image.

Amen.