



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and Prayer - February, 2006*

The Union of Catholic Apostolate

uac@uniopal.org

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Dear friends in the Union, the members of the General Secretariat of the UAC wish to continue with a monthly pamphlet of prayer and reflection for the entire UAC. We offer it for your use, it can be used for sharing in groups and communities or for personal prayer. Prayer is an essential component of the Christian life, prayer shared in community strengthens communion between those who pray, when we pray we open ourselves to God, to his Spirit and to his activity in us. Study and reflection are paths to growth and to maturity in the Christian faith and in Pallottine spirituality.

For the coming months we propose that the theme for reflection be

## *The imitation of Jesus*

### **Introduction**

St Vincent reminds us, with great concern and zeal, just what our unique and fundamental vocation is in:

*“The practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ by the observance of the holy rules and constitutions.”*

Pallotti says:

*“Every Christian experiences a holy pleasure in the thought of his obligation to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. But, there are few who constantly and seriously strive to imitate Him because there are few who think of it; but those who do think of it, in so far as they immerse themselves in this holy thought, aspire likewise, to imitate Him more and more, and from this, love for our Lord Jesus Christ grows in them. As love grows, so trust in the grace necessary to imitate Him grows and with it also, the knowledge of one’s*

*unworthiness to receive such grace. In this way one is open to receiving grace ever more abundantly. These are the few who constantly strive to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ”.*

*(OCC. III)*

### **Reflection:**

It is not a question of one's nature being transformed, but of one's activities being changed, and this comes about through the grafting of the grace and nature of the life of Jesus Christ in the life of the person. If a graft is watched over in order that the wild plant does not produce further shoots from the old trunk but only flowers and fruits from the true sprouts grafted on to it, the plant will be completely transformed; the same will occur if the individual Christian channels all his or her energies in to the way of Jesus Christ, then his or her transformation in Jesus Christ becomes a dynamic and living reality. (cf. OCC X, 452-453)

Imitation and love are factors of transformation and St. Vincent, with the assurance and confidence of one who has seen and experienced it, affirms that if a Christian commits himself to imitating Jesus Christ with humility and in trust, he or she will discover that Jesus Christ will enter the person's soul and He himself will brush away every deformity and excess; *“He will live in it (the soul), He will operate in it, and He will attribute to it the merits of His holy works”.* (cf. OCC III,37)

### **Prayer: from the Book of Wisdom 9, 1-6; 9; 11.**

God of our ancestors, Lord of mercy,  
who by your word have made all things,  
and in your wisdom have fitted man  
to rule the creatures that have come from you,  
to govern the world in holiness and justice  
and in honesty of soul to wield authority,  
grant me Wisdom, consort of your throne,  
and do not reject me from the number of your children.

For I am your servant, son of your serving maid,  
a feeble man, with little time to live,  
with small understanding of justice and the laws.

Indeed, were anyone perfect among the sons of men,  
if he lacked the Wisdom that comes from you, he would still count  
for nothing.

With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works,

she who was present when you made the world;  
she understands what is pleasing in your eyes  
and agrees with your commandments.

Dispatch her from the holy heavens,  
send her forth from your throne of glory  
to help me and to toil with me  
and teach me what is pleasing to you,  
since she knows and understands everything.  
She will guide me prudently in my undertakings  
and protect me by her glory.”

### **Gospel reading.**

“They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man whom they begged him to touch. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Then putting spittle on his eyes and laying his hands on him, he asked, ‘Can you see anything?’ The man, who was beginning to see, replied, ‘I can see people; they look like trees to me, but they are walking about’. Then he laid his hands on the man’s eyes again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly.” (Mark 8,22-26)

### ***Allowing oneself to be transformed by Jesus***

The example of Mother Teresa of Calcutta comes to mind. She once was young just like so many others, she studied, she became a Sister and she was sent to India by the religious superiors of her Congregation. She allowed herself to be transformed by Jesus, by the Jesus who gave her the ability to come close to lepers, to welcome them, to be with the poor and not to be afraid. Her life became a living Gospel for our time.

### **From the Encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” (14)**

“Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental “mysticism” is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself

towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body”, completely joined in a single existence.”

*"HE WHO follows Me, walks not in darkness," (Jn. 8,12, says the Lord. By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has His spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ."*

The Imitation of Christ, Thomas a Kempis; Chapter 1,§1.



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*Reflection and Prayer - March, 2006*

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## **The Imitation of Christ according to St Vincent Pallotti (continued)**

Vincent Pallotti's reflections on the imitation of Christ are so profound thought-provoking that they merit a detailed and extensive study. This month's reflection is on the text "A practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ by observance of the holy rules and constitutions."

(OCCC III, pages 34 – 39).

**Prayer:** "Eternal Father, in union with the Heart of Mary, we offer you the blood of Jesus Christ in thanksgiving as if you had already granted us the gift of making his hidden and public life even up to his self-giving of the Cross, our fundamental rule: for your greater glory and for the sanctification of our brothers and sisters. Amen"

### **Pallotti presents a theology of grace and of the development of the spiritual life and he outlines the following points:**

1. There are few people who imitate Jesus Christ, because, there are few who think of it or realize that it is possible to do it.
2. Those persons who do think of it and are willing and ready to imitate Jesus Christ, grow in love for Jesus, when this love grows, their confidence in receiving the graces necessary to imitate him also grows, as does their recognition of their own unworthiness of receiving such graces.
3. As a consequence of this openness the person is open to receive grace ever more abundantly.
4. Pallotti recommended that one keep this daily reminder to imitate Jesus in a little book separate from the rules, so that they might read it often and at odd moments.

5. He explains, in detail, this ‘practice’. It entails various components:
  - a) ‘reminder’: to remember and recall the obligation that all Christians have to imitate Jesus Christ;
  - b) ‘practical’: it is necessary to **effectively** imitate Jesus, to imitate him in actual fact in thought, in speech, in deed and in action and in governing the affections of the heart;
  - c) ‘daily’: it is not enough to put this obligation into practice for a day, or a month or a year, but it must be practiced every day right up to death.
6. This obligation to imitate Jesus Christ is common to all Christians, however, the members of the UAC have received, as a gift, the fundamental Rule of the life of Jesus Christ; therefore they are urged in a special way to imitate him.
7. As members of the UAC, and in the course of daily life, we experience countless graces in order to imitate him.

### **Biblical texts.**

The Temptation of Jesus; Mark, 1: 12–15

The Transfiguration of Jesus; Mark 9: 1–10.

### **Reflection.**

We recall that our Holy Founder has given us the life of our Lord Jesus Christ as our fundamental rule, so as to imitate him in our life in community and in our apostolate. The life of our Lord Jesus Christ: this means all of the life of Jesus, his infancy, his youth, his so called ‘hidden life’ and his public life.

Pallotti was convinced that Jesus wanted him to meditate on his ‘hidden’ life, because he was convinced of the need to know everything about Jesus, to know the ‘total’ Jesus.

We are accustomed to meditating and reflecting on the public life of Jesus, it is relatively easy to do this because we have the help of Gospel texts that tell us of his public life. To meditate on the hidden life of Jesus it is necessary to use our imagination in conjunction with our faith. We know that Jesus is with us when we pray, when we invoke his presence amongst us. Let us ask him to accompany us in our reflection on his hidden life, to

open our minds and our hearts to this form of meditation and to lead us, step by step to a deeper knowledge of him.

***From the writings of Saint Vincent Pallotti.***

“The fundamental rule of our little Congregation is the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to imitate him, with humility and trust, with the greatest possible perfection, in all the works of his hidden life and of his public Gospel ministry, for the greater glory of God, our heavenly Father, and for the greater sanctification of our soul and that of our fellow men and women.” (OCCC III, 40).

“My God, we are unworthy to receive the gift of a perfect love for our Immaculate Mother, Mary most Holy, but you, in your infinite mercy and by the merits of Jesus and of Mary, most Holy, grant us this gift. We mean (intend) to love our most beloved Mother Mary with the love with which you, o eternal Father, love her, you who love her as a Daughter; with the love with which you, o divine Son, love her, you who love her as a Mother; with the love with which you, o divine Spirit, love her, you who love her as a Spouse; and we intend that she be loved in the same manner by all possible creatures, past, present and future.” (OCCC VIII, 224).

***Reflection - testimony.***

Pope John Paul II lived a life that was marked by sufferings and by moments of transfiguration. He allowed himself by transformed by Jesus, and so he became, for the Church, a courageous figure giving testimony to the crucified and risen Christ. He acquired incredible strength in the face of the problems of our times; he came close to everyone, he engaged in dialogue with everyone, he both sought and found communion in diversity. He went out to meet young people and families, he welcomed all. Like Jesus he had the courage to let his suffering be visible; like Jesus he was not ashamed to manifest and witness to his great love for the Heavenly Father. He was not ashamed to show his own limitations when these became apparent. His death moved the entire world, but his life testimony lives on in our hearts. Both the Church and the world have been enriched by the gift of his life.

## THE THIRD BOOK of the "Imitation of Christ"

### *Of the inward voice of Christ to the faithful soul*

1. I will hearken to what the Lord God will say within me.(Psalm 85, 8)  
Blessed is the soul which hears the Lord speaking within it, and receives the word of consolation from His mouth. Blessed are the ears which receive the echoes of the soft whisper of God, and turn not aside to the whisperings of this world. Blessed truly are the ears which listen not to the voice that sounds without, but to that which teaches truth inwardly. Blessed are the eyes which are closed to things without, but are fixed upon things within. Blessed are they who search inward things and study to prepare themselves more and more by daily exercises for the receiving of heavenly mysteries. Blessed are they who long to have leisure for God, and free themselves from every hindrance of the world. Think on these things, O my soul, and shut the doors of your carnal desires, so may you hear what the Lord God will say within you.
2. These things says your Beloved, "I am your salvation, I am your peace and your life. Keep yourself close to Me, and you will find peace." Put away all transitory things, seek those things that are eternal. For what are all temporal things but deceits, and what shall all created things help you if you be forsaken by the Creator? Therefore put all things else away, and give yourself to the Creator, to be well pleasing and faithful to Him, that you may be able to attain true blessedness.



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## **The Imitation of Christ according to St Vincent Pallotti (continued).**

In preparation, let us pray with St. Vincent Pallotti:

“O my Jesus, I am infinitely unworthy to be allowed participate in your humble, poor, suffering, benevolent, hard-working and scorned life. You, in your infinite mercy and through the intercession of Mary most holy and of all the Angels and Saints, grant me this grace. May the life of our Lord Jesus Christ be my life both now and forever. Amen.”

### ***Reflection.***

In the ‘Practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ’ (OCCC III, pages 34 – 39) St. Vincent Pallotti proposes the following:

1. Before beginning any activity in the daily routine:
  - reflect first of all on what would be the thinking of the holy mind of Jesus in these concrete situations;
  - consider what the feelings of his divine Heart would be;
2. In situations in which one must speak:
  - ask oneself what words of humility, gentleness, charity, patience and prudence would Jesus use;
  - consider just how measured his words would be, he would use neither too many nor too few words;
3. In the use of all material and created things that are necessary to life:
  - consider the moderate use that Jesus Christ made of these;

- with ones imagination try to see Jesus, and using the imagination and in a spirit of reviving or intensifying ones faith, think of the God-man who became for us both an example and a model;
- it is Jesus Christ himself who is the practical rule or guide for both the interior and outward life of the Christian;
- an invitation is made to trust in the grace with which he wishes to bless us abundantly in order that we may imitate him.

### **Biblical texts for reflection.**

Isaiah 58, 5-9;

John 8, 1-12;

Luke 23, 33-34;

Luke 8,13-16;

John 19, 25-27;

John 14, 1-11.

The challenge before us is that of imitating Jesus in both his hidden and public life. The following reflection is one that Pallotti himself wrote, it is taken from **“The God of Infinite Love,”** reflection 12:

“On the obligation of becoming perfect, since we are living images of the Son.

Enlightened by holy faith, I must remember that my soul, created in the image and likeness of God, is therefore a living image of the divine Son. Because this is so, and by natural obligation of creation and trusting in grace, I must avail of my free will in order to become perfect inasmuch as I am a living image of the same divine Son of the eternal divine Father. And since the divine person of the Son is infinitely similar to the Father, my soul is therefore under an obligation of its very nature to become increasingly more perfect in its essence as an image of God and of all of God. To do otherwise would be, according to the wise designs of infinite love, to work against nature and against the needs of the nature of my soul which God wishes to be like Himself in glory. In so far as it is possible and helped by grace, I am, therefore, obliged to govern all the thoughts, words and deeds of my life in such a manner that I may imitate God in everything according to His purposes.”

In April we commemorate the birth of Saint Vincent Pallotti on April 21<sup>st</sup> 1795. He was born in Via del Pellegrino, 130, in the city of Rome. He was the third of ten children born to Pietro Paolo Pallotti and Maddalena De Rossi and he was baptised on April 22nd in the Church of Saint Lorenzo in Damaso.

The *reflection-testimony* this month is on the exemplary life of Saint Vincent:

St. Vincent Pallotti sought, throughout his life, to imitate Jesus Christ at every opportunity. As a child he learnt from his parents to listen carefully to the Gospel and to meditate on Jesus Christ; little by little his heart opened to the activity of the Holy Spirit who ensured that Pallotti's life was filled with the love of God. This love was so strong that it often caused him to forget himself; it helped him to acknowledge his weaknesses and, at the same time it allowed him to know himself as deeply loved by God. This experience gave rise to a desire to respond to such love and to commit all of his life to awakening others to the infinite and merciful love of God.

Pallotti is a great Saint because he gave room to God's grace, he allowed it to work in him, and when God enters a soul he does marvellous things. Examples of this in St. Vincent's life are the amount of time that he dedicated to listening to the people who came to him for counselling, he never seemed to tire; he once gave his coat to a poor person who was shivering from cold and he continued to hear confessions despite the cold. Vincent forgot about himself, he did not worry about a possible dose of 'flu, he considered the needs of the other to be of greater importance than his own. Like Jesus he gave his life for others. This is what it means to truly love.

We too are called to open our hearts, our minds and our hands so that the Holy Spirit, working in us and with us, can transform us and teach us to love as Jesus taught us.

From the *"Imitation of Christ"*, Book III, Chapter XVIII:

### *After the Example of Christ*

"O Lord, because You were patient in life, especially in fulfilling the design of the Father, it is fitting that I, a most miserable sinner, should live patiently according to Your will, and, as long as You shall wish, bear the burden of this corruptible body for the welfare of my soul. For though this present life seems burdensome, yet by Your grace it becomes meritorious, and it is made brighter and more endurable for the weak by Your example and the pathways of the saints. But it has also more consolation than formerly under the old law when the gates of heaven were closed, when

the way thereto seemed darker than now, and when so few cared to seek the eternal kingdom. The just, the elect, could not enter heaven before Your sufferings and sacred death had paid the debt.

Oh, what great thanks I owe You, Who have shown me and all the faithful the good and right way to Your everlasting kingdom! Your life is our way and in Your holy patience we come nearer to You Who are our crown. Had You not gone before and taught us, who would have cared to follow? Alas, how many would have remained far behind, had they not before their eyes Your holy example! Behold, even we who have heard of Your many miracles and teachings are still lukewarm; what would happen if we did not have such light by which to follow You?"

***Act of Consecration to Our Lady.***

O Mary, my Mother! I give myself entirely to you, and, to show my devotion to you, I consecrate to you today my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, my entire self. And because I am yours o loving Mother, keep me, defend me, as your property and possession, Amen.



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## **The Imitation of Christ according to St Vincent Pallotti (continued).**

Dear brothers and sisters in the Union, we propose to continue, for the month of May, with our reflection on the imitation of Christ as outlined by St. Vincent Pallotti in the text **'a Practical daily reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ'** (OCC III, pages 37 to 39). This will be the final meditation on this text. We will begin to reflect, from June onwards, on St. Vincent's Rule in the so-called '33 points'.

In preparation for the reflection let us pray with St. Vincent Pallotti:

“My Jesus, by myself I can do nothing. May you accomplish everything in me, may you do so out of love for Mary, most Holy, and in your infinite mercy and by your infinite merits, which I mean to offer once more to the Eternal Father and to offer them from all eternity and for all eternity in thanksgiving as if you had already given me everything and as if you had already given it to me from all eternity and for all eternity. Amen.”

### **The effects of the Daily Practical Reminder**

(OCC III, pages 37 to 39).

St. Vincent teaches us that:

- If we have trust in Jesus Christ and if we strive to imitate him, he himself will destroy in us all our faults and shortcomings, because on entering into our soul, he is actively present and so continues to live his life in us;
- Jesus Christ will live in that soul and he will apply the merits of his most holy works to the soul, this is affirmed by the words of Jesus as reported in the Gospel of John: “whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works”

(14, 12), and indeed, the truth of this can be verified in the life of the person;

- Jesus Christ himself will do everything in us. Here Pallotti quotes the words of St. Paul, words born of his own experience of the Spirit of Jesus operating in him: “I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2,20).

Pallotti invites us to remember that “... Jesus Christ, in his infinite mercy and in his infinite love, and in order to continue his most holy life in us, deigned to remain among us in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist in which he gives us himself as food and nourishment for the soul”.

Let us meditate on the words of Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharista* on its relationship to the Church (n.16):

“The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord's body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (*Mt* 26:28). We are reminded of his words: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (*Jn* 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. *The Eucharist is a true banquet*, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. When for the first time Jesus spoke of this food, his listeners were astonished and bewildered, which forced the Master to emphasize the objective truth of his words: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you” (*Jn* 6:53). This is no metaphorical food: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (*Jn* 6:55).

Pallotti, in the *Practical Daily Reminder to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ*, continues to reflect on the manner of imitating Jesus, he affirms that, “in order to imitate Jesus Christ, we need, above all else, to have his Spirit”, if we possess his Spirit then all the interior movements of our souls

can be similar to those of Jesus Christ, because to imitate him sincerely implies that the external works are true expressions of the interior ones.

In summary, he says that (i) enlightened by Faith, (ii) with trust and confidence in the grace of God, and (iii) with mistrust of ourselves; we can and must “ponder and call to mind Jesus Christ, at least in the principal interior and external actions of his most holy life.”

Then Pallotti lists the principal interior actions:

- a spirit of sacrifice;
- Jesus’ infinite love of suffering;
- to relive in ones minds the sufferings of Jesus in the passion;
- constantly doing the Will of the Father, just as Mary most holy, did;
- the humility of his heart;
- the docility of his heart;
- the stance of not seeking ones own glory;
- a love for being held in contempt or disdained;
- an incomprehensible love of poverty;
- a love for the honour and glory of the heavenly Father;
- a love for the welfare of souls; Jesus had such a love even though he knew how few would take advantage of his salvation and how many would be ungrateful in the face of the benefit of Redemption:
- a spirit of prayer and of continuous entreaty;
- a spirit of union with God.

St. Vincent Pallotti was Spiritual Director to the seminarians at the Urbano College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. The present students at the College participate each year in the Triduum in preparation for the celebration of his feast day on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and it has become a tradition that one of them write a letter to St. Vincent, in reply to the letter of encouragement that he sent to the students during the Roman Revolution in 1849. This year it was written by the seminarian Janan Shamil Aziz of the Chaldean Church in Iraq, he is from the diocese of Kirkuk.

In his letter to Pallotti Janin wrote:

“Dear St. Vincent, on reading the letter that you wrote to us, I have been touched by the great love you had for us ... I was struck by the phrase “have hope” because you wrote these words in 1849 which was indeed a very difficult moment in history ...

Today, as then, we need apostles of hope like you were. In fact our own time is not that different from yours: this is a ‘hard time’ for the Church ... but it is there, in those places where there is persecution, suffering and hardships, threats and pain, that hope stands out ...; our Christian community is still alive, and it seeks to always be an instrument of hope for all the Iraqi people; a living hope founded on faith. You left us the example of uniting a living hope with charity, and it is this that has inspired so many men and women to follow in your footsteps in the Catholic Apostolate; this is especially true for lay persons like Thomas Alkusi – who was a close collaborator of St. Vincent, and a native of Alkush, Iraq – who put in practice your motto ‘Caritas Christi urget nos’. St. Vincent, I also ask myself “what must we do?” (Acts 2,37), asking the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and listening to “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches,” (Rev. 2,7). Further I ask myself: how can this be done? How can we become a sign of hope in today’s world?”

We could reflect on the challenges that these extracts from the letter of the seminarian Janin to Pallotti put before us, and do so in the context of meditating on Pallotti’s teaching on the imitation of Christ, we could ask Pallotti himself to show us the way.

The Union of Catholic Apostolate proposes that our spirituality be one of following Jesus Christ. Article 16 of the General Statutes of the UAC indicate what this entails and how it should be lived:

“The spirituality particular to the Union is the following of Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. In faith and in love, the members of the Union choose to remain united with the Crucified and Risen Lord ever-present among them (cf. Mt. 18, 20). They strive to imitate his love of the Father and of all people, seeking to imitate his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible.”

***Pray together: The Canticle of Zechariah*** (Lk. 1: 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!

He has visited his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up for us a mighty saviour  
in the house of David his servant,

as he promised by the lips of holy men,  
those who were his prophets from of old.

A saviour who would free us from our foes,  
from the hands of all who hate us.  
So his love for our fathers is fulfilled  
and his holy covenant remembered.

He swore to Abraham our father to grant us,  
that free from fear, and saved from the hands of our foes,  
we might serve him in holiness and justice  
all the days of our life in his presence.

As for you, little child,  
you shall be called a prophet of God, the Most High.  
You shall go ahead of the Lord  
to prepare his ways before him,

To make known to his people their salvation  
through forgiveness of all their sins,  
the loving-kindness of the heart of our God  
who visits us like the dawn from on high.

He will give light to those in darkness,  
those who dwell in the shadow of death,  
and guide us into the way of peace.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.  
Amen.