



# PENIEL

September 2002

WHERE JACOB WRESTLED WITH GOD AND SURVIVED

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## JOURNAL OF AN ALIEN STREET PRIEST

*"If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel you will save it" Mark 8:34-35*

During my six week sabbatical this summer, my times of reflection were centered around those major questions that haunt every human being: "Why am I here?" "Is this all there is?" "Does what I am doing really have any meaning?" "Am I only a part of the evolutionary process that will soon turn to dust and be forgotten?" and the questions we all struggle with around aging and death.

Faith is a muscle that has to be exercised to be strong, and this summer my faith has had and still is having a workout. Confronted by the grief of loss, the constant misunderstanding, rumors, and threats, I looked deep within myself and reexamined these now eight years of street ministry. Daily I prayed the "Liturgy of the Hours" four times, sometimes five, and the words of the psalmist reminded me that all human beings confront these questions, and that ultimately we must look to God, for in the end that is all we have.

What conclusions have I drawn, besides the fact that I am a human being with many "thorns in the flesh", and am very mortal?

First that we must be grounded in a Center, and for me that is in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the Eucharistic message. Without a Center our lives flow into addictions and promiscuity as we seek meaning and relief in the midst of life. Each day I see young adults do drugs, some poor, some

wealthy, all trying to find something to give their lives meaning. Their center is drugs and the constant search for love in sex. Our Center determines who we are and the quality of our lives.

Secondly, the way to find life is to give it up. Jesus said: "If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel you will save it" (Mk. 8:34-35). In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "[w]e are gravely mistaken to think that religion protects us from the pain and agony of mortal existence. Life is not a euphoria of unalloyed comfort and untroubled ease. Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear. To be a Christian one must take up his cross, with all of its difficulties and agonizing and tension-packed content, and carry it until that very cross leaves its mark upon us and redeems us to that most excellent way which comes only through suffering." In Rev. 5:6 stands the Lamb who is slain and victorious. We find ourselves in the emptying of our lives, and in the suffering of the cross.

Many years ago I wrote this mission statement for my life, and I find it has not changed: "The best summary for my mission in

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life can be found in the statement: **obedience to Christ does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such away that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist.** To be a living mystery means to practice the Works of Mercy, and in the words of Dorothy Day: "To love to the point of folly."

As I begin my ninth year of ministry I know that I have chosen a Calvary of walking with the most despised of societies rejects, to be identified with them, to be labeled with them, to be threatened, slandered, and abused. But in so doing I stand with

===== **We Are Beggars** =====

We depend not on government grants, or city funding, but upon the generosity of others and our own work. We invite you to help us kick off the fall with your generosity.

===== **BUDGET REPORT** =====

Donations June – August	\$7,209.81
Expenses:	8,931.91
Total On Hand September 1:	966.91
Needed Monthly:	\$24881.00

**Email Newsletter**

Due to some difficulties we may have lost some email addresses. Those of you if you are on the email list will be getting this by email as well. If you do not and want to be on email please send address to Fr. River at punkpriest@cs.com

**FERN ALLEY EUCHARIST**

We will return to our weekly Eucharist in Fern Alley at 6:00 p.m. on September 29, 2002.

**Memorial for Patrick Degmar**

Patrick Degmar, one of our long time parishioners

passed away at Laguna Honda Hospital the last week in August of AIDS related illness. We will celebrate his life on September 19, at Old First Presbyterian Church, at 1:00 p.m. Fr. River will be the celebrant.

**SALTER COLUMN TERMININATED**

Stephanie Salter has been a long-time columnist with the SF Examiner and Chronicle. Her writing has reflected her deep faith and social justice. She has been our long-time friend and supporter. Her column was terminated by the San Francisco Chronicle recently. We invite all of you to write a letter to the Publisher of the Chronicle at protesting the demise of a voice of social justice.

October 1 is our eighth anniversary. Thanks to all of you who have journeyed with us these years, you have made it a little less lonely for a certain priest and for many, many young people.

**CARE NOT CASH**

On our November ballot will be an initiative to cut the General Assistance funds from \$200, to \$59 for homeless recipients. The remainder of the money would be given in vouchers for services. The catch is that we do not have enough services for our homeless and this money would not be used to create new services; thus we simply have more bureaucracy added. We urge you to vote no on this.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

The SF Civic Center Plaza will be the site of a Community Prayer Service / Rally to express deep concern about the Prop N "Care Not Cash" initiative on **September 29th**. Sponsored by Religious Witness with Homeless People, **In the Spirit of St. Francis** will be held from 2:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. **Volunteers** are needed to work with Fr. River in passing out flyers opposing Prop N.