

The Red Zone

Those troubling times that tempt us

By *Donnell Kirchner, C.Ss.R.*

It usually starts around 9:35 at night. The day's work is done. It is too early to go to bed. Should I take that extra drink or not? Maybe call the wrong person for comforting words? Turn on the computer and watch questionable sites? I have entered into the RED ZONE, a dangerous time of day when I am most vulnerable and weak.

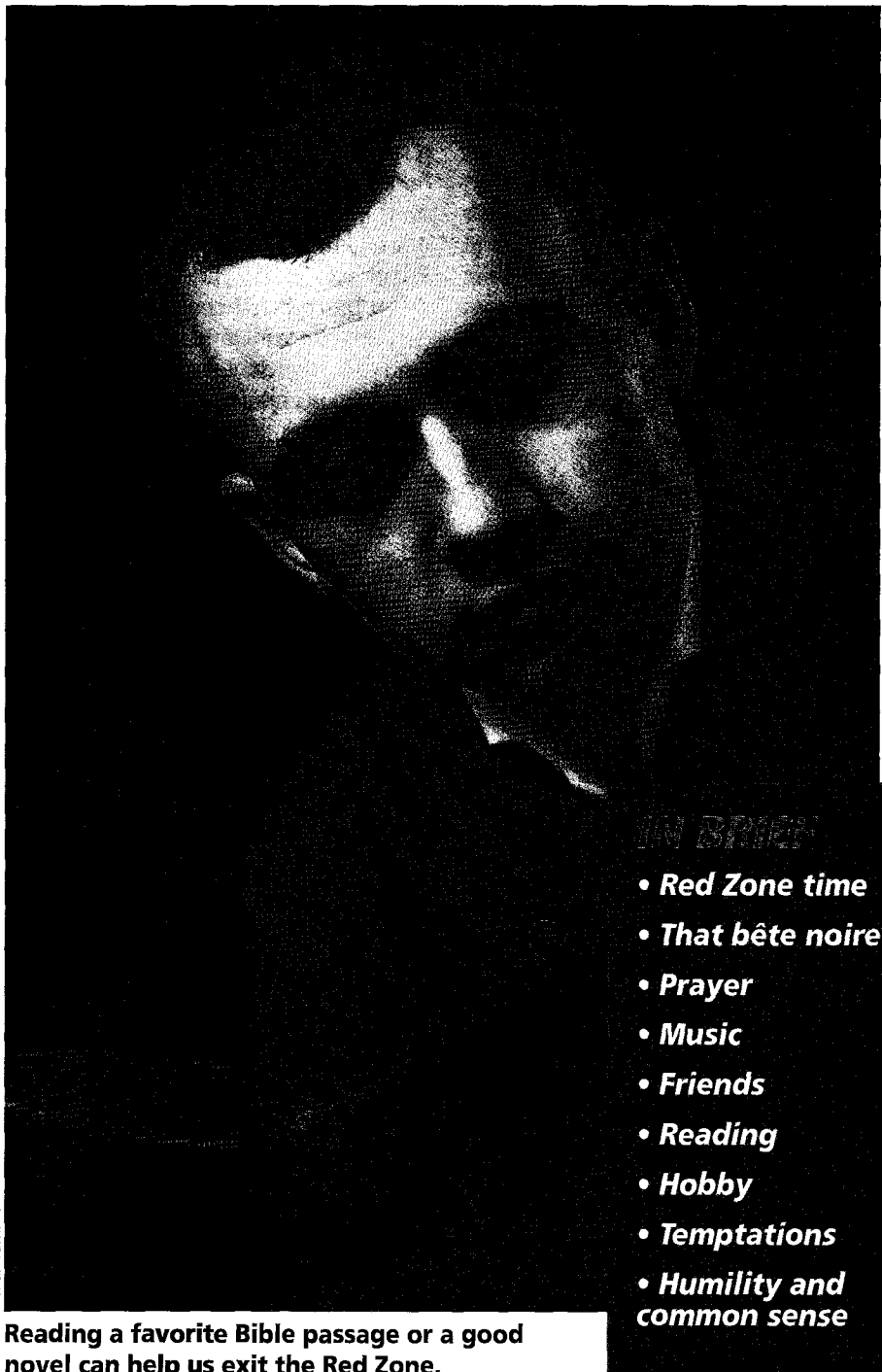
It might have been a nothing day. Or I feel hurt or wounded because someone yelled or complained. It was a tough day. I am resentful, not feeling appreciated. My libido is working in overdrive. I am restless.

So what am I to do? How do I handle all these very alive and active emotions and sentiments? Strong urges which are demanding my attention? I know that they are not going to go away on their own.

Ask for Help

1.) My first suggestion to a priestly brother would be to ask for help. Divine assistance. Be humble. I am in over my head. I cannot handle this by myself. Accept the fact that I am a work in progress. Imperfect. I am not exempt from Original sin. A defective person who needs to pay constant attention to my inner life.

All of us have our deeper needs and desires: anger, a sex drive, ambitions, a truly wants, a need to be loved and recognized, etc. Habits from the past continue on with me. One night I was sitting in a chapel and suddenly went into catastrophe mode (e.g., catastrophication). I became angry with someone I did not want to reach out and hurt him. It was as though a trap door in the floor had opened. A large, vicious black beast, with gnashing teeth, was push-



IN BRIEF

- Red Zone time
- That *bête noire*
- Prayer
- Music
- Friends
- Reading
- Hobby
- Temptations
- Humility and common sense

SHUTTERSTOCK PHOTO

Reading a favorite Bible passage or a good novel can help us exit the Red Zone.

**God wishes to test you like gold
in the furnace. The dross is
consumed ... but the pure gold
remains and its value increases.**

ing his nose out, trying to escape from his cage. This fiend was alive, well and healthy, ready to tear me apart if I let him get out. It scared me as I realized that I was that beast. It was not only inside of me, but part of me. Out of sight, silent, but there, waiting for a chance to emerge.

2.) Maybe it is time for prayer. Reading a favorite Bible passage. Say a Rosary. Invoke a beloved saint. I find walking, moving around, getting out of a comfortable chair to be helpful. Whether it be on my knees or lying down, there is a prayer for every occasion.

The Bible talks about the Lord chastising those whom he loves. The purest gold is tried in the hottest fire. St. Jerome Emiliani wrote to his brothers, saying that "God wishes to test you like gold in the furnace. The dross is consumed by the fire, but the pure gold remains and its value increases. It is this

manner that God acts with his good servant."

Temptations develop one's ability to follow God's will. It strengthens me. It may also be a wake-up call. I find that often when I am suffering temptations or spiritual growth has become distasteful it is because I have not been praying much or have been living on the edge, sliding by on my commitments.

The Blessed Sacrament

I have found that frequent (and long) visits to the Blessed Sacrament have helped me get through those moments when I felt fragile and weak. Who has not felt that empty sense of worthlessness? Of being alone? Jesus and his love have seen me through many a moment of dejection. I had a

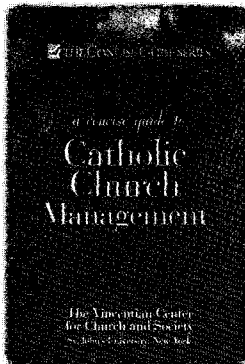
friend who was close, whose love I could almost touch.

As Hebrews 5 reminds me, I better understand people's sins and faults because I am aware of my own. "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people" (5:2-3).

But I am not only a spiritual being. I am human and there are other ways in which I can apply acceptable solutions and remedies to see me through such periods.

3.) Soothing music calms beasts. Depending upon your preference, the emotional power of a melody penetrates into the soul and evokes responses. I have walked around an empty house shouting out a Frank Sinatra song. Percy Faith and Montavani are

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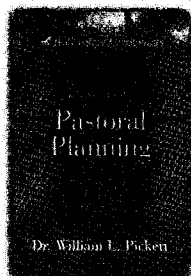
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among my favorites.

4.) There are dependable friends who are available at any hour. They know I have those moments when I need to reach out and seek consolation or strength. I keep those telephone numbers in my cell phone.

5.) A good novel gets me into another mood. Seeing someone else's predicament moves me into a different direction. I have a collection of spy novels which are my companions in such moments. I fly off to Prague, Buenos Aires or Bangkok.

Some Pastimes

6.) A hobby can be more than just something to fill up idle minutes. It takes my mind off daily concerns and worries. It involves me in something invigorating and challenging. Whether it be gardening, collecting coins or stamps, painting, writing poetry, a hobby is an escape, a diversion from daily routine and those stressful periods

which leave one vulnerable to pleasure in forbidden areas. Whatever works for you, have some pastime to turn to. It is not only by spiritual things that a good priest's lives by.

Temptations come, temptations go. They are like headaches. I may know the cause, but then again, they appear either when I am too self-confident or in a weakened state. It is hard to avoid them. Some are the results of my activities. Others are just part of human nature. A bit of humility and common sense goes a long way to resist those seemingly overpowering ones.

At one of the churches in Assisi, the guide will show you the rose garden where St. Francis threw himself upon those thorny plants. Reports now have it that there is a belt that Pope John Paul II used to whip himself for mortification. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert not only preparing himself, but also to help us get ready for our trials.

In his work on St. Alphonsus' book

for priests (*Dignity and Duties of the Priest* or the *Selva*), Father Norman Muckerman, C.Ss.R., quotes from the Doctor of the Church saying, "If the priest is to be a mediator between God and God's people, he must never appear before God stained with sin. If the priest is to be a light to the world, he himself must shine with the splendor of all virtue."

Good advice from a scrupulous saint. Could we ever reach the deeper regions of sanctity without being tested by temptations? Like paying taxes, they are part of life. May mine help me to grow and love Jesus more. **P**

FATHER KIRCHNER, C.Ss.R., was ordained a priest in 1966, spent 39 years in the Amazon, has been a pastor many times and also did formation work. He received a degree in Moral Theology in Rome, taught courses in parishes and is currently working and living at Liguori, Mo.

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