



BOLETIN  
ECLESIASTICO  
de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN ORGAN

EDITOR	EFREN RIVERA. O.P.
ASSOCIATE EDITORS	PEDRO LUIS GONZALEZ, O.P. JOSE MA. B. TINOKO, O.P.
EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS	FRANCISCO DEL RIO, O.P. JESUS MA. MERINO, O.P. PABLO FERNANDEZ, O.P. BONIFACIO SOLIS, O.P.
PUBLICATION ASSISTANT	AMELITA M. HERRERA

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Fathers' Residence  
University of Santo Tomas  
Manila, Philippines

FR. EFREN O. RIVERA. O.P.  
NCBC-RM. 308. ISABEL BLDG.  
F. CAYCO ST., ESPAÑA. MLA. 1008



## **PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE HOLY FATHER'S VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES**

O Lord Jesus Christ, You have chosen JOHN PAUL II to be your Vicar on Earth. Give him health of mind and body as he prepares to make a pastoral visit to our country, and we hope, to beatify our proto-martyr Lorenzo Ruiz.

May his coming be a clearer sign of Your presence among us, a source of renewed faith in You and Your Church, an inspiration in our efforts to build a truly Christian community of love and service among our people.

Keep him from all harm. Give him always the spirit of courage and right judgment as he strengthens your Church into a veritable sacrament of unity, love and peace all over the world.

We ask you this, who live and reign forever and ever.  
Amen.



## EXPLANATION OF THE LOGO FOR THE PAPAL VISIT

Circular in form, the Logo has three fields colored blue, white and red, reminiscent of the Philippine flag. On the white field which shapes the top part of the circle into a "V" is the mitered head of the Pope. The Cross and the big letter "M" on his miter recalls his coat of arms which in turn speak of his great devotion to Jesus Christ and to Mary. He has a smiling face to remind the viewer that the present Holy Father is a joyful man who has special appeal to the young.

Immediately below the face of the Pope is a big halo encircling five men and two women. The halo is sustained by two hands to signify the act of beatification. The Pope will beatify sixteen martyrs who died for the faith in Japan between 1633 and 1637. *Nine of them were Japanese* and they are represented in the Logo by the two women with scapulars (they were members of the Third Order of Saint Dominic), the layman in Japanese clothes (representing Miguel Kurobioye and Lazaro of Kyoto), the priest and the young man in black at the back (three of them were Dominican priests and two were Dominican lay brother novices). Wearing a Dominican habit, a bearded priest behind the front figure represents the *four Spaniards, a Frenchman, and an Italian*, who among others had the missionary zeal to penetrate Japan when authorities tried to seal it off from contact with the Christian world. The figure in front of the other martyrs is Lorenzo Ruiz, a *Filipino-Chinese* who, by God's unscrutable plan, joined the group led by Fr. Antonio Gonzalez that left the Philippines in 1636. He holds a Rosary in his hands because he was a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. The palm of martyrdom is in his left hand.

## LIST OF THE NAGASAKI MARTYRS, 1633 - 1637

### Martyred on August 14, 1633

1. **FR. DOMINGO IBANEZ DE ERQUICIA, O.P.**, priest, Spaniard Lector of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas (which will later become the University of Santo Tomas).
2. **BRO. FRANCISCO SHOYEMON, O.P.**, catechist and Dominican novice lay brother.

### Martyred on August 17, 1633

3. **FR. JACOBO GOROBIOYE TOMANAGA DE SANTA MARIA, O.P.**, priest, Japanese.
4. **MIGUEL KUROBIOYE**, layman, Japanese.

### Martyred on October 19, 1633

5. **FR. LUCAS ALONSO DEL ESPIRITU SANTO, O.P.**, priest, Spaniard, Professor of Arts at the Colegio de Santo Tomas.
6. **BRO. MATEO KOHIOYE DEL ROSARIO, O.P.**, novice lay brother, Japanese, (eighteen years old).

### Martyred on November 11, 1634

7. **SR. MAGDALENA OF NAGASAKI, O.P.**, novice of the Dominican Third Order, Japanese, around twenty four years old.

### Martyred on November 17, 1634

8. **SR. MARINA OF OMURA, O.P.**, professed member of the Dominican Third Order, Japanese.

### Martyred on November 17, 1634

9. **FR. JORDAN DE SAN ESTEBAN, O.P.**, priest, Italian (born Giacinto Ansalone in the diocese of Agrigento, Italy).
10. **FR. TOMAS DE SAN JACINTO, O.P.**, priest, Japanese (born Hioji Rokuzayemon Nishi).

### Martyred on September 24, 1636

11. **FR. ANTONIO GONZALEZ, O.P.**, priest, Spaniard, Lector of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas, Lector of the Colegio and head of the mission from the Philippines in 1636.

### Martyred on September 29, 1637

12. **FR. GUILLAUME COURTET, O.P.**, known also as **Fr. Tomas de Santo Domingo**, priest, Frenchman, Lector of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas.
13. **FR. MIGUEL DE AOZARAZA, O.P.**, priest, Spaniard.
14. **FR. VICENTE SHIWOZUKA DE LA CRUZ, O.P.**, priest, formerly of the Third Order of St. Francis ministering to his countrymen in Manila, Japanese.
15. **LORENZO RUIZ**, a married man with children, member of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, Filipino.
16. **LAZARO OF KYOTO**, layman, among the Christian lepers/exiled to Manila in 1632; he volunteered to be an interpreter of the mission that left the Philippines in 1636.

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## EDITORIAL

### The First Beatification In Asia

Why is it that, after four hundred years of Christianity in the Philippines we still do not have a Filipino saint? This question started to be asked in 1965 when the Philippines celebrated the quadricentennial of its christianization. Concerned individuals and groups started to look for likely filipino candidates for sainthood. However, after a few enthusiastic starts, the efforts came to a standstill.

When the Archdiocese of Manila celebrated its quadricentennial in 1978-1979, the desire to have a filipino saint was again revived. Ambassador Antonio Delgado, our representative at the Vatican, spearheaded the research. In the meantime, the Dominicans resumed their interest in a group of Dominican priests, theology students, men and women tertiaries martyred in Japan in the seventeenth century, and the record showed that with them was a filipino layman, Lorenzo Ruiz. Providentially, Ambasssador Delgado got in touch with the Dominicans and a concreted effort began for the beatification of the Dominican martyrs and Lorenzo Ruiz.

God's hand could be seen in the developments. A historian from the University of Santo Tomas, Fr. Fidel Villarroel, O.P., was allowed to go on leave from his assignments in the Philippines so that he could work for the beatification of the martyrs in Rome. By accident — or was it by God's design? — he found in the Jesuit archives in Rome the verbal process of the trial of the group. The presentation of this document to the Holy See may be considered as the decisive factor that speeded up the process of beatification.

The Pope's visit to the Philippines was announced several times in 1978, 1979 and 1980. But to the careful reader, it was evident that the Pope was waiting for the beatification process of the martyrs to reach its final stage before coming here to beatify them.

In the meantime, the Pope accepted invitations to Africa and Brazil. Why not a beatification or canonization in these places? Picking up the idea, some officials suggested that such



an act be included in the program of the papal visits. But our ambassador in the Vatican stepped in. The idea of a beatification outside Rome was ours. So we should have the priority in its realization.

So now, for the first time in the history of the Church, a beatification is going to be held in Asia. We should recognize, of course, that Asia already has many saints and martyrs. One of the twelve disciples of Jesus, St. Thomas, was martyred in India. Men and women from China, Japan, Vietnam, and other asiatic countries, are now venerated as saints or blessed in the Church. But it was in Rome that they were beatified or canonized.

The fact that the Pope is coming to Manila to beatify martyrs can be seen as a further step in the de-romanization of the Church. For many centuries now the Roman Church has beatified and canonized saints for other churches. It was considered the safest way by which an infallible judgment could be made on the heroism of Christians who have gone to the next world. Yet the Pope knows that infallibility is a prerogative of the universal church, although it is exercised in a special way by the Pope. Other churches keeping their communion with the successor of Peter could also act infallibly. In fact in the early Christian centuries, local churches "beatified" or "canonized" heroic Christians coming from their ranks.

Clearly, it is the Pope, not the local church, who will beatify the martyrs in Manila. The fact remains, that the venue is not Rome, but a city in Asia. This opens the door to the desire of the local churches to experience "at home" some of the ecclesial happenings that are now centralized in Rome. In this way the first beatification in Asia is an event of special significance to the universal church.

Further making the event significant to the universal church is the fact that the group to be beatified includes two former Rectors of the University of Santo Tomas and two other professors of the same university. Through their martyrdom they remind their colleagues in the catholic academe all over the world today that professors in catholic universities have the vocation of giving witness to their faith.

For the Philippines the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz should be like a new awakening to the challenges of the Christian faith. In a special way he should be presented to charismatic groups as a man who was filled by the Holy Spirit. In him was fulfilled the promise of Christ that his followers who will

be persecuted will receive the Holy Spirit so that they will manifest a wisdom and a courage that will put their persecutors to shame (see Matthew 10:7-11; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17). He is the charismatic to be emulated by Filipinos so that they could also say, "I am a Christian and I shall die for God, and for Him I will give many thousands of lives if I had them."

## IN THIS ISSUE

Shown in the cover of this special issue for the papal visit is the Holy Father in a gesture of blessing. The first four pages are also commemorative because they give readers the Logo of the papal visit, the special prayer for the success of the Pope's coming, the explanation of the Logo, and the list of martyrs to be beatified at the Luneta.

While some newsmakers and journalists were busy giving false alarms about the coming of the Pope to the Philippines, people were quietly working in Rome to comply with all the requirements so that the group of martyrs that included Lorenzo Ruiz could be beatified as soon as possible. From the beginning the Holy Father had made it clear that his visit to the Philippines will not take place until the beatification papers are ready. Now we have the *Decree on the Beatification Cause* issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on October 11, 1980. To help readers reflect on the meaning of martyrdom we have the article about *Martyrs in the Bible*. A special application of the biblical teaching is made for *Lorenzo Ruiz* because he will be the first Filipino to be beatified.

The beatification of the martyrs triggered the idea of the Pope's visit to the Philippines but it will take on a wider perspective. The Pope will come as a shepherd to proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ, the truth about man, the truth about the Church, and the truth about God. The papal Nuncio, Archbishop Bruno Torpigliani, points this out in his paper on the *Theologico-Pastoral Perspective of John Paul II's Visit to the Philippines*. Just what is the *philippine ecclesial situation* that awaits the Supreme Shepherd of the Church when he comes here is set forth in the work of the UST Sociological Research Center presented by its director, Fr. Fausto Gomez.

It is the hope of the editors that the above-mentioned articles will help readers see greater meaning in the papal visit.

**SACRED CONGREGATION**  
**FOR THE CAUSES OF THE SAINTS**

D E C R E E

On the Beatification Cause initiated  
by the Dioceses of Nagasaki, Macao and Manila

Beatification or Declaration of Martyrdom  
of the Servants of God

DOMINGO IBAÑEZ DE ERQUICIA  
JACOBO KYUSHEI TOMONAGA,  
Priests of the Order of Preachers,

LORENZO RUIZ, layman  
and thirteen Companions  
killed, as reported, in hatred of the Faith  
(1633-1637)

**ON THE QUESTION**

*Whether their martyrdom and its causes as well  
as the signs and miracles under consideration have  
been demonstrated with certainty and for the intended  
purpose.*

“Whenever we mention the name Martyr, with the force and meaning attached to it by Christian hagiographers, a scene both frightful and wonderful comes to our mind. Frightful because of the injustice which, armed with authority and cruelty, is the cause of such most grievous crime; the blood flowing, the mangling of bodies subjected to excruciating pains and to death are indeed very frightful. On the other hand, innocence — which does not rely on natural strength for resistance but meekly surrenders itself to the torments, joyfully and happily testifying to the unconquerable truth of the faith so intimately blended with human life — is wholly admirable. Life dies out, but faith lives on. Force challenges fortitude; the former, while conquering, fails; the latter, when crushed, triumphs... Such is martyrdom: The supreme expression of

love for, and faithfulness to, Christ, the exemplar, the testimony, the perennial message given to men both present and future. This is the glory of the Church lasting through all ages" (A.S.S., LVI, 1964, pp. 904-905).

It is fitting to recall here these words of Pope Paul VI pronounced in his homily on the occasion of the canonization of the twenty two Martyrs of Uganda, as we now read and admire the acta or "Passions of the Martyrs" who, during the period of over forty years (1597-1643), shed their blood for Christ in the lands of Southern Japan.

Among those innumerable confessors of the Holy Church, twenty six of whom were canonized by Pius IX and two hundred and five beatified by the same Pontiff, another seventeen have been chosen in our days to be added to the number of the Blessed. In one way or another, all these latter ones belong to the Order of the Friars Preacher and suffered martyrdom about the same time (1633-1637), that is, when the violent persecution against the Christian religion was resumed by a double decree issued by the Supreme Military Ruler Tokugawa Yemitsu (1633 and 1636), bringing to a close the period known as the "Christian century" in Japan.

A pressing alternative was given to the disciples of the Gospel: either to renounce their faith or to die. Those who persevered in the profession of their faith were condemned to the capital punishment, executed by the lengthy and frightful process of being suspended head down from a gibbet into a closed pit. Sometimes also they were subjected to cruel torments preliminary to a merciless death, whether by means of big quantities of water forced in and out of their bodies, or by thrusting bamboo needles between the nails and the flesh of their fingers.

The catalogue of these martyrs follows here according to the order of their death at the execution grounds in the city of Nagasaki.

— On August 14, 1633 FR. DOMINGO IBAÑEZ DE ERQUICIA, O.P., priest, Spaniard, hailing from the town of *Régil*, now of the Diocese of San Sebastián. He was born in 1598; was Lector of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas in Manila; worked as missionary in the Philippine Islands (*Luzón*); and for ten years he was Vicar Provincial in Japan.

His companion in martyrdom was BRO. FRANCISCO SHOYEMON, Japanese, catechist and Dominican novice lay-brother.



— On August 17, 1633, FR. JACOBO GOROBIOYE TOMONAGA, surnamed DE SANTA MARIA, O.P., priest, born in the village of *Kyudetsu* near *Omura*, who was a missionary in the island of Formosa and in the city of Manila, and finally a messenger of Christ in the kingdom of *Satzuma* for half a year.

His companion in the catechetical apostolate and in martyrdom was MIGUEL KUROBIOYE, Japanese layman.

— On October 19, 1633 FR. LUCAS ALONSO, surnamed DEL ESPIRITU SANTO, O.P., priest, born in the Spanish village of *Carracedo* of the diocese of Astorga, in the year 1594. He was a preacher of the faith in the Philippine Islands (*Luzón*) and Professor of Arts at the Colegio de Santo Tomás. He spent ten years as minister of the Gospel in Japan, where he reached the northernmost parts of the island of *Honshu*.

His companions in the propagation of the faith were BRO. MATEO KOHIOYE DEL ROSARIO, Novice laybrother of the Order of Preachers, native of the kingdom of *Arima*, who was 18 year of age, and DOMINGO KAKUSUKE, Japanese layman.

— On October 15, 1634 SISTER MAGDALENA OF NAKASAKI, virgin, born around 1610, a strong woman of manly heart both in working for the faith and at the torture of the gibbet and the pit which she withstood for thirteen days. She had first professed the Rule of the Third Order of the Augustinian Recollects, but in the last two years of her life, as she was unable to have any spiritual director of that Order available, she approached Fr. Jordan de San Esteban, O.P., from whom she received the habit of novice of the Third Order of St. Dominic in preparation for her profession, but she was never able to profess because of her martyrdom.

— On November 11, 1634 SISTER MARINA OF OMURA, virgin, professed of the Third Order of St. Dominic, and host to the friars of the same Order. Because of this, she was put in prison, exposed to public humiliations and indignities against modesty, and finally burned at the stake, dying like a valiant woman.

— On November 17, 1634 FR. JORDAN DE SAN ESTEBAN, O.P., whose family name was Giacinto Ansalone, priest, born in the diocese of Agrigento (Italy), minister of the Gospel and of the sacraments in the Philippine Islands (*Luzon*) for six years. He continued the ministry in Japan for two years until his death, after many hardships and labours.

His companion both in the apostolate and in martyrdom was FR. TOMAS DE SAN JACINTO, O.P., that is, HIOJI ROKUZAYEMON NISHI, priest, native of the city of *Hirado*, born in 1590, a missionary in Formosa for three years and a valiant champion of the faith in the region of Nagasaki during the last five years.

They both underwent the torment of the gallows and the pit.

— On September 24, 1637 FR. ANTONIO GONZALEZ, O.P., priest, born in the Spanish city of León in 1593. He taught Theology and held the office of Rector at the Colegio de Santo Tomás in Manila. While still holding that office in the year 1636 he was appointed head of the other five members of the mission to Japan mentioned hereafter. Kept in prison, he underwent twice the torment of the water and, consumed by high fever, he died ahead of the rest of his companions.

— On September 29, 1637 FR. GUILLAUME COURTET, O.P., known in religious life as Fr. TOMAS DE SANTO DOMINGO, priest, born in the French town of Serignan, then in the diocese of Montpellier, in 1590. He had been Lector of Theology and Prior of the convent of Avignon. He taught the Sacred sciences in Manila, where he lived a life of rigorous penance, which he ended after many torments in Japan.

Also, FR. MIGUEL DE AOZARAZA, O.P., priest, born in the Spanish town of Oñate, within the boundaries of the present diocese of San Sebastian. He was a most faithful minister of souls in the Philippine Islands (Luzon). He underwent many kinds of tortures in the jail of Nagasaki.

Also, FR. VICENTE SHIWOZUKA DE LA CRUZ, O.P., priest, Japanese, formerly a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, and in charge of the pastoral ministry among his countrymen in Manila. Taken into prison he denied the faith for fear of the torments, but he repented quickly and, gathering new strength, he withstood the tortures until death.

Also LORENZO RUIZ, a married man with children, born in Manila, member of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, helper at the convent of the Dominicans. Although he never planned to go to Japan, yet on arriving he did not want to abandon his Dominican companions nor to renounce his faith, explicitly willing to give his life for that faith a thousand times.

Also LAZARO OF KYOTO, Japanese, who had formerly been exiled from his fatherland for having accepted the Gospel and resided in Manila. He volunteered to join the Dominicans to return to Japan as their interpreter. Overcome by the torments he apostatized, but he courageously made up for that fault and died with the rest of the group in the torment of the gibbet and the pit.

The bodies of all of them were immediately cremated and their ashes cast into the sea.

A historical "*Positio on the Martyrdom*" has been presented on behalf of the above mentioned Servants of God, tried with the test of faith, whom nothing separated from the love of Christ (cf. *Hebr.* XI, 39; *Rom.* VIII, 35-39). This *Positio* is supported by many proofs taken from contemporary documents, or from two informative "Processus" done in the years 1636 and 1637 at the episcopal curiae of Manila and Macao. After the introduction of the Beatification Cause before the Holy See on November 26, 1979, the special meeting of the Theologians was held on April 29, 1980, and the Plenary Congregation of the Cardinals on the following July 1st., in which the most Reverend Cardinal Luigi Ciappi, relator of the Cause, proposed the following question for decision: *Whether the martyrdom and its cause, as well as the signs and miracles under consideration have been demonstrated with certainly and for the intended purpose.*

A favourable and unanimous sentence was expressed about sixteen Servants of God; while about DOMINGO KAKUSUKE dissenting sentences were elicited, as his martyrdom was not sufficiently proved from the documents.

A faithful report having been submitted by the undersigned Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on September 11 of the present year, POPE JOHN PAUL II, confirming the opinions of the same Sacred Congregation, ordered that the Decree on the martyrdom of the sixteen Servants of God be readied; however, for the Servants of God DOMINGO KAKUSUKE it was decided: To be deferred and to be supported by proofs.

Today, finally, having called too His Presence the most Reverend Cardinals Pietro Palazzini, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, and Luigi Ciappi, rela-

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tor of the present Cause, and myself the Bishop-Secretary, and all those who are customarily called for such occasions, and all being present, He declared: *That the martyrdom and its cause of the sixteen aforementioned Servants of God was proved and attested, permitting ulterior steps to be followed, while dispensation is granted from the signs and miracles required by canon 2116, & 2, and from any other dispensation that be needed.*

He ordered that this Decree be published and reported in the Acta of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

Done in Rome, on the 11th of October of the year of the Lord 1980.

Pietro Card. Palazzini, *Prefect*

† Giuseppe Casoria, Tit. Arch. of Forovan.  
*Secretary*

(Translation by Fr. Jesus Ma. Merino Antolinez, O.P.)



## MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT — 1981

Dear brothers and sisters,

Lent is a time of truth.

Christians, called by the Church to prayer, penance, fasting and self-sacrifice, place themselves before God and recognize themselves; they rediscover themselves.

“Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return.”<sup>1</sup>

Remember man, that you are called to the things other than these worldly and material goods that can easily divert you from what is essential. Remember, man, your first calling: you come from God, and you return to God by going towards the Resurrection which is the path marked out by Christ. “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple”.<sup>2</sup>

Lent is a time of profound truth, which brings conversion, restores hope and, by putting everything back in its proper place, brings peace and optimism.

Lent is a time that makes us think about our relationship with “Our Father”; it re-establishes the order that should reign between brothers and sisters. Lent is a time that makes us jointly responsible for one another; it detaches us from our selfishness, small-mindedness, meanness and pride; it is a time that enlightens us and makes us understand better that we, too, like Christ, must serve.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another”.<sup>3</sup> And who is my neighbor?”<sup>4</sup>

Lent is a time of truth, which, as in the case of the Good Samaritan, makes us pause, recognize our brothers and sisters, and put our time and possessions at their service in daily shar-

ing. The Good Samaritan is the Church! The Good Samaritan is every man and woman! By calling! by duty! The Good Samaritan lives charity.

Saint Paul says: "So we are ambassadors for Christ".<sup>5</sup> It is here that our responsibility lies. We are sent to other people, to our brothers and sisters. Let us respond generously to the confidence that Christ thus places in us.

Yes, Lent is a time of truth. Let us examine ourselves sincerely, honestly and simply. Our brothers and sisters are there among the poor, the sick, the outcasts, the aged. What sort of love do we have? What sort of truth?

On the occasion of Lent, in all your dioceses and churches an appeal is going to be made to that truth of yours, to that charity which is the proof of it.

So, open your minds to look around you; open your hearts to understand and sympathize; open your hands to help. The needs are vast, as you know. I therefore urge you to take a generous part in this sharing, and I assure you of my prayers and send you my Apostolic Blessing.

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<sup>1</sup> Formula for the distribution of ashes.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 14:27.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. 13:34.

<sup>4</sup> Lk. 10:29.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 5:20.

# THEOLOGICO-PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN PAUL II'S VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES

by

**Bruno Torpigliani, D.D.**

Papal Nuncio to the Philippines

*U.S.T. Ecclesiastical Faculties*

*13 January 1981*

The Holy Father arrives in Manila next month. This is the second time, in ten years, that the Pope visits the Philippines. Not too many years ago, the Pope travelled nowhere except to his summer residence at Castelgandolfo, a few kilometers outside Rome. To go beyond those few kilometers was unheard of; to go outside Italy, unthinkable! As a result, the Pope was an extremely remote figure, so remote that he was on the verge of being unreal. We called him our Holy Father; but he was a father never seen; out of touch with his children; perhaps, occasionally heard, but from a great distance.

Today all that has changed, thank God. The Holy Father is a father in touch with and seen by his children. The visits he makes to other countries bring out the dimensions of his universal fatherhood. After all, if we expect a conscientious parish priest to visit and get to know on a personal basis the families in his parish; if we expect, and Canon Law requires, a bishop to visit and get a personal feel of each parish in his diocese; is it not logical to expect something similar from the Pope? After all, he is a Bishop, whose diocese covers the world, or a parish priest whose parishioners inhabit the earth. For he is the Vicar of that Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and calls them each one by name.

From our present point of view we can only wonder how it was ever possible for the idea to take root that the Holy Father should remain locked up in the Vatican at several removes from his flock, never coming in personal contact with his children. Such an idea is inconsistent with the idea of a father. The father plays with his young children; he listens to them and gets involved with their problems; he lends a hand in their difficulties. It is inconsistent with the idea of a good shepherd who goes out to look for the stray sheep, nurses those that are injured, and even carries them on his

shoulders. The other idea is the idea of an administrator — a company president or general manager — who runs an international conglomerate from the executive suite on the top storey of company headquarters far removed from, and invisible to, the rank and file; entertaining no relationships with them save those of an official nature; knowing them not by name but only by rank, title and serial number.

## INSTITUTION vs. INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The Pope locked himself up in the Vatican in protest over the confiscation of the papal estates, which threatened his independence in governing the Church. But when Vatican City obtained official recognition and guaranteed political sovereignty, the Pope remained virtually a prisoner, restricted to the Vatican, not only by the affairs of the Church, but also his position as a Head of State. This points to the distinction between institution and institutionalization; to the necessity which the former has of the latter; and yet, notwithstanding, to the danger which the latter can pose to the former.

There is here the same problem which exists between the spirit and the letter of the law. The law itself is spirit because it is a conception or norm of reason for an end in view. But if the law is to serve its purpose it must be expressed in words. The words are the letters of the law. And the letter is supposed to be interpreted and ruled by the concept and purpose which defines the concept and is its *raison d'être*. But when the letter is taken for its own sake, regardless of the concept and purpose, then the letter kills the law and turns it into an instrument of injustice.

Likewise an institution is essentially a spiritual reality. Fundamentally an institution is a conception of the mind about the relationship of people with people, as, for instance, the family, or democracy; or about the behaviour of people, as care of the elderly, hospitality, social manners; or about the way of doing things, as, banking, elections, etc. However, in order to be operative and effective, that conception must take on a concrete form that is recognized and accepted by the community. Democracy, for example, is a concept, then, needs institutionalization into forms. The forms are valid and valuable insofar as they incarnate and serve the concept which is its spirit. But when the forms are valued for their own sake, then institutionalization can stifle the institution and kill it. Democratic forms can be the coffin of democracy.



Perhaps there is some ground for the claim that institutional forms were slowly turning the Church into a sprawling administrative bureaucracy. If that was the case, then the Holy Spirit has, through the Second Vatican Council exercised that danger by proclaiming loud and clear the intimate nature of the Church as the People and Family of God.

In consonance with this concept, the Pope has shed the image of the bureaucrat, the administrator: impersonal, remote, unreachable, invisible, faceless. He draws close to the people, he visits the faithful in their own lands. He becomes accessible in his own person: crowds press about him, they reach out and touch him with their hands. They do not listen to a voice booming out disembodied from loudspeakers, or from the surrogate image on a picture tube, but from a real and living face of flesh and bones, a face lit up by lips and eyes that smile back at the people who smile at him. The Pope is once more a father among his children, a shepherd among his flock.

### PASTORAL VISIT

The Pope's visit to the Philippines is a pastoral visit. Pastoral, that is, undertaken in discharge of his responsibility and office as the Shepherd of the Universal Church; an official visit. But the office of the Holy Father is not exactly like any other public office. All other public offices concern themselves with the good of the community or of the corporate entity, with scant or no concern for the individuals. Not so the office of a father, or of a shepherd. The father is certainly concerned for the welfare of the family as such; but, being a father, he is also deeply concerned for the welfare of the flock, but at the same time he also looks after the good of each individual sheep.

The Pope's visit might also be describe as a business visit, inasmuch as it has to do with the business of the Church, which certainly has little to do with trade and commerce, with the whole enterprise of money-making. In another sense, the word "business" denotes getting down to practical or pragmatic matters rather than to theory and doctrine. In this sense, the term fails to convey the nature of the business of the Church. The business of the Church, while it has to do with praxis is fundamentally and primarily concerned with the doctrine of the faith.

For the business of the Church, especially as invested in the office of the Papacy is to pasture the flock of Christ. In his address to the entire South American Episcopate convened for its Third General Conference at Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico, the Holy Father said:

It is a great consolation for the universal Pastor to see that you come together, not as a symposium of experts or a parliament of politicians or a congress of scientists or technologists (however important such meetings may be), but rather as a fraternal gathering of church pastors. As pastors, you keenly realize that your *chief duty* is to be *teachers of the truth*: not of a human, rational truth, but of the truth that comes from God... *Carefully watching over purity of doctrine*, basic in building up the basic Christian community, is therefore the *primary and irreplaceable duty of the pastor*, of the *teacher of faith* — in conjunction with the proclamation of the Gospel.

(Puebla. Official English Edition. National Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat. Washington, D.C., 1979; pg. 2. Underscoring supplied).

The business of the Church is TRUTH in its two-fold aspect: proclamation and praxis or the building up of the Christian community on truth and in truth. "Verba quae locutus sum vobis, spiritus et *vita* sunt." (Jo. 6:64). "Qui audit verba mea, et *facit* ea, assimilabitur viro qui aedificavit domum suam supra petram." (Mt. 7:24).

The consciousness he has himself as the Supreme Pastor of the People of God is in Pope John Paul II an unflinching dedication, an unwavering loyalty to the preservation, defense, and communication of the revealed truth in its integral purity. To this truth and to the interpretation of the signs of the times by its light, that is, to the fulfillment of the present needs of men by the application and vitality of this truth, our Holy Father has committed his entire Pontificate, following the lead of Vatican II. "I chose the same names that were chosen by my beloved Predecessor John Paul I... In choosing them, I wish, like him, to express my love for the unique inheritance left to the Church by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI and my personal readiness to develop that inheritance with God's help." (RH, 2). The unique inheritance left by these two Pontiffs is none other than Vatican II, convened and opened by John XXIII; continued and concluded by Paul VI, who also began and persevered until his death in the task of authentically

interpreting and implementing the Council. The present Pope is even more explicit in his second encyclical: "...in the present phase of the Church's history we put before ourselves as our primary task *the implementation of the doctrine* of the great Council." (DIM, 1. Italics in the original)

## THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

The Pope has singled out for special emphasis in our times four truths. These four truths are heavy with pastoral implications. They are the four pillars of the integral evangelizing endeavour called for today, both as proclamation and as praxis.

The first pillar is the truth about Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, Vatican II proclaims, and our Holy Father insists, that "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light... Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself, and brings to light his most high calling." (GS, 22). In Christ, the human race, and each individual human being is called to, and reaches the perfect age of full and mature humanity — "in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi." (Eph. 4.13)

On the other hand, this is an age of scientific and technological development. The advances in these fields have engendered in mankind at large a sense of dominion and mastery over physical nature, which has been taken by some influential modern thinkers as evidence of man's coming of age, the dawn of mature manhood. Consequently, it has also been understood as humanity's Magna Charta of independence from all those things that have, supposedly, kept mankind in childlike subjection. Independence pointedly from God and from his Christ.

Thus there have been re-readings of the Gospel in order to update it, to make it palatable to a man come of age. The re-reading of the Gospel has taken the path of demythologization, of purging the record from all traces of the supernatural. Obviously, the first myth that had to go was the "myth" of the incarnation of the Son of God, the "fable" of a historical human being who not only was in the past, but IS in the present, because he is not simply a man, but also truly God. Thus, there is either a stony silence on the divinity of Christ, or an outright denial of it. Those who deny Christ's divinity, either

deny even the historical existence of our Lord, of, accepting his historicity, either say, that he is just a prophet or mouth-piece of God, or even demean him further to the level of a political activist or of a subversive.

Denying or questioning the divinity of Jesus has for its inevitable consequence the view that Christ himself is of little or of no consequence. What matters — the only thing that matters — is his message. What men today need to accept is not Christ, but his message. However, any tampering with the person of Christ cannot but end with the tampering of his message. Say, that Jesus Christ is God. Then his message — whether in words or in deeds — is divine; possesses per se absolute and unchangeable truth, absolute and unchangeable goodness. But question his divinity, and you lay his message open to question, open to correction, open to adaptation, open to updating to bring it into line with other human developments. Vatican II enjoined us to read the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. But with the questioning of the divinity of Christ, the Council's injunction is inverted to mean the reading of the Gospel and the interpretation of the Gospel in the light of the signs of the times.

On the other hand, the penchant of seeing in Jesus Christ little else but a political activist systematically overlooks or ignores, as the Holy Father points out, "the Lord's willing self-surrender or even his awareness of his redemptive mission. The Gospels show clearly that for Jesus anything that would alter his mission as the Servant of Yahweh was a temptation (Mt. 4:8; Lk. 4.5), he does not accept the position of those who mixed the things of God with merely political attitudes (Mt. 22.21; Mk. 12.17; Jn. 18.36). He unequivocally rejects recourse to violence." (*Puebla*, pg. 4) Against these re-readings of the Gospels, so much in vogue today, and against the brilliant and beguiling but fragile programmes constructed on them, the Holy Father insists that "any form of silence, disregard, mutilation, or inadequate emphasis on the whole of the mystery of Jesus Christ that diverges from the Church's faith cannot be the valid content of evangelization." (*Puebla*, pg. 4)

The late McLuhan popularized the phrase, "The medium is the message". That slogan is no more clever phrase, but absolute literal truth in the case of the Lord Jesus. He, the messenger, is the medium and the message. Human messages are couched in words, and human words are mere flatus vocis. God's message is his Word, but his Word is not a mere "flatus

vocis;" his Word is a living Person — God of God, consubstantial with the Father, Light of Light. The message is the messenger, and the messenger is the message. The Father's Word is the living Light sent into this world to illumine each and every man born into it. The Word enters our human world through the medium of human flesh. "Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis. Et vidimus gloriam ejus, quasi Unigeniti a Patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis." That human flesh, assumed hypostatically by the Word, has no other personality save that of the Word: the man Jesus is the Person of the Word. The message is the messenger is the medium.

God's message of salvation is not a general, propositional truth; it is a concrete, subsistent truth — a Person. God's salvation is not just a process, an event, a happening — it is a Saviour. Our salvation is not merely an action on our part, not something we do, or something being done to us — it is something ontological, it is *being* something: being *saved* is being a *member of Christ*; being, in a mystical but nonetheless real way, Christ himself. "Ego sum vitis vera, vos palmites." (Jn. 15.5) "Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus" (Gal. 2.20).

This is the essence of salvation. "By his Incarnation", says Vatican II, "he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS, 22). It is what our Holy Father insists on per longum et latum in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*. Anything short of this faith of the Church is not salvation, but a caricature of salvation. And, unfortunately, it is the caricature that is being peddled today as the Christianity for our times, the Christianity that modern man can accept.

In this regard, our Holy Father recalls the pained protest of St. Hilary of Poitiers in the 4th century: "Today, under pretext of a piety that is false, under the deceptive appearance of a preaching of the gospel message, some people are trying to deny the Lord Jesus. I speak the truth, so that the cause of the confusion that we are suffering may be known to all. I cannot keep silent". And the Holy Father pointedly adds immediately: "Nor can you, the bishops of today, keep silent when this confusion occurs" (*Puebla*, pg. 4)

## THE TRUTH ABOUT MAN

The second pillar of evangelization is the truth about man himself, his destiny, the meaning of his existence, the way he



should treat himself and his fellow-men. This truth is itself intimately linked with the first truth.

The Pope observes that our century could aptly be called the century of man, a century marked by an exacerbated cult of whatever is human, by anthropolatry. The most cursory review of the fields of human activity provides evidence beyond dispute. In art, for instance, objectivism is set aside in order to give the freest play to forms conceived by the human imagination. In human relationships everything is measured by the yardstick of whether or not it asserts and develops the human personality. At one end of the political spectrum it is a truism that the ultimate source of political power is the people; at the other end, the state is held as the ultimate absolute, brooking no rivals. In morality, relativism and subjectivism are rampant everywhere. The supreme law is the right claimed by every one to do his own thing as, when, where, and how he sees fit. In the sciences and through the sciences, man has staked his claim to lordship over physical nature, including his own genetic constitution. What God had molded in his own image, man would now remold according to his own lights, concepts and purposes. In philosophy, the old sceptical axiom, "man is the measure of all things" is taken up under all possible variations. The supreme ideal is authentic human existence, by which is meant the freedom to think and to dispose of oneself; all laws, customs, traditions, and conventions notwithstanding. Human liberty is incompatible with any external law or criterion of action. And in religion, man has declared himself of age, and proclaimed God to be a useless crutch or better still, dead.

And yet, paradoxically, as the Pope observes, ours is also the age in which peoples harbour the deepest anxieties about their identity and destiny, nay, even about their physical survival. Ours is the age in which human life has been devalued to zero, and human rights savagely trampled and crushed underfoot.

These paradoxes point to something grossly inadequate and defective in the view about man, in the concept of human nature. The view and the concept contain nothing capable of commanding reverence. And no matter how lofty the praises, how extravagant the paeans sung in honour of man, it remains a fact that what man does not love, he will manipulate; and what man does not reverence, he will abuse.

Ours is an age of humanism, but it is an atheistic humanism. Therein lies the fatal defect, the deadly flaw. We are witnessing the spectacle of a humankind that has severed itself from the essential dimension of its being, that has cut itself off from the Absolute, from God, and thus inflicts on itself the worst possible diminishment and debasement. Matter is not meant to be loved; matter is not meant to be revered. On the contrary, matter is meant to be used; matter is meant to be manipulated. And if man's crowning glory is to be matter, is it any wonder that in our age of materialistic humanism men should be used and abused? Is it any amazement that ideologies of love and liberation for man in general and in the abstract should eventually turn up as ideologies of violence, ideologies of repression and oppression of men in the concrete, as individuals?

Vatican II has put its finger squarely on the heart of the matter: "Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light". (GS, 22). The mystery of man is so deep and so sublime that human reason can have a suspicion, an inkling of it, but not clearly perceive it, let alone fathom it. The veil of that mystery was lifted partially when, setting about creating man, the Creator said: "*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.*" (Gen. 1.26) And, indeed, philosophy discovers traces of that image when it finds man's mind naturally focused on being as such, and man's will necessarily gravitating towards the good as such. The link to God is ingrained in the very core of human nature. To deny it to efface it, or even simply to ignore it, constitutes not only a crime of *lèse divinité*, but also a crime of *lèse humanité*.

But the mystery of man, partly disclosed in creation, is fully revealed only in the mystery of the Incarnation. The full scope of "*faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*" is laid bare in "*Verbum caro factum est*". This is the last Word spoken to us by the Father, and having spoken it, the Father has nothing more to say to us. "*Multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis, novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio... qui cum it splendor gloriae et figura substantiae ejus... portans omnia verbo virtutis suae...*" (Hebr. 1.3).

The link and covenant between God and man initiated in creation, and broken later by man's sin, is re-established even more firmly in the Incarnation. Now it is only a link, not only a covenant, not even only a union, but a unity, a hypo-

static personal unity — perpetual, unbreakable, indissoluble unto all eternity. God has accepted us as his own definitively and irrevocably. There can never be again a break between God and mankind. Consequently, each one of us will always find open the way back to the Father, and acceptance waiting at the end of that road. The father of the prodigal stood every day looking out for his return. Christ's arms are nailed to the Cross, perpetually open to receive, never closed to reject. If there be any rejection, any turning away, it will always come from us; if there be any definitive estrangement, it will be of our own making, not God's. Hell is our choice, not God's.

This is the truth about man, made in the image of God — not just any image, but the image of the only begotten and well-loved Word, who became man to be the "primogenitus in multis fratribus" (Rom. 8.29).

This is the anthropology of faith, which the Holy Father vigorously proclaims:

The primordial assertion of this anthropology is that the human being is the image of God and cannot be reduced to a mere fragment of nature or to an anonymous element in the human city...

I made especially pointed reference to this irreplaceable foundation of the Christian conception of the human being in my Christmas Message: "Christmas is the feast of the human being... Viewed in quantitative terms, the human being is an object of calculation... But at the same time the human being is single, unique, and unrepeatable, someone thought of and chosen from eternity, someone called and identified by name".

Faced with many other forms of humanism, which frequently are locked into a strictly economic, biological, or psychological view of the human being, the Church has the right and the duty to proclaim the truth about the human being that it received from its teacher, Jesus Christ. God grant that no external coercion will prevent the Church from doing so. But above all, God grant that the Church itself will not fail to do so out of fear or doubt, or because it has let itself be contaminated by other brands of humanism, or for lack of confidence in its original message.

So when a pastor of the Church clearly and unambiguously announces the truth about the human being, which was revealed by him who knew "what was in man's heart" (Jn. 2.25), he should be encouraged by the certainty that he is rendering the best service to human beings.

This complete truth about human beings is the basis of the Church's social teaching, even as it is the basis of the Church's social teaching, even as it is the basis of authentic liberation. In the light of this truth we see that human beings are not the pawns of economic or political processes, that instead these processes are geared towards human beings and subject to them (*Puebla*, pg. 8).

## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH

The truth about the nature and mission of the Church constitutes the third pillar of authentic evangelization.

After the fall of man, history is the history of Redemption. Redemption is the specific mission set by the Father for his own Son to accomplish, it is the perduring work of the Son until all the elect shall have been fathered together at the consummation of time. This is the same mission he has entrusted to his Church faithfully to carry out visibly among men after he had ascended into heaven. Any misconception of the nature and mission of the Church unavoidably negates the work of Christ and frustrates the history of Redemption. It is precisely for this reason that the Son sends the Spirit — "Spiritus veritatis docebit vos omnia... docebit vos omnem veritatem" (Jn. 14.26, 16.13) — and abides himself with his Church — "Ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi" (Mt. 28.20).

Hence, "as teachers of the truth, [the pastors of the Church] are expected to proclaim unceasingly, but with special vigor at this moment, the truth about the mission of the Church, an object of the Creed we profess and a basic indispensable area of our fidelity" (*Puebla*, p. 5)

The re-readings of the Gospel earlier mentioned, just as they obscure and confuse the truth about the Lord Jesus, so also they obscure and confuse the truth about the Church. The

humanism of our century, just as it distorts and debases the dignity of man, so does it distort and debase the nature and the mission of the Church.

In *Redemptor hominis* the Pope asserted that "for the Church all ways lead to man" (*Ibid.*, 14). But that was said within a context that is often ignored by the trendy theologians and clergy of today. A way not only leads to, it also starts from. All these ways that for the Church lead to man, where do they start from? The Holy Father is very clear and explicit:

Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. He himself is our way "to the Father's house" and is the way to each man. On this way leading *from Christ to man*, on this way on which Christ unites himself with each man, nobody can halt the Church. (Rh, 13. Underscoring supplied)

It is clear, then, that every deviation from the truth about Christ entails a deviation of the way for the Church to man, a distortion of the work of evangelization.

The Holy Father mentions the error of those who "purport to depict Jesus as a political activist, as a fighter against Roman domination and the authorities, and even as someone involved in the class struggle. This conception of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary as the subversive from Nazareth, does not tally with the Church's catechesis" because it either ignores or downgrades "the Lord's willing self-surrender or even his awareness of his redemptive mission... as the Servant of Yahweh". (*Puebla* p. 4) That awareness was foremost in the Lord's mind and heart when he set out for Gethsemane — "It cognoscat mundus quia diligo Patrem, et sicut mandatum dedit mihi Pater sic facio. Surgite, eamus hinc" (Jn. 14.31); when he prayed, "Pater, si vis... Verumtamen, non sicut ego volo, sed sicut Tu" (Mt. 26.39); when he reviewed his entire life prior to commending his soul to his Father: "Consummatum est".

Every reduction of Christ necessarily involves a reduction of his Church. Reduce Christ to a subversive, and you reduce the Church to a revolutionary movement. Reduce Christ to a class activist, and you reduce Christianity to a variation of



Marxism. Reduce Christ to a political agitator, and you reduce the Kingdom of God to a socio-political party and platform. In the words of the Pope:

Emptied of its full content, the Kingdom of God is understood in a rather secularist sense: i.e., we do not arrive at the Kingdom through faith and membership in the Church but rather merely by structural changes and sociopolitical involvement. Where there is a certain kind of commitment and praxis for justice, there the Kingdom is already present" (*Puebla*, p. 6).

This political reduction begins by distinguishing between the Church and the People of God. Next, it sows mistrust and opposition between the two. It ends, as it has to end, by entirely secularizing the Kingdom of God and identifying it with the kingdom of man. Needless to say, *Lumen Gentium* sets forth an entirely different view of the Church. In the first place, there is no dichotomy, let alone opposition, between the Church and the People of God. The community of faith, hope, and charity is established and maintained by Christ as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men. Thus

The society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate World" (LG, 8).

In the second place, this visibly organized Kingdom of God is intimately a community of faith, hope, and charity. Thus, it is accessible only through faith, hope and and charity; not through structural changes and socio-political involvement. Structural socio-political reforms will inevitably follow any community that lives up to its faith, hope, and charity. However, they are not the keys to the Kingdom, but effects of the Kingdom. To invert the order is to put the cart before the horse.

In the third place, the People of God is a community of faith, hope, and charity precisely because it is a mystery, conceived and hidden from all eternity, as the "utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of [the eternal Father's] wisdom and

goodness" (LG, 2), brought forth and revealed to men in time, and by them received by faith, lived in hope, and consummated in charity. The Kingdom thus utterly transcends all worldly schemes, all temporal projects, all earthly designs. Conceived in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, it passes through time, to be consummated in the glory of the Blessed Trinity seen, possessed, and love. When asked about his kingdom and his kingship by Pilate, Jesus pointedly replied: "*Regnum meum non est de hoc mundo*". And in faithful echo the Pope makes his own the gentle but firm reply of his immediate predecessor. "It is a mistake to state that political, economic, and social liberation coincides with salvation in Jesus Christ; that the *regnum Dei* is identified with the *regnum hominis*". (*Puebla*, 6. Italics in the original).

The Holy Father also mentions those who either deny or are silent about Christ's divinity. This position, too, has deleterious results for ecclesiology.

Question Christ's divinity, and you have to question the value of the sacrifice of the cross. Christ offered himself a ransom that he might make us a people acceptable to the Father. His was the only sacrifice that had intrinsic power to please the Father and redeem us because he was truly the Son of God. Question his Sonship, and his death becomes simply a ritual sacrifice on the same level as the immolation of goats and bulls — "*Hostias et oblationes et holocaustomata pro peccato noluisti*" (Heb. 10.8). Thus, the very notion of a People of God through Jesus Christ crumbles; the community of hope in the ransom paid by his parishes.

Question Christ's divinity, and you question his power to turn the bread into his body, and the wine into his blood; you question his real presence in the Eucharist, you strike at the very roots of the Christian agape, of the gathering of love around the sacred table. The Eucharist is the very life and *raison d'être* of the Church. Because the Eucharist is Christ himself, the Eucharist is the sacrifice of atonement and expiation, the sacrifice of propiation, the sacrifice of reconciliation, the sacrifice of adoration, the sacrifice of praise, of thanksgiving, and of impetration. Because the Eucharist is Christ himself, it is the sacrament of life, the sacrament of nourishment, the sacrament of communion and solidarity and unity, the sacrament of reconciliation, the sacrament of growth and strengthening, the sacrament of hope and optimism, the sacrament of joy, the sacrament of love. It is all these things until

the end of time. In one word, it is the sacrament of Emmanuel, of God with us, of the Father with his family. Remove the Eucharist, as you must, if you but even question the divinity of Christ, and the splendid, vital, hopeful, joyful community and family of love that is the Church withers from starvation, becomes an empty husk without the living grain.

Question the divinity of Christ, and you perforce question his authority, and the authority of the Church that derives from him. You must question the authority of the Magisterium to teach; you must question the authority of the hierarchy to govern. "Qui vos audit, me audit; qui vos spernit, me spernit." Question Christ's divinity, and you must question his power to send the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Thus you must question the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church, his assistance to the Church, and the infallibility resulting from that assistance to teach us and guide us without possibility of error along the paths of salvation to our Father in heaven. In one word, the community of faith degenerates into a debating club.

Without an infallible magisterium and a divinely established hierarchy there is no true evangelization. As the Holy Father points out, the Church evangelizes insofar as she herself is evangelized by Christ. As she is sent out by Christ, so also she sends out evangelizers to preach and spread the message. Two things are entailed here. In the first place, when the Church commissions preachers, she entrusts them with a message to deliver. But that message is not her own, because she herself has been entrusted with it by Christ, who is message, messenger and medium all rolled into one. Thus the work of evangelization is carried out by preachers sent to preach "not themselves or their personal ideas, but a Gospel that neither they nor the Church own as their own absolute property, to dispose of as they see fit". (EN, 15). On the contrary, in accepting the mission, both the evangelizers and the Church bind and commit themselves to absolute fidelity in faith to the Gospel entrusted to them.

In the second place, no other evangelizer receives the message directly from Christ, but from the Church. It is the Church alone who has received the message directly from Christ. Consequently, "for no one is evangelizing an isolated, individual act; rather, it is a profoundly ecclesial action... an action of the Church" (EN, 60). In other words, the preaching of priests, the proclamation of missionaries, the social apostolate of nuns and laity, the renewal of the temporal order — all these

undertakings, insofar as they partake of the evangelizing character, are not, and cannot be, an individual enterprise, a private endeavour "subject to the discretionary authority of individualistic criteria and perspectives; it stands 'in communion with the Church and its pastors' (EN, 60)" (*Puebla*, p. 6). In a nutshell, the correct notion and the correct praxis of evangelization essentially depend on the correct idea of and the correct attitude towards the Church.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD

On 30th November 1980, the Pope proclaimed a fourth truth, from which all the three previously mentioned truths proceed, and which they, each in its own way reveal and embody. This is the deeply consoling and uplifting truth that God is the Father of mercies. To it the Holy Father devotes his second encyclical, appropriately titled *Dives in misericordia*.

This encyclical complements and counterbalance the first one, which by its concentration on man highlighted by the phrase, "For the Church all ways lead to man", could perhaps prove misleading to the unwary and the socially impatient. The Pope himself seems to have adverted to this possibility when he writes,

The more the Church's mission is centred upon man — the more it is, so to speak, anthropocentric — the more it must be confirmed and actualized theocentrically, that is to say, be directed in Jesus Christ to the Father. While the various currents of human thought both in the past and in the present have tended and still tend to separate theocentrism and anthropocentrism, and even to set them in opposition to each other, the Church following Christ, seeks to link them up in human history, in a deep and organic way. And this is also one of the basic principles, *perhaps the most important one*, of the teaching of the last Council. In (*Redemptor hominis*) I have tried to show that the deepening and the many-faceted enrichment of the Church's consciousness resulting from the Council must open our minds and our hearts more widely to Christ. Today I wish to say that openness to Christ, who as the Redeemer of the world fully "reveals man to himself", can only be achieved through an ever more mature reference to the Father and his love" (DM, 1. Underscoring supplied).

The truth of God's mercy is particularly relevant to these times of world-wide tension and stress, uncertainty and danger, suffering and misery. "The truth revealed in Christ, about God the 'Father of mercies', enables us to 'see' him as particularly close to man, especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity" (DIM, 2). It is also relevant because the pride and arrogance engendered in the heart of man by the control he has achieved over physical nature through science and technology, make modern men, recoil in horror at the very idea of being the object of mercy, which suggests weakness and impotence (DIM, 2).

At the very core of the mystery of the creation and of the creation and of the election of man lies the mystery of God's beneficent love. Man rejected that love and turned his back on his Creator, but God remained faithful to his love and promised a Redeemer. Thus at the very heart of the economy of salvation after the fall lies the mystery of God's love in *that* peculiar manifestation which is called mercy. Jesus Christ is God's mercy incarnate. His life, teaching, works and miracles are so many other vivid revelations of God's boundless mercy. Jesus Christ on the cross is God's justice turned mercy. In a profound meditation on the Old Testament, the Pope observes that

mercy is in a certain sense contrasted with God's justice, and in many cases is shown to be not only more powerful than that justice but also more profound. Even the Old Testament teaches that, although justice is an authentic virtue in man, and in God signifies transcendent perfection, nevertheless love is "greater" than justice: greater in the sense that it is primary and fundamental. Love, so to speak, conditions justice and, in the final analysis, justice serves love. The primacy and superiority of love vis-a-vis justice — this is a mark of the whole of revelation — are *revealed precisely through mercy*. This seemed so obvious to the psalmists and prophets that the very term *justice* ended up by meaning the salvation accomplished by the Lord and his mercy (DIM, 4).

In another searching and moving meditation on the parable of the prodigal son, the Pope discloses how God's loving mercy is especially directed to the restoration of human dignity. Reciprocally, the process of conversion has its beginning in the dawning of the awareness of lost human dignity, and is



bound, in its completion, to the full recovery of that same dignity. Thus, the notion of mercy as establishing an inequality between the one offering mercy and the one receiving it, is shown to be erroneous because it is based simply on a shallow acquaintance with the workings of mercy. "Treat me as one of your hired hands" shows the prodigal's consciousness of a greater and deeper loss than that of his material inheritance, viz., the loss of squandered sonship. It is this realization that sends him back to his father's house. On the other hand, the father is overjoyed by the prodigal's return. He does not receive him as a servant, but orders a bath to be prepared, the finest garments to be laid out, rings for his fingers, the fatted calf for a celebration. The motivation behind all this is revealed in the explanation given by the father to a peeved elder brother: "This brother of yours was dead, and he has returned to life!" In other words, the father's faithfulness to the love emanating from the essence of his fatherhood obliges him to be totally concerned with the dignity of his prodigal son and to see to its recovery by the repentant one. And the Holy Father concludes:

Conversion is the most concrete expression of the working of love and of the presence of mercy in the human world... Mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and *draws good from all the forms of evil* existing in the world and in man. Understood in this way, mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission. His disciples and followers understood and practised mercy in the same way. Mercy never ceased to reveal itself, in their hearts and in their actions, as an especially creative proof of the love which does not allow itself to be "conquered by evil", but "overcomes evil with good". The genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew. In spite of many prejudices, mercy seems particularly necessary for our times (DIM, 6. *Italics in the original*).

The work of restoration, of renewal, of liberation, fontally springs from and is powered by mercy. In this work justice is subservient to and an instrument of merciful love. This

profound insight is substantiated in the mystery of the cross, where justice is motivated by and serves the purposes of mercy. From this insight the Pope draws the conclusion that justice by itself is not, and will never be enough. Even more the singleminded concentration on justice in the end distorts and subverts justice itself. Without the counteracting influence of the positive and more profound power of love and mercy, the demand for justice is soon infiltrated by negative forces such as revenge and hatred masquerading as justice.

For this reason, the appeal to violence as a positive instrument for social reform, renewal and liberation, is and must forever be unacceptable to Christians. Violence runs counter to justice: its essence is the subjugation of the other by brute force. But even more fundamentally, it is inconsistent with the merciful love which the Lord, on the eve of his passion, especially bequeathed as a new commandment to his followers: "*Novum mandatum do vobis ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos ut et vos diligatis invicem*" (Jn. 13.34). *Sicut dilexi vos*. This is the new criterion: not the natural love one has for oneself; not the abundant love that one shows by laying his life for a friend; but the superabundant love of Christ who laid his life down for sinners. "*Commendat autem charitatem suam Deus in nobis, quia cum peccatores essemus, Christus pro nobis mortuus est*" (Rom. 5.8). "*Propter nimiam charitatem suam qua dilexit nos cum mortui essemus peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo*" (Eph. 2.4). The Christian — elected by the Father of mercies, redeemed by the merciful love of the Son, quickened and sanctified by the Spirit of love — is called to be living proof of the presence of mercy in this world: "*Ambulate in dilectione, sicut et Christus dilexit nos et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis*" (Eph. 5.3).

John Paul II, our Holy Father, comes to us in a few weeks' time. John Paul — two names richly evocative of love. John, the evangelist of love, who told us *quoniam Deus caritas est* (1 Jn. 4.8). Paul, the Apostle who translated the energy of love into action, into apostolate, into evangelization — *Caritas Christi urget nos* (2 or. .514).

What will John Paul speak to us about when he sets foot in Manila? It is not for me to venture a guess on what he

will or will not say. Of one thing, however, I am certain: whatever he chooses to speak about will be related to, and provide insights into the mystery of Christ, the Redeemer of man; into the mystery of the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation and in a special way for the Philippines, Mother Church's first-born daughter in the Far East; and into the mystery of the Father of mercies, who has singled out this country and this people with the particular distinction of being up to now the only Christian country in this corner of the world. Four great themes of his constant meditation. Four sublime truths to whose proclamation and vitalization he has dedicated all his love, all his energies, all his pontificate.

# LORENZO RUIZ IN THE LIGHT OF MARTYRS IN THE BIBLE

by

Fr. Efren Rivera, O.P.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, when we speak of martyrs, we think of people who undergo suffering or give up their life for a cause they believe in. Sometimes people measure the greatness of a person's martyrdom by determining how much pain and torture he underwent before finally dying for his convictions. Others ascertain the importance of a martyr from the quality of the life he gave up. For example, Fathers Gomez, Burgos and Zamora are among our greatest political martyrs because, as priests, they were highly esteemed by the people, and they died so that Filipinos may exercise more political rights and autonomy. Another way of assessing the worth of a martyr's sacrifice is by estimating the impact it produced on others who were inspired to work harder for the same cause because of his heroic example. Thus, Jose Rizal is acclaimed in the Philippines as the highest ranking national hero not because he, among our many political martyrs, suffered the most, but because his writings and his death gave an unstoppable momentum to the movement for Philippine nationhood until it was finally achieved.

In ecclesiastical usage, a martyr is one who dies upholding his faith in Jesus Christ, in spite of being tempted to give up this faith in exchange for life, freedom and temporal comforts. In ancient times it was not uncommon for Christian martyrs to be officially recognized as such by acclamation — when the laity, the priests and bishops spontaneously and perseveringly venerate them as Christian heroes. In our days, a process of beatification or canonization culminating in an act of papal infallibility is needed so that the title and the veneration of a "martyr" may be officially bestowed on one who died for the Christian faith.

From what has been said above it should now be clear that two main elements combine to form the concept of "martyr". The first element is that of being a WITNESS or giving a gua-

rantee about the rightness of a cause. The guarantee could be one's words or one's way of acting boldly, not necessarily one's suffering and death. The second element is that of SUFFERING AND DYING, which is considered as the highest guarantee one could give to prove the rightness of what one is doing or saying.

One can give WITNESS without being a martyr — when one testifies without suffering and dying. One can also SUFFER AND DIE without being a martyr — when one's suffering and death are not related to upholding the rightness of a cause. To be a martyr one must GIVE WITNESS TO THE RIGHTNESS OF A WORTHWHILE CAUSE BY DYING FOR IT.

The integral concept of martyr has its roots in the Bible, especially in the words of Christ about the WITNESS his followers will be called upon to give when they are PERSECUTED OR EVEN PUT TO DEATH for his sake:

"Be on your guard with respect to others. They will hale you into court, they will flog you in their synagogues. You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings, *TO GIVE WITNESS* before them and before the Gentiles on my account. When they hand you over, do not worry about what you will say or how you will say it. When the hour comes, you will be given what you are to say. You yourselves will not be the speakers; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will hand over brother to *DEATH*, and the father his child; children will turn against their parents and have them *PUT TO DEATH*. You will be hated by all on account of me." (Matthew 10:17-22; see also Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17).

The deacon Stephen, who was stoned to death so that he would cease attracting converts to the Christian faith by the grace and power with which the Holy Spirit filled him is expressly called a "martyr" (in translations: "witness") in Acts 22:20.

We must note, however, that the word "martyr" in the Bible means WITNESS and it is oftentimes restricted to the first element in our present concept of martyr. In other words, the word "martyr" in the Bible has a wider application than our present usage of the word. Another kind of witnessing distinct from suffering and dying may be in the mind of the



biblical author when he uses the word "martyr". For example, the Acts of the Apostles refer to the Apostles as "martyrs of Christ" (in translations: "witnesses of Christ") long before they died for Christ's sake: see Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 13:31. They were called "martyrs of Christ" because they boldly defended the claims of Jesus when these were being denied by the Jewish authorities. They testified as eye-witnesses of Christ's public ministry and specially of his resurrection (see Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; and Acts 1:22; 4:33).

It must also be said that not all those mentioned in the Bible as suffering and dying for the true religion are called martyrs. In the Old Testament we can mention the old man Eleazar who was executed for refusing to obey the order of Antiochus Epiphanes to eat pork against his conscience (2 Machabees 6:18-31), and the seven brothers tortured and put to death for the same reason (2 Machabees 7). Although sectional headings in translations refer to their deaths as "martyrdom", this word or its root, "martyr" is nowhere to be found in the biblical text.

Although the Bible does not call the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh" a martyr we have to study what the Bible says about him in order to see the meaning of the suffering and death of martyrs.

In this article (1) after this introduction, (2) we shall consider martyrs in the Old Testament, (3) then martyrs in the New Testament, (4) and then Jesus Christ as the greatest martyr, (5) and as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, (6) and then we shall give our conclusion on Lorenzo Ruiz in the light of biblical martyrs.

## 2. MARTYRS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Martyrdom as a tradition in the People of God may be said to have started with the persecution of the Israelite people by the pharaohs of Egypt (Exodus 1:8-22; 5:1-21). Hebrew baby boys were ordered thrown into the river so that the people would not grow in number and become a threat to the Egyptians (Exodus 1:22). No mention is made of adults slain by the Egyptians, but they were oppressed as slaves put to hard labor. The memory of deliverance from this slavery through faith in the promises of God will one day become the cornerstone of the Israelite belief. On the spiritual level, the similarity between the Israelite experience and the Christian

experience will later be evoked by Matthew when he tells about the massacre of innocent children by Herod in an attempt to kill Christ (Matthew 2:13-18).

Passing over the events of the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the period of the Judges and the reigns of Saul, David, Solomon and his immediate successors, we come to the prophet Elijah. He was a defender of the orthodox religion, and for this reason the wicked king Ahab and his foreign wife, Jezebel looked on him as a "disturber" of Israel (I Kings 18:17). He hid in the Wadi Cherith and escaped the slaughter of prophets by Queen Jezebel (I Kings 18:4). After he challenged the prophets of Baal and put them to death, Queen Jezebel wanted to kill him and he had to flee for his life (I Kings 18 and 19). He escaped violent death, and in this sense he does not fulfill one requirement for being a martyr. But his faithful service to God in spite of threats on his life established a trend for future martyrs to follow. In Isaiah 49:6 and Sirach 48:10 he is thought of as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. His counterpart in the New Testament, John the Baptist, called the new Elijah by Christ himself, died a martyr (see Matthew 17:11-13 and Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29; Luke 3:19-20).

There is a tradition about prophets persecuted and put to death (see Matthew 5:12; Acts 7:52 and Matthew 23:29,37; 1Th. 2:15). This is supported by 1 Kings 18:4 which speaks of countless prophets killed by the wicked queen Jezebel; by 2 Kings 21:16, which tells us of the evil king Manasseh "shedding so much innocent blood as to fill the length and breadth of Jerusalem"; and by Jeremiah 2:30, which recalls prophets devoured by swords like a ravening lion. However, we do not have the names of the martyred prophets nor details about their sacrifice.

There are indications that the prophet Isaiah died a martyr and there is an apocryphal book about his martyrdom. It is also possible that the prophet Jeremiah ended his life, full of suffering and contradictions, with a martyr's death in Egypt. In any case, his sufferings which made his love for God and dedication to duty shine more brightly, serve as an inspiration to all who commit themselves totally to the service of God. The fourth poem of the Suffering Servant, which we will discuss in our fifth section, may have been written with Jeremiah in mind.

The two books of Machabees tell us of Israelites faithful to their religion massacred in Jerusalem during the great per-

secution of Antiochus Epiphanes: see 1 Machabees 1:29-67; 2 Machabees 5:24-6:17. In a few lines the author of 2 Machabees explains that persecutions resulting in martyrdom are ways by which God disciplines his people and accepts atonement for sins. In an ironic way they manifest God's presence among his people (2 Machabees 6:12-17).

The cult of martyrs is encouraged in 2 Machabees chapters 6 and 7, where the martyrdom of the old man Eleazar is narrated, and that of the seven brothers.

### 3. *MARTYRS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT*

Theologically speaking, the first martyr of the New Testament and the greatest martyr of all time is no other than Jesus Christ himself. However, we shall have a special discussion about him in the fourth and fifth sections of this paper, and so for the moment let us pass on to other martyrs.

Matthew narrates to us the killing of the Holy Innocents by king Herod in an attempt to kill Jesus in his infancy. Biblical commentators debate about the historicity of this event. It is possible that a minor incident of some babies being killed by Herod in a search for the infant Messiah is associated by the author with the killing of Christians for the sake of Christ during the infancy of the Church and it is with this mental frame that the narrative is symbolically constructed to show how the text of Jeremiah 31:15 was "fulfilled" or became true in a new way connected with the life of Christ and the Church. In such an interpretation, the narrative of Matthew is taken as a kind of MIDRASH — a commentary following the method of rabbis who used events of their time to throw light on the meaning of an ancient text so that it would become applicable to the contemporary religious life of the community. In this case the killing of the Innocents loses precise chronological value and becomes representative of various happenings in the life of the nascent Church. This interpretation does not altogether rule out the historicity of the massacre of children by Herod in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus, but it does tone down the magnitude of such an event and mixes it with other happenings of other times and other places, and especially, it draws attention more to the meaning of events than to the events themselves.

If we take the theological view of starting the New Testament with the Paschal Event of Jesus Christ, the martyrdom of babies during the infancy of Christ would still pertain to the Old Testament dispensation. The same should be said about the martyrdom of John the Baptist, Precursor of the Messiah. As the last martyred prophet before the martyrdom of Christ, he capped the long tradition of prophets put to death for their fidelity to the mission given to them by God. In the words of Jesus:

"I solemnly assure you, history has not known a man born of woman greater than John the Baptizer. Yet the least born into the kingdom of God is greater than he. From John the Baptizer's time until now the kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. All the prophets as well as the law spoke prophetically until John." — (Matthew 11:11-13; Luke 7:28).

This passage should not be taken to mean that John the Baptist was greater than Jesus himself. He was the greatest in history *before* Jesus. Then, we must also avoid thinking of John's greatness in terms of rank in heaven. It was his *mission* that made him great. He brought to completion the work of all the prophets who prepared for the coming of the Messiah. The "least" in the kingdom of God (after the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus) are greater than John the Baptist because they participate in the greatness of Jesus Christ himself, who gives them his Holy Spirit.

The martyrdom of John the Baptist is narrated in Matthew 14:1-12 and in Mark 6:14-29. He was already a witness for Christ as the one who pointed him out to the people as the Lamb of God (see John 1:7.8.15.19.32.34). In addition, he became a martyr of moral integrity when he was beheaded because he disturbed the conscience of Herodias, the adulterous mistress of Herod.

Through his teaching Jesus clearly prepared his followers for martyrdom. He proclaimed the happiness of those who are "persecuted in the cause of right." He told his disciples:

"Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way." — (Matthew 5:10-12).

He exhorted them:

"Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for next to nothing? Yet not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you, every hair of your head has been counted; so do not be afraid of anything. You are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. Whoever disowns me before men I will disown before my Father in heaven." — (Matthew 10:28-33; Luke 12:4-12).

He promised them:

"There is no one has given up home, brothers or sisters mother or father, children or property, for me and for the gospel who will not receive in this present age a hundred times as many homes, brothers and sisters, mothers, children and property — and persecution besides — and in the age to come, everlasting life." (Mark 10:29-30; Mt. 19: 28-29)

Through the parable of the sower he warned his disciples that persecutions could cause the Word to become fruitless, like seed sown on rocky ground.

He prophesied:

"They will hand you over to torture and kill you. Indeed, you will be hated by all nations on my account. Many will falter then, betraying and hating one another. False prophets will rise in great numbers to mislead many. Because of the increase of evil, the love of most will grow cold. The man who holds out to the end, however, is the one who will see salvation. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a witness to all the nations. Only after that will the end come." (Matthew 24:9-14).

"They will expel you from the synagogues, and indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God." (John 16:2)

In the book of John we have these famous words:

"I solemnly assure you,



unless the grain of wheat falls to the  
earth and dies,

it remains just a grain of wheat,

But if it dies,

it produces much fruit.

The man who loves his life

loses it,

while the man who hates his life in

this world

preserves it to life eternal."

"If anyone would serve me,

let him follow me;

where I am,

there will my servant be.

If anyone serves me,

him the Father will honor."

(John 12:24-26. Verse 24 will find an echo in the well known patristic phrase, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.")

The teaching of Jesus bore its fruit in the deacon of St. Stephen, the first to give his life for Christ, as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, 6:8-7:60. On the occasion of his martyrdom the Church suffered its first systematic persecution which caused the dispersal of the apostles "throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria" (Acts, 8:1). At this point, Saul who will become known as Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, began his persecution of Christians. "He entered house after house, dragged men and women out, and threw them into jail" (Acts 8:3; 9:4-5; 22:7-8; 26:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). In acts 22:4, it is said that Saul persecuted Christians "to the death".

A few years later (A.D. 43 or 44) King Agrippa I orders the capture and beheading of James (Santiago), the Apostle (Acts 12:1-2). He thought he could do the same to Peter, who is put in prison. Miraculously, however, Peter regains freedom flees (Acts 12:3-17).

The Apostolic Churches suffered from other persecutions which certainly resulted in the death of numerous martyrs, but these have not been clearly recorded in the New Testament. In July of A.D. 64 Nero burned Rome and persecuted the Christians there. Among the victims of neronian persecution were the Apostles Peter and Paul. Peter may have been martyred

in the year 64 or he may have suffered martyrdom in the year 67, when Paul was also put to death. The New Testament book of the Apocalypse refer to the killing of many Christians by the roman authorities: see Apocalypse 13; 6:10-11; 16:6; 17:6. The Letter to the Hebrews exhorts Jewish converts to Christianity not to be discouraged by persecutions and to stand firm in the faith: see Hebrews 10:19-39.

#### 4. JESUS CHRIST, THE GREATEST MARTYR

The Book of Revelations or Apocalypse speaks of Jesus Christ as the FAITHFUL WITNESS, the AMEN, the TRUE WITNESS (1:5; 3:14). We also have a verse in 1 Timothy 6:13 which presents Jesus Christ as "a witness for the truth in front of Pontius Pilate." Indeed, we read of Jesus saying:

"The reason I was born,  
the reason why I came into the world,  
is to testify to the truth.

Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice."  
— (John 18:37).

As a witness to the truth Jesus was hated by the world because he gave evidence that its ways are evil (John 7:7). The world of evil men tried to overpower him by putting him to death on the cross but he emerged triumphant through his resurrection, to be constituted Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 2:23-36).

At the beginning of this paper we already noted that it is not necessarily the greatness of suffering that makes a martyr great. Much consideration has to be given to the quality of life that is given up as a witness to a right cause. Since the life of Jesus is the life of the Son of God, his martyrdom is the greatest from this point of view. Another matter to be considered is the impact produced by the martyr's sacrifice. On this score, the martyrdom of Jesus has had the greatest impact of all, because it reconciled all mankind with God: it saved us from our sins and released for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus himself put it:

"When I am lifted up from the earth,  
I shall draw all men to myself." — (John 12:32).

The Evangelist commented: "By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die" (John 12:33).

The most important aspect to be considered in determining the greatness of a martyrdom is the love with which it is accepted (see I Corinthians 13:1-13). For this reason no other martyrdom is greater than that of Jesus because no man ever loved God or men more than he did. He explains his sacrificial death in John 14:31:

"The world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me."

As far as love for people is concerned, we have the texts of John 13:1 and 15:13:

"He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was."

"A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."

#### 5. JESUS CHRIST, THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF YAHWEH

We enrich our understanding of martyrdom when we look at it in the light of the poems about the Suffering Servant of Yahweh in the book of Isaiah. Many questions may remain unresolved regarding the identity of the original Servant and his role, but these poems certainly show that atoning suffering fits into God's plan of salvation as the catalyst of man's redemption.

The first poem, Isaiah 42:1-9, speaks of the Servant as one chosen by God, one in whom his soul delights. He has been endowed with the Spirit of God that he may bring true justice to the nations. In doing this he will not cry or shout aloud or make his voice heard in the streets. He will not break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame. He will serve the cause of right as covenant of the people and light of the nations.

The Servant is presented in the second poem, found in Isaiah 49:1-6, as God's instrument in making salvation reach the ends of the earth. In the third poem, Isaiah 50:4-11, the Servant is identified as a disciple of Yahweh who follows rigid discipline. For this reason, he says, "I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle." He puts all his trust in Yahweh as the one who will sustain him in all trials. In this poem there is an exhortation to readers so that they

would follow the example of the Servant: "Whoever walks in darkness, and has no light shining for him, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, let him lean on his God."

The longest and most important poem is the fourth, found from Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. It describes the Servant as a man like Job who suffers in spite of his innocence; he is treated as an evil-doer whom God has punished and condemned to a shameful death. In this way he atones for sinners and intercedes for them. Yahweh accepts the atonement and salvation is brought to all men. The Servant will grow great and fulfill his destiny as the light of the nations.

The New Testament sees Jesus as the one who makes come true what was said about the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. In the baptism that inaugurated his public ministry the Spirit of God descends on him (recall Isaiah 42:1); he is identified as the Beloved or Chosen One with God's favour resting on him (recall Isaiah 42:1 and 49:3). When he speaks of his work in Luke 4:16-22 and 7:22 he uses words reminiscent of Isaiah 42:7: "to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon" (see also Isaiah 61:1-2).

Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30 expressly call Jesus "Servant". The same book uses verses from the fourth Servant poem as the starting point for the explanation of the messiahship of Jesus: see Acts 8:32-35.

John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God" in John 1:29,36. Possibly the original title used by John the Baptist was "Servant of God". But even if this is not the case, "Lamb of God" is reminiscent of what is said about the Servant in Isaiah 53:7, "Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth."

The role of the Servant of Yahweh to atone for the sins of others through his suffering is fulfilled by Christ in his passion and death. The evangelists saw this and their narratives of Christ's ordeal allude to it. In the words of the institution of the Eucharist, Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24 recall that Jesus spoke of his blood as being poured out.

*FOR MANY* (Matthew adds: "for the forgiveness of sins"). There is a reference here to the fourth poem of the Servant: "Through his suffering, my servant shall justify *many*, and their guilt he shall bear... he shall take away the sins of *many*, and win pardon for their offenses" (Isaiah 53:11-

12). Luke sees an allusion to another text about the Servant, Isaiah 53:4, "it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured... he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed;" and so he gives a different modification to Christ's words: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed *FOR YOU*" (Luke 22:20).

Jesus, like the Servant who was compared to a lamb that was "silent and opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7) is described in his trial as keeping silent (Matthew 26:63; Mark 14:61; John 19:9). Luke does not mention this silence but, for his part, he takes pains to show that Jesus was reckoned among criminals (Luke 22:37) and this is reminiscent of Isaiah 53:12, "he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked."

It may be true that the New Testament uses the word "martyr" more to emphasize WITNESS rather than SUFFERING AND DEATH FOR A CAUSE. But in pointing to Jesus as the Servant of Yahweh it equivalently reveals him as the prototype of all martyrs.

## 6. CONCLUSION

We have considered martyrs in the Bible in an attempt to bring out the relevance for us today of the martyrdom of the first Filipino martyr, Lorenzo Ruiz, who was executed so long ago in Japan, on September 29, 1637. We should see him as a countryman who invites us to stand as witnesses to the truth and to the love of God and man. We know how much truth and love are abused in our days. With Lorenzo's heavenly intercession perhaps a new breed of Filipinos could, through their lives if not through their deaths, lead the way for our countrymen to be more dedicated to the truth and more active in charity. As the slogan for the beatification of Lorenzo and his companion martyrs says, "To die for the faith is a gift to some; to live the faith is a call for all."

Most of the biblical martyrs are lost in obscurity. We do not even know their names. Their importance lies in the fact that they represented the community in giving heroic witness to the truth of their religion. Lorenzo, too, for more than three hundred years, has been an obscure figure. If he is now



given prominence it is because he is a representative of thousands of Filipinos who, throughout four centuries of Christianity in the Philippines, have loved and served God in the way taught by Jesus Christ. Lorenzo is taken out of obscurity to become a rallying point for a more vital, and maybe a more heroic practice of Christian life today.

The Bible shows that martyrdom is closely knit with prophecy. We can say that the martyrdom of Lorenzo in a foreign Asian country is a kind of prophetic sign. It is a strong invitation to our youth to pursue the missionary vocation in neighboring Asian countries. We may say that in Lorenzo Ruiz we Filipinos have found not only a Christian martyr but also a prophet of our destiny as missionaries.

To his followers who will be persecuted Jesus promised the fulness of the Holy Spirit so that they could answer with wisdom and courage in front of authorities who could decide on their life or death. This promise was fulfilled in the martyrdom of Lorenzo. Apparently he had no outstanding qualities before he was brought to trial. At some time during his captivity he wavered or at least was confused about what he really wanted and what he should do. However, when the moment of decision came and he was asked: if we grant you life, will you renounce your faith? he answered without hesitation:

"That I will never do, because I am a Christian and I shall die for God, and for Him I will give many thousands of lives if I had them. And so, do with me as you please."

In our days there is great interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit but the movement of charismatic renewal, which encourages this interest, is in need of proper direction. Lorenzo Ruiz, a man truly filled with the Holy Spirit in accordance with the promise of Jesus, can help us promote true charismatic renewal with the right perspective.

As one who followed in the tradition of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, Lorenzo Ruiz atoned for the sins of his persecutors and his countrymen. We should turn to him for help so that our lives could be more free from sin and more pleasing to God.

Lorenzo Ruiz, through his martyrdom gave witness to the truth of St. Paul's words:

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As Scripture says: 'For your sake we are being slain all the day long; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.' Yet in all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

It is love for God, witnessed to by the free giving of one's life, that makes a martyr great. Lorenzo Ruiz attested to such a love with the words that sealed his fate: "for Him I will give many thousands of lives if I had them." It is love that made Lorenzo great.

# THE SITUATION OF THE PHILIPPINE CATHOLIC CHURCH: PRESENT AND PROSPECTS

by

• FAUSTO B. GOMEZ, O.P.

By February 1981, Pope John Paul II will travel to the Philippines on his ninth major journey outside Italy. The papal visit to the Philippines will be highly significant for the Pontiff and for the Philippine Catholic Church — because the Philippines is principally a Catholic country and also because it is the only Catholic country in Southeast Asia.

On the threshold of the papal visit, it is relevant to ask: *How Catholic is the Philippines? What is the situation of the Catholic Church in the Philippines?* In brief, *what kind of Catholicism — sociological, authentic — will the Pope see when he visits “the Pearl of the Orient Seas?”*

The title is really ambitious: we cannot answer those radical and complex questions — there is a scarcity of socio-religious studies, in the first place —, much less in this article. What we plan to do in the following pages is to give an approximate panoramic view of Philippine Catholicism, a sketchy overview of some of its salient points, that is, the *Catholic population, Church structures and Christian faith and practice.*

## CATHOLIC AND NON-CATHOLIC RELIGIONS

The Philippines, a great country of seven thousand islands located off the Southeast coast of Asia, is inhabited today by fifty two million people (according to the preliminary estimates from the 1980 census). It is considered a developing country, with a strong voice among the unfortunately called Third World nations. *Socio-economically*, the Philippines is mainly agricultural, in the process of rapid industrialization, rich in natural resources, with an uneven distribution of income, natural and artificial wealth. *Socio-culturally*, the Philippines has a rich mixed culture — with Oriental and Western elements —, and a highly educated population (83% is the rate of literacy; among

the highest in Asia). *Socio-politically*, it has been an independent nation since after World War II. After 26 years of American-type democracy, the Philippines is currently, and after eight years under the regime of Martial Law, or the so-called "Constitutional authoritarianism", and hopefully, in the process of democratic normalization.

From the cultural perspective, the religious element appears as the primary component among the other social factors: *the Filipinos are a deeply religious people*. For the great majority, their religiosity is qualified as *Catholic religiosity*.

The Catholic faith, however, was not the primeval religion of the Philippines. Before the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century, the inhabitants of the Islands possessed, obviously, their set of different beliefs, animistic in nature — some of these are still prevalent in ethnic groups and are also partly present in all religious, including Catholicism.

Before the sixteenth century, likewise, there were already, among some groups in different islands, religious elements from other Asian religions. Although the pre-hispanic contacts of India, China and Indonesia were mainly commercial in nature, these brought also culture and religious elements from Buddhism, Islam and other Asian beliefs and philosophies.

The Spanish exploration and colonization of the Islands achieved positively (there were, of course negative elements) the political unity of the Philippines and, through the missionaries, the Christianization of the land. By the nineteenth century, the Catholic faith became firmly established. After almost four hundred years of Spanish domination, and by 1898, the American government became the new colonizer and brought with it a new educational system and Christian non-catholic-missionaries. These represented the main Protestant denominations, which soon were implanted in the Philippines; salient today, among them, are the Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Baptist Churches, the Methodist Church... By the beginning of the twentieth century, two prominent national Christian Churches were founded — the Aglipayan Church (1902) and the Iglesia ni Kristo (1916).

The data on religious affiliations, included in *the 1978 Philippine Yearbook*, are the following (these data were gathered from the findings of the 1970 census; total Philippine population then: 36,684, 486):

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<i>Catholics</i>	85%
<i>Muslims</i>	4%
<i>Aglipayans</i>	4%
<i>Protestants</i>	3%
<i>Iglesia ni Kristo</i>	1%
<i>Buddhists</i>	.9%
<i>Others</i>	2%

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(There are in the world, according to the latest statistics of the Church, 750 million Catholics; of these 7.8 belong to Asia; however, the Asian Catholics constitute only the 2.3% of the whole Asian population.)

## THE STRUCTURE AND PERSONNEL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Church is also an institution, a society structured with hierarchical organization, functionally organized to fulfill its central mission of evangelization; besides the universal Vatican-organization, there is a local organization structured mainly in archdioceses, dioceses and parishes, and directed by archbishops, bishops and parish priests, respectively.

The statistical data on the ecclesiastical divisions (organization) and the ecclesiastical personnel (bishops, priests, religious, laity) of the local Philippine Church will help us perceive — quantitatively — the situation of the Church in the Philippines.

### *Ecclesiastical divisions*

As of July 15, 1980, there are 65 ecclesiastical divisions in the Philippines, compared with the 42 that existed in 1965. The precise data are:

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	<i>In 1965</i>	<i>In 1980</i>	<i>Additions</i>
Archdioceses .....	8	14	6
Dioceses .....	19	34	15
Prelatures .....	11	13	2
Apostolic Vicariates .....	4	4	0
Total	42	65	23

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The data clearly show the continuing numerical growth of the Philippine Church, and imply a better division of the territory of the country and a better planning towards the realization of the tasks of evangelization and re-evangelization.

The territorial area of the ecclesiastical divisions varies, although the average length is over 5,000 square meters (the total land area of the Philippines is 300,000 square kilometers). On the other hand, the average number of Catholics per ecclesiastical division is high — over half a million persons, except in the Apostolic Vicariates and in the Prelatures. The Apostolic Vicariates have an average of 287,000 Catholics each; each Prelature, 328,000 Catholics; each Diocese, 504,000 and each Archdiocese 1,194 Catholics.

The different ecclesiastical divisions are organized into parishes. According to the 1978 *Catholic Directory of the Philippines*, there were at that time 1,898 parishes in the whole country: the Archdiocese of Manila (over 5 million Catholics) had 149 or the largest number of parishes (152 in 1979) and the Apostolic Vicariate of Jolo (over 10,000 Catholics), the smallest number (4 parishes).

On the average, there are about 20,000 Catholics per parish in the country. In particular, the average number of Catholics in the Archdioceses is 21,342; in the Dioceses, 17,278; in the Prelatures, 16,505, and in the Apostolic Vicariates, 9,406 Catholics.

### *Ecclesiastical Personnel*

The ecclesiastical personnel that directs the pastoral activities in the ecclesiastical divisions of the local Church are the bishops (and archbishops), the priests (secular and religious men), the religious men and women, and the lay leaders and catechists.

There are at present one hundred bishops. They are the higher ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholic flock, whom they lead as high shepherds and teachers in union with, and due dependence on, the Pontiff, the Supreme Shepherd and teacher of the Universal Church. Among the high priests of the local Church, there are at present 2 cardinal-archbishops (of the Archdioceses of Manila and Cebu), 12 Archbishops, 86 bishops (residential, auxiliary, coadjutor bishops, etc.) The bishops of the Philippine Catholic Church belong to the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*, the highest adminis-

*tering organization body* and, pastorally, the most influential in the whole local Church, particularly through its pastoral letter, and letters of exhortation addressed to all Filipino Catholics.

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<i>Total priests in the Philippines</i>	4751
<i>Ratio of Catholic Population to every Catholic Priest</i>	7601:1
Total Catholic priests throughout the world	416,329
Ratio of Catholic population to every catholic priests, by continent	
Africa	3251:1
America	3016:1
Oceania	1014:1
Europe	1079:1
Asia	2223:1

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In general, the average number of Filipino Catholics per priest is 7,601; in particular, that average is lower in the archdioceses (6,270), and in the Apostolic Vicariates (5,652); but it is higher in the dioceses (9,601) and in the Prelatures (9,652). (The optimum number of Catholics per priests is placed by pastoralists between 1,000 and 5,000.)

Another important component of the ecclesiastical personnel of the Philippine Church is the religious personnel — religious men and women. They play a fundamental role in the mission of the local Church.

In 1978, there were 33 religious orders and congregations for men and 60 for women; however, 8 ecclesiastical divisions had no religious men and one had no religious women (the Prelature of Batanes-Babuyan).

In 1978, the total number of religious men including religious priests was 2,656 (1,183 of them were in the Archdiocese of Manila). There were, then, 7,557 religious women throughout the country (again almost half of them work in Manila. (The world statistics place the number of non-priests religious men at 74,792, and the number of religious women at 173,895.)

In the context of the ecclesiastical personnel, it is important to add that *the number of vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life is not only not decreasing* (like in most local Churches, throughout the Catholic world), *but it appears increasing significantly*. Moreover, it is likewise necessary to

stress that the Philippine Catholic Church is becoming increasingly aware of her *important role in evangelizing Asia*; this is already a wonderful reality, manifested by the hundreds of Filipino missionaries already proclaiming the Word in other Asian countries.

### *The Catholic laity of the Philippines*

The Catholic laity, especially its leaders of religious associations and movements, is also an important force of Philippine Catholicism today. Like the priests and the religious, the Catholic laity is an equal component of the People of God and, therefore, responsible for the task of evangelization, particularly the Christianization of secular realities and temporal affairs — total human development and Christian liberation.

The situation of the Lay Apostolate in the Philippines is marked, as in other local Churches, by general passivity (90%) and the dynamic action of a dedicated minority (10%). Moreover, and this is important, we can observe already clear signs of intense renewal and positive change. A highly symbolic act: In 1976, the Council of the Laity of the Philippines (CLP) decided to carry out two main tasks, that is, *the restructuring of the Lay Apostolate and the formation and propomotion of Basic Christian Communities*.

Besides the traditional Lay Apostolate *religious associations* (like Adoracion Nocturna de Filipinas, the Catholic Women's League, the Legion of Mary, the various professional Guilds, the Student Catholic Action...), there are the dynamic *Christian Movements* (like the stable Christian Family Movement — 3,780 couples —, the struggling Cursillo Movement, the emerging and promising Charismatic Renewal Movement, the refreshing Focolare Movement and the joyful Youth Christian Crusaders). However, we believe that the *Basic Christian Communities* (estimated number 2,455), already organized throughout the country, especially in the South (the Kriska Movement), appear in general as a harbinger of authentic Christian renewal — personal as well as social. Regarding social change and commitment, *the Alay Kapwa Movement*, launched by the CBCP and spread throughout the parishes of the land, has offered, since 1975, an excellent program of evangelization for *Total Human Development*.

### CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE

From the few general socio-religious studies we have on on Philippine Catholicism, we may statistically affirm that the

majority of the Filipinos are Catholic; quantitatively, they are Catholics. Are they Catholics also qualitatively, that is sociologically and really? To be able to answer this general question, we need to respond to some basic concrete questions on the faith, the worship and the personal and social life of the Filipino Catholics: What do we believe? How do we worship God? How do we live the moral demands of our Christian faith?

We may, of course, answer those questions in a general manner: *the faith of the Filipino Catholics* is doctrinally Catholic — but, possibly, lacking in depth and, at times, mixed with superstitious beliefs; *the Filipinos' ritual Christian life* is definitely very rich and colorful (probably more than 90 per cent approach the Sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist, and participate in the Eucharistic Celebration regularly) — but, probably, their ritual Christian life appears often as heavily devotional and more than slightly ritualistic; *the Christian ethical life of the Filipino Catholics* is a doctrinally principled life, at the level of moral message — but, perhaps, and in some social categories and classes, it is not engagingly committed to social justice and integral Christian liberation.

Unfortunately, the clear statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on *Evangelization and Development* (1973) is still substantially accurate: The Philippine Church

“has apostolic personal and pastoral structures, but the whole situation is rather precarious, because many people have not come to understand the gospel as a living, personal commitment; the nation or community group, as such, has not carried out an adequate process of evangelization, because not a few people have not received adequate Christian formation or do not evince an apostolic form of life. Often, they see religion as a ritualistic or pietist set of practices than as a life of fervor and active effort.”

May we answer the above stated questions in a more concrete and scientific manner? Not all the questions: but, some concrete answers (basically sociological but initially theologico-pastoral also) on various concrete questions have been given, although we still need more and wider socio-religious studies that would constitute the raw material for a reading of the situation from faith and a realistic pastoral program of evangelization. The best socio-religious studies, thus far, have been produced by the Asian Social Institute (ASI); only recently, the Philippine Priests Incorporated published a good survey

on the Philippine Clergy entitled: *The Church of the Philippines on the Threshold of the 80's*. Moreover, the socio-religious studies being undertaken by the UST Social Research Center will undoubtedly contribute its positive share towards the analysis of the situation of the Catholic Church in the Philippines and her organizational structures and ecclesiastical personnel (the recently established UST SRC has published a research study on *the Changing Filipino Family* and another on *Faith, Attitudes, and Practice of the Filipino Youth Today*).

## THE FUTURE: PROSPECTS AND PRIORITIES

Trying to read the situation of the Philippine Church, from Christian faith, how do we see the future of the local Church and the priorities in her evangelizing tasks? From the concrete teachings of the local Church, particularly of the pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, we can draw some apostolic priorities, that must jointly be pursued. These are: *the option for the poor, the option for the young, the spreading and strengthening of the Apostolate of the Laity, and the religious discernment of Folk Catholicism.*

(1) *The option for the poor.* In 1974, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference made this option for the local Churches of Asia because it is an evangelical option, and because "most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor." The Philippines is a rich country, but with many poor people! According to NEDA statistics, the annual income of 60% of Filipino families in 1971 is 1,560 pesos (this constitutes 25% of total family income); 20% receive 3,924 pesos annually which makes 21% of total family income), and 20% get 10,079 pesos yearly (for the 54% of total family income). More in particular, the top 10% among all Filipino families get 13,850 pesos every year, that is 37.1% of total family income; the top 5% receive 18,518 pesos a year, that is, 24.8% of total family income.

Those bare figures urgently ask the Church and all her members to be committed to social justice and human development — these constitute an integral part of total Christian liberation; more particularly, it demands from the People of God their communitarian option for the poor among us — *the preferential, although not exclusive, option for the poor.* As the Philippine Bishops declared in one of their most courageous pastoral letters, *The Bond of Love in Proclaiming the Good News*: "The Church embraces all men as brothers under the Fatherhood of God. She is not partial to any group. She has



a motherly sympathy for the poor and voiceless. She has love for all, no malice towards any one."

(2) *The option for the young.* The Asian population, in general, is young (2/3), and the Philippine population, in particular, is probably younger: the median age of the Filipinos was, in 1960, 20.2, and in 1975, 16.7 (the projected trend will be partly reversed by the year 2,000, according to population growth estimates). Hence, the Church must continue her evangelization of the young and also be evangelized, in turn, by the young. Like the Latin American Churches, with whom the Philippine Church has much in common (as acknowledged by the Philippine Hierarchy), our local Church has "to foster the growth and deepening of the young people's faith for the sake of communion with God and human beings", "to give direction to the vocational option of young people", and "to offer them the resources for becoming factors for change and also effective channels for participating actively in the Church and in the transformation of society" (*The Puebla Documents*). As Jaime Cardinal Sin, President of the CBCP, recently said in a lecture on *the Future of Catholicism in Asia*: "High pastoral priority ought to be given to communicating with the young through all personal and mass media; our best efforts should be devoted to solid leadership training of Catholic youth."

(3) *Spreading and strengthening the Apostolate of the Laity.* The overdue emergence of the lay persons as members come-of-age of the Church is a notable phenomenon in the universal Church and, in particular, in many local Churches, especially in the Third World. This encouraging "happening" is refreshingly apparent in the Philippine Church, with the hopeful sprouting of Basic Christian Communities and new or renewed Christian movements and associations; still the way to go towards the active and wide participation of lay men and women in the tasks of evangelization is long: "We have to confess", the International Mission Congress of December 1979, asserted "that there is hardly any lay participation in the decision-making of the Church." In this regard, the statement of the Fourth Manila Synod, of October 1979 should, perhaps, be carried out through the whole local Church: "There shall be an integrated pastoral program in every parish, which shall stress the laity's sharing in the responsibility of building up the Christian community in accordance with each's personal charism."

(4) *Discernment of Folk Catholicism.* The religiosity of the Filipinos is deeply rich and colorful as any anthropological or socio-religious study will easily attest. Nevertheless, this

multi-faceted religiosity, which is fortunately present in young and old, men and women, urban and rural people, includes certain traits of superstition and animism — traits that the Church must try to purify on the anvil of authentically inculturated Christian faith and praxis.

The Philippine Bishops, in one of their best pastoral letters ever, *Ang Mahal na Birhen* (1975), said pertinently:

"Popular religiosity in our country is a springboard as well as an invitation for the deepening of a more religious consciousness. The valid elements of an authentic faith, which are present in the profound religiosity of our people, need and demand that they be purified, interiorized, made more mature, and brought to bear on daily life."

## A NEW SPRING OF RENEWAL

The Philippine Church, with all its problems, is undoubtedly a living and dynamic Church: "We find that the Church has been implanted, the gospel has been preached, and it has permeated people's culture" (CBCP, 1973). The Philippine Church appears today as a *Church of hope* that will meet creatively her many challenges — of social poverty and injustice, of deeper inculturation, of wider missionary openness to Asia, of a clearer awareness of her place in the Third World and her closeness with the Latin American Churches.

The pastoral visit of John Paul II will hopefully signify a re-awakening for the whole Philippine Church. The papal visit will launch — this we pray — *a new spring of deeper and wider renewal* — internal and external renewal, personal and social renewal. According to the message of our Bishops, the pope's visit should not be a fleeting moment of religious fervor, but *an occasion for reflection, an opportunity for personal conversion*. As pope Paul VI, who visited the Philippines in November 1970, said:

"Let each one examine himself, to see what he has done up to now and what he ought to do (concerning Christian faith — enlightened and committed). It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations... It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how *personal conversion is needed first*".

# ACCULTURATION

by

**Jaime Cardinal Sin, D.D.**

*(Keynote Speech delivered by His Eminence, Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, during the 24th Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference held at St. Louis University, Baguio City, on December 28, 1980 at 5:30 p.m.)*

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you this afternoon. I wish to thank Mrs. Monina Manapat and her Continuation Committee for the invitation to deliver the keynote address. I wasn't exactly sure what "keynote address" meant. So I looked it up in Webster's and found this definition: "An address, as at a political convention, that presents the essential issues of interest to the assembly." I can assure you that it was a relief to find that I was not expected to present solution, but only points of interest that might serve to stimulate further discussion.

I would like to present these points in the form of questions. And the first is a question of terms.

What is *culture*? Is it any different from *civilization*? In every day language we use these two terms as synonyms, hardly making any distinction between, say, ancient Egyptian culture and ancient Egyptian civilization, or between Babylonian culture and Babylonian civilization. Perhaps in these two cases, and in some other historical examples, the distinction is practically non-existent.

But consider modern Japan. Faced with the guns of Commodore Perry, Japan decided to open up and go Western. So successfully have the Japanese gone Western that today Japan stands the equal of the West in such typically western areas as commerce and trade, banking, industry, technology and science. Europe and the U.S.A. are seriously worried over the invasion of Japanese cars, cameras, TV sets, watches and other appliances and gadgets of modern life. What has Japan so successfully adopted from the West: its culture or its civilization?

Consider ourselves. There are many among us who moan the loss of Filipino identity. They bewail that we have become too Westernized. In what sense? Obviously, not in the same

sense as Japan. For one thing we cannot stand comparison with Japan in commerce and trade, industry, technology and science. For another thing, I rather doubt that these mourners of the loss of Filipino identity would give up their cars for a carabao cart, their plush apartments for nipa huts, their clothes for tribal costumes, their plumbing for an outdoor house. We have become too Western: in what? In our culture or in our civilization?

Consider Christianity. No one can deny that Christianity has, historically speaking, been a civilizing force. Yes, what is Christianity essentially, a civilization or a culture?

For a clue to the distinction between culture and civilization, one has to take account of the roots of these two words.

Culture is the English form of the Latin *cultura*. In its turn, *cultura* is the noun form of the word *cultum*, which is the past participle of the verb *colere*. *Colere* means to till the soil. The English verb *cultivate* is itself derived from the same past participle *cultum*.

Culture, then, originally meant the cultivation of the land for the production of crops — agriculture —, or for the growing of flowers and other ornamental plants — horticulture. From the farming of the land, the term was transferred to the husbanding of animals. For example, the farming of bees is known as apiculture. Today, scientists grow culture, of bacteria on dishes as farmers grow crops on acres of land. Miki-moto has oyster farms for the culture of pearls.

Man cultivates the soil; he cultivates animals; but most of all he cultivates himself. For cultivation is simply the development of potentials, and, of all things on earth, man is himself the one with most potentials, and thus the one most suitable for, and in need of, cultivation. But the self of man has an outer element and an inner element: there is his body, which can be seen and felt; and there is his soul, which cannot be seen or felt in itself, but which makes itself manifest through his external bodily activities.

There is, consequently, in human culture the cultivation of the outer self, that is, the development of the body — physical culture —, and the tending of its needs and comforts. There is also the cultivation of the inner self, namely: the growth and maturation of the reason, the will, and the emotions.

But, besides this outer and inner culture, human culture can still mean three other things. First, the active process of cultivation, which we commonly designate by the name of

education. Second, the state of development reached by either the individual or the community. "Thus, on the community level, we distinguish between primitive and advanced cultures. Third, the objects which evidence the degree of culture reached. Such objects are artistic creations, technical artifacts, and social institutions. Thus, we speak of Greek, or Chinese, or African culture.

Culture, then, stands for the development or growth of the total human person. To borrow from Vatican II: "The word 'culture' in the general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse *mental* and *physical* endowments." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 53; underscoring supplied)

On the other hand, civilization is rooted in the Latin term *civitas*, which means *city*. The city, first of all, brings to mind a contraposition to the countryside or rural areas. It conjures the vision of a mode of living, a life-style removed from the rusticity, that is, the crudity of the backwoods: beautiful houses, comfortable settings, smartly dressed men and women, well-paid jobs, sleek cars, sophisticated fun and entertainment, and a multitude of appliances and gadgets to ease the burden of daily chores. In one word, the city means a life-style of physical ease and convenience.

In the second place, the city denotes a more complex interaction among human beings, a more complicated social organization, more complex social institutions, and, therefore, more roles and functions to play and perform. Class distinctions follow, whether these are officially recognized or not. De facto class distinctions, in turn, create differences in life-styles, or reinforce those already existing by turning them into status symbols.

By its roots, then, the term civilization directly refers to the things that make human life physically easier and more comfortable, and to the more or less advanced stage of the social organization. The latter also serve, in their own way to make human life easier and more convenient. How? By removing the unpleasantness, not to say danger, in personal confrontation to settle differences between man and man. Out in the back country a man has to do all the dirty jobs by himself: from drawing water out of the well, to cleaning the house, to redressing his own grievances. In the city the dirty jobs are done by somebody else: water is drawn for him and piped into his bathroom by the waterworks; his house is cleaned by servants or by a battery of appliances; his grievances are redressed by the government.



All these things clearly belong to the outer aspects of human life. Civilization, then, is directly linked to the external development, to the outward manifestations of the cultural enterprise. Culture is the broader term; it *includes* civilization. Civilization is the narrower term; it *implies* culture.

But when the two terms are contrasted, culture signifies rather the inner growth of the intellect, the will, and the emotions; the vision of, and the attitude towards, reality and oneself which define a man's approach to, his relationships with, and the use he makes of everything and everyone he comes in touch with. In one word, culture, as contrasted to civilization, has to do more with the mental, moral, and emotional maturity achieved by an individual or a people; whereas civilization results from the impact this inner maturity has on the things men make, on how they use things, and how they deal with other men. Culture is the soul of civilization; civilization, the trappings of culture.

That last phrase is not altogether correct in that it implies a mere accidental link between civilization and culture. This is not the case. Culture is the parent of civilization; civilization, the child of culture. Our present material ease and comfort directly depend on technology, and technology on science. The social organization, laws, customs and institutions of a community directly depend on the emotional attitudes and the moral character of the people. This explains why in most historical instances culture and civilization correspond and look alike. It also explains why in our own times, with the global reach of international trade and commerce, the face of civilization begins to look the same all over the earth. The material goods that serve the physical comforts of life are easily transportable and exportable; ideas and attitudes not so easily, although with the growth and expansion of mass media; this might not be true in a little while.

The second question is: Which of the two, culture or civilization, relates more closely to national identity? If the foregoing analysis is substantially correct, it follows that culture lies closer to the heart of the identity of a people and defines national identity more accurately.

There is an English proverb that says, "Not all that glitters is gold". The Spaniards have another that says, "El hábito no hace al monje". The point these sayings make is a thing is not necessarily what it appears to be. Often the real man does not match his public image.

A man is not the things he owns and uses. Existentially speaking, a man is what he thinks and believes in; a man is what he loves, cherishes and values; a man is his fundamental attitudes towards reality and life. These same things: the beliefs held in common by a people, the values they cherish and uphold, the attitudes they share in common — these are the main ingredients of their culture. And if these are the things that group some people together and segregate them from others, then it is culture which identifies a people or a nation and sets it apart from the rest.

Biologists say that our bodies are completely renewed every seven years. All the old cells have disappeared and been replaced by new ones. Yet the personal identity remains, each one is the same person. Why? Because that which makes each one of us a person — the spiritual soul — remains. So, too, even if the outer trappings of civilization should change, if the soul of the civilization — the culture — remains, the national identity remains.

That is why the Japanese remain Japanese even if they dress in coat and trousers; even if they ride in motorcars and bullet trains; even if they live in concrete-steel-and-glass buildings with plumbing, electricity and all the latest gadgets; even if they drink whiskey and Coca-Cola. They remain Japanese because their culture is very much alive. So very much alive, indeed, that it stamps with a peculiar character the social institutions that have been adopted from the West. Take private enterprise. In the West it is permeated with division, mistrust and opposition. Workers and management regard one another as opponents with almost irreconcilable interests. In Japan free enterprise is permeated with a sense of belonging, of solidarity, and family loyalty. No son or daughter is expelled from the family, they are members of the family until they die. Workers stay with the company until they die; no worker is laid off, instead, in times of hardship, company executives take big cuts in salary along with the lowest employee. In the West private business eyes government as its foe. In Japan the same family attitude is evident in the relationships between the private corporations and the government. Private businesses are fiercely competitive among themselves, but this attitude of each one for himself is not carried over and against the government. Public policy is decided upon by a consensual process between the public and the private sector. The result is that public

policy is not rammed down the throat willy-nilly, but issued mildly in the form of an advice with which all parties voluntarily comply.

It also might explain why the Filipino nationalist can, without inconsistency, mourn the loss of Filipino identity and frenetically agitate for its recovery, without feeling obliged to replace his car with a carabao cart, or his air-conditioned home with a nipa hut, or his fashionable clothes with a tribal costume. What he seeks to recover is a lost culture, a vanished soul, not the trappings of a bygone civilization.

The third question: Are there good and evil cultures? Are some cultures superior and others inferior? Or are cultures neither good nor evil, neither superior nor inferior, but merely different?

The last view, namely, that cultures are merely different, neither good nor evil, neither superior nor inferior is vastly appealing to contemporary western thinking. The West today is saturated with relativism. Nothing is absolutely true, nothing is absolutely false. Nothing has value absolutely; values are simply a matter of preference.

On the other hand, Asian thinking unequivocally denies that nothing is absolute; it denies that man is the ultimate measure of everything. Asia is the cradle of the great religions of the world. All of them — Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam — not to mention Christianity — uphold the existence and reality of a supreme and absolute being, be he called Brahman, Yahweh, Allah, or simply God.

These two positions are not simply opposed, but contradictory in the strict logical sense. Hence they cannot both be true, nor can they both be false. One of them is necessarily true, the other necessarily false. And since either absolutely excludes the other, then whichever is true is absolutely true, and whichever is false is absolutely false.

It follows that the values of one are true, and absolutely true, values; and the values of the other are false, and absolutely false, values, which is to say, no values at all. If a man were to say to me that what is truly valuable is only different from, but not superior to what is valueless, I can only say, to be charitable, that the man, obviously, did not know the meaning of the word *valuable*, or of the word *superior*.

*Value* is the modern term which replaces the old-fashioned term *good*. A false value cannot possibly have any value in

itself; if it did, it would be truly valuable. Since a false value has no value in itself, it is a value only because somebody *values* it, that is, because somebody *desires* it. The fact that somebody desires it is what gives it the appearance or semblance of being valuable. Now, experience testifies that people desire not only what is good, but that sometimes they also desire what is positively evil. Therefore, on account of the true values it adheres to, a culture can be deservedly characterized as good. Likewise, on account of the false values it embraces, a culture can be labeled evil.

Of course, there is no culture totally devoid of true values, as there is no culture totally free from false values. Which is to say that there is no culture that can be called absolutely good without qualifications, and no culture that can be said to be absolutely evil without qualifications. It is only in this sense, that is, according to the greater or lesser preponderance of the good and the evil, that cultures are said to be relatively good and relatively evil. In other words, the term *relatively* is not to be understood qualitatively, but quantitatively.

A fourth question now arises with respect to evil cultures: Do evil cultures have the right to exist? Put thus in the abstract, the question is rather confusing. Let me, then, translate the question into concrete terms: have people the right to carry out the evil practices approved by their respective cultures? For example: would any surviving Aztecs have the right to perform human sacrifices? Would any surviving Romans have the right to entertainment in the form of gladiatorial combats? Would any surviving Nazis have the right to exterminate Jews or other inferior races? It is a safe bet that you would not hesitate up answer, "No, they do not have that right!"

But suppose I ask: Do the Chinese have the right to expose unwanted babies? Do the Americans have the right to abortion? I will bet that now some of you will hesitate before answering. Many will even choose to straddle the fence and say, "No comment."

That hesitation underscores the distinction between what is morally right and what is legally right. The ideal would be that what is morally right would also be legally right, and what is morally wrong would also be morally wrong. But that is not always the case. There are cases where the law sanctions, or at least condones, what is morally evil. These are usually the cases where the public consciousness is unclear or confused regarding what is morally good and what is morally evil. The

public mind seems rather clear on the evil of human sacrifices, gladiatorial combats, and the extermination of the Jews. So clear, indeed, that I doubt the public mind is not clear about abortion. Why it should not be clear about the butchery of unborn babies is another matter. But the fact is that the public mind does not seem to be clear about it. In consequence, abortion is legal in some countries.

This serves to highlight another distinction, namely, the distinction between what is right and what is possible. Often it is not possible to do what is right: one finds oneself stopped by the entire community, so to speak. Anyone who attempted to stop a woman from having a legal abortion, would find arrayed against him all the power of the state, all the machinery of the forces of law and order.

No one does right in doing what is morally evil. Which is to say that no one can claim any real and true right in the strict sense of the term to what is morally evil. The legal right to morally evil behaviour simply means two things: one, that the state will not stop you from doing it: and two, that the state will stop anyone from stopping you from doing it. Impunity and immunity — that is all a legal right amounts to.

The prevailing culture, then, may confer a legal right. Prevailing, that is, the culture generally accepted and lived by in a given territory or community. People behaving, in accord with the prevailing culture enjoy impunity, that is to say, they are not liable to punishment for such behaviour. They also enjoy immunity, that is, they are in principle free from any interference that would hinder such behaviour.

But culture has no power to transform moral evil into moral good; at least not if the natural law which defines the moral character of human behaviour and is the immediate ground of human rights, is independent of man. Culture is a creation of man; the natural law is not. Indeed, man is himself subject to the natural law. By the same token, the culture which he creates is likewise subject to the natural law. As a matter of fact, one of the criteria of the worth and excellence of a culture is the extent to which it incorporates true morality and fosters moral rectitude in the people. And one of the clearest indices of the decadence of a culture is the individual and the public immorality which it sanctions, or at least condones.

A fifth question: What of the non-prevailing cultures? The minority cultures. Do they have the right to exist?



There are three major possibilities here.

The first one is the case where the minority culture is, at least in some of its essential elements, inconsistent with basic human rights. Observe that I am not speaking of the accidental, but of the essential features of the culture. Likewise, I am not referring to the minor or secondary human rights, but to the primary ones. Inconsistency means that the two cannot coexist. One has to choose between the two.

There isn't much of a choice, is there? The choice is obvious. Man and his rights come ahead of culture. Indeed, respect for culture is grounded on and flows from respect for man and for human rights. For, when all is said and done, what is culture but a human right? Culture is man's right to cultivate and develop himself, and consequently to be what he has made out of himself. But just as no man has the right to develop himself at the expense of others by trampling on their rights, so no man has the right to exist or to live a life that is the denial of the rights of others. Respect for man and his rights is the root of the respect for anything that is in any way human. Any culture that does not respect man and human rights has cut itself off from its own roots.

On the other hand, any law worthy of the name must safeguard human rights. No law can condone, much less sanction, the infringement of basic human rights, without transforming itself into an instrument of institutionalized injustice. Violators of human rights should not be allowed to get away with it by hiding behind the skirts of "culture". I have already remarked that one of the criteria of a culture's worth is whether or not, and to what extent, it fosters moral rectitude and human rights. The elimination of those features that are inconsistent with human rights does not impair, but rather improves the culture. Head-hunting may be esteemed among primitives as a token of personal valour, or of commitment to one's own tribe. But surely there are better and more mature ways of demonstrating personal courage, and surely the inability to see beyond the tribe to a common humanity indicates a very parochial limitation of mind. These things might come naturally on the lower rungs of culture, but one would expect them to be outgrown and discarded by any people who had climbed higher along the paths of culture.

However, the law and its application is one thing; the manner how the law is applied is another thing. The neces-

sary amputation of a gangrenous leg can be done on a carpenter's workbench, with a saw and without anesthesia, or it can be done with all the facilities of a modern operating room. One can apply the law with total lack of compassion, or one can apply it with compassion and understanding of the offender's situation. One thing is the hardened criminal who has conditioned himself through his own criminal actions to the infringement of the law; another thing is the offender who, through circumstances beyond his control, finds himself preconditioned to break the law. The culture into which one is born is a preconditioning of intellect, will, and emotions and attitudes. Firmness on the part of the law which represent the society, has to be wedded to compassion and a process of education that will enable the offending minority to reach a higher level of culture.

I need not tell you that the evolution of culture is a slow process. It is not accomplished overnight, nor over a generation or two, and it is accompanied by a lot of frustrations and pain on both sides. One major frustration and pain is that, no matter how justified the repression, no matter how compassionate its application, there is no guarantee that it will produce the hoped — for improvement. Repressive measures can as easily be counterproductive and engender nor enlightenment but obsession, not improvement but rebellion.

The second possibility is the case of a minority culture that is inconsistent, not indeed with basic human rights, but with the culture of the majority.

This inconsistency can manifest itself in different ways. For instance, it might present itself in the guise of religious intolerance, as that which drove the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World; or it can make stubborn capital out of religious differences, as in the continuous tension between Belfast and the Irish Republic. At times it takes on the form of racial prejudice, as between Whites and Blacks, or between Gringos and Chicanos. Or it might appear in the form of opposed political options, as in the case of monarchists vs. republicans, or communism vs. democracy. At other times it surfaces as contrary social institutions: polygamy is sanctioned by Islam, whereas Christianity allows only monogamy. In the U.S., the Union abolished slavery, while the Confederacy decided to stick to it. Finally, the inconsistency might appear simply as a minority bid for independence from the majority. This is the case of

the Basques seeking to secede from Spain; it is also a not altogether settled issue in the case of the Bansa Moro in our own country.

Let us assume no violation of human rights. In that case, religious convictions, racial identity and traditions, political options, social institutions, freedom and independence — all these things considered per se are legitimate objects of choice and endeavour. Consequently, there ought to be, in principle, a margin of freedom in pursuit of their realization. The only thing left to be considered is the manner in which these objectives are to be achieved, because the manner in which they are pursued might infringe on the rights of others, whether as individuals, or as a collectivity. One such manner is armed conflict, and even still more, indiscriminate terrorism. Armed conflict could still be justified in some cases as a necessary means to resist and repel unjustly inflicted violence; but not as a positive, let alone the main instrument for achieving one's purposes. On the other hand, indiscriminate terrorism is, in my view, altogether unjustifiable.

The alternative to armed conflict is dialogue and negotiation. What we have here is not a conflict between what is right and what is wrong. It is not even a conflict between right and right. I think it is rather a conflict between what is right and what is *possible*. Here are two cultures on a collision course. One way out is for them to pursue their separate paths. But that is not possible. Why not? For any number of reasons. For instance, the geography will not allow it: the land and its resources cannot support two independent communities. Or history and tradition will not allow it. Or the psychological climate and temper will not allow it.

It is not possible. No; not in the present, not *now*. But later... who knows? And that is where the challenge lies. The impossible is in the present; but the present is not unchangeable. The possible lies in the future, and there might be some way of accelerating its coming. That is the challenge: to institute the changes that are possible now, to find options that are possible now, which will bring the desired future that much closer. Just what these changes and options are, and how they are to be initiated remain to be discovered by the interested parties. They will need to sit down together and talk it out among themselves. That is the challenge that must be met by dialogue and negotiation.

However, this dialogue should not remain confined to the stratosphere of government and highly placed figures. It must also take place on the grassroots levels; for what is important, even indispensable, is that the two cultures, the two peoples should get together and get to know and understand one another. The participants must bring to the dialogue vision, imagination, goodwill, sincerity, patience, humour, and flexibility. Vision and imagination should serve to eliminate parochiality of interests and see beyond to the broader common concerns and take the pulse of each other's feelings and worries. Goodwill and sincerity should dispel suspicion and distrust, the mere shadows of which are deadly to all efforts at approachment. Irritants and friction are unavoidable, but patience and humour should provide effective counteraction. Finally, flexibility should soften stubbornness and pave the way to the exploration and acceptance of reasonable alternatives.

*(To be continued next issue)*

# HOMILIES

**FEBRUARY - MARCH 1981**

**By**

**Fr. Herman Mueller, S.V.D.**

## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

Today's liturgy speaks about the poor: "In your midst I will leave a humble and lowly people" (first reading) Zephaniah had foretold. The sensational, revolutionary news of the Sermon on the Mount is: "Blessed are the poor" (gospel). The Corinthians had to admit that the majority of them came from the lower class. God had chosen what is weak by human standards (second reading).

### **FIRST READING: ZEPHANIAH 2:3; 3:12-13**

Zephaniah (Sophonias) is one of the least known and least used Old Testament prophets. He is only once cited in the New Testament (Mt. 13:41). He prophesied during the reign of the reforming king Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and his book is probably composed ca. 630. Since the reform of Josiah came after the irreligious years of king Manasseh (687-642 B.C.), Zephaniah was telling his people: "Do penance! Fight against sin!" This message he was underlining by picturing the Day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:1-2:3). This first part of the book illustrates this day of darkness and judgment for Israel. From here the medieval hymn "Dies irae" in the Requiem Mass borrows heavily. The second part of the book contains prophecies against pagan nations (Zeph. 2:4-15) and the third part (Zeph. 3:1-20)



threatens Jerusalem because of her sins (3:1-8) and ends with a bright outlook on the future after all: the kingdom of God (3:9-20): A remnant will enter this kingdom, a people humble and lowly (3:13). These same humble people were already addressed in 2:3: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth!" Only humble and righteous people will escape the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah is often called the prophet of the Day of the Lord. But one has to add that his other contribution to Old Testament religious thought is his emphasis on God's concern for the *Anawim*, or poor, an idea which will be taken up in the first beatitude in today's gospel.

### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 5:12a

The gospel of Matthew is constructed in a chiastic form, where the first part corresponds with the last, the second part with the second last etc. Narrative sections prepare the seven sermons (3:8-12; 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25; 28:18-20). The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) is the second of these seven sermons. Luke has the same sermon, but much shorter (Lk. 6:20-49). Neither of the two versions of the Sermon on the Mount brings the very words of Christ; each evangelist selected and composed according to his outlook on Christ and the need of his hearers (readers). But by and large Matthew comes closer to what Jesus probably said than Luke, although both are beautiful in their own way. Luke, omitting dealing with the Jewish law (he wrote for non-Jews who were not interested in the Mosaic law) came up with the theme: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Matthew however lets Jesus be confronted with the question what he thinks about the Mosaic law and lets Jesus answer: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come, not to abolish them, but to fulfill them" (Mt. 5:17). And thus his content of the Sermon on the Mount is this justice of which the Mosaic Law speaks which is perfected by Christ. And the theme is: "Be you perfect (just) as your Father in heaven is perfect (just)" Mt. 5:48. There are four parts of the Sermon on the Mount: 1. The new justice is superior to the old, perfecting, not opposing the old law (Mt. 5:17-48). 2. The new justice is not theatrical (as Pharisees were) but internal (Mt. 6:1-18). 3. The new justice demands a heart and will completely surrendered to the Father (Mt. 6:19-34). 4. Advices for the new justice in action (Mt. 7:1-27).

A head of above main parts of the sermon goes an introduction (Mt. 5:3-16) which speaks 1. about the basic qualities of the members of the kingdom and tells us who is a member (Mt. 5:3-12) and 2. about the task of the leaders of the kingdom (Mt. 5:13-16). The gospel of today is taken from this first part of the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount.

Luke also speaks about the beatitudes (Lk. 6:20b-23), but he has only four beatitudes; on the other hand, he has four corresponding woes which we do not find in Matthew. A form critical study of the beatitudes in Mt and Lk shows that in the original source which both evangelists used, were only four beatitudes and no woes. Mt added four beatitudes and Lk four woes corresponding to the first four beatitudes. (Mt. 5:11-12, although introduced with "blessed" is not a ninth beatitude, but only an extension of the eighth in 5:10).

Here is the probable original form of the (four) beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the sorrowing, for they will be consoled.

Blessed are those who hunger, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are you, if they revile you,  
if they persecute you,  
if they say everything bad against you on my account

Be glad and rejoice over it, for your reward will be great in heaven, for that is the way they persecuted the prophets who went before you.

As one can see, these four beatitudes are revolutionary; whereas the remaining four (which only Mt has: 1. blessed are the gentle, 2. blessed are the merciful, 3. blessed are the single-hearted, 4. blessed are the peacemakers) are more "ordinary", idealizing the "small virtues" in life, which make life beautiful, and which everybody, even a non-Christian would admit as desirable. Nobody, however, would dare declaring poor, mourning, hungry people blessed, and even less those who are persecuted. It can be only because with Christ's arrival things have changed.

Trito-Isaiah (Is. 61:1-2) had foretold: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor... to comfort all who mourn." This now is true in the person of Christ, with his coming. And thus Christ can call

the poor, the sorrowing, the hungry blessed; all three make up one group. They are called blessed not so much because of their internal disposition, their openness to God's grace which is caused by poverty (this is true but is not the original idea), but because of God's disposition towards them. The beatitudes are first of all God's free gift, his grace, which is present before man responds. In the Old Testament God undertakes to guarantee the rights of persons who cannot protect themselves by their own means. The poor, sorrowing and hungry are called blessed, not because of their poverty as such, but because of God's justice, which is on their side, their condition is going to change with the dawning of the kingdom of God. God is on the side of the poor, and with Christ here present God is here.

The beatitudes promise inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, consolation and satisfaction. The second and third beatitude speak of a possession in the future, they will be consoled, they will be satisfied) and thus also the first beatitude is (fully) only eschatological: The kingdom of heaven *is* already for the poor, since God is king already now, but they *will* experience it *fully* only later.

The fourth beatitude is different from the other three and was probably not spoken by Christ in connection with the Sermon on the Mount but only later when one clearly could see that Christ was going to be rejected and thus also any follower of Christ. But the fourth beatitude is equally or paradoxical and revolutionary as the first three and expresses even more clearly why one can call somebody blessed who according to human standards is at a disadvantage: it's because of Christ. Blessed, however is not anybody who is persecuted, but only those who are persecuted for Christ's sake.

Luke still more clearly than Matthew addresses the materially poor. Matthew, however, adds already a moral attitude, a disposition on the part of the hearers which is required, not just God's benevolence. And thus the first beatitude reads: Blessed are the poor *in spirit*. And the third beatitude reads: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst (to thirst is added probably by Mt to the original form of the beatitude) *for righteousness*. Before Mt wrote his gospel, the community had experienced that God's grace and justice is certainly the most important thing, yet it also depends on our cooperation. This tendency to speak about our share in God's action we see also elsewhere, e.g., in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:13-23 par), in which Christ certainly spoke about the irresistible power of the word of God: It will have success in spite of all obstacles

and bring forth fruit. Later the Christian community stressed more the idea that it also depends on the soil, i.e. on our own cooperation if the seed will bear fruit.

One could preach about different parts of the beatitudes: the original ones and the ones added by Mt. But since the readings of today obviously speak about the poor, it is preferable to restrict the homily to these poor.

## HOMILY

### BLESSED ARE THE POOR

1. Somewhere in the middle of his preaching career in Galilee Jesus delivered one of his most important speeches: the Sermon on the Mount. The gospels are not stenographical reports of the words and deeds of Christ, but are pieces of catechetical instruction, *kerygma*, selected and redacted by each evangelist according to his view on Christ and the needs of his readers (hearers). Accordingly, Matthew writing for Christians coming from Judaism presented the new and more perfect justice of Christ (Mt. 5-7), superior to the justice of old. And thus most pericopies are introduced with: "You have heard... but I tell you." And the sum total of the Sermon on the Mount is this: "Be you perfect (just) as your Father in heaven is perfect (just)" (Mt. 5:48). Luke, writing for Christians coming from paganism who had no idea about the Mosaic law, omits all sections dealing with the law and arranges the remaining material (just thirty verse, Lk. 6:20-49) around the theme: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36).

2. By way of introduction, or if one wants, by way of overture, the beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-13; Lk: 20b-23) speak about the members of the kingdom and thus speak about those who are more just than the Pharisees, are merciful as the Father is merciful, i.e. the poor. Poor, sorrowing, hungry people is one and the same class and we do not have to ask for exact distinctions between them. Jesus probably said: Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Trito-Isaiah had already spoken about these poor to whom the Messiah would bring the good tidings: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted...

to comfort all who mourn" (Is. 61:1-2). This prophecy was now fulfilled in Christ's preaching. And thus he could call the poor blessed. Initially in his person the kingdom of God was here, was at hand, although the full revelation would only come step by step.

3. Each evangelist took this beatitude and understood it his way: Luke says: Blest are you poor; the reign of God is yours" (Lk. 6:20). That means "you actually materially poor". Luke does not bless poverty as such. But as so often in Luke, tables change: the *dives* was rich on earth, he will be destitute in the life hereafter. Lazarus was poor, he lives with Abraham in the life hereafter (Lk. 16:19-31). But God is on the side of the poor, he is the protector and the defender of them. He assumes this role in virtue of the justice which is characteristic of him.

Matthew, however specifies: "Blest are the poor *in spirit*, the reign of God is theirs" (Mt. 5:3). That means: (1) People who bow before God and expect everything from him, (2) people whose poverty is so oppressive that they even suffer internally and are almost dried up so that they can only turn to the Lord, and even more (3) people who are willing to take poverty upon themselves, though they have possessions. In short, people who are detached from all inordinate attachment to riches, although they may have riches.

4. Both versions, the one of Mt and the one of Lk, are inspired and thus true, although both may not be the very words of Christ. But how can both be inspired and true: the one which says: Blessed are the actually poor people (Luke) and: Blessed are the poor in spirit, i.e. those who are detached from inordinate attachment to riches, although in reality they may be rich. The answer seems to be: All other things being equal, the man who is actually poor has an easier time to be detached from all inordinate attachment to riches than a man who is actually rich. And this truth is demonstrated by the pericope of the ideal rich young man who came to Christ and wanted to be perfect but could not since he could not give away all his possessions and follow the Lord (Mk. 10:17-27 par). This young man is a real idealist. He has observed all the commandments so that the Lord looks at him with love (a rare expression) and says: "There is one thing more you must do. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor; you will then have treasure in heaven" (Mk. 10:21). The result is: This is asking too much of the young man. "He went away sad, for



he had many possessions" (Mk. 10:23) the evangelist adds. Jesus draws the conclusion: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God... It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:23.25). The apostles are completely overwhelmed by Christ's remark and say: "Then who can be saved" (Mk. 10:26) as if to say: "Then maybe not even we have a chance to be saved." But Christ does not take back his statement. On the contrary, he can only insist and add: "For man it is impossible but not for God. With God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:27).

Some have tried to soften the expression "eye of a needle" saying: this means a small side door next to the big city gate which at night was open when the big city gate was closed. Through such a small side door a camel could perhaps pass with some difficulty. But obviously, this explanation is not correct; one can see it from the reaction of the apostles. Certainly, this is a literary form which one does not have to take literally, but it obviously means: It is very difficult for a rich man to go to heaven because he is too much attached to his riches and this young man in question was.

5. It is true, one can be rich and yet be poor in spirit, i.e. detached from in-ordinate attachment to riches. But as the pericope of the rich young man shows, this is not easy. It needs God's special grace. We all know from experience that there are generous people among the rich and among the poor. But percentage wise most generous people are to be found among the poor, not the havenots but those who feel the pinch. The more a person has the more he wants to have.

And thus, although Christ blesses the poor not because of poverty as such but because God is on the side of the poor; it is after all true that for many poverty causes a person to be more open to God, to expect great things from him and not from oneself, and this can be another reason why they are blessed. How often in life do things which seem to be a disaster turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

We also know how often people of an affluent society become luke-warm and indifferent toward God and religious values.

6. Nothing is said with all this about the goodness or need of a social reform, of an equal distribution of goods. Christ hardly ever spoke about this, although nobody will deny the need of it. But for the Lord this was not of prime importance.

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

February 8, 1981

"You are the light of the world", Christ tells his disciples and us today (gospel). Our light shall rise in the darkness, especially works of charity (first reading) and by proclaiming Christ crucified (second reading) in the power of the Spirit.

**FIRST READING: ISAIAH 58:7-10**

The first reading is taken from Third Isaiah (Is. 56-66) (ca. 538-510 B.C.), addressed to the Jews returned from exile. The first enthusiasm was soon spent; the expected salvation did not come as fast as some had hoped for. Thus the anonymous prophet in the first part (Is. 56:1-59:20) points out the difficulties and obstacles to salvation. Thus in 58:1-59:15a he singles out: Salvation does not come yet because of mere external piety and especially not because of sins. God wants sincere piety and charity (58:1-14). After the return, the Jews even fasted when commemorating different days of the past. But that is not enough for God. They fasted only to quarrel and to fight (58:4). God tells them: "Is this not the fasting I wish: unleashing those bound unjustly... sharing your bread with the hungry..." With this introduction we hear this reading in Lent (Friday after Ash Wednesday): True fasting consists in charity. But the preceding question in the Biblical text ("Is this the manner of fasting I wish?" (Is. 58:5) is omitted in today's first reading since we are not in the Lenten fast but in the season after Epiphany. Thus the theme is: Christian life is an epiphany of God's love for man. Christ's light is shining to all men if we feed the hungry (58:10) and, what is similar, satisfy the afflicted (Is. 58:10).

That these works of charity (Is. 58:7-8 and 58:9-10) are like God's light shining in the darkness are an epiphany is clearly underlined by the two-fold statement after each series of works of charity: "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn" (58:8). "The light shall rise for you in the darkness" (58:10).

**READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 5:13-16**

Last Sunday we started with the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12) showed us the basic qualities of the members of the kingdom. The gospel of today speaks about

the task of the leaders of the kingdom (Mt. 5:13-16). The formal structure is similar to that of Mt. 16:17-19: The mission of Peter and of the disciples suppose a similarity of condition.

## Mt 5:(11-12) 13-16

(1) *benediction*

11-12 Blest are you  
when they persecute you...

(2) *new name (function)*

13-15 You are the salt of the  
earth.

You are the light of the  
world.

(3) *commission*

16 Your light must shine  
before men.

## Mt 16:17-18

(1) *benediction*

17 Blest are you,  
Simon Son of John

(2) *new name (function)*

18 You are "Rock"

and on this rock...

(3) *commission*

19 I will entrust you the keys  
of the kingdom of heaven.

From this follows that the disciples are the recipients of the beatitudes, and the disciples who are called the salt of the earth and the light of the world are none other than the poor and powerless (persecuted) to whom the beatitudes are addressed. The disciples are (1) the salt of the earth and (2) the light of the world. And since they are this (3) they shall let their light shine before men.

1) *You are the Salt of the Earth*

Mt. 5:13-16 as it stands is a composition of Matthew, for the single sayings about the salt we find in another context in Luke (Lk. 14:34f) and Mark (Mk. 9:50), and so the word about the light (Lk. 11:33; a second time in Lk. 8:16; Mk. 4:21). What salt is for the earth the disciples are for mankind. The salt and the disciples must season, preserve, stimulate. (Details see in the homily).

If the salt goes flat (NAB), loses its taste (RSV), becomes tasteless (NEB), how can one restore its flavor (NAB), its saltiness (RSV, NEB)? One may ask: Can salt ever get flat, lose its salinity? Some will answer: Usually it does not, but in Palestine it could because (1) Salt was of poor quality and had additional ingredients of magnesium, lime (chalk) remains of dried plants which would remain as useless rest when the salt was dissolved by water. (2) Others think of a custom of ancient Semites, as Arab bakers are sometimes still doing,

of covering the floor of their ovens with slabs of salt to promote the combustion of poorly burning fuel like dried camel dung. After several years the catalytic effect of the salt wore out and it was thrown into the street.

Others, however, would say, the application of the saying shines through and does not really apply to the salt, but to the disciples. This seems to be plausible if we see the word used; literally we read: "But if the salt becomes foolish (*moranthē*)": To become foolish is true more with the disciples than with the salt. When a disciple does not come up to his distinctiveness, to his vocation, he is useless and shall be cast out. This is a technical term for the judgment of God (Mt. 7:6; 8:12; 22:13; Lk. 21:24).

### 2. *You are the Light of the World*

Meaning of light is to be seen, to light. Thus function of the disciples is to illuminate by their preaching and by their example, by their good deeds. One places a light on a stand, not under a bushel basket that it really can shine. The lamp in Palestine was like a sauce-boat filled with oil with the wick floating in it. Since it was not easy to rekindle a lamp in the days before the matches existed, normally when people went out for a short time, for safety's sake, they took the lamp from its stand (which would be not more than a roughly shaped branch of wood) and put it under a earthen bushel measure, so that it might burn without risk until they came back.

### 3. *You must shed light for men*

What the disciples are by their call, by Christ's grace, they shall also try to live. They will let their light shine by doing good works. These good works they shall do not in order to be seen by men (Mt. 6:1.16.18; 23:5.28), but that people will glorify God and invoke him as Father.

## HOMILY

### YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH, YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

1. When Christ delivered his magna charta, the Sermon on the Mount, it was something revolutionary to start with: "Blessed are the poor... Blessed are those who are persecuted

for my name's sake. Who would ever call a poor man, a persecuted man blessed! Yet, with the arriving of Christ things have changed. What normally is a disadvantage can become an advantage because with Christ God is on the side of the poor, the persecuted for his name's sake and because poverty can make a person more open to God. With these beatitudes Christ addresses in the first place his disciples. But these beatitudes are valid for all Christians.

2. In the passage (Mt. 5:13-16) that follows the beatitudes, our Lord outlines the duties of his disciples by a three fold simile: They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world and a town on a hill. The point of comparison between the second and third simile is pretty much the same (and thus one could reduce them to one): light and town on a hill will be seen. Pliny said already: "Nihil utilius sale et sole" (Hist. nat. XXXI 102) "Nothing is of greater benefit (to the whole body) than salt and sun". No life is possible without salt and sun (light).

3. *Salt* the disciple shall be. Sir. 39:26 tells us: "Chief of all needs for human life are water and fire, iron and salt."

a. Salt *flavors* things, makes food tasty. One only has to think about people who live on a diet and are not allowed to use salt and know how tasteless every single bite is, how sickening. People take to food because it tastes well, because it is salted just perfectly.

We take to Christianity if we experience joyful Christians, disciples, who radiate Christ and make Christian values credible, and attractive. Yet, there is always the possibility that we take the flavor out of life by not coming up to our call, by not being a full-fledged Christian.

b. Salt *preserves* food, keeps things from going bad and rotten. It averts decay and putrefaction. Meat is a dead body and will, left to itself go bad. But salt preserves it and keeps it fresh. When we think of salt, we often think of this anti-septic influence.

There are certain people in whose company it is easy to be good. And there are people who do not keep up standards, who easily tell double-meaning or even doubtful, ambiguous stories which one would not dare telling in the presence of the first group of people. By our mere presence we must defeat corruption and make it easier for other people to be good.



c. Salt is often equated with *purity* because of its whiteness. It comes from the sun and the sea.

Christians must have high standards. They must be honest and diligent in work and very conscientious. They must hold up the standards of purity in speech, conduct and thought.

d. Salt is kept in jars, big and small ones. It has its own entity and identity. And only thus it will be preserved. But salt does not make sense if it is kept in jars. It wants to be used, it shall season and preserve things.

A disciple is called by Christ to be with Him, to be separated and different from others. And yet he shall not leave the world to itself and stay in seclusion. Rather, he must go out and be the one who brings Christ to the world, making life tasty and enjoyable, making life worth living. A Christian must mix with the persons he is supposed to serve and live at the same critically in the sense of having priorities, emphasizing values which are sometimes opposed to what "everybody" says, thinks, and lives.

e. Salt is sometimes used as a *catalyst*: In Arab countries people sometimes cover their ovens with slabs of salt to increase the combustion of poorly burning material, like dried camel dung. The salt does not burn out the dried dung. But without the salt working as a catalyst the dried dung would hardly burn or at least poorly burn.

Christian are such catalyzers. How many a wife has been influencing for the good a husband who was in a key position in politics; whereas she herself remains hidden. How many a cloistered nun has with her prayers before the Blessed Sacrament been a counterpart to all the bad influence in public life.

f. Whatever the reality and possibility of salt becoming tasteless might be, a disciple can lose his identity, his distinctiveness being adulterated by compromise with the world and thus he no longer transforms the world. The Lord will cast out such a Christian because a Christian who does not orientate the world to God is most useless. To be "cast out", however is tantamount to being cast into (eternal) fire (Mt. 13:48,50; 18:8,9).

4. A disciple shall be the *light* of the world. This is a tremendous compliment.

a. After all, there is only one light: Jesus Christ, who said: "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5) as Yahweh was the

light in the Old Testament. "Nations shall walk by your light" (Is. 60:3) refers to Yahweh's light. And as Jerusalem was called to be the light of the Gentiles, so we Christians shall be the light of the world. Deutero-Isaiah tells the Israelites: "I have set you a light to the nations" (Is. 42:6; 49:6). We do not produce our own light, we are not light by ourselves. We can only radiate God's, Christ's light.

b. Light is meant to *be seen*. Houses in Palestine had usually only one small window and thus were very dark. The lamp would be placed on a simple lampstand, consisting of a roughly shaped branch of wood. Only when one would go out for a short time, one would place the light under a bushel measure so that the lamp would go on burning, slowly, without endangering anything and one did not have to rekindle it, which was not so easy in a time without matches. But light makes sense only on a lampstand so that it can enlighten the whole room.

A disciple must be seen. There is no secret discipleship. Christianity must be visible to all men. Our Christian life must be lived everywhere, not just in church. Christianity which stops at the church door is not of much use to anyone. We should be recognizable as Christians the way we dress, the way we work in a factory, in the classroom, the way we play on the playgrounds. Christ said: "You are the light of the world". He did not say: "You are the light of the Church."

b. A light is a *guide*. We are so used to street lights that we hardly would find our way without them. We need lights in corridors of big institutions or hospitals so that they are burning all night. On the estuary of most rivers lights mark the channel for the ships to sail in safety.

Christians must be such a light showing people the way. Many do not have the courage to take a stand unless somebody takes that stand first. We all know how helpless we are during an unexpected brown-out or even more during a complete and long blackout as the one in New York not too long ago. We Christians must be shining examples of where to go and what to do.

c. In times of danger we need *warning* lights, which tell us to halt because of an impending danger. How many accidents would happen without these red lights, and how many accidents happen, if these warning lights do not function properly.

A Christian must warn sometimes. Of course, our warnings must be given with love, embracing a person; not in anger, irritation, and criticism, condemning people. It would be too bad if somebody would tell us later: "I would never be in this situation in which I am now, if you would spoken in time."

5. *Let your light shine before men!*

a. What we are by our call, by essence as Christians, i.e., salt and light, we shall try to be fully. Become who you are!

a. Men are to see our good deeds. Good can be in Greek *agathos* = good in quality, and *kalos* = good, winsome, beautiful, attractive. The last expression is used in our text. Christianity, therefore, must win over people; it must be attractive. But we all know some Christians who by their brand of "goodness", which is hard, cold, and austere rather repel other people instead of charming them and making our religion a lovely thing.

b. Our good deeds shall draw attention to God, not to ourselves. Our good works must not be theatrical. Goodness which is conscious, which draws attention to itself is not the Christian goodness. A Christian never thinks of what he has done, but of what God has enabled him to do. He never tries to draw the eyes of men to himself but to God. Then they will glorify the Father in heaven.

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(February 15, 1981)

Christ did not come to abolish the Law but to bring it to perfection, make it a new law, a more perfect law in continuity with the old one (gospel). We can observe it since we are created free (first reading). The second reading, as usual, has a theme of its own: Paul preaches a wisdom after all: Christ crucified, who is power and wisdom for those who accept the message. But only the Holy Spirit could tell us that this is wisdom.

### FIRST READING: SIRACH 15:15-20

One would better start the first reading with Sir. 15:11. Here we have the clearest statement of the Old Testament on man's free will. It's rather optimistic: Man can do everything. And thus somebody would be inclined taking it as a Pelagian

statement. But from the context we see that the author wants to exonerate God from all responsibility for sins in this world. Nobody can say that evil and sin are all God's fault, for he made us men that way. On the contrary, God created man free. We can serve him and we can refuse to serve. He did not want to force us. Creatures make sense only if they do what God has made them for, and that is ultimately to do his will. But whereas nature and animals do this automatically, man should do it freely. Only free service would mean something to God.

But this freedom is at the same time a risk. Giving us a free will God risked that we would abuse our freedom. We can choose life and death (15:16-17). Only those who obey receive life and blessing (Deut. 11:26-28). Life is found in following the path of justice (Prov. 12:28).

God knows all our actions (Sir. 15:18-19). He like those who fear him. Those who obey his will live (Deut. 30:15-20).

To round out the picture of man's free will, one would have to take also Rom. 7:7-25 (limitations imposed upon us by our fallen nature) and Phil. 4:13: "In him who is the source of my strength I have the strength for everything." We can do everything with God's grace.

### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: 5:17-37

Today's gospel starts the main part of the Sermon on the Mount. To have a better grasp of the gospel of today and the next Sundays, here is the

#### A. Introduction: Members of the Kingdom Mt. 5:3-16

1. Basic qualities of the members (who is member?) of the kingdom Mt. 5:3-12 (Lk. 6:20b-23)
2. Task of the leaders of the kingdom Mt. 5:13-16

#### B. Theme: The new justice of the kingdom, i.e. Christian perfection Mt. 5:17-7:27

1. The new justice is superior to the old, perfecting, not opposing the old law (Mt. 5:17-48)

Jesus' attitude toward the Law Mt. 5:17-20

- a. Fifth commandment Mt. 5:21-26
- b. Sixth commandment Mt. 5:27-30

- c. Divorce clause Mt. 5:31f
  - d. Swearing Mt. 5:33-37
  - e. Retaliation Mt. 5:38-42 (Lk. 6:29-30)
  - f. Love of enemies Mt. 5:43-47 (Lk. 6:27f. 31-35)
- Repetition of the theme: "Be perfect as your Father..."  
Mt. 5:48 (Lk. 6:36)

2. The new justice is not theatrical (as Pharisees were) but internal Mt. 6:1-18

General Advice 6:1

- a. Giving alms Mt. 6:2-4
  - b. Prayer Mt. 6:5-8.9-15
  - c. Fasting Mt. 6:16-18
3. The new justice demands a heart and will completely surrendered in confidence to the Father Mt. 6:19-34
  4. Advice for the new justice in action Mt. 7:1-27 (Lk. 6:37-49)
    - a. Don't judge Mt. 7:1-5 (Lk. 6:37-42)
    - b. Do not cast the holy to the dogs Mt. 7:6
    - c. The small gate and the rough way Mt. 7:13-14
    - d. Beware of false prophets Mt. 7:15-20 (Lk. 6:43-45)
    - e. Act, do not merely talk Mt. 7:21-23

#### C. Epilogue:

1. The parable of the building of a house is at the same time a fitting close to the Sermon on the Mount Mt. 7:24-27.
2. Conclusion of the Evangelist Mt. 7:28-29

Today's gospel comprises the general advice (Mt. 5:17-20) and Christ's statement concerning the fifth (Mt. 5:21-26) and sixth commandment (Mt. 5:27-30) divorce (Mt. 5:31f) and swearing (Mt. 5:33-37), almost too much for one reading.

1. *General advice: Jesus' attitude toward the Law* Mt. 5:17-20

The Law of Moses was for any Jew the foundation of his belief in God. Thus when Jesus started preaching he had to take a stand toward the Law. Here at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, introducing the first part, we find one



of the most positive statements about the Law, almost incredibly positive if we remember that Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath law and other laws (Mk. 2:23-3:7), and Paul tells us that justification comes by faith in Christ not by observance of the Law (Gal. 3:5.8.19).

Christ has come not to abolish the law and the prophets (meaning the whole Old Testament), but to fulfill them (Mt. 5:17). He fulfills (1) all the prophecies made about Him by the prophets, (2) the preparatory things, esp. the sacrifices, by the everlasting things, esp. the everlasting sacrifice, (3) the moral laws, by perfecting them, proclaiming the whole depth and width of the Law, stressing the interior spirit, as we will see in the antitheses ("You have heard, but I tell you...").

"Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter of the law (literally a *iōta* (Greek) which is the translation of the Hebrew *yod*, the smallest letter of the so-called square Hebrew alphabet), not the smallest part of a letter (literally *keraia* = horn: figuratively: a hook as part of a letter), shall be done away with until it all comes true" (Mt. 5:18). The end of the world will not come before above complete fulfilment. As one can see, not the Mosaic Law as Mosaic will be observed to the last dot, but the law in as much as it is perfected and deepened by Christ.

"Whoever breaks the least significant of these commands and teaches others to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of God. Whoever fulfills and teaches these commandments shall be great in the kingdom of God" (Mt. 5:19). The Pharisees distinguished between small and big commandments, those of little importance and those of great importance or very serious ones. This classification is done away with, since all laws are an expression of God's will.

The theme of the Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew is this: Be perfect (just) as your Father in heaven is perfect (just) (Mt. 5:48). In Mt. 5:20 the Lord tells his disciples: "Unless your justice surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of God." — About this greater justice of the disciples, the main part of the Sermon is going to speak. In Mt. 5 we have six antitheses (Mt. 5:21.27.31.33.38.43) where Christ compares his doctrine with the Mosaic Law and shows that the new justice perfects the old one. Each antithesis is introduced with: "You have

heard... but I tell you." Today's gospel brings the first three antitheses. The divorce clause is only an Matthean enlargement of the word on the sixth commandment.

2. *Solid, deep-seated anger is tantamount to murder* Mt. 5:21-26

Christ does not annul the Mosaic Law but brings it to perfection. Thus he is not satisfied if somebody abstains from doing a bad act; bad, evil thoughts leading to such acts are actually bad and thus sinful. We must also abstain from such evil thoughts.

The tribunals mentioned could be a gradation: (1) local tribunal, (2) Sanhedrin, (3) God himself (is only insinuated as tribunal by mentioning the punishment: Gehenna, hell) and thus the sins mentioned would be a gradation, too: (1) internal anger (merits the punishment which so far was stated for externally completed murder), (2) small insult ("use abusive language"; literally: "says *raka*" which in free English translation one could render with "stupid", (3) greater insult ("holds him in contempt; literally: "says *môre*" which probably means "fool", "godless". But most likely neither the sins are meant as gradation, nor the punishment. What the Lord wants to say is: Solid, deep-seated anger (not just losing of one's temper) is tantamount to murder.

Mt adds that God does not even accept a sacrifice from somebody who is not at peace with his brother (Mt. 5:23-25).

3. *Lustful look at a woman is tantamount to adultery* Mt. 5:27-30

Following the same procedure as in the fifth commandment, Jesus states that he is not satisfied with mere abstention from a sinful act, here adultery. One must also abstain from sinful thought, here lustful look at a woman with the intention of sinning. This of course is more than finding a woman attractive.

4. *Divorce clause: No separation except in case of concubinage* Mt. 5:31-32.

This was probably not in the oldest form of the Sermon on the Mount, but was added by Mt. Here is not the place to discuss the details. Since in Mk and Lk Jesus simply forbids divorce entirely and this is also the meaning in Mt. 19:10 as

one can see from the reaction of the disciples: "If divorce is completely forbidden, then it is better not to marry," it cannot be an exception here either. Traditional explanation has it that in case of divorce one could have separation from board and bed. But perhaps the best explanation is that Christ here as in Mt. 19 was confronted with the dispute on divorce between the different Rabbinical schools and the Hebrew *zenut* (Greek *porneia*) mentioned here would designate unlawful union of concubinage and thus we would read here: "Every one who sends away his woman — except in the case of concubinage — makes her commit adultery."

#### 5. *No swearing, but reliability in words* Mt. 5:33-37

The new justice requires a deeper, more internal observance of the law, as we saw. Thus laws are not annulled but intensified. On the other hand, the Lord takes back wrong concessions and requires that we are consistent. Rabbis would be satisfied if somebody would swear rightly. And there were different forms and formulas for different oaths. Christ, however, points out that oaths should not be necessary at all, for they prove that we do not trust one another. And who guarantees that we do not make a wrong oath! We should be reliable in our words. A "yes" should be a "yes" and a "no" a "no". More should not be necessary.

As one can see, there would be different approaches for a homily. The second reading would speak about the cross of Christ as the mystery of God's power and wisdom in our life which only the Holy Spirit can teach us. — Another approach would be to unfold one of the different antitheses. Here is one of taking the main ideas of the first reading and the gospel, without getting lost in all the details.

## HOMILY

### FREELY OBSERVE THE LAW OF CHRIST!

1. God has given man the greatest human gift: his freedom. The sun, moon and stars follow definite laws. And so do flowers, birds, and other animals. There is a definite time for sowing and harvesting, a time of migrating and returning for the birds, a time of high and low tide for the ocean. That

law is inborn in nature. We men, however can choose, we can choose to do God's will and we can say: "Non serviam = "I will not serve". God could force us as sometimes bigshorts force their subjects, or at least greatly intimidate them. But he likes nothing more than if somebody freely does His will. For this he even takes the risk that many people will abuse their freedom. Humanly speaking he enjoys more one who freely follows him than he regrets ninety-nine who are stubborn.

2. He has placed an awful responsibility in our hands: to choose between life and death. Life will be ours only if we freely do God's will. After all, freedom is not a freedom from something, but a freedom for something. Freedom is not license but obligation to come up to one's dignity. A decision should not be made easily and hastily without much thinking. The consequence may be death, spiritual death.

3. A free man also is willing to shoulder the responsibility for a given act. If we do something wrong, we also have to have the courage to bear the consequences. But there are enough people who do something wrong, even grievously wrong, but then want to dissociate themselves from the consequences. Often enough they blame somebody else, yes they even blame God: "Why did you give me my freedom! Sirach tells us: "Say not: 'It was God's doing that I feel away; for what he hates he does not do... If you choose you can keep the commandments" (Sir. 15:11.15). But to shun away from one's own responsibility for one's own bad act is as old as mankind. The first man blamed his sin on his wife and would not admit that he did something wrong: "The woman whom you put here with me — she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it" (Gen. 3:12). And the first woman did not want to shoulder the responsibility for her free bad act either: "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it" (Gen. 3:13). Just to mention one example: How many a young man who had premarital relations with a girl leaves the girl alone when she is with child.

4. Laws and regulations are for most of us a burden from which we would prefer to be free. No doubt, there are many regulations which are not really necessary, or are not consistent and thus should be changed or even abrogated. But this is not the case with natural laws which even God can not change.

The responsorial psalm of today is P. 119. It is the longest of all the psalms, an alphabetic acrostic with twenty-two stanzas (since there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

Each stanza has eight lines and each line starts with that particular letter of the alphabet, the first stanza with aleph, the second with beth, etc. Each line speaks about the law and it is interesting to see how many synonyms the psalmist uses to express the greatness and the beauty of God's law. For him it is not a burden, but an instruction, a testimony telling us of God's greatness and love, a way to walk on (everybody knows how difficult it is to travel without roads, a precept (literally: something that pays us a visit so that we can get to know one another), a statute (literally something engraved so that nobody can ever forget it), a commandment (an order that leaves us no doubt what we shall do), a judgement (making the right decisions which are often so hard for us to make), a word which is not just empty, but powerful, accomplishing what it says. These are just the synonyms taken from the first stanza. Can we get so enthused about God's law as this psalmist does?

5. The Lord certainly wanted us to see in the law more than a burden, curbing our freedom. He wanted that we do not observe just the letter. This is what many Pharisees did (certainly not all). After all, they had enlarged the ten commandment to 613 positive and negative commandments and could not do justice to all, a fact which naturally brought about a mere external observance of many regulations. To this Christ could only say: "Unless your justice (perfection) surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20). Or as he puts it positively as the theme of the Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew: "Be you perfect (just) as your Father in heaven is perfect (just)" (Mt. 5:48). Thus the Sermon on the mount unfolds this greater perfection, this greater justice or holiness which the Lord wants us to strive after by observing the law to the smallest dot. We should not ask so much if something is a grave obligation, the transgression of which would be in traditional terminology a "mortal sin" or if something obliges only under pain of "venial sin". It should be enough to know that something is God's will. That greater justice means that Christ intensifies the law. He is not satisfied by a person doing good deeds and avoiding bad ones; the interior attitude which produces good and bad acts is equally (if not more) important. This idea we see unfolded in the fifth and sixth commandment. And wherever the Rabbis made a wrong concession, the Lord takes it back as with the case of swearing.

6. "You have heard... 'You shall not commit murder.' What I say to you is: everyone who grows angry with his brother



shall be liable to judgment" (Mt. 5:21-22). We probably do not have to look for the exact gradation in the gravity of offense (internal anger, saying *raka* = stupid or saying *mōre* = fool) or the gravity of punishment (local tribunal, Sanhedrin, God's tribunal), but what the Lord wanted to impress on us is: Real solid, deep-seated anger is tantamount to murder. We all loose our temper. But this is not what the Lord means here. Rather if somebody does not talk for some months with his wife or her husband, if fellow religious or fellow priests are not on speaking terms for a long time and avoid one another, wherever they possibly can, there is something seriously wrong.

Some people are sympathetic to us at first glance, others we find unsympathetic. This is as such a mere feeling, which we often cannot prove with our cool intellect. And this is as such not moral yet. But it becomes morally wrong, if we do not do something to overcome apathy or even more upcoming anger. "Sin is a demon lurking at your door... Why are you so resentful" (Gen. 4:7.6) God told Cain. But Cain would not listen and try to overcome his resentment against Abel till he finally killed him with his hands. But he had killed him in his mind long before.

7. To be on good terms with our neighbor is for God so important that he does not even want a sacrifice from an angry heart. "Leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:24) we are told. One cannot have God as Father unless we have our neighbors as our brothers.

8. "You have heard the commandment, 'You shall not commit adultery'. What I say to you is: anyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his thoughts" (Mt. 5:27-28) the Lord goes on in the Sermon on the Mount. Again the same radical consistency: We must not only abstain from gravely sinful acts but also from gravely sinful thoughts. Real lustful looks (i.e. with the intention of sinning) are tantamount to adultery. To find a girl, or a Sister, or a seminarian or a priest attractive is nothing wrong, but normal. But we cannot act on that but we must try to disregard it.

9. "You have heard the commandment imposed on your forefathers, 'Do not take a false oath; rather, make good to the Lord all your pledges.' What I tell you is: do not swear at all... Say, 'Yes' when you mean 'Yes' and 'No' when you mean 'No'" (Mt. 5:33-37). Here the Lord takes back a wrong con-

cession of the Pharisees. They were satisfied if somebody swore a right oath. For the Lord, oaths prove that we do not trust one another. We should be reliable in our words. Oaths on public occasions (e.g., before taking office) are a necessary evil, but not the ideal. There is nothing more beautiful than if we know we can rely on a person. He will not deceive us, he will not lie.

10. Remains the question: Can anybody observe God's law as outlined, to the fullest? We saw that Sirach is quite optimistic. St. Paul would be more realistic and admit that he often enough wants to do something good, but does not do it and the bad he does is a puzzle to him (Rom. 7:14-25). Yet he also knows, and that is the answer: "In him who is the source of my strength I have the strength for everything" (Phil. 4:13). The difference between the Old and the New Covenant is this: In the Old Covenant there were laws, but people did not have the strength to observe them. In the New Covenant God has given us also the power to observe his commandments, the Holy Spirit, as already Ezekiel had said: "I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart, so that they will live according to my statutes, and observe and carry out my ordinances; thus they will be my people and I will be their God" (Ez. 11:19-20).

## SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(February 22, 1981)

The liturgy of today speaks to us about love of others, which the first reading formulates with: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The Lord, however surpasses it by demanding: "Love your enemies" (gospel): — The second reading's independent theme is: Boast of no man but boast of the Lord. Only then will there be unity.

## FIRST READING: LEVITICUS 19:1-2. 17-18

The Book Leviticus takes its name from its preoccupation with the duties of the family of Levi and his descendants. It continues the legislation regarding the cult of the Hebrews and their priestly ministry and explains what Israel must do for God and what it must avoid, if it wishes to remain united with

him. There are five parts: 1. The ritual of sacrifices (1:1-7:38), 2. Ceremony of ordination (8:1-10:20), 3. Legal purity (11:1-16:34), 4. Legal Holiness (The Holiness Code) (17:1-26:45), 5. Redemption of offerings (27:1-34).

Today's reading is taken from the Holiness Code. Its name comes from the fact that in these chapters we find regulations for legal holiness in marriage, worship, meals, seasons. Lev. 19 brings various rules of conduct. The Israelites shall be holy because God is holy (Lev. 19:1-2). Then today's reading bypasses all the other rules in ch. 19 and goes directly to the commandment to love our neighbor (Lev. 19:17-18). We shall not bear hatred for our brother in our heart. If he does wrong, we shall reprove him; but we must not sin. We shall not take revenge and bear no grudge against a country man. And, to sum it all up: we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. The way we love ourselves shall be the way and the measure of loving our neighbors.

To be sure, here is only talk about love of our neighbors, of members of the same clan or people. Nothing is said about strangers or about enemies.

### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 5:38-48

The gospel of today brings the fifth and the sixth (last) antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. Christ proclaims the new justice which is more perfect than the old one, being not satisfied with abstention from bad acts; taking back wrong concession and being consistent all the way.

#### 1. *No retaliation Mt. 5:38-42*

##### a. *Fifth antithesis (Mt. 5:38-39a)*

Mt. 5:38 ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") states the *jus talionis* which we find in the Old Testament: "If injury ensues, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:23-25). "Anyone who inflicts an injury on his neighbor shall receive the same in return. Limb for limb, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Lev. 24:19-20). "Do not look on such a man with pity. Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot" (Deut. 19:21).

The real intention of these Old Testament texts was to restrict vengeance, not to incite to it. It was a limitation upon the custom of unrestricted revenge, which not only permitted, but required an individual, a family, a clan, to avenge not only upon the person of the wrong doer, but also upon all connected with him. The above texts are, therefore, an advance towards mercy. Matthew, however understands it as an incitement to vengeance so that the antithesis becomes even stronger. Against the *lex talionis* the Lord places in Mt. 5:39 the command to renounce resistance: "Offer no resistance to injury". Evil is not overcome as long as we fight it off with similar means. Not only the *lex talionis* but all human legal systems are based on the principle that punishment must correspond to the crime. There must be proportion and restitution. Christ, however, questions all (human) law in as far as it is based on the idea of strict retribution corresponding to the wrong. Legality should not be the basis for our relations with our fellowmen, but love. Evil remains according to the Lord, and keeps its strength as long as the injured retaliates. but it loses its strength when it is absorbed by a man who renounces all forms of satisfaction and revenge. As Paul puts it: "Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good" (Rom. 12:21)!

#### b. Illustrations (Mt. 5:39b-42)

This spirit of not taking revenge, of not resisting injury is then illustrated by Matthew with four examples. They are extreme cases, which illustrate the principle of not taking revenge. They are not regulations to be literally carried out, but want to recommend the spirit. They are no regulations for public life either. These sayings are illustrations of a new way of dealing with people rather than regulations for it. But if one approaches a crisis with this spirit (of not resisting evil) one will find a way in concrete acting.

(1) "When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other" (Mt. 5:39b).

Here we have the first attack on our natural tendency to put self-protection first. It does not want to foster evil and injustice and a burdensome passivity. Striking somebody on the right cheek was considered especially contemptuous, since it can be done only with the back of the hand, if it is done by a right-handed man. Thus Jesus wants to say: "Even if a man should direct at you the most deadly and calculated insult, you must not retaliate and you must not resent it."

(2) "If anyone wants to go to law over your shirt, hand him over your coat as well" (Mt. 5:40).

A very poor man usually had only one cloak or outer garment. This was also used as a blanket at night. Of the shirt or tunic, *chiton*, the long, sack-like inner garment made of cotton or of linen, the poorest man would have a change. Of the above cloak Ex. 22:25-26 stated: "If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else does he have to sleep in?" The same statement we find again in Deut 24:12f. Jesus, however, says: If a man sues for your shirt, which he can quite legally take from you, give him your cloak too, even though he has no legal right to take it from you. Literal execution of this advice would lead to nudism. But again, it's the principle which the Lord wants to illustrate by such an extreme example which is at the border of the ridiculous. It wants to underline the radical demand of not looking for revenge, of not insisting on one's right, but on one's duties.

(3) "Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him two miles" (Mt. 5:41).

The third illustration comes from the Persian postal system. Each road was divided into stages lasting one day. At each stage there was food and drink for the courier, water and fodder for the horses, and fresh horses for the road. But, if by chance something was lacking, any private person could be impressed (here the Greek verb *angareuein* is used, going back to that Persian custom of impressing a person into service) into giving food, lodging, horses, assistance, and into carrying the message himself to a stage. In the end the verb *angareuein* was used for any kind of forced impressment into service of the occupying power, also the Romans. (Cf. Mk. 15:21 where Simon of Cyrene is forced by Roman soldiers to carry the cross of Jesus.) Such a practice was quite naturally hated. But Jesus says: Rather than to resent going one mile carrying something, you should carry it two miles. Obviously, the Lord does not want to justify or condone the excesses committed by oppressive regimes, but he stresses again the spirit of not taking revenge, but rather the spirit of love, even love of an enemy.

(4) "Give to the man who begs from you. Do not turn your back on the borrower" (Mt. 5:42).



This fourth illustration is different from the first three. It does not insist on renunciation of all retribution and use of force, of insistence on one's rights and of opposition to coercion. But it insists on non-resistance to the request for gifts and loans. This was already recommended by Deut. 15:7-11: "If one of your kinsmen in any community is in need... you shall not harden your heart... You shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need." It is not quite clear if Mt speaks about "begging" which does not involve return or "borrowing" which does, or if the second half ("do not turn your back on the borrower") means "we should not press someone who has borrowed from us to have it back", which Lk. 6:30 clearly says. In any case, always to be willing to give and to lend is what the Lord recommends.

## 2. *Love your enemies!* Mt. 5:43-48

The first half of verse 43 (You shall love your countryman (neighbor) refers back to Lev. 19:18 as we saw in the first reading. Missing is only: "as yourself", because of the obvious reason that Mt. 5:43 adds: "and hate your enemy". This however one can hardly do as one hates oneself.

The second half of verse 43 ("and hate your enemy") is not found in the Old Testament. On the contrary we find at least two statements that one should love one's enemies: "When you come upon your enemy's ox or ass going astray, see to it that it is returned to him. When you notice the ass of one who hates you lying prostrate under its burden, by no means desert him, rather, raise him up" (Ex. 23:4-5).

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him to drink; for live coals you will heap on his head, and the Lord will vindicate you" (Prov. 25:21-22). These texts refer probably to a personal, not a national enemy.

Thus perhaps Mt summarizes the contemporary attitude which limited the concept neighbor to one's countryman and thus neglected anybody else. Instead of saying: "You shall love your fellow countryman, but you need not love your enemy"; in typical Hebrew way it is formulated as "hate your enemy". (Cf. the formulation of Lk. 14:26: "If somebody does not hate father and mother he cannot be my disciple," where the parallel text in Mt. 10:37 says: "loves father and mother more than me.") In any case, Mt formulates it so sharply again to have a stronger antithesis.

Jesus requires that we love our enemies, not just our friends, neighbors and those who do something good for us (5:46-47). That much everybody does, even pagans and sinners. But to love an enemy is really Christian and only a Christian can do so, since Christ loved us when we were still his enemies (Rom. 5:10); and by doing so we will be sons of God, we will be godlike. (Sons of God: In Hebrew, adjectives are often enough expressed with "son of.., e.g. "son of peace" = peaceful man). God lets his sun shine on good and bad people alike. Loving our enemies our love will also be universal as God's love is. Doing so we are perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect" i.e., coming up to what we are supposed to be, realizing the purpose for which we were created.

## HOMILY

### LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR — LOVE YOUR ENEMY

1. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him," (1 Jn. 4:16) St. John tells us. "If God has loves us so, we must have the same love for one another" (1 Jn. 4:11). It is relatively easy for most people to understand and believe that love makes us godlike because God is love, that a person who loves has all virtues and the one who does not has nothing. Thus James 2:8 calls it the kingly commandment. As bottles of softdrinks come in standard sizes (which for the average drinker is the small size) and king sizes, so virtues can be small and big. Love is a king size virtue. St. Paul tells us in Rom. 13:8: "Owe no debt to anyone except the debt that binds us to love one another. He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,' and any other commandment there may be are all summed up in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. Love never wrongs the neighbor, hence love is the fulfillment of the law. In Col. 3:14 the Apostle compares love with a belt that holds the garment in shape and place so that one does not stumble and fall, stepping on the outer garment, as people had it at that time: "Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect."

2. For most people love means love of one's friends, acquaintances, *neighbors*, members of the same clan and race.

So it was with the Jews. Thus the classical formulation in Lev. 19:18 has the fellow Jew in mind when it states: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." It is relatively easy to be kind and good to somebody who is kind and reciprocates our love. And we can easily fool ourselves so that in the end we do not really love but we do it in order to get something in return. Can we really say, we have done something for the Lord? The Lord tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: "If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? Do not tax collectors do as much? And if you greet your brothers only what is so praiseworthy about that? Do not pagans do as much" (Mt. 5:46-47)? In almost all the instances where the Old Testament speaks about human love, where a person loves another person, not God, it is a fellow Jew, or acquaintance, somebody of his own kind. — Are we inclined to do the same, i.e. to love just our acquaintances, friends and relatives, people of the same clan?

3. The Lord, however extended the concept "neighbor". In the famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) the Samaritan is preoccupied with a Jew, who is not of the same kind; whereas the priest and Levite, being Jews pass by. Neighbor is therefore anybody who crosses my way and needs my help. That can be an employee, that can be the boss, but it can also be somebody of a different race and language.

4. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ goes a big step further. And only here love becomes really Christian: Our enemies become our neighbors. We must *love our enemies*.

a. That mean first: no *retaliation*! Who are these enemies? Hopefully our enemies should be found among those far away from us, not among our relatives, members of our family or our clan. And yet, we know this is not always true. Somebody said jokingly: "God said 'love your neighbor as yourself!' and 'Love your enemies!' because both are one and the same group. So whatever is said in the Sermon on the Mount applies to personal and to national enemies, although in most cases it will refer to personal enemies with whom we get more in contact than with national enemies. We all know from experience how much we hate and resent injustice done to us and we want that justice be restored. That is easily understandable in case of murder of a member of the family. But even then we have to ask ourselves, how much we are interested in the restoration of justice and how much our *ego*, our proud

I is hurt, how much we are just looking for revenge. We can easily fool ourselves and are not satisfied, even after somebody made up for the injustice.

"Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" is still in some places the directive followed. *Katarungan* lets people believe they are obliged to kill the killer of their brother or member of their clan, and everybody has this obligation till "justice" is done. As reasonable as this *lex talionis* was (in the Old Testament) since it restricted the killing and the damage to a minimum: The person who did some damage had to repay the damage in the same degree as he had inflicted it; it becomes dangerous if it means that every member of the clan is obliged to inflict harm not only on the member who did harm but also on his clan members. It becomes a vicious circle.

The Lord did not want to bring a new social regulation with all the details for any given problem and crisis. He wanted to underline the new principle, the new attitude which should guide all our actions and help us find new ways in a given problem. The illustrations which he brings are meant as extreme cases as they hardly occur in life and would, if taken literally almost border on the ridiculous; so if a man who is sued for his shirt would give his coat as well: He would stand there naked.

But we would be mistaken if we would jump to the conclusion too fast that these illustrations must not be taken literally, pointing at the other illustration of turning the other cheek, Christ himself did not follow his own advice for when the servant of the high priest slapped him, the Lord remarked: "If I said anything wrong produce the evidence, but if I spoke the truth, why hit me" (Jn. 18:23). What is obliging all the time is the spirit of not looking for revenge, of not insisting on one's right, if we want to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

We will never destroy violence by violence, but by submitting to violence and hatred with an act of love, not with foolhardiness or disgust or disinterest. Christ accepted the violence of suffering and death and refused retaliation: "Those who use the sword are sooner or later destroyed by it. Do you not suppose I can call on my Father to provide at a moment's notice more than twelve legions of angels" (Mt. 26:52-53)? This is not an advice for an institution, or justification for injustice done.

b. For most of us, this not taking revenge will be an acute problem in small things in practical daily life. "A Christian does not take revenge," we have to tell ourselves when somebody forgot our birthday and we would be tempted to bypass somebody else's special day. Or it might be that somebody has offended us and we do not hand on the needed information for a new job. Or we retaliate for an offense by not recommending a certain application of the offender. Such subtle retaliations are more common than we would want to admit.

c. To love our enemies is *typically Christian*. Pagan religions will not easily require such an attitude. Christ died for his enemies as St. Paul outlines in Rom. 5:10: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son, it is all the more certain that we who have been reconciled will be saved by his life." And his word for forgiveness for those who killed him ("Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing", (Lk. 23:34) has been prayed by many following Christ, starting with Stephen, praying for his murderer Saul that he became a Paul till the archbishop Romeiro of San Salvador who was shot during a Funeral Mass and prayed for his murderers.

d. We shall love (*agapēseis*) our enemies. Perhaps we do not have to press the expression *agapēseis*. Yet it may be more than chance. *Stergein* is the verb used for family love; *eran* means usually love of two fallen in love; *philein* singles out the warmest word for love and means affectionate love; but *agapan* and the Noun *agapē* would have in mind unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodwill, directed by our will. This kind of love the Lord wants us to have for our enemies. It's not the unsought love, the falling in love that comes easy to us, if we just like somebody almost at first sight. But it is the love directed by our will, by our power to love those whom we do not like and who do not like us.

e. We are told to *pray* for our enemies: "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors" (Mt. 5:44). This again is something typical Christian as we saw in above cases. If we would pray for all those whom we do not understand, for all those who hate us, are mean to us, persecute us, things would slowly become different. Who knows how many Sauls have turned into Pauls by the prayer of a Stephen?

f. Only if we love our enemies and pray for them are we perfect as our Father is perfect, because his love is universal. He does not hold back his goodness because somebody does not appreciate it. Rather his sun shines on good and bad people alike (Mt. 5:45).



**EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

(March 1, 1981)

Today we are told: "Trust in the Lord (gospel)! The Lord does not forget us even if a mother could (first reading)." — The independent theme of the second reading is: An apostle is a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God.

**FIRST READING: ISAIAH 49:14-15**

The main intention of Second Isaiah (Is. 40-55) was to encourage the exiles in Babylon. The fact that they were in exile proved only that they had not done God's will, but not that God had forsaken them. On the contrary. God would always remain faithful in spite of man's unfaithfulness. Thus in the first part (Is. 40:1-49:13) the unknown author prophesies the deliverance from Babylon and in the second part (Is. 49:14-55:13) pictures the new salvation for Zion-Jerusalem.

The second part opens with an affirmation that Yahweh never forgot his people (Is. 49:14-50:3). And the first two verses (we should add verse 16 to the first reading) compare God's concern for us with a mother. It is one of the finest passages of the Old Testament and of Scripture as a whole. If Zion said: "The Lord has forsaken me," this is just not true.

"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you" (Is. 49:15). Everybody would admit that it is an anomaly if a mother does not care for her children. It is just against the nature of a mother. And yet, should it ever happen that a certain mother would relinquish her child (we know that such anomalous cases exist), God can never forget us.

And as proof that this is so Isaiah adds (v. 16): "See, upon the psalm of my hands, I have written your name; your walls are ever before me." God has engraved Zion's name and the plan of the city Jerusalem in his hand. Thus, even if he were an absent-minded professor, he could never forget his people.

**READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 6:24-34**

We saw as a topic of the Sermon on the Mount in Mt "the new Christian justice (perfection)". The first part (Mt. 5) developed this new justice as superior to the old, not opposing

it but being more radical and more consistent. The second part shows that this new justice is not theatrical (as many Pharisees were) but internal. And everything depends on this internal attitude with which we do things. Without it, God does not like any act. If this internal attitude is here, God, who sees what is hidden, will take notice, even if the act would be done in secrecy and will reward it. This Mt illustrates with three examples: (1) Alms should be given not to be seen and praised by others (Mt. 6:1-4). (2) We should pray not to be seen and admired but in private. The Father will see it (Mt. 6:5-8). Here Matthew adds the "Our Father" into the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:9-15) which has a clear different point of comparison from the three examples of secret good works, i.e. "When you pray do not use long prayers in order to impress God with the length of your prayers, but make it short; say the essential prayer, the "Our Father". All these parts are omitted in the liturgy of the Sundays. Mt. 6:1-6. 16-18 is used on Ash Wednesday and on Thursday of the 11th Week of the Year; Mt. 6:7-15 on Tuesday of the First Week of Lent and On Thursday of the 11th Week of the Year.

Between above three examples, illustrations that the new justice is something internal, not a show, and ch. 7 Matthew adds a new part, which was not in the original Sermon on the Mount: "The new justice demands a heart and will completely surrendered to the Father (Mt. 6:19/34). Most of these pericopes Lk has in a different and a better context so that scholars conclude, they were added to the Sermon on the Mount by Matthew, not omitted by Luke. Matthew speaks first about the cupidity of riches (Mt. 6:19-24) and then about confidence in God in our needs (Mt. 6:19:24). The gospel contains this second part and the last verse of the first part.

1. *Nobody can serve two masters: God and money* (Mt. 6:24)

Of the passage on cupidity of riches (Mt. 6:19-24) the gospel of today retains only the last sentence. Whatever one may say about money, i.e. that it is neutral as such, that it all depends on us what we are doing with it, Mt in this passage sees rather sceptically. Riches are like treasures which thieves steal and moth destroy (Mt. 6:09-20); we shall not loose our heart at them. Otherwise our eyes do not see clearly (Mt. 6:23). Yes, riches can have power over a man like a master, like a false god. (Mammon here is personified and is a Hebrew word for material possessions.) Instead of being some-

thing entrusted to us, we put our trust in it. And since God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5; 39:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15) he cannot tolerate another god besides him. He is our absolute Lord. And if one uses the picture of lord and slave at that time, one must say: Nobody can be slave of two masters, because a master expects the services of a slave a hundred percent, the whole day. A slave has no free time which he could devote to somebody else. God is such a master and money would be another master; to try to serve both would involve one in a contradiction.

## 2. *The forbidden worry and its cure* (Mt. 5:24-34)

But somebody could object: Material possessions are necessary. How should I make a living? Obviously Mt. 6:24 does not talk about everything concerning money and the Lord knows that we have to have a livelihood, for which we shall care; but we shall not worry. After all, there is a Father who cares for us. The passage unfolded, we get the following ideas:

a. God gave us life, the higher good. He will us give the lesser good too, our livelihood (Mt. 6:25).

b. Birds do not worry, yet God sustains them. We are more important than they are. Why should God not support us (Mt. 6:26).

c. Worries are useless. They cannot make us live one single day longer (Mt. 6:27).

d. The flowers which are more beautiful than the clothes of Solomon and yet wither away so fast tell us that God will take care of us, for we are more important (Mt. 6:28/30).

e. To worry is pagan. We have a Father in heaven (Mt. 6:31-32).

f. We should seek first God's kingdom. Then everything else will be given us also (Mt. 6:33).

g. We shall live one day at a time (Mt. 6:34).

## HOMILY

### TRUST IN GOD WHO CARES FOR US!

1. Everybody who is a head of a family or an institution knows how hard it is to provide the means for daily life, especially now, when prices are going up and the salary does not quite match. And he may spend many a sleepless night, think-

ing how he can make ends meet. And yet, the Lord tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing" (Mt. 6:25). The Lord certainly knows that we are human beings who have to make plans for our life, who have to see to it how we can live, that we have to care. But this is not the same as worry. Worry (*merimnan*) means excessive care, exaggerated care.

2. One reason for this worry could be that money has become a mammon, a god for us, something that takes priority in all our thinking and planning, so that there is hardly any time left to think about God and his kingdom, to think about eternal values. God, however, demands our whole attention and our wholehearted service. "I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God... You shall not worship any other god" (Ex. 20:15; 34:14). The more a person has, the more he thinks he must have; otherwise he could not live. And before a person even knows it, his mind is absent when he prays, when he goes to church; it becomes a mere obligation. And sooner or later that praying may also stop because these material projects are so important and demanding. "Nobody can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24) Christ insists.

3. Another reason for excessive worry is that we do not believe in *God as Father* who knows what we need (Mt. 6:32). About this caring heavenly Father the Sermon on the Mount had already spoken several times: We shall let our light shine, doing good works, that people will believe in the heavenly Father and praise God as Father (Mt. 5:16). Love of enemies was motivated by the fact that God as Father lets the sun rise over good and bad people alike so that by loving our enemies we become as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:45.48). Mt. 6 pictures God as a Father who is interested in us, who sees everything we do, even the most hidden things nobody would notice nor care for and he will be generous in rewarding; our giving of alms which we give in such a way that our left hand does not know what the right hand is doing (Mt. 6:1-4), our prayers, offered in our private room (Mt. 6:5-7), and our unostentatious fasting (Mt. 6:16-18). He takes care of the birds, how much more of us (Mt. 6:26).

Many people certainly have a hard time believing in God as Father because they have never experienced a father in their home when they were little. Too easily the picture of our earthly father we apply to God. Many people see in God a

moody, unpredictable God because their father at home behaved that way. They never felt at home. They often preferred their school or their peers to father and mother. The greater therefore is the obligation for fathers and mothers to be what their name implies.

To worry therefore would be pagan, would be tantamount to not believing that God is our Father (Mt. 6:31-32): "The unbelievers are always running after these things. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need."

4. Isaiah (Is. 49:14-16) even uses a more daring comparison to show that God cares for us, one of the finest in Scripture: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?" Anybody would right away answer: "Of course not, that's against the nature of a mother. Whoever thinks of his mother thinks of her love and care. But realistic as Isaiah is, he thinks there could perhaps be such an unusual mother, who does not care. And thus the prophet continues: "Even should she forget, I will never forget you".

Not satisfied with this, Isaiah uses another picture to demonstrate God's loving care for us: "See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name" (Is. 49:16). Everything is in a name. And if people, teachers, former superiors remember our name still after many years of absence, we are most happy. But we are disappointed, if they do not remember us any more, because we identify this easily with disinterest in us. God, to be sure (humanly speaking) that he will never forget us, has written us in the palms of his hands. So should he for a moment not recall our names, a glance at his palms reminds him who we are. The plans of the city of Jerusalem, that means also the plans for our personal life are engraved in his hands, are of great concern for him.

The Little Flower one evening, after having seen the Orion in the winter sky which she read as a T ran jubilantly home and told her father: "Daddy, my name is written in the sky." She was convinced that she would go to heaven. Our names are not only written in the sky but in God's hands.

5. Going into details to motivate us to have confidence in God, the Lord tells us: God has given us the higher gift: our human life. Being consistent, as he is, he will also give us the less important and less difficult gift: our livelihood. So should



we be discouraged we should remind ourselves that we are born and therefore God will also see us through. That argument is used in Scripture in several key passages. When Job is highly discouraged and does not know how to solve the dilemma that God is just and yet Job has to suffer, although he has not committed any bigger sin, just small ones as we all commit, he finds hope that God will not destroy him in the fact of his birth: "Your hands have formed me and fashioned me; will you then turn and destroy me? Oh remember that you fashioned me from clay! Will you then bring me down to dust again" (Job. 10:8-9)? And then Job describes in a refined way the mystery of conception: "Did you not pour me out as milk, and thicken me like cheese? With skin and flesh you clothed me, with bones and sinews knit me together" (Job. 10:10-11). For Job his birth is guarantee that lastly God will not abandon him.

In a similar way the psalmist (and this Psalm 22 was prayed by Christ on the cross) after he has expressed the deepest sorrow and dereliction anybody could suffer with the words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Ps. 22:1) and a long description of his loneliness, all of a sudden he remembers his birth from his mother and takes the mere existence of his life as a guarantee that God will see him through: "You have been my guide, since I was first formed, my security at my mother's breast. To you I was committed at birth, from my mother's womb you are my God. Be not far from me, for I am in distress, be near, for I have no one to help me" (Ps. 22:10-12).

It is true, the fact that we are born, that God gave us our life is guarantee that he will give us food also.

6. A look at the *birds* and the *flowers* tells us that we are more important than they are. No bird worries. Why should we worry! The flowers are more beautiful than Solomon could ever afford dressing himself and yet they are shortlived. Should God not care for us more (Mt. 6:26-28-30)?

7. Worries are useless. They cannot make us live one day longer, nor make us an inch taller (Mt. 6:27). They are even harmful and may cause us ulcers.

8. The only reasonable thing to do is to live one day at a time. The past is past, the morrow is not in our but in God's hands. He has given us the today to use well.

**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

(March 8, 1981)

Lent was in earlier Christian days preparation for baptism and for reconciliation by public penance to the Church. Other readings were conditioned by the papal station Masses. Much of this has been changed in the new Missal. Yet, the first two Sundays are still meant for penitents; and the third, fourth, and fifth Sunday prepare for baptism, which is administered in water and Spirit (third Sunday of Lent), which is compared to light (fourth Sunday) and to life (fifth Sunday). But by and large the readings form a preparation of the faithful for Easter. Usually the epistles refer to the gospel, but not always. The Old Testament readings (first readings) explain the Old Testament salvation history: sinfulness of mankind (first Sunday), Abraham (second Sunday), Moses (third Sunday), Joshua, David or the exile (fourth Sunday), the New Covenant (fifth Sunday). The epistles expound the believer's participation in Christ's death and resurrection in baptism and in our Christian life. The gospels, finally narrate incidents from the life of Jesus which foreshadow and prepare for his death and resurrection and thus prepare us for the celebration of our redemption at Easter.

God created Man, and this creature was very good. Disorders came only through man's sin by not passing the test (first reading). Through man's sin came death, but through Christ's obedience came righteousness and thus eternal life (second reading). The second Adam passed the test of temptation which the first Adam did not pass and thus is really Son of God (gospel).

**FIRST READING: GENESIS 2:7-9; 3:1-7**

Lent prepares us for Easter and thus for the fact that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification (Rom. 4:25). But why was this necessary? The first reading tells us that man is God's creation, but a fallen creature who cannot blame God for the disorders in his life and in the world.

The Priestly Author (P) informs us in Gen. 1:1-2:a how everything that God made was good. Before he created man he deliberated and then he created him in his image and like-

ness and it was very good (Gen. 1.31). After God created all things and animals (and thus prepared the way) he created man as the climax of all creatures.

The Yahwistic Author (J) in Gen. 2:4b-25 (our first reading is a part of it) makes man the center of creation. Nothing can grow before God created man. In picture language and anthropomorphic features the Yahwist narrates man's creation. Instead of saying: Man consists of body (that one day will decay) and soul (that is spiritual and thus will not die) the Yahwist pictures man as clay which breathes. God places man in paradise and gives him everything necessary for his happiness. And there is the mysterious tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Skipped in today's first reading is the test man has to pass, if he shall go on in lasting happiness: He must not eat from the three of the knowledge of good and evil, that means he must not try to decide for himself what is good and evil but follow God's law.

And then again in picture language the Yahwist describes man's fall, dramatizing his interior struggle as if there had been a serpent (devil) talking to him. (A byproduct of the story is that the author attacks fertility cult, practised under the symbol of a serpent: For these Baal worshippers, life came from sacred prostitution in the Baal shrines. For the Yahwist it comes from God.)

The word "Adam" is used as proper name several times only since Gen. 4:25. In most cases it just means "man", "mankind". Thus we can understand him here as the personification of Everyman and his sin, the sin of us all: The tempter (thus lastly we ourselves) pictures God as jealous, narrow-minded who wants to keep things under his control and deprive us of our liberty. "Is it true that he said: 'You must not eat of any of the trees'?" Eve listens, giving her small finger to loose her whole hand soon, for the tempter is smarter than we. She tries to put the exaggeration in its right place and perspective: "Only of the tree of knowledge of good and bad we must not eat; otherwise we will die." Yet, Eve any listening and arguing has almost lost the battle. "You will not die, but become like God" is the answer of the tempter. Mistrust in God is sown, the argument sounds reasonable and now the object becomes attractive too. She wants to become like God and independent: "She saw that the tree was good for food and a delight for the eyes." Their eyes are opened, but only to recognize that they have lost their real freedom.

**READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 4:1-11**

In all three Synoptic Gospels Jesus starts his public career by going to the Jordan to be baptized by the Baptist and then he is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Only Lk places the genealogy of Jesus between the baptism and temptations in which he traces Jesus back to Adam and thus wants to picture Jesus as the new Adam, who is now going to pass the test which the first Adam did not pass.) Mk has only a short summary of the temptation, Mt and Lk describe three temptations in detail with a different sequence of the second and third temptation.

Obviously Jesus must be the source of the report of the temptations, for he alone could know about them. And here we would have kind of autobiography which should be dear to us, encouraging for us for: "Since he was himself tempted through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Hebr. 2:18). This could suggest the idea (although we are not sure) that Jesus gave his disciples only a summary, as we have it in Mk and the early Church later unfolded this by having recourse to the Book of Deuteronomy which describes the temptations of Israel and thus could contrast Jesus to the unfaithful Israel. It will be difficult to make out if Mt or Lk has the more original sequence. Both composed according to their different theology. For Lk Jerusalem is the center of his gospel and thus also the temptations end here. Some would say this must be also the historically last temptation since the devil wanted to kill Jesus by making him jump from the Temple. Mt makes the temptation on the mountain the last temptation because of the theological contrast between the real Lord and master and the devil who tries to usurp supreme authority: "I will give you the kingdoms, if you fall down and worship me." After this, can only follow (which Lk omits): "Begone Satan!"

We can assume that these temptations were not the only temptations of the Lord as Hebr. 2:18 and 4:15 indicate and as we see it from the gospels: Peter tempted him to run away from the cross (Mt. 16:23). And obviously Satan who according to Lk. 4:13 had left Jesus till another time tried again to make Jesus fall. Satan entered the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:21-27; Lk. 22:3) and made him betray the Lord. And obviously the Lord was hard pressed in the garden of Gethsemani and again on the cross. The report of the temptations in Mt and Mk is therefore a summary of all possible temptations, Messianic in nature, but they are also temptations as they hit us.

As so often in the Bible we can also assume here that an interior experience of Jesus is dramatized and pictured as if Christ saw Satan personally. Satan certainly did not take Jesus and placed him on the Temple, nor is there any mountain from which one can see all kingdoms of the earth.

The other details will be unfolded in the homily.

## HOMILY

### TESTED AS THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAM

1. Man is created according to God's image and likeness. God has created him a little less than the angels. He gave him rule over the works of God's hands, putting all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea (Ps. 8:6-9). But we are only stewards of God, taking his place. We are not sovereign. And our greatness consists in obedience.

2. Yet, from the beginning of mankind man has been tempted to be like God, to decide for himself what is good and bad, to be his own boss, to be sovereign. Masterfully does the Yahwist picture the temptation of Everyman with a picture story. God has given him everything but one thing: the access to that tree of good and bad. It's in the nature of God that he alone knows and can decide what is morally good and morally bad: everything that corresponds with his will or anything that is contrary to his designs. Then slowly a question, then a doubt, a sneaky suspicion is creeping up in every man's mind: "Why does God make laws in the first place, why should certain things be allowed and other things not? Does this distinction really lie in God's nature and thus in the essence of things, or is God moody, does God want to keep certain privileges for himself? Is it not humiliating to be told what to do and what to avoid! Does God not take me serious, does he treat me like a child (or do his representatives treat me thus? we would say)? To be one's own master looks attractive. And thus the first man and Everyman takes from the forbidden fruit, decides for himself what is good and bad, only to discover how wrong he was. He even hides from God and from others.



3. All misery, sin and death comes from disobedience to God. Men seldom learn from the mistakes of others and make the same mistakes. Ever since the first sin many other people have been wanting to be like God and take their destiny in their own hands. The sinfulness became hopeless till Jesus became man and placed himself under obedience to the Father. "Doing the will of him who sent me and bringing his work to completion is my food" (Jn. 4:33) Jesus said about himself. He was the Son sent by the Father. As such a son he had been solemnly declared by the Father's voice after the baptism in the Jordan and he had been anointed by the Spirit to start his public career (Mt. 3:17). Thus that same Spirit wanted to test him as the new Adam, if he could do what the first Adam had refused to do: to obey and thus find real greatness and make up for what the first Adam had sinned. Through the first Adam sin and death came into the world. The Holy Spirit (humanly speaking) wanted to see if through this second Adam righteousness and eternal life (Rom. 5:12-14) would come into this world by his being obedient, even to the death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).

4. Jesus had fasted for forty days, Matthew adds: even forty nights. Nearness to God lets a person forget about many things and time flies. It is so good and feels good to be with God in such days. But after each great moment in our life comes the reaction. So also Christ must have felt hungry, really hungry. The devil sees his chance: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to turn into bread." It is most reasonable to eat when one is hungry. But Jesus knows the power to perform miracles has not been given to him for his private needs, but for others. He knows about the temptation to overemphasize the material side of our life, in the Church, to overstress the sociological questions, to abuse our spiritual power for our private purposes by simony. The Lord does not argue with the tempter as Eve did, he does not rationalize. He is founded in the word of God and God's will. Thus Deut 8:3 comes to his mind: "Not on bread alone is man to live but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God." God easily can take care of our material needs, if need be even by an extraordinary food as the manna, as he did in the context of Deut 8. But manna or not manna, the dedication to God's word and his will sustains a man more than anything else.

5. The Lord had not answered the question "if you are the Son of God", which the tempter had heard as a statement at the Jordan; so he is still in the dark about Christ's identity.

The tempter only knows that much: This Jesus is not a glutton, but a spiritual man. Thus the devil tries to seduce him by pride: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Scripture has it: 'He will bid his angels take care of you; with their hands they will support you that you may never stumble on a stone'." It is as if to say: "Why should you go the way of the cross. That way you will not convince anybody. Have success in your life. Perform a show miracle, throw yourself down from the Temple. When people will see how you are supported by angels, they will believe in you." Success is what counts in life, not the sacrifices. It's a temptation to make religion wordly, a temptation of pragmatism. With the same sovereignty Jesus rejects the attack: "Scripture also has it: 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test' (Deut 6:16)". This can mean: "You devil, must not test me who am Lord." Or: "I must not tempt God." So the devil is still in the dark concerning the identity of Jesus.

6. Thus far the temptations of the devil were smart, psychological. But now the devil makes the last desperate attempt and appeals to earthly ambition, to the drive of having power, the urge to enforce everything, to be the boss everywhere. The tempter shows Jesus in imagination all the kingdoms of the earth and says: "All these I will bestow on you if you prostrate yourself in homage before me." What a lie! How can the devil act as if all kingdoms were his! And how can the Son of God fall down and adore the devil! He resists that urge to power because he knows great is the person who is willing to serve. The answer is even easier than before, to be found in the same Book of Deuteronomy and the same chapter (Deut 6:16): "Away with you, Satan! Scripture has it: 'You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore'."

7. The temptations of Christ are also our temptation. St. John tells us in 1 Jn. 2:16: "The love of the Father cannot be in any man who loves the world, because nothing the world has to offer could ever come from the Father." We will be tempted by (1) sensuality, worrying about our livelihood, forgetting that the kingdom of God must come first, telling us and others that an empty stomach cannot listen to the word of God. And thus we get involved in social activities and social questions, in buildings and social improvements. But before we even know it, we have no time for the real evangelization, for the word of God. We are generous in giving gifts, but often enough we are trying to buy spiritual values, we inadvertantly make people dependent upon us. It's the temptation to make religion social.

(2) Then again we are tempted to look for success in our life. We judge a person by his or her accomplishments, the buildings we put up, the success in management, the number of persons who come for advice or for confession. We easily avoid sacrifices, jobs which do not bring in honor and recognition. Who does not know about the temptation to make religion worldly.

(3) At other times we feel like being the man in charge, like getting things done, like mingling politics. Not, of course, for politics sake, but because we are really thinking we can do things. In reality we succumb to the temptation to make religion political.

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

(March 15, 1981)

Abraham is called to be the father of many nations (first reading); in him many will be blessed. As Christians we are called to a gospel worth suffering for (second reading). In the transfiguration the voice from heaven calls Christ the "beloved Son." He will have to die. But the transfiguration as an anticipated Easter proves he will rise again (gospel).

## FIRST READING GENESIS: 12:1-4a

After the first part of Genesis (Gen. 1-11), the Primitive History, the second part starts with Gen. 12 the Patriarchal History (Gen. 12-50). At the treshold of this history stands as towering figure Abraham. One could not think of any Jewish or Christian History without him. The Jewish credal formulas which form also the red thread of the Pentateuch speak about (1) God's promise to the Fathers, (2) the oppression in Egypt, (3) the liberation, and (4) the possession of the promised land. All that started with Abraham. One such credal formula may stand for others: "My father was a wandering Aramean who went to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given us" (Deut 26:5-10). This prayer a Jew would say when he would bring the first sheaves as thanksgiving to God.

When God called Abraham out of Ur, the patriarch could hardly imagine that all mentioned in this creed would come true. In this first act of faith Abraham cut off all earthly ties and with his childless wife set out for an unknown land. To Abraham's unquestioning act of faith, the chosen people owes its existence and destiny (Hebr. 11:8-19). But not only the physical descendants of Abraham are blessed in his name, but also, and even more, all those who believe in God like the patriarch.

#### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 17:1-9

Jesus had predicted his suffering (Mt. 16:21-23) and he would do it two times more (Mt. 17:22-23; 20:17-19). It was a great scandal for the disciples so that Peter, after the first prediction of suffering, could only remark: "May you be spared, Master! God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you" (Mt. 16:22)! But Jesus, knowing that his suffering was God's will and design, answered: "Get out of my sight, you satan! You are trying to make me trip and fall. You are not judging by God's standards but by man's" (Mt. 16:23). Peter thus had suggested the same idea as satan had done during the second temptation on the Temple, i.e. not to go the way of suffering but to perform a show miracle and thus to impress people.

Thus as an antidote against the scandal of the cross, Jesus takes three of his disciples: Peter, John and James and is transfigured before their eyes to tell them: passion and death on the cross has to be, but it is only transitory. Easter will follow with necessity. Transfiguration is an anticipated Easter glory.

It will be difficult to say what the exact historical happening behind this mystical experience was. The theology behind the happening is what the evangelists want to tell us. All three Synoptic gospels have the pericope. After six days Jesus went to a mountain. The number is probably taken from the day Jesus spoke about his suffering. Furthermore, after a long week of suffering comes a Sunday of relief. According to a tradition from the 4th century Mount Tabor, near Nazareth, 560 meters high, was this mountain. Others favor Mount Her-

mon, north of Caesarea Philippi, ca. 3,000 meters high. But it is even more probably a symbolic mountain on which the events of Mount Sinai are reenacted in the life of the new Moses, as it is with the Mount of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5). The three favored disciples who would see Christ in his deepest humiliation in the garden of Gethsemani would see the Lord now in his glory.

Jesus was transfigured with a luminous clarity which reminds of the brightness of the face of Moses when he returned after the Sinai revelation (Ex. 34:29-35), which made it necessary for Moses to veil his face.

Moses and Elijah appeared, the representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Both had to prepare for Christ.

The experience is for Peter a mixture of happiness and fear, but more of happiness. He does not know how to express it. He would like to hold on to it: "Lord, how good that we are here" (Mt. 17:4)! With the permission of Jesus he wants to build three booths (because of the dignity of persons), thinking probably of the covenant tent (Ex. 25:8), where people received revelation of the Law. Here is even more. The disciples as servants would sleep outside of the tents.

The answer to this suggestion comes from the luminous cloud, which is a clear sign of God's presence, the Shekinah (Ex. 19:9; 24:15-16).

The Father's voice, as at the baptism in the Jordan says: "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests", which reminds us of Is. 42:1 and Ps. 2:7. Added here is: "Listen to him" (Deut 18:15)! i.e. when Christ tells you what to do, when he tells you that he must suffer. This theophany, therefore, reveals Christ as the Servant of Yahweh (Is. 42, and thus also Is. 52:13-53:12), who proclaims and suffers. But just because of this he will be the Son of God (in power).

This is made clearer still in Mt. 17:10-13: Elijah has to come and prepare the way of the Messiah (Mal. 3:23f). Yet, he has already come in the person of the Baptist. But as both were suffering, and as Elijah and the Baptist were persecuted and (almost) and (really) put to death, so Jesus would be put to death.

The result of the great revelation is fear on the part of the disciples, as always, when God appears. But Jesus comes to them and tells them to get up, an expression used when Christ



brings a dead person to life. When they look up they see nobody but Jesus. Going down the mountainside Jesus tells his disciples not to tell anybody anything about the transfiguration till after the resurrection. Only then, they would understand the necessity of the passion and would not be scandalized that a transfigured Jesus suffered.

## HOMILY

### THROUGH AN EXODUS OF HARDSHIPS TO BECOMING A BLESSING FOR MANY

1. It is rewarding to compare the life of Abraham and of Jesus Christ. In a simplified way, one could coin the comparison, saying: "Through an exodus called to become the father of many nations (Abraham), to see his children's children (Jesus)."

2. When Abraham was in UR God said to him: "*Go out from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessings in you*" (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham does not ask any questions; he does not object that he has never seen anything else but Ur, that he is scared to leave home, that he does not know what the rest of the world looks like. "*Abram went as the Lord directed him*" (Gen. 12:4a). Scripture simply continues, as if it were the easiest thing in the world to do. And yet, only with an immense act of faith Abraham was able to go. And, ever since he has become the father of all believers.

3. We know that God's promise was slow in coming true. Abraham had to walk many ways: from Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt back to Canaan. He was a wanderer most of his life. He gave way to the wishes of his nephew Lot and left him the fertile region of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13) to go himself to the less fertile hill country. He followed the four kings who captured

Lot and defeated them (Gen. 14). He was wandering, wandering. And there was no son yet and, even less, a great posterity.

4. But now and then God would lighten the way and the darkness, by a kind of transfiguration, i.e. the different covenants the Lord made with the patriarch. Thus one good day, God promised him: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; I will make your reward very great" (Gen. 15:1). Abraham could only answer: "You have given me no offspring." Whereupon the Lord told him: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be" (Gen. 15:5). Abraham put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). To this Elohist report the Yahwistic source adds another covenant: Abraham prepares a sacrifice to the Lord: big animals he cuts in half, placing one half on the one and the other on the other side. With smaller animals, he put one animal on the right, the other on the left side (Gen. 15:7-12). Then a flaming torch passes between the pieces as a sign that God will stand on Abraham's side and destroy his enemies just as the pieces of sacrifice have been consumed by fire. And God renews the promise of a great posterity: "To your descendants I will give this land" (Gen. 15:18). — The Priestly author adds his version of the covenant in Gen. 17: First the name of Abram is changed to Abraham and of Sarai to Sarah (although actually the first name [Abram and Sarai] is the Mesopotamian, the second [Abraham and Sarah] a Canaanite version of the same name). Abram-Abraham means "father of a multitude (of nations)". — And the second part of the covenant is the circumcision. All these events together must have given Abraham the light necessary for him to go on in the darkness of uncertainty. But they were only bright *moments*.

5. The greatest crisis for Abraham came when he had to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22). How could he become the father of many nations if he would slaughter his only son! "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go (one could say: "go out!") to the land (the mountain) of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you" (Gen. 17:2). Abraham obeys and believes. "By faith he offered up Isaac" (Hebr. 11:17). God was satisfied with the interior act of sacrifice, but substituted the external sacrifice with a ram (Gen. 22:13). God does not want human bloody sacrifices. Christ would do that once and for all by dying for us on the cross.

6. We saw on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord that Jesus probably from the moment of his baptism, when he heard the voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son", saw himself as the Servant of Yahweh of Isaiah (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12): The Servant of Yahweh (*ebed Yahweh*), in Greek *pais theou*) is the chosen one, elected by God (Is. 42.1). The Greek term for Servant, *pais*, comprises two extremes; servant (slave) = *doulos* and son = *hyios*. The implication is: by being the servant (slave) all the way till suffering on the cross, Jesus becomes the Son of God (in power), i.e. the glorified son.

7. In the context of the liturgy of today, we can take especially the one aspect: that by his exodus (Moses and Elijah in the version of the transfiguration of Luke call Christ's death an exodus — Lk. 9:31 — that has to take place on a mountain in Jerusalem) Christ would, as Is. 53:10 terms it, see many descendants.

8. Christ's life according to the Father's design was to be an exodus, full of hardships. Luke introduces the travel narrative which ends with Christ's arriving in Jerusalem and thus his death, saying: "As the time approached when he was to be taken from this world, he firmly resolved to proceed (we could say "to go out") to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). Here would be fulfilled what the fourth Servant of Yahweh song predicts (Is. 52:13-53:12): "Many were amazed at him, so marred was his look beyond that of a man... There was in him no stately bearing... It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured... He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins... By his stripes we were healed... If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life."

9. This outlook Christ had before himself since baptism, when he heard the voice, reminding of Is. 42:1: "This is my beloved son", which we could translate with "This is my beloved Servant (*pais*)". He must have prayed often to ascertain the Father's will for himself. And when he was wandering across the country, as Abraham had, things must have looked gloomy for him as they were dark for Abraham. But as Abraham was reassured of God's will, especially when God made the covenant, so also Jesus was reassured during the transfiguration that the way of the cross was the Father's will. The devil had suggested to him on the Temple to go the easy way of success, impressing people by a show miracle, jumping down from the pinnacle and then being supported by angels so that he

would not even strike his toe. Christ had rejected Satan's suggestion, and he had rejected it again when Peter suggested something similar to him (Mt. 16:22-23). Luke mentions explicitly that Jesus prayed (Lk. 9:29), and it seems that the transfiguration was the answer to his prayer. "Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke about his passage (exodus), which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31). The Father's voice, "this is my beloved son (servant)" reassured him again that he was on the right way, taking the day of the cross. It assured him of Easter glory after the crucifixion.

The transfiguration took place after six days, i.e. on the seventh day. After the passion week would come the seventh day, the day God has made, Easter.

10. Second Isaiah made it clear: "If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life" (Is. 53:10). What seems to be a paradox, is true: Through exodus, through his death Jesus becomes, if one uses the terminology of Gen. 12, the father of a great nation. All communities of the earth find blessing in him.

11. What is true for Abraham and Jesus, was true for his disciples and is true for us: There is no way of being a blessing for us and others than through the cross, the passion. There is no Easter without suffering, without exodus. We have to give up our secure positions and go where nobody else went ahead of us. We cannot ask, what other people will do, if they follow or not. We are personally called. And most of the time that journey in the uncertain lasts long, a whole week.

12. Yet, there are light moments in our life, where God enlightens us, where we want to say with Peter: "It is nice to be here. Lord, let me stay here." We are aware that there is no suffering without Easter. On earth it will be only transfiguration, short anticipated Easter glory, that always passes fast. The long, lasting Easter comes only on the seventh day, at the end of our week of life.

### THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

(March 22, 1981)

"Give us water to drink!" the Jews asked Moses (first reading). "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty" Jesus tells us (gospel). This "living water" which

is Christ's word and His Holy Spirit is unfolded as love of God, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (second reading).

### FIRST READING: EXODUS 17:3-7

The first part of the Book of Exodus (Ex. 1:1-15:21) reports the liberation of the Jews from Egypt. The second part (Ex. 15:22-18:27) tells us about the stay of the Israelites in the desert. The bitter water of Marah (Ex. 15:22-27), the manna and the quails (Ex. 16:1/35) are described. In Ex. 17:1-7 the Elohist narrates the incident of the water from the rock which the Priestly author reports again in Num. 20:1-13.

The Jews encamp at Rephidim, near Mt. Sinai. There is no water to drink. So people complain to Moses and thus to God: "Give us water to drink (Ex. 17:2)! They are freed from the slavery of Egypt, yes, but that liberty is a great risk and is insecure. Many would prefer the stifling security of slavery in Egypt with the fleshpots and enough water to drink.

It is a challenge for Moses who always stands between God and his people, often being attacked by them. Their grumbling and hardening of hearts is even too much for him so that he, according to Num. 20:11-12, doubts if God will give them water. And because of this doubt of God's kindness, he is not allowed to enter the promised land (Num. 20:12). God, however gives the water in spite of Moses' doubt and the complaint of the people.

Paul in 1 Cor. 10 uses the episode of the rock as a type of Christ from whose side, on the cross, according to Jn. 19:34-37, flow streams of blood and water. John 4 takes up the theme of living water which Christ brings by his word and His Holy Spirit. In the dry climate of Palestine, water is an obvious symbol of salvation.

When the Lord speaks and assures us of salvation, we must not harden our hearts (Ps. 95) as the Jews did and for a while, even Moses.

### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: JOHN 4:5-42

The third, fourth, and fifth Sunday in Lent interrupt the readings of the gospel of Matthew and bring a pericope of the gospel of John.



What the Jews have asked Moses ("Give us to drink!"), Jesus offers in a perfect way to the Samaritan woman and to us: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty." Of all the many themes which jostle one another in this dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, this is the unifying theme: Jesus, the living water.

The fourth gospel more than any other is gospel, i.e. *kerygma*, as it was preached at the time of the author, and not a historical report with all the exact details of when, where it happened and what exactly Jesus said. Rather, the author has shaped the historical nucleus to a theology, where he projected much of the outlook on Jesus and the Church of his time into the days of Christ. Thus we must not ask about the exact historical details (but must be satisfied that there is a historical nucleus), but rather look for the theology of a given pericope. In the gospel of today, for instance, we can be surprised to see how much success Jesus had among the Samaritans, and we are not sure how much John projects the status of the Christian Church in Samaria of his time into the time of Jesus. That the dialogue is shaped by the author and does not represent a stenographical report of the actual conversation is obvious. This we even know from contemporary secular writers. The style is the style of John.

When the Northern Kingdom (the Kingdom of Israel) was conquered in 722 B.C. and most of the Jews were deported into Assyrian captivity, many pagan settlers moved into the vacuum. Later (in 538 B.C.), returning Jews mixed with these pagans and thus the inhabitants of Samaria were considered Jews of second class, and slowly a hostility grew between them and the Jews of Judea. This hostility became even stronger when the Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim, and they for all practical purposes only recognized the five books of Moses as Holy Writ. This is the background of the dialogue. Samaritans would often vex Jews going from Galilee through Judea and vice-versa. Another point to keep in mind: Rabbis did not speak with women in public.

In Schechem, Abraham had already built an altar to God at the oak or the terebinth and God promised him to give his descendants the land (Gen. 12:6f). The same spot was acquired by Jacob and willed to his son Joseph (Gen. 48:22). Such a sacred tradition, reaching the oldest patriarchs, Jerusalem did not have, although they would refer to 2 Kgs. 7:12f:

"I will raise up your son after you (i.e. Solomon after David)... He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

Here on his own property, Jacob had dug a well (Jn. 4:12), about 100 ft. deep, which still exists today, and in Christian time had become a baptisterium. The crusaders found everything in ruins and built a new church which slowly fell in ruins again, but never was completely rebuilt.

The well was located at a fork of the road, going toward north-west to Shechem itself, Nablus, Sebaste and toward north-east to Ashar (Sychar) and then on to the Jordan. The different towns had of course their own wells.

Jesus arrives at noon. The disciples go to town to buy some food. Meanwhile the Samaritan woman arrives at the well. One could subdivide the pericope thus: (1) Jesus breaks down the barrier, talking to a Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1-9); (2) He speaks about the "living water" (4:10-15), (3) makes the woman face the truth (4:15-19), (4) explains what "worship in Spirit and in truth" is (4:22-26); (5) the woman becomes an apostle (4:27-30); (6) to the returning disciples; Jesus speaks about the most satisfying food (4:31-34) (7) and about the sower, the harvest and the reapers (4:35-38); (8) the Samaritans proclaim Jesus as the Saviour of the world (4:39-42).

## HOMILY

### JESUS THE LIVING WATER

1. In a country with a dry climate as Palestine, water is more than anywhere else a necessity of life, will be often talked about, and becomes easily a symbol of salvation. No wonder then that of the 491 times the term "water" occurs in the Bible, after being used in the natural sense as a basic commodity of life, that it often has over- and undertones for spiritual reality. Jesus in the fourth gospel often calls himself the "I AM", "I AM HE", in a predicateless sense. God had called himself the "I AM" to Moses (Ex. 3:14-15): The one who exists by himself, whose essence is being; the one who is about to save, when the cry of the Jews in Egypt goes upward to the skies

and cries for liberation; the one who causes others to be. All this Jesus claims to be by calling himself the "I AM", as he does in Jn. 13:19: "I tell you this now (that he will be betrayed), before it takes place, so that when it takes place you may believe that "I AM", and 8:58: "I solemnly declare it: before Abraham came to be, "I AM".

2. In that same gospel there are other references where Jesus uses the phrase "I am" with a predicate. In that sense we can take Jn. 4:26: "I who speak to you am he", i.e. the Messiah, mentioned in 4:25. Other expressions are: "I am the bread of life" (Jn. 6:35.41.48.51); "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12); "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25); "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn. 14:6); "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1). It is true, Jesus does not say directly "I am the living water", or "I am the true water", but what he says in Jn. 4 practically amounts to it: He is the "living water" because of his word, giving us life.

3. The Samaritan woman could stand for most of us, how a person with all his faults, can follow Christ and receive eternal life, living water, if he is only open and ready to listen. She opened up more and more, the more Jesus revealed himself to her.

Jesus is a *Jew* for her at the beginning. And in that term "Jew", she places all the prejudices a Samaritan could have for a "hated" Jew ever since the Northern Kingdom existed. North and South had never, or only for a short time, been really united. Only Judah had liked the idea of a monarchy around the house of David. Israel (the northern part of Palestine) was more in favor of a loose confederacy. And when the Northern Kingdom was overrun by Assyria and people had been deported and pagan settlers had taken their place, who after the exile mingled with the few returning Jews, Samaritan for the Jews of the South came to mean second class citizen. And the hatred grew even stronger when the Samaritans separated with regard to cult and religion by having their own Bible, leaving out the prophets. "You are a Jew" (Jn. 4:9), she says.

But this Jew, Jesus, was different, as the Samaritan woman soon sensed. Cliches are often wrong. This Jew talked to a Samaritan and even to a woman, when nobody else did. Jesus started the conversation with: "Give me a drink!" The woman could only answer: "How can you as a Jew ask me a Samaritan, and a woman at that, to give you a drink!" Jesus

overhears the remark and raises the mind of the woman to God's love (away from the hatred between Jews and Samaritans) and to the gift from heaven which his own presence is to her. The conversation follows the typical instruction pattern of Johannine misunderstanding by talking on two levels: "If only you recognized God's gift, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he would have given you living water." For her this living water is running spring water which is very precious in Palestine, where during the long rainless months, people have to rely on cisterns which store up the winter rain. Jesus refers to God's gift of revelation.

5. But that much the woman understands, that this Jew is different. And thus she calls him "*Sir*" (4:11), which is a title of high respect.

6. Should this stranger really be able to draw water without bucket and a rope to draw it with? Or could he even get water from another well better than this, maybe spring water that really flows in a stream, not being 100 ft. deep as this well of Jacob, then this Jesus would be really *greater than the patriarch Jacob*. The reverence for the stranger grows.

Jesus goes on explaining the living water. Everybody who drinks natural water will always get thirsty again. But the person who drinks from the living water of God's word will never be thirsty again. It will leap up to give eternal life. Is. 12:3 had foretold that in the time of the Messiah people would "with joy draw water from the spring of living water." Yes, to the thirsty, God would give water without price from the fountain of the water of life (Is. 21:6).

This "living water" would also refer to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus: "I will pour water on the thirsty land... I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants" (Is. 44:3). Or as Jesus explained it during the ceremony on the Feast of Tabernacles when water was brought in a golden jug from the pool of Shiloe to the altar of holocausts: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believe in me, as the Scripture says, 'From within him there shall flow rivers of living water.' He was referring to the Spirit, whom those that come to believe in him were to receive" (Jn. 7:37-39).

And since baptism is the sacrament of faith and the Holy Spirit is given in baptism, living water reminds also of baptism. All these gifts are the result of faithfully accepting Christ's

word. Yes, the woman is right, Jesus is greater than Jacob, or Moses, who could only give natural water. The Lord can give water that never makes thirsty again since it fully satisfies.

7. But when the woman still misunderstands, Jesus gives her a sign: his superhuman knowledge of her past. That is the reason why Jesus apparently changes the subject, although it is only apparently. For if she sees that He is no ordinary man, she will understand that He is not speaking of ordinary water. When Jesus tells her to call her husband, she remarks that she has none. That is the starting point to reveal her past. Yes, the husband she has now is not her husband, for she is an adulteress. She had five husbands already. As often in John when Jesus confronts a person with himself, he also gets to know Christ. No person can see himself until he sees himself in the presence of Christ. So it is with Nathanael (Jn. 4:18-20.39) and with Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:16). Christianity begins with the realization that our life, as we live it, will not do. Jesus is a *prophet* (4:19). Who tells people a message from God, the truth, if they like it or not, and who shows a way out. It is not the smallest sign of greatness that the woman accepts the truth.

8. As prophet Jesus is also presented with the legal question on the place of worship: Is Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim the place where God wants his sacrifice? (Even today the Samaritan community of about hundred and fifty people offers the Easter lambs on Mount Gerizim.) Jesus clearly states the purity of the Jewish tradition as opposed to the heretical Samaritan. And the fact is that salvation comes from the Jews with Jesus being a Jew, as well as his mother and father and the apostles. Nobody can be a Christian without accepting Judaism. But the true worship does not depend on a certain place. It is a worship in Spirit and in truth, i.e. God gives us the Spirit (in baptism), and the Spirit as principle of this new life enables us to worship the Father. The true worshippers are those who are born of the Spirit (3:3-8) and sanctified by the word of truth (17:17.19), in other words, the children of God. The only way to worship the Father is in and through Jesus, since Jesus possesses the fulness of the Spirit (3:34), is the place where the Spirit dwells (1.33) and his indwelling in the believer is at the same time the indwelling of the Spirit (14:23 and 15:26).



The woman understands that Jesus is talking about the Messianic time. And when Jesus tells her that he is the one, she accepts him as the *Messiah* (4:26.29).

9. One never accepts Christ for oneself alone, but a true disciple wants to share and lead others to Christ. The gospel wants to be spread. The woman hurries to her fellow Samaritans and tells them about her great discovery. Her shame is gone, she becomes an apostle. "He told me everything I ever did" she exclaims.

10. Meanwhile the apostles return from town and urge Jesus to eat. But he refers to another *food*: to do the will of his Father (Jn. 5:30; 6:38). As food conserves our life, so obedience to the Father conserves Christ's life. He can say that he has just eaten, for he sees the salvation of the Samaritans coming. The Father's work, which is Christ's work, is to be also the work of his disciples. It results in the gathering of a spiritual harvest. It will be a rich harvest. They shall reap what they did not sow. But there will also be cases where they will sow, and other will reap.

11. Samaritans believes the woman and want to see for themselves to learn more from Christ and to get to know him more profoundly. If somebody leads us to Jesus we must enjoy the friendship with him ourselves. The Samaritans invite Jesus to stay with them. And they proclaim him as the *Savior of the world* (4:42). It is not explicitly said that the woman made this profession also, but we can assume it.

11. Jew, Sir, man greater than Jacob, prophet, Messiah, Savior of the world, these are the steps of faith of the woman as she slowly, but honestly, approaches Christ and discovers him as the "living water", whom she would never forget, who would quench her thirst once and for all. Her life stands for ours.

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

(March 29, 1981)

"I am the light of the world" (gospel) Jesus tells us and makes the blind man see. Thus we want to walk as children of the light (second reading). — As a rare exception the first reading has a theme of its own: God's call, in this case to be the king of Israel. God's call is grace not our merit. Man judges from the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.

**FIRST READING: 1 SAMUEL 16:1b. 6-7. 10-13a**

It is not easy to see how the first reading fits in with the theme of the gospel and second reading of Christ as the light. For sure the first reading in Lent is an instruction of the catechumens in the history of salvation, talking about the sinfulness of mankind (first Sunday), Abraham (second Sunday), Moses (third Sunday), and David (fourth Sunday), the new covenant (fifth Sunday). Perhaps the anointing of David to be the king (the psalms describe him as shepherd) is a type of a Christian who in baptism receives the illumination of the Spirit.

There are two strands in the Old Testament: the one represented by the Elohist Source (=E) and thus the Northern Kingdom of Israel which is not much in favor of a monarchy. At the most, it would be a necessary evil and helpful to avert the danger of the Philistines. But for the rest, Samuel as the main representative, explains the disadvantages very well: "He (the king) will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariot... He will use your daughters as ointment-makers, as cooks, and as bakers. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials. He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When this takes place you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the Lord will not answer you" (1 Sam. 8:11-18).

There are others, represented by the Yahwistic Source (=J) and thus the Southern Kingdom of Judah who are in favor of the monarchy, especially, of course, David. The main texts are the reading of today and 2 Sam. 7:8-17: "I will make his royal throne firm forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son for me."

Today's first reading singles out that David was not so much elected by men but by God and even anointed. And this, although he was not the oldest son (who usually would be in the genealogy of the Messiah) but the youngest. (This is also one feature of the Yahwistic Source to show how again and again God made exceptions electing not the oldest son, but somebody else, like Judah (the fourth), or even the youngest, like David.

The first king of the Jews, Saul had done what was displeasing in God's eyes (assuming priestly functions, keeping goods of the enemies which he was supposed to destroy, encouraging thus idolatry. Cf. 1 Sam. 15.) Thus God rejected

him and elected David, the most lovable of all Jewish kings. The first reading describes the scene. Samuel, the last Judge, is sent to Bethlehem to the house of Jesus to look for God's chosen king. Jesse presents all his seven sons in sequence of their age, one taller and more handsome than the other. And each time Samuel is read to anoint the one presented, only to hear from God: "Man judges by appearances but God by the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Finally David, the youngest is called. He is "only" a shepherd. But shepherd he shall be for Israel. And Samuel anoints him king, the best king of them all, although he had his faults. But even in his faults he was great, doing public penance. He conquered Jerusalem, the city of the Jebusites and made it the capital of the kingdom that no tribe could object to a capital of one particular tribe as capital for the whole kingdom. And he made it the religious center by bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

#### READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: JOHN 9:1-41

The fourth gospel centers around certain symbols standing for a higher truth, and Jesus performs miracles as sign for these truths. The main symbols are water, light, life. On the Feast of Tabernacles when in the Court of Women four great candelabra were lit, Jesus proclaimed himself as the light of the world (Jn. 8:1-20). On that same Feast (which lasted one week) he cured a man born blind and again proposed himself as the light of the world. This is the content of the gospel of today. It is a masterpiece.

##### 1. *The cure of the man born blind* Jn. 9:1-7

Jews believed that sickness and even more such a sickness would be punishment for sin. Either pre-natal sin or sin of the embryo. Or, the child born blind, was punished for the sins of the parents. Jesus rejects both opinions. God's power and glory shall be revealed through it, i.e. when he cures the blind man, proclaiming himself as the light of the world. Jesus performs the miracle in a "strange" way. With his own saliva he makes mud and places it on the eyes of the man. Saliva was believed to have healing power. For Christ, however, it has only symbolic meaning: He formed man from clay. By using such human means he attracts the attention of the blind and stimulates his faith which is necessary for healing. The following washing in the pool of Siloam again symbolizes Christ who is sent (Siloam means "sent") by the Father.

2. *The healed man is questioned by his friends and neighbors 9:8-12*

The miracle is so unheard of that people can hardly believe it. Thus the friends want to make sure that it is real and that the cured person is the same person. He only says laconically: "I went, I washed, I saw".

3. *The healed man questioned by the Pharisees 9:13-34*

In the eyes of the Pharisees Jesus has violated the Sabbath and therefore is a sinner, and a sinner cannot perform such a miracle. That such small works were forbidden on a Sabbath we know from the Talmud. Healing on a Sabbath was forbidden, unless there was danger of death; so was putting saliva on the eye (Shabbath 108b and kneading clay (Shabbath 73a). For the blind man, however, Jesus is a prophet, for only prophets could perform miracles (cf. Lk. 7:16). Thus they throw him out. His parents did not commit themselves, fearing excommunication.

4. *The healed man questioned by Jesus 9:35-39*

For Jesus' sake the man has been expelled. Thus a new bond exists and when Jesus reveals himself to him as Messiah he accepts his testimony.

5. *Jesus and the Pharisees 9:40-41*

The Pharisees are worse than blind, because they do not want to see and recognize Jesus.

## HOMILY

### JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

1. It was an impressive and unforgettable ceremony when on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles four great candelabra were lit in the Court of the Women in the Temple of Jerusalem. Its brilliance was so great that it could be seen in the whole city of Jerusalem. Jesus used the opportunity as a visible aid to tell all people: "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody who sees him can ever forget him. He is the light through his revelation.

On the same Feast of Tabernacles as a sign that he is the light Jesus gave sight to the man born blind. The healing of the man born blind who can see again is masterfully contrasted with the hardening blindness of the Pharisees. Three times the former blind man, who is truly gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance (12,25,36). Three times the Pharisees, who are really plunging deeper into abysmal ignorance of Jesus, make confident statements about what they know about him (16, 24, 29).

In between stand the parents of the man born blind. They do not want to commit themselves out of fear of excommunication.

Where do we stand? After all, Christ has become the crisis for everybody. Nobody can overlook the light of the world. Either we accept that we are blind and he makes us see him or we claim to see and we become blind.

2. There are the Pharisees, people well educated with a special training, leaders of the people.

a. Versed in Scripture, they are not satisfied with the commandments but add many others to be sure that God's commandments will be observed. The Sabbath must be holy to the Lord as a sign that work shall not be a drudgery but must lead to a fulfilment in man's life as God created heaven and earth in six days, making it good and even very good so that he could rest on the seventh day. Furthermore, Sabbath should remind the Israelites of the liberation from the slavery of Egypt. Thus everybody should enjoy the privilege of rest on the Sabbath, even a slave. And to be sure that this would be done, the Pharisees added many minute details: To fill a dish with oil and put it beside the lamp was too much work on a Sabbath, or to put the wick in it. Nor was one allowed to extinguish the lamp on a Saturday. To go out with sandals shod with nails would have amounted to a burden forbidden to be carried. One was not even allowed to cut nails or pull out a hair, to put spittle on an eye lid.

b. Jesus had violated these Sabbath laws in their eyes and thus could not be any good. The light was shining in their presence, but they did not want to recognize it. For them it was no light. They plunged deeper and deeper into darkness. "This man cannot be from God because he does not keep the Sabbath" (9:16); thus they tried to avoid the force of the miracle. But when others observed that a sinner cannot per-



form any miracle they did not know what to say and insisted: "We know this man is a sinner" 8:24). They claim to know. Do they really know? Facts cannot be true; they must not be true, and they are not true. Instead of recognizing the miracle done by the power of God, they call Christ a sinner. Or they simply plot ignorant: "We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man comes from" (8:29).

There is an awful possibility for all of us to explain God's laws the way we think they should be, the way they would fit us, the way they would make sense to us. But we have not made the laws; God made them, and we have to be tuned into his promptings.

c. Light enables us to see what is good and what is bad, what is pleasing to God and what is not. The Pharisees however do not want to see. Jesus confronts a person and thus we have to make the decision in favor of him or against him. He does not judge anybody; we judge ourselves. If we see nothing to desire, to admire or to love, we condemn ourselves as the Pharisees did. Woe to us, if we see nothing to wonder at, to respond and to reach out to. We are lost, if we think we know it all, if we do not realize that we do not see; then we are really blind as the Pharisees were.

d. The more knowledge we have, the more we will be condemned, if we do not recognize the good. If the Pharisees had been brought up in ignorance, they would not have been condemned. Their condemnation consists in this that they know so much and claimed to see so much but failed to see God's Son when he came.

e. And this blindness toward God has another side: The Pharisees sensed that this simple blind man was in many ways superior to them. But they were not honest enough to admit it because it would have meant to do the same as he did, and that they did not want to do; they did not want to change their life and become learners once again. It was nicer to play the leader, the man who knows everything. They could not win the blind man's argument: This Jesus has performed one of the greatest miracle, i.e. to heal a blind man, blind from birth. A sinner, however cannot do that, since God does not hear the prayer of a sinner (Ps. 66:18; Job. 27:9, Is. 1:15; Ez. 8:18); whereas on the other hand he always hears the prayer of a good man (Ps. 34:15; 45:19). But they thus browbeat the blind man. They (1) abuse him: "You are the one who is that man's disciple. We are disciples of Moses" (9:28).

(2) They insult him: "You are steeped in sin from your birth, and you are giving us lectures" (9:34) and (3) they threaten him by throwing him out (9:34). We may have our own opinions in life, and it is alright if there are different opinions. Otherwise life would be dull. But if we try to win the argument by intimidating others and use our authority instead of logic, it will be rather a contest in bitterness. If we refuse the light coming from somebody else, God will not give us light anymore either. What an irony: seeing people (naturally) become blind (spiritually).

3. And there is the blind man, one of the most sympathetic figures of the New Testament, a man of flesh and blood, one from whom one can learn most.

a. He is blind from birth and thus he suffers from all the prejudices people have for such a case: He must have sinned before his birth, or his parents have sinned. Thus he is an out-cast because of his blindness and because of these prejudices. He takes it and it makes him realize his smallness and his dependence upon God.

b. Then the light comes into his life, the one time chance. Since the Lord never performed a miracle before the recipient expressed his faith in Jesus, we can assume that the blind man had that faith also, although the gospel does not mention it explicitly. We can assume that Jesus used such a complicated procedure of spittle and clay and then sending him to the pool to stimulate the blind man's faith. A blind man is more receptive to touch than a seeing man, and feeling what Jesus did, the man could sense Christ's love and compassion, and thus he became more and more receptive for the natural sight and even more to the spiritual sight.

c. The Pharisees three time were falling deeper and deeper into darkness. The blind man three times humbly expresses his ignorance and thus becomes knowing and seeing. When he is asked where Jesus is, after Jesus had healed him, the later can only say: "I have no idea" (9:12). And when the Pharisees insist that Jesus is a sinner, the healed man insists: "I do not know whether he is a sinner or not I know this much: I was blind before; now I can see" (9:25). And finally he asks Jesus: "Who is he (the Son of Man), sir, that I may believe in him" (9:36)? And when the Lord answers, "You have seen him. He is speaking to you now" (9:37), the healed man makes the greatest confession of his life: "I do believe, Lord" (9:38).

Expressed in other words, his growing knowledge of Christ and his increasing faith in Him the blind man expresses by calling Jesus (1) the man (9:16.24), (2) the prophet (9:17), (3) the Messiah (9:22), (4) the one coming from God (9:33), (5) the Son of Man (9:35).

d. Hand in hand with this increasing faith in and acceptance of Christ goes the blind man's stand against the spiritually blind Pharisees. He knows his precarious situation: He is a simple man of the uneducated people; they are the upper class, the leaders of Israel. But with the inborn sense of honesty and goodness and the simple logic of such people he can only take the side of Jesus: Jesus has performed the greatest miracle. God however hears only good people. Therefore Jesus must be somebody extraordinary. And he follows the lead of Christ. His light helps him expose the evil of the Pharisees and to admit his own helplessness. And thus he sees naturally and soon spiritually.

He does not fear to be excommunicated by the Pharisees. Truth must remain truth and cannot be traded in for convenience. His excommunication brings him closer to Jesus. If a man's witness to Christ separates him from his fellow men, it brings him closer to Christ. Loyalty to Jesus always brings greater and fuller revelation. To the man who is true, faithful and reliable, God fully reveals himself. The healed man becomes really seeing: He accepts Christ as Son of Man.

4. And there is finally a third group of people around Jesus: the parents of the blind man. They are not cooperative with the Pharisees. They do not tell them what they would like to hear, i.e. that Jesus is a sinner or that their son was not really healed. But they are not as courageous as their son either. They do not take a stand for Christ. "Ask our son. He is old enough and can tell you, how he was healed." A humanly smart answer. Nobody can excommunicate them because of this word. But they cannot remain on that stand. Such an uncompromising stand can only be temporary. Sooner or later we have to accept or to reject Christ. Nobody in the long run, can remain neutral. Christ is the light of the world.