



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

DIVES IN MISERICORDIA

Pope John Paul II

THE DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

**Common Statement of the United Bible Societies
and the World Catholic Federation for the
Biblical Apostolate**

**REFLECTIONS ON VOCATIONS TO THE
ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD AND CONSECRATED LIFE**

Episcopal Commission on Vocation

LITURGICAL VESTMENTS FOR HOLY MASS

Florencio Testera, O.P.

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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
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

- 578 TO THE VIRGIN OF PEÑAFRANCIA
579 IN THIS ISSUE

DOCUMENTATON

- Pope John Paul II 580 DIVES IN MISERICORDIA — ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF, JOHN PAUL II ON THE MERCY OF GOD
- United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation of the Biblical Apostolate 626 THE DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

FEATURES

- Episcopal Commission on Vocations, CBCP 639 REFLECTIONS ON VOCATIONS TO THE ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD AND CONSECRATED LIFE

LITURGY

- Florencio Testera, O.P. 646 LITURGICAL VESTMENTS FOR THE HOLY MASS

HOMILETICS

- Herman Mueller, S.V.D. 650 BIBLICAL NOTES AND OUTLINES FOR HOMILIES
-

EDITORIAL

To The Virgin Of Peñafrancía

The theme song of your feast this year could well be a paraphrase of Psalm 137:

"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down
there we wept when we remembered Zion..."

The river on which your image went on fluvial procession every year continues to flow. Life will go on as usual. But we cannot avoid feeling the pall of gloom that the loss of your image has cast on our land. There will be no merry-making in Naga on the third Sunday of September. For the first time in 270 years your fiesta will be a day of mourning.

We mourn not so much because an image has been lost. We mourn because our society, after more than four hundred years of Christianity, has bred wicked men who strike at the very heart of the people's devotion to you whom we call mother. We mourn, for just as Esau of old gave up his birth right for a "mess of potage", some men from among ourselves give up their right to be children of God just for the few thousands of pesos they can get for selling your image. We mourn because there are those who will buy your image for selfish purposes that will deprive Bicolanos and all Filipinos of a priceless heritage.

Your image has been lost, but you are still with us! We believe that there is a message in what has happened to us, just as long ago God had a message for his people when He allowed the destruction of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem by wicked men. The people were purified during their exile in Babylon. Those who were truly devoted to God held on, in spite of the loss of the material temple. They built themselves into a living temple of God. They turned their worship to a more spiritual exercise centered on the reading of the Sacred Scriptures.

So too, today, dear mother, we pray that you will teach us to truly love you, not as an image, but as our mother and the associate of Jesus in giving salvation to all men. Help us cling to you in a more spiritual way. Transform each and everyone of us into your living images so that all men may join in singing a great "Magnificat" celebrating the mercy of God.

IN THIS ISSUE

Very soon it will be the anniversary of the issuance of the encyclical, "*Dives in misericordia*". Our publication of the Pope's letter was delayed by the document of the papal visit and our limited space. But now we can perhaps read the encyclical with greater depth, in the light of the Pope's speeches in the Philippines and also in relation to recent happenings affecting the Pope personally. God's mercy is timeless.

The big circulation presently being chalked up by "The Good News Bible" and its counterparts like the "Magandang Balita Biblia" and the Popular Cebuano Bible have made some people apprehensive because these Bibles put the Deuterocanonical Books (called "Apocrypha" by Protestants) in a special section between the Old and New Testaments. The *Common Statement* of the United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate should be helpful in clearing up questions.

We still have to do much for vocations. So, we invite our readers to reflect on the matter with the help of an article prepared by the *Episcopal Commission on Vocations*.

Liturgical vestments are a matter of daily concern in the Church. Fr. Testera shares with us his study on this matter.

DIVES IN MISERICORDIA

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II ON THE MERCY OF GOD

*Venerable Brothers,
and Dear Sons and Daughters,
Greetings and the Apostolic Blessing*

I

HE WHO SEES ME SEES THE FATHER

(cf. Jn. 14:9)

1. *The Revelation of Mercy*

It is "God, Who is rich in Mercy"¹ whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is his very Son who, in himself, has manifested him and made him known to us.² Memorable in this regard is the moment when Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, turned to Christ and said: "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied"; and Jesus replied: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me...? He who has seen me has seen the Father".³ These words were spoken during the farewell discourse at the end of the paschal supper, which was followed by the events of those holy days during which confirmation was to be given once and for all of the fact that "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ".⁴

Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and paying close attention to the special needs of our times, I devoted the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* to the truth about man, a truth that is revealed to us in its fullness and depth in Christ. A no less important need in these critical and difficult times impels me to draw attention once again in Christ to the countenance of the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort".⁵

¹ Eph. 2:4.

² Cf. Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:1f.

³ Jn. 14:8-9.

⁴ Eph. 2:4-5.

⁵ 2 Cor. 1:3.

We read in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "Christ the new Adam... fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his lofty calling", and does it "in the very *revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love*".⁶ The words that I have quoted are clear testimony to the fact that man cannot be manifested in the full dignity of his nature without reference — not only on the level of concepts but also in an integrally existential way — to God. Man and man's lofty calling are revealed in Christ *through* the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love.

For this reason it is now fitting to reflect on this mystery. It is called for by the varied experiences of the Church and of contemporary man. It is also demanded by the pleas of many human hearts, their sufferings and hopes, their anxieties and expectations. While it is true that every individual human being is, as I said in my Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, the way for the Church, at the same time the Gospel and the whole of Tradition constantly show us that we must travel *this way* with every individual *just as Christ traced it out* by revealing in himself the Father and his love.⁷ In Jesus Christ, every path to man, as it has been assigned once and for all to the Church in the changing context of the times, is simultaneously an approach to the Father and his love. The Second Vatican Council has confirmed this truth for our time.

The more the Church's mission is centered 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 at 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. Since, therefore, 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, we must act upon this principle with faith, with an open mind and with all our heart. In the Encyclical already referred to, I have tried to show that the deepening and the many-faceted

⁶ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1042.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

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.

2. *The Incarnation of Mercy*

Although God "dwells in unapproachable light",⁸ he speaks to man by means of the whole of the universe: "ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made".⁹ This indirect and imperfect knowledge, achieved by the intellect seeking God by means of creatures through the visible world, falls short of "vision of the Father". "No one has ever seen God", writes Saint John, in order to stress the truth that "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known".¹⁰ This "making known" reveals God in the most profound mystery of his being, one and three, surrounded by "unapproachable light".¹¹ Nevertheless, through this "making known" by Christ we know God above all in his relationship of love for man: in his "philanthropy".¹² It is precisely here that "his invisible nature" become in a special way "visible", incomparably more visible than through all the other "things that have been made": it becomes *visible in Christ and through Christ*, through his actions and his words, and finally through his death on the Cross and his Resurrection.

In this way, in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in his mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as "mercy". Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God's mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does not he speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all *he himself makes it incarnate* and personifies it. *He himself, in a certain sense, is mercy.* To the person who sees it in him — and finds it in him — God becomes "visible" in a particular way as the Father "who is rich in mercy".¹³

⁸ 1 Tim. 6:16.

⁹ Rom. 1:20.

¹⁰ Jn. 1:18.

¹¹ 1 Tim. 6:16.

¹² Tit. 3:4.

¹³ Eph. 2:4.

The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of "mercy" seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it.¹⁴ This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to leave no room for mercy. However, in this regard we can profitably refer to the picture of "man's situation in the world today" as described at the beginning of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Here we read the following sentences: "In the light of the foregoing factors there appears the dichotomy of a world that is at once powerful and weak, capable of doing what is noble and what is base, disposed to freedom and slavery, progress and decline, brotherhood and hatred. Man is growing conscious that the forces he has unleashed are in his own hands and that it is up to him to control them or be enslaved by them".¹⁵

The situation of the world today not only displays transformations that give grounds for hope in a *better future for man on earth*, but also reveals a multitude of *threats*, far surpassing those known up till now. Without ceasing to point out these threats on various occasions (as in addresses to UNO, to UNESCO, to FAO and elsewhere), the Church must at the same time examine them in the light of the truth received from God.

The truth, revealed in Christ, about God the "Father of mercies",¹⁶ 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. And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God. They are certainly being moved to do this by Christ himself, who through his Spirit works within human hearts. For the mystery of God the "Father of mercies" revealed by Christ becomes, in the context of today's threats to man, as it were a unique appeal addressed to the Church.

¹⁴ Cf. Gen. 1:28.

¹⁵ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 9: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1032.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 1:3.

In the present Encyclical I wish to accept this appeal; I wish to draw from the eternal and at the same time — for its simplicity and depth — incomparable language of revelation and faith, in order through this same language to express once more before God and before humanity the major anxieties of our time.

In fact, revelation and faith teach us not only to mediate in the abstract upon the mystery of God as “Father of mercies”, but also to have recourse to that mercy in the name of Christ and in union with him. Did not Christ say that our Father, who “sees in secret”,¹⁷ is always waiting for us to have recourse to him in every need and always waiting for us to study his mystery: the mystery of the Father and his love?¹⁸

I therefore wish these considerations to bring this mystery closer to everyone. At the same time I wish them to be a heartfelt appeal by the Church to mercy which humanity and the modern world need so much. And they need mercy even though they often do not realize it.

II

THE MESSIANIC MESSAGE

3. *When Christ began to do and to teach*

Before his own townspeople, in Nazareth, Christ refers to the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”.¹⁹ These phrases, according to Luke, are *his first messianic declaration*. They are followed by the actions and words known through the Gospel. By these actions and words Christ makes the Father present among men. It is very significant that the people in question are especially the poor, those without means of subsistence, those deprived of their freedom, the blind who cannot see the beauty of creation, those living with broken hearts, or suffering from social injustice, and finally sinners. It is especially for these last that the Messiah becomes a parti-

¹⁷ Mt. 6:4, 6, 18.

¹⁸ Cf. Eph 3:18; also Lk. 11:5-13.

¹⁹ Lk. 4:18-19.

cularly clear sign of God who is love, a sign of the Father. In this visible sign the people of our own time, just like the people then, can see the Father.

It is significant that, when the messengers sent by John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask him: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?",²⁰ he answered by referring to the same testimony with which he had begun his teaching at Nazareth: "Go and tell John what it is that you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them". He then ended with the words: "And blessed is he who takes no offense at me!"²¹

Especially through his life-style and through his actions, Jesus revealed that *love is present in the world* in which we live — an effective love, a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity. This love makes itself particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty — in contact with the whole historical "human condition", which in various ways manifests man's limitation and frailty, both physical and moral. It is precisely the mode and sphere in which love manifests itself that in biblical language is called "mercy".

Christ, then, reveals God who is Father, who is "love", as Saint John will express it in his First Letter;²² Christ reveals God as "rich in mercy", as we read in Saint Paul.²³ This truth is not just the subject of a teaching; it is a reality made present to us by Christ. *Making the Father present as love and mercy* is, in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of his mission as the Messiah; this is confirmed by the words that he uttered first in the synagogue at Nazareth and later in the presence of his disciples and of John the Baptist's messengers.

On the basis of this way of manifesting the presence of God who is Father, love and mercy, Jesus makes mercy one of the principal *themes* of his *preaching*. As is his custom, he first teaches "in parables", since these express better the very essence of things. It is sufficient to recall the parable of the Prodigal Son²⁴ or the parable of the Good Samaritan,²⁵ but

²⁰ Lk. 7:19.

²¹ Lk. 7:22-23.

²² 1 Jn. 4:16.

²³ Eph. 2:4.

²⁴ Lk. 15:11-32.

²⁵ Lk. 10:30-37.

also — by contrast — the parable of the merciless servant.²⁶ There are many passages in the teaching of Christ that manifest love-mercy under some ever fresh aspect. We need only consider the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep,²⁷ or the women who sweeps the house in search of the lost coin.²⁸ The Gospel writer who particularly treats of these themes in Christ's teaching is Luke, whose Gospel has earned the title of "the Gospel of mercy".

When one speaks of preaching, one encounters a problem of major importance with reference to the meaning of terms and the content of concepts, especially the content of *the concept of "mercy" (in relationship to the concept of "love")*. A grasp of the content of these concepts is the key to understanding the very reality of mercy. And this is what is most important for us. However, before devoting a further part of our considerations to this subject, that is to say, to establishing the meaning of the vocabulary and the content proper to the concept of "mercy", we must note that Christ, in revealing the love-mercy of God, at the same time *demanded from people* that they also should be guided in their lives by love and mercy. This requirement forms part of the very essence of the messianic message, and constitutes the heart of the Gospel *ethos*. The Teacher expresses this both through the medium of the commandment which he describes as "the greatest",²⁹ and also in the form of a blessing, when in the Sermon on the Mount he proclaims: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy".³⁰

In this way, the messianic message about mercy preserves a particular divine-human dimension. Christ — the very fulfilment of the messianic prophecy — by becoming the incarnation of the love that is manifested with particular force with regard to the suffering, the unfortunate and sinners, makes present and thus more fully reveals the Father, who is God "rich in mercy". At the same time, by becoming for people a model of merciful love for others, Christ proclaims by his actions even more than by his words that call to mercy which is one of the essential elements of the Gospel *ethos*. In this instance it is not just a case of fulfilling a commandment or an obligation of an ethical nature; it is also a case of satisfying a condition of major importance for God to reveal himself in his mercy to man: "The merciful... shall obtain mercy".

²⁶ Mt. 18:23-35.

²⁷ Mt. 18:12-14; Lk. 15:3-7.

²⁸ Lk. 15:8-10.

²⁹ Mt. 22:38.

³⁰ Mt. 5:7.

III

THE OLD TESTAMENT

4. The concept of "mercy" in the Old Testament has a long and rich history. We have to refer back to it in order that the mercy revealed by Christ may shine forth more clearly. By revealing that mercy both through his actions and through his teaching, Christ addressed himself to people who not only knew the concept of mercy, but who also, as *the people of God of the Old Covenant*, had drawn from their agelong history a *special experience of the mercy of God*. This experience was social and communal, as well as individual and interior.

Israel was, in fact, the people of the covenant with God, a covenant that it broke many times. Whenever it became aware of its infidelity — and in the history of Israel there was no lack of prophets and others who awakened this awareness — it appealed to mercy. In this regard, the books of the Old Testament give us very many examples. Among the events and texts of greater importance one may recall: the beginning of the history of the Judges,³¹ the prayer of Solomon at the inauguration of the Temple,³² part of the prophetic work of Micah,³³ the consoling assurances given by Isaiah,³⁴ the cry of the Jews in exile,³⁵ and the renewal of the covenant after the return from exile.³⁶

It is significant that in their preaching the prophets link mercy, which they often refer to because of the people's sins, with the incisive image of love on God's part. The Lord loves Israel with the love of a special choosing, much like the love of a spouse,³⁷ and for this reason he pardons its sins and even its infidelities and betrayals. When he finds repentance and true conversion, he brings his people back to grace.³⁸ In the preaching of the prophets *mercy* signifies a *special power of love, which prevails over the sin and infidelity* of the chosen people.

³¹ Cf. Judges 3:7-9.

³² Cf. 1 Kings 8:22-53.

³³ Cf. Micah 7:18-20.

³⁴ Cf. Is. 1:18; 51:4-16.

³⁵ Cf. Bar. 2:11-3, 8.

³⁶ Cf. Neh. 9.

³⁷ Cf. e.g. Hosea 2:21-25 and 15; Is. 54:6-8.

³⁸ Cf. Jer. 31:20; Ez. 39:25-29.

In this broad "social" context, mercy appears as a correlative to the interior experience of individuals languishing in a state of guilt or enduring every kind of suffering and misfortune. *Both physical evil and moral evil, namely sin*, cause the sons and daughters of Israel to turn to the Lord and beseech his mercy. In this way David turns to him, conscious of the seriousness of his guilt;³⁹ Job too, after his rebellion, turns to him in his tremendous misfortune;⁴⁰ so also does Esther, knowing the mortal threat to her own people.⁴¹ And we find still other examples in the books of the Old Testament.⁴²

At the root of this manysided conviction, which is both communal and personal, and which is demonstrated by the whole of the Old Testament down the centuries, is the basic experience of the chosen people at the Exodus: the Lord saw the affliction of his people reduced to slavery, heard their cry, knew their sufferings and decided to deliver them.⁴³ In this act of salvation by the Lord, the prophet perceived his love and compassion.⁴⁴ This is precisely the grounds upon which the people and each of its members based their certainty of the mercy of God, which can be invoked whenever tragedy strikes.

Added to this is the fact that sin too constitutes man's misery. The people of the Old Covenant experienced this misery from the time of the Exodus, when they set up the golden calf. The Lord himself triumphed over this act of breaking the covenant when he solemnly declared to Moses that he was a "God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness".⁴⁵ It is in this central revelation that the chosen people, and each of its members, will find, every time that they have sinned, the strength and the motive for turning to the Lord to remind him of what he had exactly revealed about himself⁴⁶ and to beseech his forgiveness.

Thus, in deeds and in words, the Lord revealed his mercy from the very beginnings of the people which he chose for himself; and, in the course of its history, this people continually

³⁹ Cf. Sam. 11: 12; 24:10.

⁴⁰ Job passim.

⁴¹ Esther 4:17* ff.

⁴² Cf. e.g. Neh. 9:30-32; Tob. 3:2-3, 11-12; 8:16-17; 1 Mac. 4:24.

⁴³ Cf. Ex. 3:7 f.

⁴⁴ Cf. Is. 63:9.

⁴⁵ Ex. 34:6.

⁴⁶ Cf. Num. 14:18; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86 (85); Wis. 15:1; Sir. 2:11; Joel 2:13.

entrusted itself, both when stricken with misfortune and when it became aware of its sin, to the God of mercies. All the subtleties of love become manifest in the Lord's mercy towards those who are his own: he is their Father,⁴⁷ for Israel is his firstborn son;⁴⁸ the Lord is also the bridegroom of her whose new name the prophet proclaims: "*Ruhamah*, "Beloved" or "she has obtained pity".⁴⁹

Even when the Lord is exasperated by the infidelity of his people and thinks of finishing with it, it is still his tenderness and generous love for those who are his own which overcomes his anger.⁵⁰ Thus it is easy to understand why the psalmists, when they desire to sing the highest praises of the Lord, break forth into hymns to the God of love, tenderness, mercy and fidelity.⁵¹

From all this it follows that mercy does not pertain only to the notion of God, but it is something that characterizes the life of the whole people of Israel and each of its sons and daughters: *mercy is the content of intimacy with their Lord*, the content of their dialogue with him. Under precisely this aspect mercy is presented in the individual Books of the Old Testament with a great richness of expression. It may be difficult to find in these Books a purely theoretical answer to the question of what mercy is in itself. Nevertheless, the *terminology* that is used is in itself able to tell us much about this subject.⁵²

⁴⁷ Cf. Is. 63:16.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ex. 4:22.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hosea 2:3.

⁵⁰ Cf. Hosea 11:7-9; Jer. 31:20; Is. 54:7f.

⁵¹ Cf. Ps. 103 (102) and 145 (144).

⁵² In describing mercy, the books of the Old Testament use two expressions in particular, each having a different semantic nuance. First there is the term *hesed*, which indicates a profound attitude of "goodness". When this is established between two individuals, they do not just wish each other well; they are also faithful to each other by virtue of an interior commitment, and therefore also *by virtue of a faithfulness to themselves*. Since *hesed* also means "grace" or "love", this occurs precisely on the basis of this fidelity. The fact that the commitment in question has not only a moral character but almost a juridical one makes no difference. When in the Old Testament the word *hesed* is used of the Lord, this always occurs in connection with the covenant that God established with Israel. This covenant was, on God's part, a gift and a grace for Israel. Nevertheless, since, in harmony with the covenant entered into, God had made a commitment to respect it, *hesed* also acquired in a certain sense a legal content. The juridical commitment on God's part ceased to oblige whenever Israel broke the covenant and did not respect its conditions. But precisely at this point, *hesed*, in ceasing to be a

The Old Testament proclaims the mercy of the Lord by the use of many terms with related meanings; they are differentiated by their particular content, but *it could be said that they all converge from different directions on one single fundamental content*, to express its surpassing richness and at the same time to bring it close to man under different aspects. The Old Testament encourages people suffering from misfortune, especially those weighed down by sin — as also the whole of Israel, which had entered into the covenant with God — *to appeal for mercy*, and enables them to count upon it: it reminds them of his mercy in times of failure and loss of trust. Subsequently,

juridical obligation, revealed its deeper aspect: it showed itself as what it was at the beginning, that is, as love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin.

This fidelity vis-à-vis the unfaithful "daughter of my people" (cf. *Lam.* 4:3, 6) is, in brief, *on God's part, fidelity to himself*. This becomes obvious in the frequent recurrence together of the two terms *hesed we'emet* (= grace and fidelity), which could be considered a case of hendiadys (cf. e.g. *Ex.* 34:6; 2 *Sam.* 2:6; 15:20; *Ps.* 25[24]: 10; 40[39]:11-12; 85[84]:11; 138[137]:2; *Mic.* 7:20). "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name" (*Ezek.* 36:22). Therefore Israel, although burdened with guilt for having broken the covenant, cannot lay claim to God's *hesed* on the basis of (legal) justice; yet it can and must go on hoping and trusting to obtain it, since the God of the covenant is really "responsible for his love". The fruits of this love are forgiveness and restoration to grace, the reestablishment of the interior covenant.

The second word which in the terminology of the Old Testament serves to define mercy is *rahamin*. This has a different nuance from that of *hesed*. While *hesed* highlights the marks of fidelity to self and of "responsibility for one's own love" (which are in a certain sense masculine characteristics), *rahamin*, in its very root, *denotes the love of a mother Arehem* = mother's womb). From the deep and original bond — indeed the unity — that links a mother to her child there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a "feminine" variation of the masculine fidelity to self expressed by *hesed*. Against this psychological background, *rahamin* generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, that is, readiness to forgive.

The Old Testament attributes to the Lord precisely these characteristics, when it uses the term *rahamin* in speaking of him. We read in Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? *Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you*" (*Is.* 49:15). This love, faithful and invincible thanks to the mysterious power of motherhood, is expressed in the Old Testament texts in various ways: as salvation from dangers, especially from enemies; also as forgiveness of sins — of individuals and also of the whole of Israel; and finally in readiness to fulfil the (eschatological) promise and hope, in spite of human infidelity, as we read in Hosea: "I will heal their faithlessness, I will love them freely" (*Hosea* 14:5).

the Old Testament *gives thanks and glory* for mercy every time that mercy is made manifest in the life of the people or in the lives of individuals.

In this way, 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-à-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.⁵³ *Mercy differs from justice, but is not in opposition to it, if we admit*

In the terminology of the Old Testament we also find other expressions, referring in different ways to the same basic content. But the two terms mentioned above deserve special attention. They clearly show their original *anthropomorphic aspect*: in describing God's mercy, the biblical authors use terms that correspond to the consciousness and experience of their contemporaries. The Greek terminology in the Septuagint translation does not show as great a wealth as the Hebrew: therefore it does not offer all the semantic nuances proper to the original text. At any rate, the New Testament builds upon the wealth and depth that already marked the Old.

In this way, we have inherited from the Old Testament — as it were in a special synthesis — not only the wealth of expressions used by those books in order to define God's mercy, but also a specific and obviously anthropomorphic "psychology" of God: *the image of his anxious love*, which in contact with evil, and in particular with the sin of the individual and of the people, *is manifested as mercy*. This image is made up not only of the rather general content of the verb *hanan* but also of the content of *hesed* and *rahamin*. The term *hanan* expresses a wider concept: it means in fact the manifestation of grace, which involves, so to speak, a constant predisposition to be generous, benevolent and merciful.

In addition to these basic semantic elements, the Old Testament concept of mercy is also made up of what is included in the verb *hamal*, which literally means "to spare" (a defeated enemy) but also "to show mercy and compassion", and in consequence forgiveness and remission of guilt. There is also the term *hus*, which expresses pity and compassion, but especially in the affective sense. These terms appear more rarely in the biblical texts to denote mercy. In addition, one must note the *'emet*, already mentioned: it means primarily "solidity, security" (in the Greek of the Septuagint: "truth") and then "fidelity", and in this way it seems to link up with the semantic content proper to the term *hesed*.

⁵³ Ps. 40(39):11; 98(97)2f; Is. 45:21; 51:5, 8; 56:1.

in the history of man — as the Old Testament precisely does — the presence of God, who already as Creator has linked himself to his creature with a particular love. Love, by its very nature, excludes hatred and ill-will towards the one to whom he once gave the gift of himself: *Nihil odisti eorum quae fecisti*, “you hold nothing of what you have made in abhorrence”.⁵⁴ These words indicate the profound basis of the relationship between justice and mercy in God, in his relations with man and the world. They tell us that we must seek the life-giving roots and intimate reasons for this relationship by going back to “the beginning”, in the very mystery of creation. They foreshadow in the context of the Old Covenant the full revelation of God, who is “love”.⁵⁵

Connected with the mystery of creation is the *mystery of the election*, which in a special way shaped the history of the people whose spiritual father is Abraham by virtue of his faith. Nevertheless, through this people which journeys forward through the history both of the Old Covenant and of the New, that mystery of election refers to every man and woman, to the whole great human family. “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”.⁵⁶ “For the mountains may depart... my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed”.⁵⁷ This truth, once proclaimed to Israel, involves a *perspective* of the whole history of man, a perspective both *temporal* and *eschatological*.⁵⁸ Christ reveals the Father within the framework of the same perspective and on ground already prepared, as many pages of the Old Testament writings demonstrate. At the end of this revelation, on the night before he dies, he says to the Apostle Philip these memorable words: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me...? He who has seen me has seen the Father”.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Wis. 11:24.

⁵⁵ 1 Jn. 4:16.

⁵⁶ Jer. 31:3.

⁵⁷ Is. 54:10.

⁵⁸ Jon. 4:2, 11: Ps. 145(144):9; Sir. 18-8-14; Wis. 11:23-12:1.

⁵⁹ Jn. 14:9.

IV

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

5. *An Analogy*

At the very beginning of the New Testament, two voices resound in Saint Luke's Gospel in unique harmony concerning the mercy of God, a harmony which forcefully echoes the whole Old Testament tradition. They express the semantic elements linked to the differentiated terminology of the Ancient Books. Mary, entering the house of Zechariah, *magnifies* the Lord with all her soul for "his *mercy*", which "*from generation to generation*" is bestowed on those who fear him. A little later, as she recalls the election of Israel, she proclaims the mercy which he who has chosen her holds "in remembrance" from all time.⁶⁰ Afterwards, in the same house, when John the Baptist is born, his father *Zechariah* blesses the God of Israel and glorifies him for performing the mercy promised to our fathers and for remembering his holy covenant.⁶¹

In the teaching of Christ himself, this image inherited from the Old Testament becomes at the same time *simpler and more profound*. This is perhaps most evident in the parable of the Prodigal Son.⁶² Although the word "mercy" does not appear, it nevertheless expresses the essence of the divine mercy in particularly clear way. This is due not so much to the terminology, as in the Old Testament books, as to the analogy that enables us to understand more fully the very mystery of mercy, as a profound drama played out between the father's love and the prodigality and sin of the son.

That son, who receives from the father the portion of the inheritance that is due to him and leaves home to squander it in a far country "in loose living", in a certain sense is the man

⁶⁰ In both places it is a case of *hesed*, i.e. the fidelity that God manifests to his own love for the people, fidelity to the promises that will find their definitive fulfilment precisely in the motherhood of the Mother of God (cf. Lk. 1:49-54).

⁶¹ Cf. Lk. 1:72. Here too it is a case of mercy in the meaning of *hesed*, in so far as in the following sentences, in which Zechariah speaks of the "tender mercy of our God", there is clearly expressed the second meaning, namely, *rahamin* (Latin translation: *viscera misericordiae*), which rather identifies God's mercy with a mother's love.

⁶² Cf. Lk. 15:14-32.

at this point is very wide-ranging. The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. The analogy of every period, beginning with the one who was the first to of grace, every sin. In this analogy there is less emphasis than in the prophetic tradition on the unfaithfulness of the whole people of Israel, although the *analogy of the prodigal son* may extend to this also. "When he had spent everything", the son "began to be in need", especially as "a great famine arose in that country" to which he had gone after leaving his father's house. And in this situation "he would gladly have fed on" anything, even "the pods that the swine ate", the swine that he herded for "one of the citizens of that country". But even this was refused him.

The analogy turns clearly towards man's interior. The inheritance that the son had received from his father was a quantity of material goods, but more important than these goods was *his dignity as a son in his father's house*. The situation in which he found himself when he lost the material goods should have made him aware of the loss of that dignity. He had not thought about it previously, when he had asked his father to give him the part of the inheritance that was due to him, in order to go away. He seems not to be conscious of it even now, when he says to himself: "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger". He measures himself by the standard of the goods that he has lost, that he no longer "possesses", while the hired servants in his father's house "possess" them. These words express above all his attitude to material goods; nevertheless, under their surface is concealed the tragedy of lost dignity, the awareness of squandered sonship.

It is at this point that he makes the decision: "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants' "⁶³ There are words that reveal more deeply the essential problem. Through the complex material situation in which the prodigal son found himself because of his folly, because of sin, the sense of lost dignity had matured. When he decides to return to his father's house, to ask his father to be received — no longer by virtue of his right as a son, but as an employee — at first sight he seems to be acting by reason of

⁶³ Lk. 15:18-19.

the hunger and poverty that he had fallen into; this motive, however, is permeated by an awareness of a deeper loss: to be *hired servant in his own father's house* is certainly a great humiliation and source of shame. Nevertheless, the prodigal son is ready to undergo that humiliation and shame. He realizes that he no longer has any right except to be an employee in his father's house. His decision is taken in full consciousness of what he has deserved and of what he can still have a right to in accordance with the norms of justice. Precisely this reasoning demonstrates that, at the centre of the prodigal son's consciousness, the sense of lost dignity is emerging, the sense of that dignity that springs from the relationships with the father. And it is with this decision that he sets out.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the term "justice" is not used even once; just as in the original text the term "mercy" is not used either. *Nevertheless, the relationship between justice and love, that is manifested as mercy*, is inscribed with great exactness in the content of the Gospel parable. It becomes more evident that love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice — precise and often too narrow. The prodigal son, having wasted the property he received from his father, deserves — after his return — to earn his living by working in his father's house as a hired servant and possibly, little by little, to build up a certain provision of material goods, though perhaps never as much as the amount he had squandered. This would be demanded by the order of justice, especially as the son had not only squandered the part of the inheritance belonging to him but *had also hurt and offended his father* by his whole conduct. Since this conduct had in his own eyes deprived him of his dignity as a son, it could not be matter of indifference to his father. It was bound to make him suffer. It was also bound to implicate him in some way. And yet, after all, it was his own son who was involved, and such a relationship could never be altered or destroyed by any sort of behaviour. The prodigal son is aware of this and it is precisely this awareness that shows him clearly the dignity which he has lost and which makes him honestly evaluate the position that he could still expect in his father's house.

6. *Particular Concentration on Human Dignity*

This exact picture of the prodigal son's state of mind enables us to understand exactly what the mercy of God consists

in. There is no doubt that in this simple but penetrating analogy the figure of the father reveals to us God as Father. The conduct of the father in the parable and his whole behaviour, which manifests his internal attitude, enables us to rediscover the individual threads of the Old Testament vision of mercy in a synthesis which is totally new, full of simplicity and depth. The father of the prodigal son is *faithful to his fatherhood, faithful to the love* that he had always lavished on his son. This fidelity is expressed in the parable not only by his immediate readiness to welcome him home when he returns after having squandered his inheritance; it is expressed even more fully by that joy, that merrymaking for the squanderer after his return, merrymaking which is so generous that it provokes the opposition and hatred of the elder brother, who had never gone far away from his father and had never abandoned the home.

The father's fidelity to himself — a trait already known by the Old Testament term *hesed* — is at the same time expressed in a manner particularly charged with affection. We read, in fact, that when the father saw the prodigal son returning home "he had *compassion*, ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him".⁶⁴ He certainly does this under the influence of a deep affection, and this also explains his generosity towards his son, that generosity which so angers the elder son. Nevertheless, the causes of this emotion are to be sought at a deeper level. Notice, the father is aware that a fundamental good has been saved: the good of his son's humanity. Although the son has squandered the inheritance, *nevertheless his humanity is saved*. Indeed, *it has been, in a way, found again*. The father's words to the elder son reveal this: "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found".⁶⁵ In the same chapter fifteen of Luke's Gospel, we read the parable of the sheep that was found⁶⁶ and then the parable of the coin that was found.⁶⁷ Each time there is an emphasis on the same joy that is present in the case of the prodigal son. The father's fidelity to himself is totally concentrated upon the humanity of the lost son, upon his dignity. This explains above all his joyous emotion at the moment of the son's return home.

Going on, one can therefore say that the love for the son, the love that springs from the very essence of fatherhood, in a

⁶⁴ Lk. 15:20.

⁶⁵ Lk. 15:32.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lk. 15:3-6.

⁶⁷ Cf. Lk. 15:8-9.

way obliges the father to be concerned about his son's dignity. This concern is the measure of his love, the love of which Saint Paul was to write: "Love is patient and kind... love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful... but rejoices in the right... hopes all things, endures all things" and "love never ends".⁶⁸ Mercy — as Christ has presented it in the parable of the prodigal son — has *the interior form of the love that in the New Testament is called agape*. This love is able to reach down to every prodigal son, to every human misery, and above all to every form of moral misery, to sin. When this happens, the person who is the object of mercy does not feel humiliated, but rather found again and "restored to value". The father first and foremost expresses to him his joy that he has been "found again" and that he has "returned to life". This joy indicates a good that has remained intact; even if he is a prodigal, a son does not cease to be truly his father's son; it also indicates a good that has been found again, which in the case of the prodigal son was his return to the truth about himself.

What took place in the relationship between the father and the son in Christ's parable is not to be evaluated "from the outside". Our prejudices about mercy are mostly the result of appraising them only from the outside. At times it happens that by following this method of evaluation *we see in mercy above all a relationship of inequality* between the one offering it and the one receiving it. And, in consequence, we are quick to deduce that mercy belittles the receiver, that it offends the dignity of man. The parable of the prodigal son shows that the reality *is different*: the relationship of mercy is based on the common experience of that good which is man, on the common experience of the dignity that is proper to him. This common experience makes the prodigal son begin to see himself and his actions in their full truth (this vision in truth is a genuine form of humility); on the other hand, for this very reason he becomes a particular good for his father: the father sees so clearly the good which has been achieved thanks to a mysterious radiation of truth and love, that he seems to forget all the evil which the son had committed.

The parable of the prodigal son expresses in a simple but profound way *the reality of conversion*. Conversion is the most concrete expression of the working of love and of the presence

⁶⁸ 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

of mercy in the human world. The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil; 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".⁶⁹ The genuine face of mercy has to be ever revealed anew. In spite of many prejudices, mercy seems particularly necessary for our times.

V

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

7. *Mercy revealed in the Cross and Resurrection*

The messianic message of Christ and his activity among people end with the Cross and Resurrection. We have to penetrate deeply into this final event — which especially in the language of the Council is defined as the *mysterium paschale* — if we wish to express in depth the truth about mercy, as it has been revealed in depth in the history of our salvation. At this point of our considerations, we shall have to draw closer still to the content of the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*. If, in fact, the reality of the Redemption, in its human dimension, reveals the unheard-of greatness of man, *qui talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*,⁷⁰ at the same time the *divine dimension of the Redemption* enables us, I would say, in the most empirical and "historical" way, to uncover the depth of that love which does not recoil before the extraordinary sacrifice of the Son, in order to satisfy the fidelity of the Creator and Father towards human beings, created in his image and chosen from "the beginning", in this Son, for grace and glory.

⁶⁹ Cf. Rom. 12:21.

⁷⁰ Cf. the liturgy of the Easter Vigil: the *Exsultet*.

The events of Good Friday and, even before that, the prayer in Gethsemane, introduce a fundamental change into the whole course of the revelation of love and mercy in the messianic mission of Christ. The one who "went about doing good and healing"⁷¹ and "curing every sickness and disease"⁷² now himself seems to merit the greatest mercy and to *appeal for mercy*, when he is arrested, abused, condemned, scourged, crowned with thorns, when he is nailed to the Cross and dies amidst agonizing torments.⁷³ It is then that he particularly deserves mercy from the people to whom he has done good, and he does not receive it. Even those who are closest to him cannot protect him and snatch him from the hands of his oppressors. At this final stage of his messianic activity the words which the prophets, especially Isaiah, uttered concerning the Servant of Yahweh are fulfilled in Christ: "Through his stripes we are healed".⁷⁴

Christ, as the man who suffers really and in a terrible way in the Garden of Olives and on Calvary, addresses himself to the Father — that Father whose love he has preached to people, to whose mercy he has borne witness through all of his activity. But he is not spared — not even he — the terrible suffering of death on the Cross: "*For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin*",⁷⁵ Saint Paul will write, summing up in a few words the whole depth of the Cross and at the same time the divine dimension of the reality of the Redemption. Indeed this Redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it. In the Passion and death of Christ — in the fact that the Father did not spare his own Son, but "for our sake made him sin"⁷⁶ — absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the Passion and Cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a "superabundance" of justice for the sins of man are "compensated for" by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice "to God's measure", springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely

⁷¹ Acts 10:38.

⁷² Mt. 9:35.

⁷³ Cf. Mk. 15:37; Jn. 19:30.

⁷⁴ Is. 53:5.

⁷⁵ 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason the divine justice revealed in the Cross of Christ is "to God's measure", because it springs from love and is accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation. *The divine dimension of redemption* is put into effect not only by bringing justice to bear upon sin, but also by restoring to love that creative power in man thanks to which he once more has access to the fullness of life and holiness that come from God. In this way, redemption involves the revelation of mercy in its fullness.

The paschal mystery is the culmination of this revealing and effecting of mercy, which is able to justify man, to restore justice in the sense of that salvific order which God willed from the beginning in man and, through man, in the world. The suffering Christ speaks in a special way to man, and not only to the believer. The non-believer also will be able to discover in him the eloquence of solidarity with the human lot, as also the harmonious fullness of a disinterested dedication to the cause of man, to truth and to love. And yet the divine dimension of the paschal mystery goes still deeper. *The Cross on Calvary*, the Cross upon which Christ conducts his final dialogue with the Father, *emerges from the very heart of the love* that man, created in the image and likeness of God, has been given as a gift, according to God's eternal plan. God, as Christ has revealed him, does not merely remain closely linked with the world as the Creator and the ultimate source of existence. He is also Father: he is linked to man, whom he called to existence in the visible world, by a bond still more intimate than that of creation. It is love which not only creates the good but also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself.

The Cross of Christ on Calvary stands *beside the path* of that *admirabile commercium*, of that *wonderful self-communication* of God to man, which also includes the *call* to man to share in the divine life by giving himself, and with himself the whole visible world, to God, and like an adopted son to become a sharer in the truth and love which is in God and proceeds from God. It is precisely beside the path of man's eternal election to the dignity of being an adopted child of God that there stands in history the Cross of Christ, the only-begotten Son, who, as "light from light, true God from true God came to give the",⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

final witness to the wonderful *Covenant of God with humanity, of God, with man* — every human being. This covenant, as old as man — it goes back to the very mystery of creation — and afterwards many times renewed with one single chosen people, is equally the new and definitive covenant, which was established there on Calvary, and is not limited to a single people, to Israel, but is open to each and every individual.

What else, then, does the Cross of Christ say to us, the Cross that in that in a sense is the final word of his messianic message and mission? And yet this is not yet the word of the God of the Covenant: that will be pronounced at the dawn when first the women and then the Apostles come to the tomb of the crucified Christ, see the tomb empty and for the first time hear the message: "He is risen". They will repeat this message to the others and will be witness to the Risen Christ. Yet, even in this glorification of the Son of God, the Cross remains, that Cross which — through all the messianic testimony of the Man — the Son, who suffered death upon it — *speaks and never ceases to speak of God — the Father, who is absolutely faithful to his eternal love for man*, since he "so loved the world" — therefore man in the world — that "he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life".⁷⁸ Believing in the crucified Son means "seeing the Father",⁷⁹ means believing that love is present in the world and that this love is more powerful than any kind of evil in which individuals, humanity, or the world are involved. Believing in this love *means believing in mercy*. For mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love's second name and, at the same time, the specific manner in which love is revealed and effected vis-à-vis the reality of the evil that is in the world, affecting and besieging man, insinuating itself even into his heart and capable of causing him to "perish in Gehenna".⁸⁰

8. *Love more Powerful than Death, more Powerful than sin*

The Cross of Christ on Calvary is also a witness to the strength of evil against the very Son of God, against the one who, alone among all the sons of men, was by his nature abso-

⁷⁸ Jn. 3:16.

⁷⁹ Cf. Jn. 14:9.

⁸⁰ Mt. 10:28.

lutely innocent and free from sin, and whose coming into the world was untainted by the disobedience of Adam and the inheritance of original sin. And here, precisely in him, in Christ, justice is done to sin at the price of his sacrifice, of his obedience "even to death".⁸¹ He who was without sin, "God man him sin for our sake".⁸² Justice is also brought to bear upon death, which from the beginning of man's history had been allied to sin. Death has justice done to it at the price of the death of the one who was without sin and who alone was able — by means of his own death — to inflict death upon death.⁸³ In this way *the Cross of Christ*, on which the Son, consubstantial with the Father, *renders full justice to God*, is also a *radical revelation of mercy*, or rather of the love that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death.

The Cross is the most profound condescension of God to man to what man — especially in difficult and painful moments — looks on as his unhappy destiny. The Cross is like a touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of man's earthly existence; it is the total fulfillment of the messianic programme that Christ once formulated in the synagogue at Nazareth⁸⁴ and then repeated to the messengers sent by John the Baptist.⁸⁵ According to the words once written in the prophecy of Isaiah,⁸⁶ this programme consisted in the revelation of merciful love for the poor, the suffering and prisoners, for the blind, the oppressed and sinners. In the Paschal Mystery the limits of the manysided evil in which man becomes a sharer during his earthly existence are surpassed: the Cross of Christ, in fact, makes us understand the deepest roots of evil, which are fixed in sin and death; thus the Cross becomes an eschatological sign. Only in the eschatological fulfillment and definitive renewal of the world *will love conquer, in all the elect, the deepest sources of evil*, bringing as its fully mature fruit the kingdom of life and holiness and glorious immortality. The foundation of this eschatological fulfilment is already contained in the Cross of Christ and in his death. The fact that Christ "was raised the third day"⁸⁷ constitutes the final sign of the

⁸¹ Phil. 2:8.

⁸² 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁸³ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-55.

⁸⁴ Cf. Lk. 4:18-21.

⁸⁵ Cf. Lk. 7:20-23.

messianic mission, a sign that perfects the entire revelation of merciful love in a world that is subject to evil. At the same time it constitutes the sign that foretells "a new heaven and a new earth",⁸⁸ when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death, or mourning, no crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away".⁸⁹

In the eschatological fulfilment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy. Christ's messianic programme, the programme of mercy, becomes the programme of his people, the programme of the Church. At its very centre there is always the Cross, for it is in the Cross that the revelation of merciful love attains its culmination. Until "the former things pass away",⁹⁰ the Cross will remain the point of reference for other words too of the Revelation of John: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me".⁹¹ In a special way, God also reveals his mercy when he *invites man to have "mercy" on his only Son, the Crucified One.*

Christ, precisely as the Crucified One, is the Word that does not pass away,⁹² and he is the one who stands at the door and knocks at the heart of every man,⁹³ without restricting his freedom, but instead seeking to draw from this very freedom love, which is not only an act of solidarity with the suffering Son of man, but also a kind of "mercy" shown by each one of us to the Son of the eternal Father. In the whole of this messianic programme of Christ, in the whole revelation of mercy through the Cross, could man's dignity be more highly respected and ennobled, for, in obtaining mercy, he is in a sense the one who at the same time "shows mercy"?

⁸⁶ Cf. Is. 35:5; 61:1-3.

⁸⁷ 1 Cor. 15:4.

⁸⁸ Rev. 21:1.

⁸⁹ Rev. 21:4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Rev. 21:4.

⁹¹ Rev. 3:20.

⁹² Cf. Mt. 24:35.

⁹³ Cf. Rev. 3:20.

In a word, is not this the position of Christ with regard to man when he says: "As you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me"?⁹⁴ Do not the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy",⁹⁵ constitute, in a certain sense, a synthesis of the whole of the Good News, of the whole of the "wonderful exchange" (*admirabile commercium*) contained therein? This exchange is a law of *the very plan of salvation*, a law which is simple, strong and at the same time "easy". Demonstrating from the very start what the "human heart" is capable of ("to be merciful"), do not these words from the Sermon on the Mount reveal in the same perspective the deep mystery of God: the inscrutable unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which love, containing justice, sets in motion mercy, which in its turn reveals the perfection of justice?

The Paschal Mystery is Christ at the summit of the revelation of the inscrutable mystery of God. It is precisely then that the words pronounced in the Upper Room are completely fulfilled: "He who has seen me has seen the Father".⁹⁶ In fact, Christ, whom the Father "did not spare"⁹⁷ for the sake of man and who in his Passion and in the torment of the Cross did not obtain human mercy, has revealed in his Resurrection the fullness of the love that the Father has for him and, in him, for all people. "He is not God of the dead, but of the living".⁹⁸ In his Resurrection Christ *has revealed the God of merciful love*, precisely because *he accepted the Cross as the way to the Resurrection*. And it is for this reason that — when we recall the Cross of Christ, his Passion and death — our faith and hope are centred on the Risen One: on that Christ who "no the evening of that day, the first day of the week,... stood among them" in the Upper Room, "where the disciples were,... breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'".⁹⁹

Here is the Son of God, who in his Resurrection experienced in a radical way mercy shown to himself, that is to say the

⁹⁴ Mt. 25:40.

⁹⁵ Mt. 5:7.

⁹⁶ Jn. 14:9.

⁹⁷ Rom. 8:32.

⁹⁸ Mk. 12:27.

⁹⁹ Jn. 20:19-23.

love of the Father which is *more powerful than death*. And it is also the same Christ, the Son of God, who at the end of his messianic mission — and, in a certain sense, even beyond the end — reveals himself as the inexhaustible source of mercy, of the same love that, in a subsequent perspective of the history of salvation in the Church, is to be everlastingly confirmed as *more powerful than sin*. The paschal Christ is the definitive incarnation of mercy, its living sign: in salvation history and in eschatology. In the same spirit, the liturgy of Eastertide places on our lips the words of the Psalm: *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*.¹⁰⁰

9. *Mother of Mercy*

These words of the Church at Easter re-echo in the fullness of their prophetic content the words that Mary uttered during her visit to Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah: "His mercy is... from generation to generation".¹⁰¹ At the very moment of the Incarnation, these words open up a new perspective of salvation history. After the Resurrection of Christ, this perspective is new on both the historical and the eschatological level. From that time onwards there is a succession of new generations of individuals in the immense human family, in ever-increasing dimensions; there is also a succession of new generations of the People of God, marked with the sign of the Cross and of the Resurrection and "sealed"¹⁰² with the sign of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the absolute revelation of the mercy that Mary proclaimed on the threshold of her kinswoman's house: "His mercy is... from generation to generation".¹⁰³

Mary is also the one who obtained mercy in a particular and exceptional way, as no other person has. At the same time, still in an exceptional way, she made possible with the sacrifice of her heart her own sharing in revealing God's mercy. This sacrifice is intimately linked with the Cross of her Son, at the foot of which she was to stand on Calvary. Her sacrifice is a unique sharing in the revelation of mercy, that is, a sharing in the absolute fidelity of God to his own love, to the Covenant that he willed from eternity and that he entered into in time

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 89(88):2.

¹⁰¹ Lk. 1:50.

¹⁰² Cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22.

¹⁰³ Lk. 1:50.

with man, with the people, with humanity; it is a sharing in that revelation that was definitely fulfilled through the Cross. *No one has experienced, to the same degree as the Mother of the Crucified One*, the mystery of the Cross, the overwhelming encounter of divine transcendent justice with love: that "kiss" given by mercy to justice.¹⁰⁴ No one has received into his heart, as much as Mary did, that mystery, that truly divine dimension of the Redemption effected on Calvary by means of the death of the Son, together with the sacrifice of her maternal heart, together with her definitive "fiat".

Mary, then, is the one who *has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy*. She knows its price, she knows how great it is. In this sense, we call her the *Mother of mercy*: our Lady of mercy, or Mother of divine mercy; in each one of the titles there is a deep theological meaning, for they express the special preparation of her soul, of her whole personality, so that she was able to perceive, through the complex events, first of Israel, then of every individual and of the whole of humanity, that mercy of which "from generation to generation"¹⁰⁵ people become sharers according to the eternal design of the Most Holy Trinity.

The above titles which we attribute to the Mother of God speak of her principally, however, as the Mother of the Crucified and Risen One; as *the one who, having obtained mercy in an exceptional way*, in an equally exceptional way "*merits*" that *that mercy* throughout her earthly life and, particularly, at the foot of the Cross of her Son; and finally as the one who, through her hidden and at the same time incomparable sharing in the messianic mission of her Son, was called in a special way to bring close to people that love which he had come to reveal: the love that finds its most concrete expression vis-à-vis the suffering, the poor, those deprived of their own freedom, the blind, the oppressed and sinners, just as Christ spoke of them in the words of the prophecy of Isaiah, first in the synagogue at Nazareth¹⁰⁶ and then in response to the question of the messengers of John the Baptist.¹⁰⁷

It was precisely this "merciful" love, which is manifested above all in contact with moral and physical evil, that the heart

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ps. 85 (84):11.

¹⁰⁵ Lk. 1:50.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Lk. 4:18.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Lk. 7:22.

of her who was the Mother of the Crucified and Risen One shared in singularly and exceptionally — that Mary shared in. In her and through her, this love continues to be revealed in the history of the Church and of humanity. This revelation is especially fruitful because in the Mother of God it is based upon the unique tact of her maternal heart, on her particular sensitivity, on her particular fitness to reach all those *who most easily accept the merciful love of a mother*. This is one of the great life-giving mysteries of Christianity, a mystery intimately connected with the mystery of the Incarnation.

“The motherhood of Mary in the order of grace”, as the Second Vatican Council explains, “lasts without interruption from the consent which she faithfully gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without hesitation under the Cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. In fact, being assumed into heaven she has not laid aside this office of salvation but by her manifold intercession she continues to obtain for us the graces of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she takes care of the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home”.¹⁰⁸

VI

“MERCY.... FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION”

10. *An Image of our Generation*

We have every right to believe that our generation too was included in the words of the Mother of God when she glorified that mercy shared in “from generation to generation” by those who allow themselves to be guided by the fear of God. The words of Mary’s *Magnificat* have a prophetic content that concerns not only the past of Israel but also the whole future of the People of God on earth. In fact, all of us now living on earth are *the generation* that is aware of the approach of the third millennium and that profoundly *feels the change* that is occurring in history.

¹⁰⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62: AAS 57 (1965), p. 63.

The present generation knows that it is in a privileged position: progress provides it with countless possibilities that only a few decades ago were undreamed of. Man's creative activity, his intelligence and his work, have brought about profound changes both in the field of science and technology and in that of social and cultural life. Man has extended his power over nature and has acquired deeper knowledge of the laws of social behaviour. He has seen the obstacles and distances between individuals and nations dissolve or shrink through an increased sense of what is universal, through a clearer awareness of the unity of the human race, through the acceptance of mutual dependence in authentic solidarity, and through the desire and possibility of making contact with one's brothers and sisters beyond artificial geographical divisions and national or racial limits. Today's young people, especially, know that the progress of science and technology can produce not only new material goods but also a wider sharing in knowledge. The extraordinary progress made in the field of information and data processing, for instance, will increase man's creative capacity and provide access to the intellectual and cultural riches of other peoples. New communications techniques will encourage greater participation in events and a wider exchange of ideas. The achievements of biological, psychological and social science will help man to understand better the riches of his own being. It is true that too often this progress is still the privilege of the industrialized countries, but it cannot be denied that the prospect of enabling every people and every country to benefit from it has long ceased to be a mere utopia when there is a real political desire for it.

But side by side with all this, or rather as part of it, there are also the difficulties that appear whenever there is growth. There is unease and a sense of powerlessness regarding the profound response that man knows that he must give. The picture of the world today also contains shadows and imbalances that are not always merely superficial. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council is certainly not the only document that deals with the life of this generation, but it is a document of particular importance. "The dichotomy affecting the modern world", we read in it, "is, in fact, a symptom of a deeper dichotomy that is in man himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is subject to a thousand short-

comings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life. Torn by a welter of anxieties he is compelled to choose between them and repudiate some among them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as he is, he often does the very thing he hates and does not do what he wants. And so he feels himself divided, and the result is a host of discords in social life".¹⁰⁹

Towards the end of the introductory exposition we read: "... in the face of modern developments there is a growing body of men who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are glimpsing them with a keener insight: What is man? *What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all this progress?* What is the purpose of these achievements, purchased at so high a price?"¹¹⁰

In the span of the fifteen years since the end of the Second Vatican Council, has this picture of tensions and threats that mark our epoch become less disquieting? It seems not. On the contrary, the tensions and threats that in the Council document seem only to be outlined and not to manifest in depth all the dangers hidden within them have revealed themselves more clearly in the space of these years; they have in a different way confirmed that danger, and do not permit us to cherish the illusions of the past.

11. *Sources of Uneasiness*

Thus, in our world the feeling of being under threat is increasing. There is an increase of that existential fear connected especially, as I said in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, with the prospect of a conflict that in view of today's atomic stockpiles could mean the partial self-destruction of humanity. But the threat does not merely concern what human beings can do to human beings through the means provided by military technology; it also concerns many other dangers produced by a materialistic society which — in spite of "humanistic" declarations — accepts the primacy of things over persons. Contemporary man, therefore, fears that by the use of the means invented by this type of society, *individuals* and the environ-

¹⁰⁹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1032.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

ment, communities, societies and nations *can fall victim to the abuse of power by other individuals, environments and societies.* The history of our century offers many examples of this. In spite of all the declarations on the rights of man in his integral dimension, that is to say in his bodily and spiritual existence, we cannot say that these examples belong only to the past.

Man rightly fears falling victim to an oppression that will deprive him of his interior freedom, of the possibility of expressing the truth of which he is convinced, of the faith that he professes, of the ability to obey the voice of conscience that tells him the right path to follow. The technical means at the disposal of modern society conceal within themselves not only the possibility of self-destruction through military conflict, but *also the possibility of a "peaceful" subjugation of individuals, of environments, of entire societies and of nations,* that for one reason or another might prove inconvenient for those who possess the necessary means and are ready to use them without scruple. An instance is the continued existence of torture, systematically used by authority as a means of domination and political oppression and practised by subordinates with impunity.

Together with awareness of the biological threat, therefore, there is a growing awareness of yet another threat, even more destructive of what is essentially human, what is intimately bound up with the dignity of the person and his or her right to truth and freedom.

All this is happening *against the background of the gigantic remorse* caused by the fact that, side by side with wealthy and surfeited people and societies, living in plenty and ruled by consumerism and pleasure, the same human family contains individuals and groups *that are suffering from hunger.* There are babies dying of hunger under their mothers' eyes. In various parts of the world, in various socio-economic systems, there exist entire areas of poverty, shortage and underdevelopment. This fact is universally known. *The state of inequality* between individuals and between nations not only still exists; it is increasing. It still happens that side by side with those who are wealthy and living in plenty there exist those who are living in want, suffering misery and often actually dying of hunger; and their number reaches tens, even hundreds of millions. This is why moral uneasiness is destined to become even more acute. It is obvious that a fundamental defect, or rather a series of defects, indeed a defective machinery is at the root of contem-

porary economics and materialistic civilization, which does not allow the human family to break free from such radically unjust situations.

This picture of today's world in which there is so much evil both physical and moral, so as to make of it a world entangled in contradictions and tensions, and at the same time full of threats to human freedom, conscience and religion — this picture explains the uneasiness felt by contemporary man. This uneasiness is experienced not only by those who are disadvantaged or oppressed, but also by those who possess the privileges of wealth, progress and power. And, although there is no lack of people trying to understand the causes of this uneasiness, or trying to react against it with the temporary means offered by technology, wealth or power, still in the very depth of the human spirit *this uneasiness is stronger than all temporary means*. This uneasiness concerns — as the analyses of the Second Vatican Council rightly pointed out — the fundamental problems of all human existence. It is linked with the very sense of man's existence in the world, and is an uneasiness for the future of man and all humanity; it demands decisive solutions, which now seem to be forcing themselves upon the human race.

12. *Is Justice Enough?*

It is not difficult to see that in the modern world *the sense of justice* has been reawakening on a vast scale; and without doubt this emphasizes that which goes against justice in relationships between individuals, social groups and "classes", between individual peoples and states, and finally between whole political systems, indeed between what are called "worlds". This deep and varied trend, at the basis of which the contemporary human conscience has placed justice, gives proof of the ethical character of the tensions and struggles pervading the world.

The Church shares with the people of our time this profound and ardent desire for a life which is just in every aspect, nor does she fail to examine the various aspects of the sort of justice that the life of people and society demands. This is confirmed by the field of Catholic social doctrine, greatly developed in the course of the last century. On the lines of this teaching proceed the education and formation of human con-

sciences in the spirit of justice, and also individual undertakings, especially in the sphere of the apostolate of the laity, which are developing in precisely this spirit.

And yet, it would be difficult not to notice that very often *programmes which start from the idea of justice* and which ought to assist its fulfilment among individuals, groups and human societies, *in practice suffer from distortions*. Although they continue to appeal to the idea of justice, nevertheless experience shows that other negative forces have gained the upper hand over justice, such as spite, hatred and even cruelty. In such cases, the desire to annihilate the enemy, limit his freedom, or even force him into total dependence, becomes the fundamental motive for action; and this contrasts with the essence of justice, which by its nature tends to establish equality and harmony between the parties in conflict. This kind of abuse of the idea of justice and the practical distortion of it show how far human action can *deviate from justice itself*, even when it is being undertaken in the name of justice. Not in vain did Christ challenge his listeners, faithful to the doctrine of the Old Testament, for their attitude which was manifested in the words: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".¹¹¹ This was was the form of distortion of justice at that time; and today's forms continue to be modelled on it. It is obvious, in fact, that in the name of an alleged justice (for example, historical justice or class justice) the neighbour is sometimes destroyed, killed, deprived of liberty or stripped of fundamental human rights. The experience of the past and of our own time demonstrates that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself, if *that deeper power, which is love*, is not allowed to shape human life in its various dimensions. It has been precisely historical experience that, among other things, has led to the formulation of the saying: *summum ius, summa iniuria*. This statement does not detract from the value of justice and does not minimize the significance of the order that is based upon it; it only indicates, under another aspect, the need to draw from the powers of the spirit which condition the very order of justice, powers which are still more profound.

The Church, having before her eyes the picture of the generation to which we belong, *shares the uneasiness of so many of the people of our time*. Moreover, one cannot fail to be worried by the *decline of many fundamental values*, which constitute an unquestionable good not only for Christian

¹¹¹ Mt. 5:38.

morality but simply *for human morality, for moral culture*: these values include respect for human life from the moment of conception, respect for marriage in its indissoluble unity, and respect for the stability of the family. Moral permissiveness strikes especially at this most sensitive sphere of life and society. Hand in hand with this go the crisis of truth in human relationships, lack of responsibility for what one says, the purely utilitarian relationship between individual and individual, the loss of a sense of the authentic common good and the ease with which this good is alienated. Finally, there is the "desacralization" that often turns into "dehumanization": the individual and the society for whom nothing is "sacred" suffer moral decay, in spite of appearances.

VII

THE MERCY OF GOD IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In connection with this picture of our generation, a picture which cannot fail to cause profound anxiety, there come to mind once more those words which, by reason of the Incarnation of the Son of God, resounded in Mary's *Magnificat*, and which sing of "mercy from generation to generation". The Church of our time, constantly pondering the eloquence of these inspired words, and applying them to the sufferings of the great human family, must become more particularly and profoundly conscious of the need to *bear witness in her whole mission to God's mercy*, following in the footsteps of the tradition of the Old and the New Covenant, and above all of Jesus Christ himself and his Apostles. The Church must bear witness to the mercy of God revealed in Christ, in the whole of his mission as Messiah, *professing it* in the first place as a salvific truth of faith and as necessary for a life in harmony with faith, and then *seeking to introduce it and to make it incarnate in the lives* both of her faithful and as far as possible in the lives of all people of good will. Finally, the Church — professing mercy and remaining always faithful to it — has the right and the duty to call upon the mercy of God, *imploping it* in the face of all the manifestations of physical and moral evil, before all the threats that cloud the whole horizon of the life of humanity today.

13. *The Church Professes the Mercy of God and Proclaims it*

The Church must *profess and proclaim God's mercy in all its truth*, as it has been handed down to us by revelation. We have sought, in the foregoing pages of the present document, to give at least an outline of this truth, which finds such rich expression in the whole of Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition. In the daily life of the Church the truth about the mercy of God, expressed in the Bible, resounds as a perennial echo through the many readings of the Sacred Liturgy. The authentic sense of faith of the People of God perceives this truth, as is shown by various expressions of personal and community piety. It would of course be difficult to give a list or summary of them all, since most of them are vividly inscribed in the depths of people's hearts and minds. Some theologians affirm that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God, and the Bible, Tradition and the whole faith life of the People of God provide particular proofs of this. It is not a question here of the perfection of the inscrutable essence of God in the mystery of the divinity itself, but of the perfection and attribute whereby man, in the intimate truth of his existence, encounters the living God particularly closely and particularly often. In harmony with Christ's words to Philip,¹¹² the "vision of the Father" — a vision of God through faith — finds precisely in the encounter with his mercy a unique moment of interior simplicity and truth, similar to that which we discover in the parable of the prodigal son.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father".¹¹³ The Church professes the mercy of God, the Church lives by it in her wide experience of faith and also in her teaching, constantly contemplating Christ, concentrating on him, on his life and on his Gospel, on his Cross and Resurrection, on his whole mystery. Everything that forms the "vision" of Christ in the Church's living faith and teaching brings us nearer to the "vision of the Father" in the holiness of his mercy. The Church seems in a particular way to profess the mercy of God and to venerate it when she directs herself to the Heart of Christ. In fact, it is precisely this drawing close to Christ in the mystery of his Heart which enables us to dwell on this point — a point in a sense central and also most accessible on the human level — of the revelation of the merciful love of the Father, a revelation which constituted the central content of the messianic mission of the Son of Man.

¹¹² Cf. Jn. 14:9-10.¹¹³ Jn. 14:9.

The Church lives an authentic life when she *professes and proclaims mercy* — the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer — and when she brings people close to the sources of the Saviour's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser. Of great significance in this area is constant meditation on the word of God, and above all conscious and mature participation *in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of penance or reconciliation*. The Eucharist brings us ever nearer to the *love* which is more powerful than death: "For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup", we proclaim not only the death of the Redeemer but also his Resurrection, "until he comes" in glory.¹¹⁴ The same Eucharistic rite, celebrated in memory of him who in his messianic mission revealed the Father to us by means of his words and his Cross, attests to the *inexhaustible love* by virtue of which he desires always to be united with us and present in our midst, coming to meet every human heart. It is the sacrament of penance or reconciliation that prepares the way for each individual, even those weighed down with great faults. In this sacrament each person can experience mercy in a unique way, that is, the love which is more powerful than sin. This has already been spoken of in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*; but it will be fitting to return once more to this fundamental theme.

It is precisely because sin exists in the world, which "God so loved... that he gave his only Son",¹¹⁵ that God, who "is love",¹¹⁶ *cannot reveal himself otherwise* than as mercy. This corresponds not only to the most profound truth of that love which God is, but also to the whole interior truth of man and of the world which is man's temporary homeland.

Mercy in itself, as a perfection of the infinite God, is also infinite. Also infinite therefore and inexhaustible is the Father's readiness to receive the prodigal children who return to his home. *Infinite are the readiness and power of forgiveness* which flow continually from the marvellous value of the sacrifice of the Son. No human sin can prevail over this power or even limit it. On the part of man only a lack of good will can limit it, a lack of readiness to be converted and to repeat, in other words persistence in obstinacy, opposing grace and truth, especially in the face of the witness of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

¹¹⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 11:26; acclamation in the Roman Missal.

¹¹⁵ Jn. 3:16.

¹¹⁶ 1 Jn. 4:8.

Therefore, the Church professes and proclaims conversion. Conversion to God always consists *in discovering his mercy*, that is, in discovering that love which is patient and kind¹¹⁷ as only the Creator and Father can be; the love to which the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"¹¹⁸ is faithful to the uttermost consequences in the history of his covenant with man: even to the Cross and to the death and Resurrection of the Son. Conversion to God is always the fruit of the "rediscovery" of this Father, who is rich in mercy.

Authentic knowledge of the God of mercy, the God of tender love, is a constant and inexhaustible source of conversion, not only as a momentary interior act but also as a permanent attitude, as a state of mind. Those who come to know God in this way, who "see" him in this way, can live only in a state of being continually converted to him. They live, therefore, *in statu conversionis*; and it is this state of conversion which marks out the most profound element of the pilgrimage of every man and woman on earth in *statu viatoris*. It is obvious that the Church professes the mercy of God, revealed in the crucified and risen Christ, not only by the word of her teaching but above all through the deepest pulsation of the life of the whole People of God. By means of this testimony of life, the Church fulfils the mission proper to the People of God, the mission which is a sharing in and, in a sense, a continuation of the messianic mission of Christ himself.

The contemporary Church is profoundly conscious that only on the basis of the mercy of God will she be able to carry out the tasks that derive from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and, in the first place, the ecumenical task which aims at uniting all those who confess Christ. As she makes many efforts in this direction, the Church confesses with humility that only that *love* which is more powerful than the weakness of human divisions *can definitively bring about that unity* which Christ implored from the Father and which the Spirit never ceases to beseech for us "with sighs too deep for words".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4.

¹¹⁸ 2 Cor. 1:3.

¹¹⁹ Rom. 8:26.

14. *The Church seeks to put Mercy into Practice*

Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called "to practise mercy" towards others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy".¹²⁰ The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practise mercy. All the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount indicate the way of conversion and of reform of life, but the one referring to those who are merciful is particularly eloquent in this regard. Man attains to the merciful love of God, his mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbour.

This authentically evangelical process is not just a spiritual transformation realized once and for all: it is a whole life-style, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. It consists in the constant discovery and persevering practice of *love as a unifying and also elevating power* despite all difficulties of a psychological or social nature: it is a question, in fact, of a *merciful love* which, by its essence, is a creative love. In reciprocal relationships between persons merciful love is never a unilateral act or process. Even in the cases in which everything would seem to indicate that only one party is giving and offering, and the other only receiving and taking (for example, in the case of a physician giving treatment, a teacher teaching, parents supporting and bringing up their children, a benefactor helping the needy), in reality the one who gives is always also a beneficiary. In any case, he too can easily find himself in the position of the one who receives, who obtains a benefit, who experiences merciful love; he too can find himself the object of mercy.

In this sense *Christ* crucified is for us the loftiest model, inspiration and encouragement. When we base ourselves on this *disquieting model*, we are able with all humility to show mercy to others, knowing that Christ accepts it as if it were shown to himself.¹²¹ On the basis of this model, we must also continually purify all our actions and all our intentions in which mercy is understood and practised in a unilateral way, as a good done to others. An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from

¹²⁰ Mt. 5:7.

¹²¹ Cf. Mt. 25:34-40.

the people who are accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet true acts of mercy, nor has there yet been fully completed in us that conversion to which Christ has shown us the way by his words and example, even to the Cross, nor are we yet sharing fully in the *magnificent source of merciful love* that has been revealed to us by him.

Thus, the way which Christ showed to us in the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitude regarding those who are merciful is much richer than what we sometimes find in ordinary human opinions about mercy. These opinions see mercy as a unilateral act or process, presupposing and maintaining a certain distance between the one practising mercy and the one benefitting from it, between the one who does good and the one who receives it. Hence the attempt to free interpersonal and social relationships from mercy and to base them solely on justice. However, such opinions about mercy fail to see the fundamental link between mercy and justice spoken of by the whole biblical tradition, and above all by the messianic mission of Jesus Christ. *True mercy is, so to speak, the most profound source of justice.* If justice is in itself suitable for "arbitration" between people concerning the reciprocal distribution of objective goods in an equitable manner, love and only love (including that kindly love that we call "mercy") is capable of restoring man to himself.

Mercy that is truly Christian is also, in a certain sense, *the most perfect incarnation* of "equality" between people, and therefore also the most perfect incarnation of *justice* as well, insofar as justice aims at the same result in its own sphere. However, the equality brought by justice is limited to the realm of objective and extrinsic goods, while love and mercy bring it about that people meet one another in that value which is man himself, with the dignity that is proper to him. At the same time, "equality" of people through "patient and kind" love¹²² does not take away differences: the person who gives becomes more generous when he feels at the same time benefitted by the person accepting his gift; and vice versa, the person who accepts the gift with the awareness that, in accepting it, he too is doing good is in his own way serving the great cause of the dignity of the person; and this contributes to uniting people in a more profound manner.

¹²² Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4.

Thus, mercy becomes an indispensable element for *shaping* mutual relationships between people, in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human, and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood. It is impossible to establish this bond between people, if they wish to regulate their mutual relationships solely according to the measure of justice. In every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must, *so to speak*, be "*corrected*" to a *considerable extent* by that love which, as Saint Paul proclaims, "is patient and kind" or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that *merciful love* which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity. Let us remember, furthermore, that *merciful love* also means the cordial *tenderness and sensitivity* so eloquently spoken of in the parable of the prodigal son,¹²³ and also in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.¹²⁴ Consequently, merciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; and it is indispensable in education and in pastoral work.

Its sphere of action, however, is not limited to this. If Paul VI more than once indicated the "civilization of love"¹²⁵ as the goal towards which all efforts in the cultural and social fields as well as in the economic and political fields should tend, it must be added that this good will never be reached if in our thinking and acting concerning the vast and complex spheres of human society we stop at the criterion of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"¹²⁶ and do not try to transform it in its essence, by complementing it with another spirit. Certainly, the Second Vatican Council also leads us in this direction, when it speaks repeatedly of the need to *make the world more human*,¹²⁷ and says that the realization of this task is precisely the mission of the Church in the modern world. Society can become ever more human only if we introduce into the many-sided setting of interpersonal and social relationships, not merely justice, but also that "merciful love" which constitutes the messianic message of the Gospel.

¹²³ Cf. Lk. 15:11-32.

¹²⁴ Cf. Lk. 15:1-10.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Insegnamento di Paolo VI XIII* (1975), p. 1568 (close of Holy Year, 25 December 1975).

¹²⁶ Mt. 5:38.

¹²⁷ Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 40 AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1057-1059; Pope Paul VI: Apostolic Exhortation *Paterna cum Benevolentia*, in particular nos. 1-6: AAS 67 (1975), pp. 7-9, 17-23.

Society can become "ever more human" only when we introduce into all the mutual relationships which form its moral aspect the moment for forgiveness, which is so much of the essence of the Gospel. Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of the *love which is more powerful than sin*. Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people. A world from which forgiveness was eliminated would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of which each person would claim his or her own rights vis-à-vis others; the various kinds of selfishness latent in man would transform life and human society into a system of oppression of the weak by the strong, or into an arena of permanent strife between one group and another.

For this reason, the Church must consider it one of her principal duties — at every stage of history and especially in our modern age — *to proclaim and to introduce into life* the mystery of mercy, supremely revealed in Jesus Christ. Not only for the Church herself as the community of believers but also in a certain sense for all humanity, this mystery is the *source* of a life different from the life which can be built by man, who is exposed to the oppressive forces of the threefold concupiscence active within him.¹²⁸ It is precisely in the name of this mystery that Christ teaches us to forgive always. How often we repeat the words of the prayer which he himself taught us, asking "*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*", which means those who are guilty of something in our regard!¹²⁹ It is indeed difficult to express the profound value of the attitude which these words describe and inculcate. How many things these words say to every individual about others and also about himself! The consciousness of being trespassers against each other goes hand in hand with the call to fraternal solidarity, which Saint Paul expressed in his concise exhortation to "*forbear one another in love*".¹³⁰ What a lesson of humility is to be found here with regard to man, with regard both to one's neighbour and to oneself! What a school of good will for daily living, in the various conditions of our existence! If we were to ignore this lesson, what would remain of any "humanist" programme of life and education?

¹²⁸ Cf. 1 Jn. 2:16.

¹²⁹ Mt. 6:12.

¹³⁰ Eph. 4:2; cf. Gal. 6:2.

Christ emphasizes so insistently the need to forgive others that when Peter asked him how many times he should forgive his neighbour he answered with the symbolic number of "seventy times seven",¹³¹ meaning that he must be able to forgive everyone every time. It is obvious that such a generous requirement of *forgiveness does not cancel out* the objective *requirements of justice*. Properly understood, justice constitutes, so to speak, the goal of forgiveness. In no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence towards evil, towards scandals, towards injury or insult. In any case, reparation for evil and scandal, compensation for injury, and satisfaction for insult are conditions for forgiveness.

Thus the fundamental structure of justice always enters into the sphere of mercy. Mercy, however, has the power to confer on justice a new content, which is expressed most simply and fully in forgiveness. Forgiveness, in fact, shows that, over and above the process of "compensation" and "truce" which is specific to justice, love is necessary, so that man may affirm himself as man. Fulfilment of the conditions of justice is especially indispensable in order that love may reveal its own nature. In analyzing the parable of the prodigal son, we have already called attention to the fact that *he who forgives and he who is forgiven* encounter one another at an essential point, namely the dignity or essential value of the person, a point which cannot be lost and the affirmation of which, or its rediscovery, is a source of the greatest joy.¹³²

The Church rightly considers it her duty and the purpose of her mission *to guard the authenticity of forgiveness*, both in life and behaviour and in educational and pastoral work. She protects it simply by guarding its *source*, which is the mystery of the mercy of God himself as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The basis of the Church's mission, in all the spheres spoken of in the numerous pronouncements of the most recent Council and in the centuries-old experience of the apostolate, is none other than "drawing from the wells of the Saviour":¹³³ this is what provides many guidelines for the mission of the Church

¹³¹ Mt. 18:22.

¹³² Cf. Lk. 15:32.

¹³³ Cf. Is. 12:3.

in the lives of individual Christians, of individual communities, and also of the whole People of God. This "drawing from the wells of the Saviour" can be done only in the spirit of that poverty to which we are called by the words and example of the Lord: "You received without pay, give without pay".¹³⁴ Thus, in all the ways of the Church's life and ministry — through the evangelical poverty of her ministers and stewards and of the whole people which bears witness to "the mighty works" of its Lord — the God who is "rich in mercy" has been made still more clearly manifest.

VIII

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH IN OUR TIMES

15. *The Church Appeals to the Mercy of God*

The Church proclaims the truth of God's mercy revealed in the crucified and Risen Christ, and she professes it in various ways. Furthermore, she seeks to practise mercy towards people through people, and she sees in this an indispensable condition for solicitude for a better and "more human" world, today and tomorrow. However, at no time and in no historical period — especially at a moment as critical as our own — can the Church forget *the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God* amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it. Precisely this is the fundamental right and duty of the Church in Christ Jesus, her right and duty of the Church in Christ Jesus, her right and duty towards God and towards humanity. The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word "mercy", moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more *the Church has the right and the duty* to appeal to the God of mercy "with loud cries".¹³⁵ These "loud cries" should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries

¹³⁴ Mt. 10:8.

¹³⁵ Cf. Heb. 5:7.

uttered to God to implore his mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats.

Modern man feels these threats. What has been said above in this regard is only a rough outline. Modern man often anxiously wonders about the solution to the terrible tensions which have built up in the world and which entangle humanity. And if at times he *lacks the courage to utter the word "mercy"*, or if in his conscience empty of religious content he does not find the equivalent, *so much greater is the need for the Church to utter this word*, not only in her own name but also in the name of all the men and women of our time.

Everything that I have said in the present document on mercy should therefore *be continually transformed into ardent prayer*: into a cry that implores mercy according to the needs of man in the modern world. *May this cry be full of that truth about mercy* which has found such rich expression in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, as also in the authentic life of faith of countless generations of the People of God. With this cry let us, like the sacred writers, call upon the God who cannot despise anything that he has made,¹³⁶ the God who is faithful to himself, to his fatherhood and his love. And, like the prophets, we appeal to that love which has maternal characteristics and which, like a mother, follows each of her children, each lost sheep, even if they should number millions, even if in the world evil should prevail over goodness, even if contemporary humanity should deserve a new "flood" on account of its sins, as once the generation of Noah did. Let us have recourse to God that fatherly love revealed to us by Christ in his messianic mission, a love which reached its culmination in his Cross, in his death and Resurrection. Let us have recourse to God through Christ, mindful of the words of Mary's *Magnificat*, which proclaim mercy "from generation to generation". Let us implore God's mercy for the present generation. May the Church which, following the example of Mary, also seeks to be

¹³⁶ Cf. Wis. 11:24; Ps. 145(144):9; Gen. 1:31.

the spiritual mother of mankind, express in this prayer her maternal solicitude and at the same time her confident love, that love from which is born the most burning need for prayer.

Let us offer up our *petitions, directed by the faith, by the hope, and by the charity* which Christ has planted in our hearts. This attitude is likewise love of God, whom modern man has sometimes separated far from himself, made extraneous to himself, proclaiming in various ways that God is "superfluous". This is, therefore, *love of God*, the insulting rejection of whom by modern man we feel profoundly, and we are ready to cry out with Christ on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".¹⁸⁷ At the same time it is *love of people*, of all men and women without any exception or division: without difference of race, culture, language, or world outlook, without distinction between friends and enemies. This is love for people — it desires every true good for each individual and for every human community, every family, every nation, every social group, for young people, adults parents, the elderly — a love for everyone, without exception. This is love, or rather an anxious solicitude to ensure for each individual every true good and to remove and drive away every sort of evil.

And, if any of our contemporaries do not share the faith and hope which lead me, as a servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God,¹⁸⁸ to implore God's mercy for humanity in this hour of history, let them at least try to understand *the reason for my concern*. *It is dictated by love for man*, for all that is human and which, according to the intuitions of many of our contemporaries, is threatened by an immense danger. The mystery of Christ, which reveals to us the great vocation of man and which led me to emphasize in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* his incomparable dignity, also obliges me to proclaim mercy as God's merciful love, revealed in the same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world, as we approach the end of the second millennium.

In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, in the spirit of his messianic mission, enduring in the history of

¹⁸⁷ Lk. 23:34.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1.

humanity, *we raise our voices and pray* that the Love which is in the Father may once again be revealed at this stage of history, and that, through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit, it may be shown to be present in our modern world and to be more powerful than evil: more powerful than sin and death. We pray for this through the intercession of her who does not cease to proclaim "mercy... from generation to generation", and also through the intercession of those for whom there have been completely fulfilled the words of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy".¹³⁹

In continuing the great task of implementing the Second Vatican Council, in which we can rightly see a new phase of the self-realization of the Church — in keeping with the epoch in which it has been our destiny to live — the *Church* herself must be constantly guided by the full consciousness that in this work it is not permissible for her, for any reason, to withdraw into herself. *The reason for her existence* is, in fact, *to reveal God*, that Father who allows us to "see" him in Christ.¹⁴⁰ No matter how strong the resistance of human history may be, no matter how marked the diversity of contemporary civilization, no matter how great the denial of God in the human world, so much the greater must be the Church's closeness to that mystery which, hidden for centuries in God, was then truly shared with man, in time, through Jesus Christ.

With my Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the thirtieth day of November, the First Sunday of Advent, in the year 1980, the third of the Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II

¹³⁹ Mt. 5:7.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Jn. 14:9.

DOCUMENTATION

THE DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

A Common Statement by the United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate.

The following document is the latest in a series of important guidelines which have greatly facilitated interconfessional cooperation concerning Scripture during this decade.

The introductory part of the paper on the history of the canon of the Bible was written by Dr. Franz Josef Stendebach, then director of Katholisches Bibelwerk in West Germany and current Chairman of the WCFBA Administrative Board. The second part was composed by the UBS. A suffix, in the form of a letter written by a participating UBS official to Christians protesting the UBS/WCFBA policy, follows.

The United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate have a decade long tradition of cooperation concerning the translation, publication and distribution of sacred Scripture. Cardinal Bea as President of the Secretariate for promoting Christian Unity, initiated that dialogue at the very foundation of the Federation, and a representative of that *Vatican body* has always participated in the consultation.

Pursuant of this initiative these two international service associations have maintained a working dialogue principally among European officers of both, plus experts called in by them, called The Bible Projects Consultation. As the name indicates, the immediate objective has been to resolve practical problems arising from the cooperative efforts of local churches throughout the world to provide their communities "with easy access to sacred Scripture... with suitable and correct translations... and if given the opportunity, in cooperation with the separated brethren (Constitution on Divine Revelation 22). The mutual concern for this common goal has throughout the years been creatively accented by controversies arising mostly at the local church level where Christian communities of different traditions disagreed on how or what Scriptures were to be

translated and provided for their people. Most but not all of these difficulties could in the course of time be resolved through negotiations leading to the clarification of mutually acceptable principles of procedure.

Canon Of The Old Testament

"Canon" is a technical summary term for those books which are considered to be Holy Scripture and thus part of the Bible. Various Christian Churches hold differing views as to their number and sequence, so the canon of the Old Testament is not identical for all Christian Churches. This sometimes leads to difficulties in cooperation between the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate and its catholic partners on the one hand and national Bible Societies and the United Bible Societies on the other hand, in translating, producing and distributing biblical texts. For those who are involved in this cooperation it may be useful to summarise what happened historically and to outline how the canon developed.

The History of the Canon in Judaism

The difference in defining the content of the canon can be traced back to controversies within Judaism. Although there were "provisional forms" of the canon in earlier times, it was not definitively set until after the time of Christ.

The division of the Jewish Canon into (1) the Law (tora), (2) the Prophets (nebiim), and (3) the Writings (ketubim) reflects the history of the compilation of the books of the Old Testament. It can be assumed that the acceptance of the tora as Holy Scripture was established before the time of the Samaritan schism (ca. 300 B.C.) since the Samaritans accepted the five Books of Moses — but only those — as Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, the tora did not yet at that time have a formal, canonical character with content, extent and text being finalized or regarded as unchangeable. This can be seen by comparing the Massoretic text with the Septuagint, which have varying forms of the text.

The collecting of the prophetic books into a body of Holy Scripture took place soon afterward. The latest acceptable period of time for the consolidation of the prophetic books is around the time of Jesus Sirach (approx. 200 B.C.), since

Jesus Sirach makes mention of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets in his "Eulogy of the Ancestors" (48:22 - 49:12). For this reason the Book of Daniel, written at the time of the Maccabees (approx. 165 B.C.), was not included in the collection of the prophets either.

The third part of the Hebrew Canon, the Writings, presumably derived its name from the fact most of its books were not read aloud in worship services, but were rather read for themselves, with the important exception of the Psalms, which were regarded as Holy Scripture at an early date. The process of the "canonization" of the other books, which is not at all clear even today, took a much longer time for two reasons: (1) These books could not as unavoidably lay claim to divine authority as did the Law and the Prophets, and (2) the rabbinical debates about many of the writings, especially the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Esther, went on for a long period of time. The final integration of these books into the canon is due most likely to a number of factors: their use in worship (Lamentations, Esther), their relationship to the Levites and to the tora (Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles), the age of the traditions they dealt with (Job, Ruth) and, finally, their relationship to prominent persons in the history of Israel (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Daniel). It was above all this collection of Scriptures which remained open to the addition of further books. It was precisely on the need of having to finally draw a line somewhere that a lively discussion arose within the Synagogues.

Definitive Canon

The definitive completion of the Jewish canon only took place at the Synod of Jabne-Jamnia in 100 A.D. when Jewish pharisees recalled the origins of revelation and tried to dissociate them from the proliferation of apocalyptic literature, which because of its syncretistic character threatened to destroy Judaism from within. According to Flavius Josephus (*contra Apionem* 1:8) the canon is limited to 22 documents written in the time between Moses and Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). Postprophetic literature not excluded by this limitation were those writings attributed to authors living within this time-span, such as the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

The oldest Jewish enumeration of the canonical writings can be found in the 2nd century A.D. in the Talmud at Baba

bathra 14b: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Twelve Prophets, Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Neemiah, Chronicles — 24 pieces of Holy Scripture, as in 4 Ezra.

The discrepancy with the 22 books mentioned by Josephus is not due to a greater number of books, but because Josephus lists judges and Ruth as one book, and Jeremiah and Lamentations as one book. And the fact that our *Biblia Hebraica* today consists of 39 books is because we divide Samuel, Kings and Chronicles each into two books, and then count the twelve Minor Prophets, Ezra, Nehemiah, Judges, Ruth, Jeremiah, and Lamentations separately. Thus the canon is actually the same in the Book of Josephus, in 4 Ezra, in the Talmud at *Baba bathra*, and in our own Hebrew Bible of today. The only difference to be found is in the enumeration.

Not included in the Jewish Canon were writings which can be found in the Septuagint and in Qumran. The numerous Septuagint manuscripts available manifest many differences in the number and order of the books, and with this dynamic openness certainly carry on in the older Jewish tradition. The books in the Septuagint and Qumran not found in the Jewish Canon are called "deuterocanonical books" in the Catholic Church, whereas in the Protestant Churches the term "apocrypha" is more widely used. The number of books in the apocrypha cannot be defined exactly, since differences already exist in the Septuagint manuscripts.

The History of the Canon in the Christian Churches

The Jewish Canon was accepted by Origenes, Epiphanius and Jerome, even if not exactly in the same order of numbering.

A decisive factor for determining the canon of the Church was that the Jewish Canon had not yet been finalised at the time of Jesus and of the separation of the Christian community from Judaism. So the Christians oriented themselves according to one or other centre of Judaism, with the result that there was a certain pluralism within the Church regarding the contents of the Old Testament. But the question about a definitive establishment of the canon has been asked and answered in a variety of ways since the 2nd Century. At first, the

various Church provinces settled this question for themselves. Many of the apocryphal writings contested in Judaism were accepted in the Syrian and African Churches.

Oriental Churches

The canon of the Oriental Churches, e.g., of the Syrians, the Copts, the Armenians and the Ethiopians, shows much diversity, being open not only to the apocrypha but also to the pseudoepigraphic writings. In the Western Church the canon of the *Decretum Gelasianum* was retained throughout the entire Middle Ages as the Church norm, though the Old Testament apocrypha were occasionally excluded.

Western Church

The explicit and precise establishment of the canon occurred earlier in the Western Church than in the Eastern Church. This was not done, however, without difficulties. Rufinus, for example, described the apocrypha as non-canonical, but worth reading. Jerome was the most resolute supporter of the acceptance of the Jewish Canon alone; his position, however, did not prevail. Augustine attempted to define the canon by retaining only those books which had been accepted by the most important Churches (*apostolicae sedes*). The Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) essentially accepted the canon presented by Augustine, which included the apocrypha. This same canon is mentioned in the Rescript of Pope Innocent I (405) and in the *Decretum Gelasianum*. This canon includes not only the writings of the Jewish canon but also the Books of Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, Tobit, Judith and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Reformers

It was not until the end of the Middle Ages that criticism could again be heard against some of the canonical books. This criticism came above all from the Humanists. More significant was the criticism of individual books of the canon by the Reformers, especially Luther. Luther accepted the traditional New Testament canon, but attributed less value to some books than to others. Luther regarded the Old Testament apocrypha as non-canonical books not of equal value to the Scriptures, but yet useful and worth reading. In his first complete Bible translation (1534) he attached as apocrypha to the Old Testament

the Books of Judith, Wisdom, Tobit, Sirach, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the additions to Esther and Daniel, and the Prayer of Manasse.

Calvin dealt more harshly with the apocrypha. They do not appear in Bible translations of those Reformed Churches which are based on Calvin's teaching.

Catholic Canon

The Catholic Church had discussed the canon at the Council of Florence (1442) in the *Decretum pro Jacobitis* and listed the individual books by name. The Old Testament canon includes, over and above the Jewish Canon, the following books: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1—2 Maccabees. In its conflicts with Reformers the Council of Trent (1546) issued an authoritative and conclusive decree (*De Canonicis Scripturas*) definitively defining the Canon of Scripture for Catholics as consisting of 45 books of the OT and 27 books of the NT. The Vulgate, which Trent declared to be the authentic Bible, includes the Books mentioned above, plus Esther; Daniel and the additions to these which are found in the Septuagint. The Letter of Jeremiah is found in the sixth chapter of the Book of Baruch. In the older editions of the Vulgate, 3-4 Ezra and the Prayer of Manasse were added to the New Testament.

Versions

Whereas Luther felt that these books, although not Holy Scripture, were useful to read, Calvin and his followers feared that they were a source of false teaching. In order to emphasize the difference, Luther separated the deuterocanonical books from the rest of the Old and New Testament Books and placed them in his German Bible of 1534 in a section of their own between the Old and the New Testament. The practice was followed by many Bible editions (e.g. the Coverdale Version in English (1535), the Olivetan Bible in French (1535), the Reina Valera Bible in Spanish (1602), etc.). Calvin and theologians of his school said that the "apocryphal" books had no divine authority whatsoever, that they had been controversial in the church through the ages, and that their teaching was incoherent or even false. Reformed Confessions such as the *Confessio Belgica* (1561) and the Westminster Confession (1647) also took this line. From these two different attitudes, two distinctly different views of the deuterocanonical books became

part of the Protestant tradition. The Bible Societies which came into being after 1710 in various parts of the world mirror from their very beginning these different views.

The Bible Society's opinions on the Deuterocanonical Books

The British and Foreign Bible Society advised its auxiliaries not to make the deuterocanonical books part of their translations and publications. A considerable number of auxiliaries on the European continent, however, chose to sever ties with their founder Society in London in order to serve the churches in their own area who asked for Bible editions which included the deuterocanonical books. Generally, the development was that the Anglo-Saxon Bible Societies, including the American Bible Society and its daughter societies, were more formed by the Reformed view on the deuterocanonical books, whereas other Bible Societies, for example in countries with Lutheran State Churches, did not hesitate to translate, produce and distribute Bibles which contained the deuterocanonical books. In countries with a strong Orthodox constituency it is also clear that this Church expects the Bible Society to produce a Bible which contains the deuterocanonical books accepted by the Synod of Jerusalem (1672).

The Bible Societies generally abstained from developing a doctrinal position on the canon on their own — they simply provided the churches in their area with the kind of Bible they asked for. The Bible Societies wanted to be a service agency of the Christian community in their area.

The 1960s: A new situation

In the 1960s, with the growth and intensification of Bible Society cooperation and contacts within the United Bible Societies, differences in views held on the canon became more visible. At the same time, the Bible Societies reviewed their own role as servants of the churches. The conference of church leaders invited by the UBS President, Dr. Donald Coggan, to meet in Driebergen in the Netherlands in 1964 made the following recommendation:

“Where the churches desire and specifically request it, the Bible Societies should consider the translation and publication of the books commonly called the Apocrypha.”

Simultaneously, the Roman Catholic Church, as a result of the initiatives of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, had decided to use the Bible in national languages in worship services (and therefore needed hundreds of good new translations into these languages) and also to make the Bible easily accessible to all Roman Catholic Christians. This decision meant the beginning of a new relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the United Bible Societies.

The 'Guiding Principles' of 1968

The most formative encounter was the preparation of "Guiding Principles for Inter-confessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible", jointly worked out and agreed to between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Vatican and the UBS in 1968. These Guiding Principles contain a very significant paragraph on the canon:

"Many Bible Societies are in a position to publish editions of the Bible which contain the Apocrypha or the deuterocanonical texts in certain well defined circumstances. It is recognised that on the one hand an edition of the complete Bible bearing the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic authorities will contain the deuterocanonical texts and that, upon the other hand, while many groups within Protestantism have employed the Apocrypha, a great majority find it impossible to accept an arrangement of the Old Testament which does not clearly distinguish between these texts and the traditional Hebrew canon. It is suggested that these two positions can in practice be reconciled if normally, in editions of the Bible published by the Bible Societies and bearing the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic authorities, the deuterocanonical texts are included as a separate section before the New Testament. In the case of the book of Esther the translation of the Greek text will be printed in the deuterocanonical section while the translation of the Hebrew text will be printed among the books of the Hebrew canon. The deuterocanonical parts of the book of Daniel will be presented as items in the separate section".

The 'Edinburgh Formula'

The practical question which followed immediately from this basic agreement was how the expenses for the translation

and composition of the deuterocanonical books should be arranged by the UBS, which at that time had begun to operate a common "World Service Budget". Discussing this question, the UBS General Committee, at its meeting in Edinburgh, 1969, took into account the fact that at that time the main contributions to the UBS World Service Budget came from Anglo-Saxon Bible Societies. This meant that most of the money which was available to the World Service Budget came from donors and churches who consider the deuterocanonical books, in line with the Reformed tradition, not as books worth reading but as books which might confuse and mislead Christians.

The 'Edinburgh Formula' is reproduced to the right on this page.

Later on, the UBS Executive Committee in Addis Ababa (1972) and in Teheran (1973) made the following amendments and clarifications to the "Edinburgh formula":

Addis Ababa

"E. 1972.39

That encouragement be given to the project of translating the Bible in modern Greek according to the Orthodox Canon, and to the publication and distribution of some editions containing the deuterocanonical books, but that ways be sought of financing the deuterocanonical section of the project outside the World Service Budget".

Teheran

"The Committee discussed briefly the practical applications of the decision to ensure that the full cost of providing the deuterocanonical books is carried by the requesting Church. It was agreed that where the apocrypha is bound together with the Old Testament or with the Old and New Testament together, the selling price should be the same as that for the regular book excluding the apocrypha, but with the addition of a charge covering not less than the cost of the paper, printing and binding-in of the apocrypha plus 20%.

Where the Old and New Testaments are subsidised, the apocrypha should be added at UBS cost (as above); where the Old and New Testaments are sold at a price

higher than UBS cost, the apocrypha should also be charged at the same proportional mark-up over UBS cost. Discounts should be fully covered by additional mark-up where necessary. By following this formula there will be no World Service Budget subsidy involved in producing and distributing the apocrypha. Translations costs are handled separately, but here again, no subsidy should be provided from World Service Budget funds."

STATEMENT ON PUBLICATION OF THE APOCRYPHA

In view of much recent discussion, and considerable misunderstanding, about the policy of the United Bible Societies in relation to the deuterocanonical books commonly called the Apocrypha, the United Bible Societies' General Committee meeting in Edinburgh in September 1969 wishes to make the position clear, as follows:

1. When the Authorised Version of the English Bible was published in 1611, all copies contained the Apocrypha. The same is true of most of the early translations such as Luther and Valera. Subsequently, however, editions without the Apocrypha appeared from time to time. From its formation in 1804 down to about 1926, the British and Foreign Bible Society's circulation of Scriptures included editions with the Apocrypha: but in view of the controversy at that time, regulations were then adopted excluding such circulation. Most, but by no means all, Bible Societies have since operated under a similar limitation until recent years.
2. In June 1964, a world conference of Church leaders and Bible Society representatives, meeting at Driebergen in Holland, urged that the Bible Societies should undertake their task of world-wide circulation of the Scriptures with renewed vigour, and recommended that 'where the churches desire and specifically request it the Bible Societies should consider the translation and publication of the books commonly called the Apocrypha'.
3. It should be noted that the churches desiring to have the Apocrypha are not only (as sometimes supposed) the Orthodox and Roman Catholic; but also (for example) Anglicans and Lutherans, who value the Apocrypha as supplementary to the Old and New Testaments, though they do not regard its books as part of the Canon.

4. It needs to be stressed that each member Society remains an autonomous body within the UBS family. Subject, therefore, to the basic aims and conditions of the partnership, each Bible Society makes its own decisions as to the texts which it will or will not publish or distribute. This freedom applies, of course, in relation to editions with Apocrypha.

5. It continues to be the normal policy and practice of the Bible Societies as a whole to publish the Holy Scriptures without the Apocrypha. When editions with the Apocrypha are published, this is often* subject to the following arrangements:

- (a) that there should be a specific request from the responsible body of the church community desiring such an edition;
- (b) that the deuterocanonical books should be included as a separate section before the New Testament;
- (c) that the full additional cost of providing this separate section should be carried by the requesting church or in some separate way, so that in any case there is no subsidy for the Apocrypha from general UBS funds.

6. The Committee feels it desirable that when Bible Society editions of the Bible include the Apocrypha, it should be preceded by a clear explanatory note which indicates the difference of value at different churches.

7. A categorical assurance can be given that no group which has not requested an Apocrypha edition will receive one, and that no-one will be involved in translation of the Apocrypha against his wish or conscience".

An important policy change was made in the UBS Executive Committee Meeting, Santo Domingo, March 1977. The word, "often", was changed to "sometimes".

Present UBS Policy

The Bible Societies still follow the rule under which they began their work. They are not churches wanting to establish doctrinal opinions about the Bible. They serve the churches in their area with the Bible which these churches want and need.

Thus the Bible Societies are ready to supply Bibles which include the deuterocanonical books wherever the churches concerned so request. The World Service Budget, however, which

still in its largest part comes from donors who do not consider the deuterocanonical books as parts of the Bible, cannot be used in disregard or violation of the views held by these donors for the translation and production of these books.

Thus churches requesting Bible editions which contain the deuterocanonical books will be asked to find the money for the translation and type-setting of these portions.

The UBS will cooperate by making available, if requested, the expertise of translators and consultants so that the deuterocanonical parts are in line with the level and quality of the rest of the translation.

They will also try to achieve simultaneous publication dates for editions with and without the deuterocanonical books whenever translation deadlines and production schedules can be so arranged. They will subsidize the rest of the Bible of which the deuterocanonical section is a part, and they will hold stocks of both editions and sell them to individuals and churches as required.

To sum up, it is clear that it is the churches which set the canon of Holy Scripture, and not the Bible Societies, whose attitude was and still is pragmatic, not doctrinal. The governing factor in the thinking of the Bible Societies is the churches — both as those whom the Bible Societies want to serve and as supporters of Bible Society work. Changes in Bible Society attitude will therefore occur as the churches either change their views or their practical approaches to this matter.

UBS Letter

Brussels

The UBS Europe Regional Secretary has expressed this UBS policy in a more personal way in his reply to Christians who signed cards protesting the circulation in Belgium of Bibles with the deuterocanonical books. He wrote (in French):

"Dear brother and sisters,

We received your protest card and have read it very carefully. Let us agree on the fact that the national Bible Societies have only one aim — to serve all the churches, all the groups, all the people who need the Scriptures. This had been the only aim followed since the founding, in 1710, of the first Bible Society. We have not taken any position, whether ecumenical,

pluralist, conservative, modernist or any other, but those who have given us their support through their prayers and their gifts, have shown us the way to follow, a way that leaves aside dogma.

Thus the Orthodox in Greece or Romania, the Roman Catholics in France or Canada, the Lutherans in the Netherlands or Sweden, Anglicans throughout the world, and many other Christians in many other countries, have asked us for Bibles which contain the apocryphal books, more commonly called the deuterocanonical books. No Bible Society which is a member of the United Bible Societies has wanted to be dogmatic in refusing to include them whenever it was confronted with a real need.

Allow me to end on a more personal note. My own Dutch Bible does not contain the apocrypha. I do not need it. But I know people, strong and faithful Christians, who want to read it, even though they know that it does not form part of the Hebrew Canon. It is not for me to judge them".

Dr. Ole Van Luyn

Copies Available

"A Common Statement on Deutero-Canonical Books - United Bible Societies and the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate"

are available from either the UBS or the WCFBA

United Bible Societies
(new address)
Balingier Str. 31
7000 Stuttgart 80
West Germany

WCFBA
Mittel Str. 12
7000 Stuttgart
West Germany

REFLECTIONS
on
VOCATIONS TO THE ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD
AND CONSECRATED LIFE
on the occasion of the
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF
CHURCH VOCATIONS
10-16 May 1981 Rome

God calls. God calls people through their different charisms but in complementary roles and reciprocal objectives. He calls as one God, one Lord of all who are many and whose needs are manifold. He calls all to given functions, to needed services, to necessary ministries. He calls through and from the community so that this would be accordingly formed in truth, would recognized Him in worship, would be duly served through Him.

God called. God called us to a particular relationship with Him. He called us from nothingness, and we came to be his creatures. He called us to the faith, and we became his chosen people. He called us in baptism, and we were reborn to be heirs of his Kingdom. He called us to the Sacred Orders, to the Religious Profession, and we were made participants of the ministerial priesthood, followers of the evangelical counsels of his Son.

God is calling. God is calling us to mediate before Him in favor of priestly and religious vocations. He is calling through his Church for young men and women who would minister to others in the ordained priesthood and the consecrated life. He is calling us to call them for Him through our praying, our witnessing, our preaching.

Reading through the various Vocation Plans of Action submitted, the many Position Papers presented and the WORKING PAPER drawn for the Congress on the Vocation Apostolate, considering the different interventions made, the vast experiences shared and concrete results obtained and communicated in the pastoral endeavor for priestly and religious vocations, and reflecting on the manifest concern, the long working hours and fervent expectations of the Congress, the following appear

to be — nay, they clearly are — the basic and essential, non-dispensable and non-negotiable elements in the apostolic work for vocations to the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life: PRAYER, CATECHESIS, FORMATION. All these, these three — or lame the apostle would be. To these, various schemes and strategies may be legitimately added. In these, different plans and approaches may be licitly incorporated. But without these, these three, not much if any would the apostle accomplish.

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

*"The harvest is great, but the laborers are few.
Pray therefore that the harvest master might
send laborers into his harvest"* (Mt. 9:38).

Prayer for vocations can be understood either in general, i.e., supplication before God that He would call concrete individuals to serve the manifold and distinct needs of their community, and that these in turn would be open and responsive to his call, or in particular, i.e., deprecation before God that He would call specific individuals to the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life, and that these in turn would attentively listen and generously answer his call. It is evident that prayer for vocations understood in either way is in keeping with the economy of salvation because the former already contains the latter, and the latter is but a more concrete expression of the former. But then, Christ has in fact and in truth a categorical pronouncement with reference to Church vocations, viz., apostolic laborers in the ecclesial vineyard of God.

The mandate of Christ cannot be more clear, more direct and simple: Pray! Prayer is the means expressly required by Christ in the promotion of priestly and religious vocations. Prayer is the mediation sine qua non explicitly enjoined by Christ on us in the vocation apostolate. Prayer is an element-part revealed by Christ to be constitutive of the divine salvific plan with reference to the participants of his ordained priesthood and the followers of his evangelical counsels.

Vocation to the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life is a special gift of God, a mysterious reality from God, a free action in God: He calls whom He wills, when He wills and how He wills it! Precisely because of this markedly supernatural nature and implication of Church vocations, equally supernatural means are in order to favor their intense actuality and numerical increase. And in the ordinary dispensation of

grace, Christ so postulates that the call of God would come through prayers — through a prayerful community, through prayerful persons, through prayerful works.

The validity of pastoral approaches, of institutional and organizational plannings, and even of technical campaigns is not denied — on proviso that these neither place undue influence and excessive moral force on potential candidates, nor misrepresent the priesthood or the religious life through half-truths, vain promissorial expectations and romantic excursions. But the pertinent teachings of Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II all consider prayer as the "prime duty", the "indispensable means", the "first form of collaboration", the "primary element" in the pastoral care of Church vocations. In effect, Paul VI declared: *"The pastoral methods have always the function of an instrument; the only reality which counts is prayer"* (*Discourse to the College of Cardinals*, 22 June 1973).

Who should pray? *"The task of fostering vocations devolves on the whole Christian community, which should do so in the first place by living in a fully Christian way"* (Vat. II, O.T., no. 2) which, needless to say, is concretely expressed by a praying community whose constituent individual members are the Bishop, the priests and religious, the lay ministers, the seminarians and novices, laymen and women, the old and the young, specially the sick, the disabled, the suffering, the weak and the poor, and whose constitutive institutional members are the vicariates, the parishes and the small Christian communities, the seminaries, the convents and houses of formation, the catholic schools, the religious organizations and the families — specially those that actually have candidates to the ordained priesthood and/or the religious life. All the members therefore of the Christian community should pray for vocations!

When should we pray? When the whole world actually prays every year for Church vocations, this is but *"the culminating expression of habitual prayer from which the Christian community cannot dispense itself"* (Paul VI, *Message*, 15 March 1970). Daily, weekly, monthly the whole Christian community should pray, crowning this prayerful habit with the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. During the Eucharistic Celebration, in the Prayers of the Faithful and specially right after Holy Communion. In novenas, triduums, holy hours. At visits to the Blessed Sacrament, exposition and benediction thereof, forty hour devotion thereto. On the occasion of devotional practices, prayer sessions, Bible services. Prayer therefore for vocations must be after all, habitual!

How should we pray? "Lord Jesus, who called the ones you wanted to call, call many of us to work for you, to work with you. You who enlightened with your words those whom you called, enlighten us with faith in you. You who supported them in their difficulties, help us to overcome the difficulties we have as young persons today. And if you call one of us to be consecrated completely to you, may your love give warmth to this vocation from its very beginning, and make it grow and persevere to the end. Amen." (John Paul II, *Letter for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 1979). We pray to Christ who is the Eternal and High Priest, and who is the Author of the evangelical counsels. We pray in faith, with hope, for love. We pray through the words of mouth, through preaching the word, through witnessing in life. Prayer therefore for vocations could be oral, homiletic, behavioral, all in the context of faith, hope and love!

FAMILY CATECHESIS

"The seed of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life is nourished through family prayer, the example of faith and the support of love"
(John Paul I)

Catechesis which is growth in faith through factual events and experiential realities, and which is premised on doctrine-application-awareness, provides a sober and sobering alternative to the dangers of intellectualism in faith and gullibility in practice, to the vanity of theologism and emotionalism, to the futility of academism and actionism, all of which being extreme and radical, do not provide the connatural and ordinary denominators for a true call and persevering response to priestly ministry and religious life.

A family that is catechized, a family that has integrated faith, life and culture, a family that is nourished by prayer, christian example and love, cannot but be receptive and responsive to Church vocations as a "first seminary", as a "domestic church". Personal testimonies and open confessions prove that most if not all those actually ordained to the priesthood and professed into the consecrated life, come from catechized Christian families. Vocation talks and promotions, vocation campaigns and seminars and the like, could have inspired and encouraged them, but the planting ground has been beforehand prepared, the seed of vocation has been previously sown through family catechesis, a phrase which probably was not then even known to their families. Hereto we have to add the reality that

these confirmed vocations have been basically sustained and nurtured towards actual ordinations and professions by the same catechized families.

The Family Life Apostolate, the Christian Family Movement, the Marriage Enrichment and Marriage Encounter Programs, the Sons and Daughters Encounter, the Family Communion Apostolate, the Family Rosary Movement, the Pre-Cana, Cana and Post-Cana Conferences, the Family Day and Family Month Celebrations, the Family Prayer Sessions, the Fathers' and Mothers' Day, and similar family oriented apostolic events and initiatives should be so promoted and concerted to become effective vehicles of Family Catechesis, together with insights drawn from liturgical and paraliturgical celebrations, cultural realities, life processes and situations.

"In a Christian community, everyone has a responsibility to families" (John Paul II, Homily at Mass For the Family, no. 8, Manila). "The family must be assisted to become a milieu that fosters intimacy with God in prayer, vital attachment to the mission of the Church, and the gift of self to the poorest of our brothers" (Pastoral Approach to the Vocation Apostolate, no. 8). "Children should be so educated that as adults they can, with a mature sense of responsibility, follow their vocation, including a religious one, and choose their state of life" (Vat. II, G.S., no. 52). Catechizing contacts of priests and religious with families serve as instrument of God's grace for Church vocations (cf. John Paul II, Address to Women Religious, no. 9, Manila).

Family Catechesis is not only an urgent mandate pursuant to the signs of the times, but also the holistic premise of the Vocation Apostolate both in the order of nature and in the realm of grace.

PRIESTLY AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION

"The Council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a large extent upon the priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ, and it solemnly affirms the critical importance of priestly formation" (Vat. II, O.T., Intro.). "The up-to-date renewal of religious institutes depends very much on the formation of its members" (Vat. II, P.C., no. 18).

Prayer for Church vocations would be a mere lip service, Family Catechesis for vocations to the ministerial priesthood

and the consecrated life would be a sad empty gesture if the consequent and very much needed formators were not accordingly prepared and readily made available, if the pursuant priestly and religious formation were not seriously deliberated upon and earnestly imparted. It is somehow incongruous to emphasize the need of fervent prayer, to insist on the urgency of Family Catechesis in favor of the Vocation Apostolate, and thereafter bypass the cardinal significance of vocation formation, the critical role of seminaries and novitiates.

Priestly and religious formation is a multi-faceted reality with multiple grave implications. It is never finished really once formally began and brought to conclusion, because even those subsequently formed, ordained and professed, the formators themselves well included, need on-going formation whereas continuous is the call of Christ to the perfection of the Father. It is directly intended to mold, to prove and to promote the vocations previously recruited, but at the same time, it is obliquely itself a vocation recruiter in the sense that well formed, holy, joyful and apostolic priests and religious are necessarily vocation apostles by their very life and witnessing. It is a seemingly human endeavor, regulated by Ecclesiastical Laws and qualified by diocesan and religious statutes, and yet it is basically and intrinsically a supernatural labor with supernatural reach and repurcussion, considering the truth alone that Church vocation is a direct, free and special gift of God. It is one single activity, one single concern, but it is the collegial effort of many persons, the concatenated gathering of many things, the simultaneous or consecutive use of many places. It has one basic rationale, one ultimate finality which in substance is the preparation of candidates for ordination and profession, and yet it has several integrated processes and intents, viz., the spiritual, moral, doctrinal, technical, emotional, psychological and physical doog-dimencions of the candidates.

On the question of priestly and religious formation, there are more salient positions, declarations and options that should be attentively studied and deliberated upon for pursuant decisive action. To mention some: The scarcity of priests and religious should not be a temptation to retain in formation those with uncertified positive signs of vocation, precisely because their consequent life and behavior qua ordained priests and professed religious would even the more aggravate that scarcity. Experiments and adaptations in priestly and religious formation are such delicate matters with such uncertain results that they should be undertaken only in the event that dated structures, procedures and practices clearly prove productive of mediocres

and undesirables in the ministerial priesthood and consecrated life. The keypersons in priestly and religious formation are the formators themselves, the administration and faculty in the concrete, wherefore their natural aptitude, due preparation and opted placement in seminaries and novitiates are highly critical because theirs are the continuous and predominant pedagogical and influence factors on the subjects of formation whose promotion or otherwise to the Sacred Orders and the Religious Profession by and large also actually depends on their prudential judgment. Whereas it is the response that could be really lost and not the vocation proper, which once really made by God is not withdrawn because He is today, yesterday and tomorrow, this being the case, priestly and religious formation should be concerned not only with the actual readiness of a candidate for promotion, but particularly so, with the moral certitude on the perseverance of response to the vocation on the part of the same candidate after ordination and profession even if only for the reason that defections from the clerical and religious ranks have deeply depressing and discouraging impact on the Christian community as a whole. The glaring challenge and pressing task of priestly and religious formation in these our times appear to be that of rendering priestly and religious identity definite and defined precisely because the decline in the quality and quantity of Church vocations follows to a large measure the crisis of priestly and religious identity.

In conclusion, it must be said that the Vocation apostolate which should be evidently preferential in favor of the youth, which should necessarily include prayer, catechesis and formation in its essential overview, and which should be actually well integrated and clearly incorporated into the total Plan of Action of a Diocesan Territory, Apostolic Jurisdiction and Religious Institute, is an essential and consequently mandatory concern of the Church, an eminent pastoral concern and ministerial work, a laborious and continuous ecclesial endeavor — particularly in the appreciation of all those, and these alone, who strongly believe in the validity and wholeheartedly subscribe to the relevance of the ordained priesthood and the professed religious life. To them in particular, Christ said: *"On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Mt. 16:18). *"Ask and you shall receive ... for whoever asks, receives ..."* (Lk. 11:9). *"Know that I am with you always until the end of the world"* (Mt. 28:20).

EPISCOPAL COMMISSION ON VOCATIONS
CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
P H I L I P P I N E S
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LITURGICAL VESTMENTS FOR THE HOLY MASS

by

Florencio Testera, O.P.

The wearing of special vestments for the celebration of Mass and for other liturgical functions has been prescribed by the Church since ancient times. This has been done mostly to emphasize the ministry of the celebrant and to safeguard the dignity and sacred character of the liturgical actions.

These same guiding norms of the past are fundamentally retained both in the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) and the *New Order of Mass*. Apropos is the following ruling laid down by the GIRM:

"In the Church not all the members have the same function to fulfill. The diversity of ministries is made clear in the course of the celebration by the use of different vestments. These signify the role proper to each person who has a special part in the rite, and help to make the ceremonies beautiful and solemn" (n. 297).

The 1918 CIC decreed that the priest, when saying Mass, should wear the traditional *vestis talaris* — a vestment reaching down to the ankles — such as the cassock or *sotana*, the habit, etc. (CIC, c. 136), together with the sacred vestments prescribed by the rubrics (c. 811, 1). This practice has now become in part obsolete, as the GIRM no longer mentions the *vestis talaris* as a required garment for the celebration of Mass (n. 298). The *vestis talaris* rule of c. 811, 1, has, therefore, been abrogated and so the priest can now celebrate Mass by just donning over his street wear the liturgical garments mentioned in GIRM, to wit:

"The chasuble, worn over the alb and stole, is the proper vestment of the priest who celebrates Mass or other services connected with Mass, unless otherwise indicated" (n. 299).

Thus the alb has become the "vestment common to all ministers" as well as the standard liturgical dress when using a chasuble (GIRM, nn. 298, 299).

But is there any exception to this general rule? Or may a priest licitly celebrate or concelebrate now without wearing an alb?

Yes, the practice is possible, though on limited occasions and under certain conditions only. As far as we know, the SCDW has so far made at least two exceptions — one applicable to the universal Church, and the other in favor of the Filipino local Church.

1. The Cassock or Sotana as a Substitute for the Alb

The question of whether the traditional clerical garb worn by priests in the Philippines — the white cassock or *sotana* — could replace the alb was first raised at the CBCP meeting of July, 1969. Since the white cassock is derived from the alb and looks very much like it, could it not be possible to use the former as a substitute for the latter?

In reply, the SCDW, through its Secretary, solved the issue on 5 Aug., 1969, in the following words:

“In the New *Ordo Missae* the cassock was not mentioned because it is not a liturgical garment. In liturgical celebrations only those vestments are required which are mentioned in the *Ordo Missae*.

“The alb is the liturgical garment and it should be used for liturgical celebrations. If you so desire to use your white garments, which are very much like the alb, I see no difficulty. However, they would have to be used only for that and not as dress during the day. Hygienic purposes warrant this” (*Bol. Ecl. de Filip.* — BEF —, 1969, p. 739; *Liturgical Information Bulletin* — LIB —, 1973, p. 52).

The tenor of the second part of the reply makes it quite obvious that our “white garments” can replace the alb in liturgical functions, provided, however, it be exclusively for the celebration of the Mass and not for daily wear.

Can that much be said of the white habit worn by religious men in the Philippines? Can that type of religious garb be a substitute for the alb in liturgical celebrations?

Frankly, we find no solid reason to restrict the privilege to those using the white *sotana*. The white habits worn by most of the religious in the Philippines are much like the alb and the *sotana*, and in practice they serve the same purpose and are still in keeping with the dignity and character required of a sacred function. Considering further that a privilege ought

to be interpreted in broad and not in absolute terms, it seems safe to affirm that the white religious habit can in fact replace the alb in Mass celebrations and concelebrations. We're, of course, assuming that the said garb is clean and not worn as ordinary dress during the day.

2. The Use of Chasuble-Albs

The latest form of liturgical vestment — the chasuble-alb —, now in use in most parts of the Catholic world, was inspired by the changes introduced in the *New Order of Mass*:

“Bishops’ Conferences may determine and propose to the Holy See any adaptations in the shape or style of vestments which they consider desirable by reason of local customs or needs” (GIRM, n. 304).

The new vestment is designed to serve both as alb and chasuble. It is described as “a priestly vestment which is large and full in form and on which the stole is worn on top. It covers the whole body of the celebrant and replaces the alb” (*Notitiae*, 5, 1969, p. 366; *Canon Law Digest*, VII, 633; LIB, 1973, pp. 54, 55).

Seemingly, this latest concept of liturgical vesture originated in India as an adaptation to the tropical climate, customs and traditions of the Indian nation (*Notitiae*, 48, 1969, pp. 365-374; 1970, 52, p. 89; LIB, 1973, p. 53).

The Filipino hierarchy, not to be outdone in this matter, as early as 1975, requested permission from to use in liturgical celebrations the ample chasuble with a stole, the type already adopted in some Western countries. A conditional concession was granted on 12 March, 1973, based on the fact that the proposed type of alb was in conformity with the standards set in the *New Order of Mass*, namely:

(a) Its ample size covers the entire body of the celebrant, replaces the alb, and, when made with artistry and from beautiful cloth, it is in keeping with the sacred character of liturgical things and even adds an element of beauty.

(b) The importance given to the stole, which is worn on top of the vestment, emphasizes very well the priest's hierarchical ministry as he presides at the eucharistic celebration (GIRM, n. 60).

The use of the chasuble-alb is restricted to rather special occasions, to wit:

(a) It may be used for concelebrations, specially by the principal celebrant. However, the right of concelebrants to use only the stole on top of the alb remains in force (GIRM, n. 161).

(b) It may be used too by the celebrant at Masses for special groups (AAS, 1969, pp. 806-811; CID, VII, p. 637) or for celebrations outside a sacred place such as an auditorium, a funeral parlor, a private house, and in other cases of a similar nature, when on account of the places or persons involved it seems advisable to do so. For the ordinary celebration of Mass, specially in a sacred place, priests shall continue to wear the traditional liturgical vestments, namely, the amice — only when needed to cover the collar well —, the stole and the chasuble (GIRM, nn. 81,298, 299).

(c) As far as color is concerned, the only requirement is that the stole be in the color that fits the Mass being said (LIB, 1973, pp. 55-57).

In a nutshell, the actual discipline on the wearing of vestments at Mass is as follows:

— The ordinary classical attire (CIC, c. 136) is no longer needed for saying Mass (CIC, c. 811). The celebrant can just wear the liturgical vestment over the ordinary dress (GIRM, n. 298; BEF, 1969, p. 739).

— By special concession, the clergy and the religious in the Philippines may celebrate or concelebrate with the white cassock or habit in place of the alb under certain conditions. It is in no way permitted to perform other sacred actions with only the stole over the street wear (AAS, 1970, p. 701).

— Concelebrants, not the principal celebrant, may use only the stole on top of the alb or on the white clerical or religious habit.

— The chasuble-alb has been approved for use in the Philippines, and may be used in concelebrations, and by celebrants at Masses for special groups or outside a sacred place and in other similar cases.

— The use of the chasuble-alb in ordinary Masses is not, in our opinion, sanctioned by the concession. However, given the wide acceptance and practicality of this new type of liturgical vestment, permission should be sought for its use without restrictions.

HOMILETICS

by

Fr. Herman Mueller, S.V.D.

BIBLICAL NOTES AND OUTLINES FOR HOMILIES October - November 1981

**Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
(October 4, 1981)**

The Lord has chosen and made Israel his vineyard. But the vineyard does not bear fruit (first reading). The tenants of the vineyard refuse to hand in the fruits and thus the vineyard will be taken away from them and given to other tenants (gospel), from the leaders of the Jews to the apostles, from the synagogue to the Church. The independent theme of the second reading is: Rejoice in the Lord, keeping the bond of unity and praying. Then God's peace will be with you.

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

The writers of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, had different ways of expressing God's special love for his chosen people Israel: They compared Yahweh's love to a father, whose son Israel was, or to a husband, whose bride Israel became (especially Hosea), or they compared Israel to a vineyard. Is 5 brings this comparison (parable, allegory) for the first time. Jer. 15:1-8, Ps. 80 and Jn. 15:1-8 take it up and unfold it.

The Lord buys a property on a fertile hillside to make a vineyard of it. He spades it, clears it of stones, plants the choicest vines in it, builds a watchtower to protect the vineyard and the wine against thieves and animals, and hews out a wine press. Thus everything is ready for a rich crop of grapes and some beautiful, tasty wine. The owner of the vineyard has really done everything he could.

But the result is disappointing: Instead of producing grapes the vineyard produces wild grapes. Thus the vineyard will be left to complete destruction since it is useless. The hedge planted as a protection against wild beasts and grazing animals will be cut down and the wall itself pulled down. Then anyone who wishes can break into the plantation. The vineyard is free to be plundered. Anyone may go into it to cut off grapes or cut off vines, perhaps to use as fuel. It is no longer cultivated. Without attention the vineyard is abandoned to ruin.

God loves infinitely; but if his love is not answered, he will withdraw his love.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

The apostle tells his Philippians to rejoice (Phil. 4:4-9). That means negatively: They must not have anxiety, they must not worry, or care too much. Rather, they shall present their case in *prayer* to the Lord, with a *grateful* heart. This will give them great *peace* that will guard their hearts against all anxiety (4:6-7).

If we fix our mind on something, that something will keep us so occupied that we can hardly think of anything else. Thus we should fix our thoughts on (1) all that is true, (2) that deserves respect, (3) that is honest, (4) pure, (5) admirable, (6) decent, (7) virtuous and (8) worthy of praise. The result will be that we live according to what Paul told his Philippians and we will have complete peace (4:8-9).

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 21:33-43

Matthew has during his last days in Jerusalem Jesus tell three parables concerning the guilt and the fate of the people Israel: (1) Parable of the two sons (Mt. 21:28-32), (2) Parable of the Tenants (21:33-45), (3) Parable of the wedding Banquet (22:1-14). The first parable is proper to Matthew, the second, the gospel of today, and the last parable Matthew has in common with Mark and Luke, and Matthew took it over from Mark, but gave it his own stamp.

Originally this story was a clear parable (as one can see from the recently discovered Gospels of Thomas). And thus for the original meaning we have to ignore all secondary allegorical features. As in the Lucan parables of the unjust steward and the unjust judge, Jesus draws a surprising lesson from unbelievable human behavior. What these people in the parable (wrongly) do we must do for the good purpose. We must have their resolution for the good cause. And thus Jesus would say in our parable: As resolute as these vinedressers were to get the vineyard (they killed the different messengers and finally the son of the owner of the vineyard) so you must be in laying hold of the kingdom of God.

Slowly this parable became more and more an allegory, where all features are applied. The vineyard becomes Israel, the vinedresser its religious leaders, the different messengers the prophets of the Old Testament, the son is Jesus Christ, his murder the crucifixion.

Christ's resurrection is clearly referred to in the quoted Ps. 118:22 "The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone of the structure." Christ's crucifixion was not the end of his life, was not failure but beginning of new and everlasting life, the foundation of the edifice of the Church.

Since the tenants, the leaders of the Jews refused to hand in the fruits of the vineyard God will lease his vineyard, his kingdom, out to others who will hand in the grapes at vintage time (v. 43) which refers to the apostles and their successors.

But at the same time the allegory takes up the allegory of Isaiah 5: Since the vine, the people of Israel, do not produce grapes, since Israel rejects the gospel, the gospel will be preached to a people that will yield a rich harvest, the good news will be preached to the pagans. The Church takes the place of the synagogue.

HOMILY

MY FRIEND HAD A VINEYARD

1. The Bible does not so much present God as a person in himself (this it does also) but as a God in relation to us. God is outgoing, revealing himself, God loves us. Thus God is

pictured as Father; we are his sons. God has chosen Israel as his bride; he is the husband, as especially Hosea never grows tired telling us. Another way of illustrating God's love for his people is the comparison of a vineyard. This we find for the first time in Isaiah 5:1-7.

What love does a vinedresser invest in his vineyard, buying a good property on a fertile hillside, spading it, clearing it of stones, planting the choicest vines in it, building a watch-tower to protect it against thieves and animals, and hewing out a wine press. Now everything is ready for a bountiful harvest of grapes and thus of wine.

What love did God invest in choosing Israel as his people. It had no special claim for such a special love. It was not better than other people, may be on the contrary. They could not compete with neighbouring people of Egypt, Mesopotamia or Greece concerning culture, monuments of architecture, pieces of world literature (if we omit the Bible). Ezekiel 16:4-8 puts it very drastically: "As for your birth, the day you were born your navel cord was not cut; you were neither washed with water nor anointed, nor were you rubbed with salt, nor swathed in swaddling clothes. No one looked on you with pity or compassion to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out on the ground as something loathsome, the day you were born. Then I passed by and saw you weltering in your blood. It said to you: Live in your blood and grow like a plant in the field. You grew and developed, you came to the age of puberty... You were now old for love... I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you; you became mine."

2. God loved us first. And only therefore we can love him in return. And love expects love in return. The vinedresser expects his vine to bear fruit. The meaning of vine is to produce grapes. The meaning of being loved is to love in return. What can one do with vine which does not produce fruit? Ez. 15:1-8 answers this question:

Son of man, what makes the wood of the vine better than any other wood? That branch among the trees of the forest? Can you use its wood to make anything worthwhile? Can

you make even a peg from it, to hang on it any kind of vessel? If you throw it on the fire as fuel and the fire devours both ends and even the middle is scorched, is it still good for anything? Why, even when it was whole it was good for nothing; how much less, when the fire has devoured and scorched it, can it be used for anything. Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have destined as fuel for the fire, do I make the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will set my face against them; they have escaped from the fire, but the fire shall devour them. Thus you shall know that I am the Lord, when I turn my face against them. I will make the land a waste, because they have broken faith, says the Lord.

Vine that does not produce grapes is most useless. One cannot use it for making pieces of furniture. It is just too brittle and small. One cannot even use it for making fire over a long period of time because it burns just too fast and does not last long. The meaning of vine is to produce grapes and thus wine. God has chosen Israel to be his bride, his chosen people. As soon as he did not come up to her call, she was and is most useless.

This applies of course to all of us, to anybody who has been called by God as Christian, as religious or as priest. We have been chosen not because of our own merits but merely because of God's love for us. And his love must be answered. We are as good as we come up to our call. If we do not, if we do not produce grapes, we are most useless. We are good enough to be thrown away and to be burned. The warning to remain faithful to our calling could not be more insistent.

3. What is true for the individual persons of Israel, what is true for any individual chosen by God is even more true for the leaders of Israel, the leaders of any Christian group. The priests, the Pharisees and Scribes of Israel had been chosen to be the guides of Israel. But instead of guiding people to God they tried to work for their own benefit, enriching themselves.

Yes, when Christ came in person, they did not do as John the Baptist did, pointing out to Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Rather, they called Jesus a devil and threatened everybody who would follow him. They would exclude him from the Jewish community and synagogue as they did with the man born blind and cured by Jesus (Jn. 9:34).

After all, every superior has been appointed watchman for the people under his care. "I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, you shall warn them for me" (Ez. 3:17) Ezekiel is told by God. The responsibility is great. If a person does not come up to his responsibility the Lord will take away the job from him and give it to somebody else. This is what Christ tells us clearly in the gospel of today. We could be inclined taking it easy and say: All this just refers to the leaders of Israel. But it refers to all the leaders, big and small. And in one way or the other we are responsible for some other people, where we have to come up to our responsibility.

4. If the vineyard does not produce grapes its wall will be broken down, the hedges planted as protection against thieves and wild beasts will be cut down. Thus anybody who wishes can break into the plantation. But will God forget his love forever? Will he just take revenge? Can nothing be done if we have lost our vocation, if we have been unfaithful to the Lord and have become sour grapes, good for nothing? Psalm 80(79) answers this question. We can only pray to the Lord to restore everything. He alone can change things.

Why have you broken down its walls,
so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,

The boar from the forest lays its waste,
and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

Once again, O Lord of host,
look down from heaven and see;

Take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted.

Let those who would burn it with fire or cut it down
perish before you or your rebuke.

May your help, be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;

give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

O lord of hosts, restore us; if your face shine upon us
then we shall be safe.

Part of it is used as responsorial psalm today. If Israel has not yet turned to the Lord, if there are not more of God's chosen ones who turned their back on the Lord who came back, is it not because we did not pray enough and not hard enough: "Once again, O Lord look down from heaven and see!"

5. The Lord has heard that cry and is always willing to hear it again. He restored the vineyard by becoming himself the vine and by making us his branches (Jn. 15:1-8):

I am the vine and my Father is the vinegrower.

He prunes away every barren branch,

but the fruitful ones he trims clean to increase their yield...

I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly,
for apart from me you can do nothing.

A man who does not live in me is like a withered,

rejected branch, picked up to be thrown in the fire
and burnt.

If you live in me, and my words stay part of you
you may ask what you will it will be done for you.

Christ has not only elected and chosen us, he has not only made us his own people. He has made us part of himself, we are part of him. The same sap flows in the vine and in the branches. The same divine life pulsates in Christ and in us. That is the reason why we can produce much fruit abundantly. But only inasmuch as we stay united with him can we do anything.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Times (October 11, 1981)

The Lord has invited all nations to an eternal banquet on his holy mountain (first reading). First he had invited his chosen people Israel. But since they turned down the invita-

tion, all people from the highways and byways were invited. Yet, although everybody can come, the proper attire is required, after all (gospel). — The independent theme of the second reading tells us about the value of a gift, the support by the Philippians of Paul: It is a sweet odor to God and makes a person rich for the giving.

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10

Isaiah 24-27 is called the Great Apocalypse of Isaiah. It was not written by Isaiah but by an unknown author since the ideas of Is. 24-27 are different from Is. 1-39 (e.g. they talk of death (24:8), universal judgment), the general historical background pictures the time after the exile (Is. 1-39 talks to Jews before the exile) and the style is different. As Deutero Isaiah (Is. 40-55), Is. 24-27 faces the problem of why it was that life after the return from exile was clearly not a life of salvation as God had promised it. The answer is given that Israel was still under the burden of guilt. When that guilt was atoned then the promised salvation would come.

Our reading announces the banquet of the end of times when Israel's guilt will have been done away with and Yahweh will be crowned as king of all the nations. All nations will come to the holy mountain and eat the choicest food and drink the best wines. The Lord will take away the veil from the face of the nations which hinders them to have the right understanding of God (25:7). Thus people can do God's will, avoid sin. And the result will be removal of suffering and death (which were the consequences of sin); God wipes away all tears, death will be destroyed. That's the climax of OT prophecy, taken up in 1 Cor. 15:54 and Apc. 7:17; 21:4.

This picture of the great banquet has become the classic symbol of the confirmation of God's saving purpose in history. Its roots go back to earlier Canaanite literature. The Qumran community took this symbol up in the institution of their daily

meal, and Jesus used it on different occasions; in eating with the outcast, in the parable of the great banquet (gospel of today) and the saying at the Last Supper that he would no longer eat with his disciples until he would do so in the consummated kingdom of God.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:12-14,19-20

One purpose of St. Paul writing the Letter to the Philippians was to thank them for their material support of the apostle. This he does in Phil. 4:10-20. The relation of Paul to the Philippians was unique in the sense that it was the only community from which he accepted material help.

In the course of time the apostle has learned to live in abundance and to go hungry. After all, he can do everything in the power of Christ. Yet he is thankful for the material help of the Philippians, for himself, but more for their sake, because it makes them a pleasing odor in God's sight. And that is, after all, the greatest significance of all sacrifices as we read it already about the first sacrifice mentioned in Scripture, the sacrifice of Noah after the flood (Gen. 8:21): "When the Lord smelled the sweet odor, he said to himself: 'Never again will I doom the earth because of man.'" And all the holocausts offered to God shall have that quality to be a sweet-smelling oblation to the Lord (Lev. 1:9,13,17).

Furthermore, the giver is always given most himself (by God). Thus the apostle is confident that God will supply the Philippians' needs fully, in a way worthy of his magnificent riches in Christ Jesus (4:19). These are the two points underlining the value of any gift: It is a pleasing oblation in the eyes of God and it makes a giver rich.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 22:1-14

[This is the third parable in Matthew, as we saw last Sunday, dealing with the rejection of Israel, since she refused God's invitation and the pagan's taking her place.

Today's parable was original two parables: (1) the invitation to the banquet (Mt. 22:1-10), also — although slightly differently-reported in Lk. 14:16-24, and (2) the parable of an invited man who had no wedding garment (Mt. 22:11-14). As one can see, neither Luke nor the Gospel of Thomas have this second parable and thus the combination of both is the work of Matthew. The combination produces an unrealistic effect. After all, so one asks: How could the poor man have been expected to have a wedding garment if he had been invited unexpectedly from the street!

Probably the second parable originally had a special introduction which got lost in the combination of both parables, as one can see it for instance in a parable reported by Jochanan ben Zakkai (Strack-Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament I*, 876): a king invited people to a banquet without indicating the exact time. Some prudent people washed and dressed themselves properly and waited in front of the palace. Some foolish people went on to their work, thinking the banquet would still take some time. But when the final invitation came the prudent were ready, the foolish ones not. The king was glad over the prudent ones but angry with the foolish and said: "Those who did not wash and dress properly shall stand outside."

Others would think of a parable where those invited guests were given wedding garments at the entrance. And only a foolish person would refuse to put it on.

What this second parable wants to say is clear: Although all are invited, the admission is not too easy after all. One must be prepared.

The parable of the great banquet has been allegorized by Matthew as a comparison with Luke and the Gospel of Thomas show. And these allegorical features have been added after the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 66-70). In a real true to life story and thus in a simple parable a person invited to a banquet, not willing to come would not kill the messenger (Mt. 22:6), but just ignore the invitation. And no spurned host would kill the murderers and destroy their city. Here the allegory sets in. These details reflect the events of the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem: They were

a punishment of Israel for rejecting the goospel and for murdering Jesus Christ.

And there is another allegorical feature in Matthew which we do not have in Luke: The banquet is not just a great banquet, but a royal banquet which the king (the Father) made for his son (Jesus Christ).

What Matthew wants to tell us is: Since the Jews rejected the invitation to enter the kingdom the pagans have been invited and have entered. Early Christian experience then added that the invitation alone is not enough. One must also do something for oneself, and also Christians from paganism may not be worthy to come to the banquet.

HOMILY

THE INVITATION TO THE ROYAL BANQUET

1. When we celebrate here on earth: a wedding, a home-coming, an anniversary, a reunion, we usually have a banquet. We express our joy and love for one another best at a meal. No wonder then that Scripture pictures this happiness of being with God in form of a banquet and that to every covenant belongs a meal as climax and conclusion. Thus we find it at the establishment of the great covenant on Mount Sinai: "Moses was told, 'Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, with Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel.' . . . Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, and they beheld the God of Israel. Under his feet there appeared to be sapphires tilework, as clear as the sky itself. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank" (Ex. 24:1-9-11).

Is. 25:6-10 has become the great classic of the eschatological banquet, and Jesus used the parable of a banquet to illustrate the beatitudes in his kingdom, the happiness in heaven. Since the Jews are the chosen people they were invited first. And God send several messengers at different times: the prophets of the different centuries, John the Baptist, the greatest born of a woman (Mt. 11:11). But the Jews would not listen to them.

And when finally the Son himself came, they did not only not listen to him but they threw him out of the city of Jerusalem and killed him outside of the city on Mount Calvary.

2. According to Matthew the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem was the punishment for this refusal of Israel (Mt. 22:7). Nobody can say that this is the only interpretation of the fall of the Holy City, but certainly it is a valid one. But since Scripture is written for us, for our instruction (Rom. 15:4), not just for the Jews and the contemporaries of Matthew in our case here, the parable shows us that the invitation to the banquet, to the kingdom is an unmerited grace, a great favor God does as which we can refuse, since we have a free will. But such a refusal can be of grave consequence. Whenever we feel that God calls us to something which we — as we think — are not strictly obliged to do since it is something above the usual thing people do we have to think it over thoroughly. If God is generous toward us he expects us to be generous in response, too, especially if we had the feeling that we should do it several times, if God knocked at our door repeatedly. Since we denied him, acting as if we would not know him, who knows if he will not have to tell us later: "Be-gone, I do not know you" (Mt. 25:12). We are not only obliged to omit mortal sins, we are also obliged to be generous, if the Lord wants us to be and enables us to be otherwise, we might wind up of not even being good.

3. Paul told his Corinthians to see themselves on the screen concerning the story of Exodus (1 Cor. 10:6-7 = Ex. 32:6; Num. 25:1-9): The Jews in the desert believed they were safe since they were Jews and thus children of Abraham by the mere fact of being circumcised. But since they did not live up to their call God let them all die in the desert. "You Christians of Corinth," St. Paul goes on saying, "are in the same danger. You think to be baptized is a guarantee for heaven. But woe to you if you do not come up to your call." This holds good with the excuses the guests in today's parable use. We are pictured here.

There is the first group of people who *just refused*, the disinterested people, it is not said, why. But it is because religion says nothing to them. They are realists for whom only the earthly and the material is a reality. The ideal is a luxury. Life is a serious business. And one must use one's time well. We must speculate well in stocks, in bank business, professional advancement and social position. And thus Christianity does

not have to tell us much in this regard. Christ's invitation remains unanswered on the desk or wanders into the waste paper basket. In reality, however, we cannot be indifferent toward Christ and God. There is no entrance into the kingdom without Christ.

4. There is the group of *those who refused* (if we take the version of Luke in addition) "I have bought some land and must go out to inspect it. Please excuse me" (Lk. 14:18). These are people who live in luxury. Thus they do not need religion. They are self-sufficient since life has been good to them overflowing them with its goods. In this external abundance they hardly perceive their inner emptiness. One feast, one party follows the other. There are long weekend celebrations lasting till the early morning hours of Sunday and make attendance at Mass hard, if not impossible. These people do not really have something against religion, but they can get along without. Material riches stifle any higher religious aspiration.

. Then come those who are *very occupied* and therefore have no time to answer God's call. "I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going on to test them. Please excuse me" (Lk. 14:19). Time is money. And thus also the Sunday must be used to visit business friends and prepare for the work of the week. Mass on Sunday is a small eschatological banquet and prepares us for the last, everlasting festive meal. No wonder that Jesus installed the Last Supper and wants to be in our midst till the end of times in the form of a sacrificial banquet. But some people think religion and this banquet is good for women and children and again for older people. Then they personally will come back to it. But right now the demand of one's profession take one's whole time and energy. So the Lord has to excuse this.

But supposed one would put a poster in the rear of the church: "Everybody who attends Mass is entitled to a bonus which he can cash in the parish convento and gets hundred pesos," I am sure, our Masses would be crowded. It would be a safe and easy way of making a living. But since we do not get hundred pesos in every Mass but the Lord himself and with him everything we can ask for, we do not go to Mass. Why? Do we perhaps not really believe? It takes eyes of faith to see it.

6. And there are the *sensual people*: "I am newly married and so cannot come" (Lk. 14:20). Sex and sensuality can drown all other ideals. Not that Christ condemns sex and marriage.

On the contrary, he created mankind as man and woman (Gen. 1:27). Thus we are onesided, unless we marry. And it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Thus God created the better half for him so that he could exclaim: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh... That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (Gen. 2:23-24). But if sex takes the place of God it becomes wrong.

7. In Matthew 22:6 are pictured the *men of opposition*. They kill the messenger with the invitation. They do not respect neither the ruling lord nor the heir to the throne. Their action is open rebellion. They are militant atheists, haters of Christianity. Religion is for them not something indifferent, but opium for the people, a hindrance for the rise of mankind. Thus they attack Christianity wherever they can. In the parable the king answers swiftly and destroys their city. It is a metaphor for the great reckoning of Christ at the last judgment.

8. The *invited people* are the beggars, cripples, blind and lame, those from the highways and byways. These are people who would have never dreamed of being called to a banquet. These are men who are conscious of their spiritual poverty and know that God's invitation is pure grace for which man as beggar can only ask. They are honest enough to admit that they had no special credentials to be a member of the kingdom. But God took them just the same.

9. The *disrespectful people* are represented by the one man without a wedding garment. That man may have thought that his rags were good enough for the banquet, whereas in the picture probably he had a chance to wash himself and dress himself up or was offered a wedding garment. Such people know nothing about reverential awe. God is for them one thing alongside many others. Going to Mass is for them like going to a restaurant for lunch or to a concert or to any other performance. They do not realize that a Christian has to live different from a non-Christian, that a mere external call does not suffice, that an inner transformation has to take place. This feature was added especially for the Christians coming from paganism, who took the place of the Jews who refused to enter. Matthew wanted to tell them: The faithful are still on the way to the final sifting. They have been invited, are called, but they are not yet finally saved. The number of the called is great since they are admitted without having to fulfill any preconditions. They need not keep the law of Moses and they need

not be circumcised. They have free access. Yet, this is no guarantee of their being chosen for the eschatological kingdom of God, although they are admitted into the church. The contrast between the "many" and the "few" means that the number of those who are finally saved is not the same as that of those who were initially invited. It does not mean that there are only very few who reach the goal. Here in the parable it is only one who does not reach the goal which gives no clue for the real number. All the sacred author wants to say is: "Try hard to come up to your call!" The wedding garment means the fruits of the kingship in the previous parable, the righteousness of the kingship, made concrete in life and action. Only he who has also done the will of the heavenly Father can hope to belong to the elect.

**Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
(October 18, 1981)**

Governments are installed by God (first reading and gospel), as Cyrus was (first reading). Thus one must obey. But the service of God takes the first place (gospel). — In the second reading, the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians became Christians by taking his word as God's word, not as mere human word.

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1.4-6

The oracle concerning Cyrus in Is. 44:14-45:7 is unique. It is announced in 44:24 ("Thus says the Lord"), but comes only in 45:2, 45:1 resumes the introduction). In the oracle addressed to Cyrus God wants to speak to Israel as well. Cyrus is Yahweh's anointed (something which usually is only said about a king of Israel or the Messiah). God holds Cyrus by the right hand, calls him by name, gives him a name of honor and girds him. One is astonished to hear such great things about a pagan king.

Nations are subdued by Cyrus, doors are to be opened, doors to be broken in pieces and bars of iron cut asunder. Unexpected treasures are to be bestowed. All this is promised also in Ps. 2 for the Messianic king. Thus the astonishment goes on.

But then comes the clarification of why Cyrus is all this. His commission given by Yahweh has limits set to it. The

commission is given him for the sake of Israel (v. 4a). The latter is also called God's servant or chosen one, or God's chosen servant. Deutero-Isaiah calls Cyrus Yahweh's anointed, but not his servant, because "servant" implies mutual relationship in which there is permanence. This does not apply in the case of Cyrus. God gives him only a non-recurrent task in one particular set of circumstances. This is all that he is anointed to do. He shall set Israel free and let the Jews return to Palestine. From this does not develop any permanent relationship between Yahweh and Cyrus.

God has made Cyrus king and given him the task of freeing Israel, although Cyrus did not know Yahweh. And his rule is limited. He is no god. Yahweh alone is God. Cyrus will become an instrument in making Yahweh known to all nations when they will see the return of Israel, Yahweh's people.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Starting today, for five consecutive Sundays the second reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians. On his first missionary journey (A.D. 46-49) Paul had come to Philippi in Macedonia (Greece) and from there had gone to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. Paul made quite a number of converts among the Jews. But this caused the rivalry of the Jews, and thus Paul had to leave soon; he went on to Beroea, Athens, and Corinth. From Corinth he wrote 1 Thessalonians in 51 A.D. It is the first written document of the NT. Silas and Timothy who had later followed Paul to Corinth brought good news from Thessalonica. The Thessalonians remained faithful and held Paul in highest esteem. But there were some shadows which Paul wanted to remedy with his letter, since he could not go personally. He refers to "those things wanting to your faith" (1 Thes. 3:10), warns people against the heathen vices of unchastity and dishonesty (4:13ff). And they are disturbed about the loss of their dead relations in the faith (4:13ff). In Part I (2:1-3:13) Paul gives a survey of the relation between him and the community. In Part II (4:1-5:24) he issues warning instruction.

Today's reading is taken from the Introduction (1:1-10). For Paul the Church of the Thessalonians is a presence of the universal Church. The local Church is not just part of the universal Church. Together with his co-workers Silvanus and Timothy, Paul greets his Christians and thanks the Lord when-

ever he thinks of them in his prayers. Praise is for the apostle the best way of bringing out the good in a person, rather than blaming somebody.

The community is (1) inspired by faith, (2) prompted by love, and (3) founded on hope (1:3).

The apostle thanks God especially because the Thessalonians have accepted his word for what it is: as word of God, not as mere human speech and thus they became Christians (1:5). This is one of the finest texts in the Pauline Letters concerning the power of the word of God.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 22:15-21

As so often, the Pharisees want to trap Jesus. They start with an over-loaded, insincere compliment to make him speak out freely and openly: "Teacher, we know you are a truthful man and teach God's way sincerely. You court no one's favor and do not act out of human respect." And then comes the dilemma: "Is it lawful to pay tax to the emperor or not?" Yahweh had been king of the Jews in a holy theocracy and as a sign of that they still had to pay the poll tax to the Temple. But since the deposition of Archelaus in A.D. 6, a second poll tax had to be paid to the imperial treasury. This tax reminded the Jews at all times of their dependence on Rome. The Sadducees paid the tax rather willingly, the Pharisees only with interior resentment, the Zealots not at all, for they regarded the paying of the tax as a denial of God's theocracy. Although the poll tax was small enough, it could be regarded as an acknowledgment of the Roman dominion over the people of God, and became thus a religious question. Rome was smart enough to let the small native rulers coin copper money, whereas Rome itself coined silver money, e.g., the denarius.

Christ's adversaries ask if it is (1) *allowed* to pay the tax, and, if it is allowed to pay it, (2) if one *must* pay it. The question is thought of as a dilemma for Jesus: If he says "no", He is against the Herodians and even more against Rome; the Herodians and the Pharisees will gladly deliver Him over to the Romans. If he says "yes" he is a Jewish traitor.

Jesus makes them answer the question themselves. Jesus asks for a coin used in paying the tax. He himself does not have one. But sure enough, his enemies have one with a picture

of the emperor Tiberius. Thus the Pharisees make a fool of themselves, for it is an unwritten law: whose money I use their rule I acknowledge voluntarily or involuntarily.

The first part of the question about the moral goodness of paying the poll tax to Caesar Jesus answers by saying: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." But that is not contrary to your duties toward God. "Rather, give to God what is God's!" Such an answer astonishes even Christ's enemies.

HOMILY

THE BIBLICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STATE

1. Today's liturgy tells us about the proper biblical attitude to the state and what it entails. Some of the texts, especially the first reading, give quite a positive picture of the state. Cyrus is God's anointed. Yahweh grasps his right hand, subdues nations before him and makes kings run in his service. He will go before him and level the mountains, shatter bronze doors and snap iron bars. In short, whatever Cyrus does he will succeed in. Could the picture in his favor still be more positive?

Here we have to keep in mind the typical Hebrew viewpoint of things and events. We in modern times see many things and many secondary causes between God and us. A Hebrew omits almost all of these secondary causes and attributes everything directly to God. So he would not easily say: "God allows a king to smash other peoples," but "God makes him subdue the nations." And furthermore, Cyrus is not simply Yahweh's anointed. He is God's anointed only for a definite purpose which is dear to him: Cyrus shall say of Jerusalem: "Let her be rebuilt" (Is. 44:28). Cyrus is not God. Yahweh is God alone. He alone is the Lord (Is. 45:5).

2. A similar apparently very positive picture of the state we have in Jer. 50:1-51:58. Here Yahweh tells the rulers of Babylon: "You are my hammer, my weapon for war. With you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms. With you I shatter horse and rider, with you I shatter chariot and driver. With you I shatter man and wife, with you I shatter old and young, with you I shatter youth and maiden. With you I shatter

the shepherd and his flock, with you I shatter the farmer and his team, with you I shatter satraps and prefects" (51:20-23). Hearing such words a king of Baylon could almost congratulate himself. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar is even called "servant" of God (Jer. 27:6; 43:10) by Jeremiah. We saw that Isaiah never calls Cyrus servant of God. But again, it is the same as in Isaiah 45: There Cyrus was called God's anointed only for a definite purpose. So here Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant, is God's hammer only for the purpose of punishing the different nations, Israel included. But Jeremiah foretells equally clearly that Babylon forgets that it is *only* a hammer in God's hand and for overstepping her power soon will be punished herself.

Are not some superpowers today forgetting that they are only instruments in God's hands, acting as if all the power would be theirs. Yet, in reality, God is the only ruler of history. And God has the longer breath and can wait longer than we can.

3. Perhaps St. Paul has even a more positive picture of the State: Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, all authority that exists is established by God. As a consequence, the man who opposes authority rebels against the ordinance of God; those who resist thus shall draw condemnation down upon themselves. Rulers cause no fear when a man does what is right but only when his conduct is evil. Do you wish to be free from the fear of authority? Do what is right and you will gain its approval, for the ruler is God's servant to work for your good. Only if you do wrong ought you to be afraid. It is not without purpose that the ruler carries the sword; he is God's servant, to inflict his avenging wrath upon the wrongdoer. You must obey, then, not only to escape punishment but also for conscience sake. You pay taxes for the same reason, magistrates being God's ministers who devote themselves to his service with unremitting care. Pay each one his due: taxes to whom taxes are due; toll to whom toll is due; respect and honor to everyone who deserves them (Rom. 13:1-7).

Every authority comes from God. That means, however, also that nobody can take to himself the authority unless it is given to him from God as Jesus says to Pilate who glories to have power to release Jesus or to crucify him: "You would have no power over me whatever unless it were given you from above" (Jn. 19:11). All in all it looks as if the state would be concerned for the well-being of its subjects, and thus all shall

obey. If somebody obeys he has nothing to fear. Only evil elements will be punished. It is the throne-and-altar theology many Christian countries have had. The apostle had such a positive outlook on the Roman state because by and large he benefited from the Roman Empire. The rapid spread of Christianity would not have been possible without the well organized Roman Empire: Thus the travelling on the Roman highways, remains of which we still find today, like the Via Appia, the Via Egnatia. The postal service helped bringing letters faster to different destinations. There was peace and order, although it was not perfect in each place. By and large Paul was treated fairly by the Roman officials and his Roman citizenship stood him in good stead. Troubles were usually caused by his fellow-Jews. This explains the positive picture of the state in the Pauline Letters.

4. The author of the Apocalypse obviously had a different experience with the Roman Empire than Paul and thus his picture of the state is more critical and even negative since he had experienced persecution on his own skin probably. He compares the Roman Empire to a wild beast. It represents political power imbued with Satan's might and hate against the people of God. The blasphemous names refer the emperor worship and the emperor's use of titles such as *divus*, *sebatos* (meaning divine), savior of the world, son of God, *kyrios* or Lord. Christians could not but resent such presumption.

The beginning of such a divine claim we find on a denarius of Tiberius for it has the inscription: Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus = Emperor Tiberius, the adorable son of the adorable God.

5. Christ's assessment of the state ranks in between Paul and the Apocalypse. Religion and politics are two different domains. And expressed in modern terms, there can be separation between Church and government. Theocracy is not the only form of government to the astonishment of the Jews. But Jesus does not say that the influence of the Church must be restricted to church and sacristy. Christ's kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36) yet in Christ his kingdom is present. Jesus is not a political ruler, his rule is not of the political order. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's!" means that every man must have a certain concern for the political and social well-being of his country and must obey. But it strips every political authority of any claim of being divine. It must exercise a responsibility that is from God. "Render to Caesar what

is Caesar's" means also fidelity to God since God wills that we be concerned for our society. This in turn is a partial fulfillment of our basic duty, i.e., to render God what is his. To give God what is his is of greater importance than to give Caesar what is Caesar's. Today is Mission Sunday. Possible homilies would be: "The cost of discipleship": 23rd Sunday of the Year C, September 7, 1980. "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world": 5th Sunday of year A, February 8, 1981. "Christ exalted and head of his body sends out his apostles to preach the gospel to all nations": Solemnity of Ascension, May 31, 1981.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (October 25, 1981)

Today we are told: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (gospel) especially the underprivileged and the poor (first reading). In the independent theme of the second reading we learn that the Thessalonians turned from their idols to the true God because of Paul's preaching and from them the faith spread through Macedonia and Achaia.

First Reading: Exodus 22:20-26

The first reading is taken from the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 20:22-23:33) which is akin to many legal codes of the Ancient Near East, like the codes of Ur-nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, Eschnunna and especially the well-known Codex Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.) which is also *casuistic* in form ("If somebody does this and this . . . he shall be punished this and this way.") The other form of laws, especially used in the Old Testament is *apodictic* ("You must not kill, you must not steal! . . .")

Today's first reading speaks about charity toward the poor and the weak. Israel shall not oppress on aliens since the Israelites were aliens in Egypt and thus should feel with strangers. A Jew must not wrong any widow and orphan because God is on their side and will punish any transgression against them. A Jew shall be compassionate toward poor neighbors and not take advantage of their poverty. Thus he shall not lend money at high prices. He must not take interest. And when he takes the neighbor's cloak as a pledge he must return it to him before sunset since he needs it for sleeping; most poor people had no blankets.

All in all, charity, love of neighbor must be compassionate and concrete, must show itself in small things.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Last Sunday Paul had thanked God that the Thessalonians had accepted his word for what it is: God's word, not his own word. The result was accordingly: They turned from the idols to God, from paganism and idolatry to monotheism. Here we see in short an outline of Paul's preaching: (1) There is one true God, (2) Christ rose from the dead and redeemed us, (3) he will come again (1:9-10).

But even more, imitating St. Paul the Thessalonians have preached the gospel throughout Macedonia and Achaia (1:1:6-7). To be a Christian means to be a missionary and spread the faith.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 22:34-40

Today's gospel we also find in Mark and Luke. But as usual, every evangelist redacted it his way. In Matthew, Jesus has just silenced the Sadducees (Mt. 22:23-33) who try to deny the resurrection on flimsy grounds. Thus the other group of adversaries, the Pharisees send a representative to trap Jesus: "Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?" This question is meant as trap also in Luke. In Mark however, a scribe is enthused about Christ's answer and Jesus tells him that he is not far from the reign of God (Mk. 12:34). Jesus quotes Deut. 6:5 as greatest and first commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind." It is the *Shema* Israel, "Listen Israel." Every Israelite was told to bind these words at his wrist as a sign, let them be a pendant on his forehead and write them on the doorpost (Deut. 6:7-9).

Right after this Jesus quotes as second commandment which is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). And then he adds: "On these two commandments the whole law is based and the prophets as well."

It was not obvious that these two commandments are the greatest double commandment, or even that there is a greatest commandment. Jochanan ben Zakkai, for instance said: Woe to us that Scripture measures to us the easy and the heavy with the same weight" (Babylonian Talmud, Chagiga 5a).

But both commandments are in the Old Testament, in different books and at different places. Yet Jesus was not the first to put them together. We find it already in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Dan. 5:2 and Issachar 5:2; 7:6). Yet, new is the insistence that both are equally important.

HOMILY

LOVE GOD — LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR!

1. We meditated already on the topic love of neighbor on the seventh Sunday of the year (February 22, 1981). But there the stress was on "love of enemies". Today we want to meditate more on the intimate unity between the two great commandments to love God and to love our neighbor, and on the priority of the commandment to love among all the commandments.

When God made the covenant with his people on Mt. Sinai the essence of the covenant was the ten commandments (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). The Pharisees were not satisfied with having ten commandments. In the course of time they explained and unfolded the different commandments and came up with 613 laws, positive and negative. No wonder that one could not observe them in spite of all honest efforts.. In that context Jesus once said: "Come to me, all who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Mt. 11:28-30). Christ's yoke is *chrestos*, fitting, bearable because it is adapted to our strength. His yoke is tailor-made because the Lord took measure of us as a farmer would do when he makes a yoke for an ox. And this the Lord did mainly by reducing these 613 commandments to one double commandment: "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind! And love your neighbor as yourself!"

2. It is true that the Old Testament already speaks about these two commandments. Yet they are in different books far apart. The first in Deuteronomy 6:5 and the other in Leviticus 19:18. It is also true that Jesus is not the first one to put both commandments in the same context. The testament of the Twelve Patriarchs has two passages running like this: "Love

the Lord in your whole life and one another with a sincere heart" (Dan. 5:2). And Issachar says about himself: "I loved the Lord with my whole strength and equally I loved every man like my own children" (Issachar 5:6). But the way Christ places them inseparably together is now. 1 Jn. 4:20 puts it perfectly: "If anyone says, 'My love is fixed on God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love God he has not seen."

3. The only way in which a man can prove that he loves God is by loving his fellow men. If somebody is pious, goes to church, prays and puts in some extra time for such prayer but does not do anything for his neighbors, is unfriendly and unhelpful, one can doubt his piety. There are even religious about whom one would say: "I would like you better if you were a little less pious and a little more charitable."

4. On the other side, we can love our neighbors only inasmuch as we love God. Only if we love God, man becomes lovable. Love of man is grounded on love of God. We do not love men out of mere humanism, with a nebulous sentimentality. Such a love will not last long, especially when the first hardships come. To love man we must be truly religious. We must love man because God has made him in his image, because he is Christ or at least destined to become a Christ-bearer. Mere human social justice will not do. Innerworldly motives do not suffice. All social justice must come from the fact that God is our Father.

5. The fact that Christ put both commandments together as an inseparable unity out of so many commandments shows that love is the *greatest* commandment. The meaning of any commandment is love. And if there is nothing about love found in a commandment it is a waste of time. Thus we should look for the angle of love in every law. Rom. 13:8 shows us that angle: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery (he would offend and hurt the other marriage partner with his selfishness); you shall not murder (it's heartless to kill and what loneliness does a murderer cause in the life of the relatives of the murdered man); you shall not steal (the robbed person has to live without the things he needs so badly; how can a man be so cruel?); you shall not covet (how unhappy does such a person make the life of two marriage partners so that they do not fully trust one another any more)'. "

Yes, the commandment to love keeps all other commandments in place and in shape. Mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance are just different names or different angels of love. And so the apostle can sum them all up by saying: "Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect" (Col. 3:15). The picture is taken from the Orient where people were wearing long robes which had to be kept in place and pulled up by a belt that one would not step on the robe, stumble and fall. Love does just this.

The conclusion would be to check on many laws, rules and regulations to see if they are an outflow of love. If they are not, they should be changed or abrogated. Regulations are not good for their own sake, but only as a means to enhance love.

6. Laws and regulations can be changed, even be abrogated. Love can never be changed. Only the ways we love will differ.

7. St. Paul illustrates the greatness of love in 1 Cor. 13:1-13:

a. *He who has no charity has nothing* (1 Cor. 13:1-3)
Somebody could have the gift of tongues; without charity he would be a noisy gong. The gifts of prophesy and knowledge mean nothing without love. Somebody could even try to die for Christ (if that were possible). Without love it would not help him. He could be generous in giving alms; without love it would be a waste of money.

b. *He who has charity has everything, all the virtues*
(1 Cor. 13:4-7)

The fifteen qualities of love Paul enumerates are impressive and would be good for examination of conscience:

The love of God is presupposed, as included in charity towards the neighbor. The qualities of love of neighbor are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| v.4 1. patient | v.6 10. does not rejoice in |
| 2. kind | what is wrong |
| 3. not jealous | 11. rejoices with the truth |
| 4. not boastful | v.7 12. no limit to fore- |
| 5. not snobbish (proud) | bearance |
| v.5 6. not rude | 13. trusts everything |
| 7. not self-seeking | 14. hopes everything |
| 8. not prone to anger | 15. endures everything |
| 9. does not brood over injuries | |

c. *Who has charity has eternal life* (1 Cor. 13:8-12)

Charismata cease, for they are only imperfect: prophecy, speaking in tongues. Our knowledge on earth is only imperfect. It will cease and be followed by the vision of God in heaven. In heaven we will see God face to face.

d. *Coda* (1 Cor. 13:13)

Three things remain on earth: faith, hope and charity. But while faith gives way to vision in heaven (2 Cor. 5:7), hope to possession (Rom. 8:24), charity remains throughout eternity.

**Solemnity of all Saints
(November 1, 1981)**

In the East the idea of celebrating all the martyrs together on one day arose at the end of the fourth century on the first Sunday after Pentecost. This same feast on the same day we find in a lectionary in the west in the sixth and seventh century. At the beginning of the fifth century a similar feast was celebrated in Edessa on May 13 and in eastern Syria during the Easter Octave. In 835 Pope Gregory IV decreed a feast of all the saints for November 1 in the territory of Louis the Pious.

Originally a feast for all the martyrs who were not canonized since their names were unrecorded, it has become a feast for all the saints in heaven who are not canonized and are an encouragement for us that we can make it also.

Nobody can count the number of those in heaven (first reading). We are children of God already now; what that entails we will see only later. In any case we will be like God (second reading). We will be blessed if we come up to the ideal of the beatitudes (gospel).

First Reading: Revelation 7:2-4. 9-14

The Book of Revelation, written porbably by a Christian seer from the Johannine school ca. 90-100 A.D. wanted and wants to encourage the faithful in times of great distress. The Christians in the time of the persecution of the emperor Domitian must not fear. God will vindicate his martyrs. They will triumph in white robes, with palms in their hands, singing: "Salvation belongs to our God."

It could look as if this were the last crisis right before the end of the world. But there will be many such crises in the course of Church history and then the message of the Apocalypse becomes alive again: God allows such disasters and persecutions again and again. But God's chosen ones will always win. The seer describes six disasters (each time a seal is opened) (Rev. 4:1-6:17). But before the seventh seal is opened and the seventh disaster comes, there is a great drama: (1) The 144,000 on earth are marked (Rev. 7:1-8) and (2) the elect whose number nobody can count stand before the heavenly throne (Rev. 7:9-17). Our first reading is taken from these two sections. The first scene of the 144,000 makes clear that God protects his chosen ones from all the tribes of Israel already on earth during the persecution. 1000 is an immense number, and 144 is the square of 12 (12 tribes of Israel). The elect of Israel are countless. The second scene is even more encouraging: Before the throne of God stands a huge crowd which no one could count from every nation, race, people, and tongue. These are those who have survived the great trial. In other words, the number of the saints in heaven is immeasurable.

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

St. John wrote the third letter ca. 90-100 A.D., probably in Asia Minor (Ephesus?). The thought of the epistle does not follow any logical arrangement. Rather, thought tumbles into thought, and the writer comes back repetitiously to the same ideas, in typical Semitical fashion, developing a theme in spirals. One could distinguish three parts: Part I: As followers of God walk in the light of God (1:5-2:27). Part II: As children of God walk in the love of God (2:28-4:6). Part III: Love and faith (4:1-5:12).

The second reading is taken from Part II and the first section (2:28-3:3) tells us: "Walk as children of God!" The privilege of a Christian life is that we *are* children of God. We are not just called children of God. What that entails in heaven we do not know. We know only one thing: We shall be like God. We have been created according to the image of God (Gen. 1:26). And in Christ a Christian will be like Christ. When Christ comes we shall see him and by seeing him be and become like him. It's not just a theoretical seeing.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 5:1-12

We saw this opening of the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes already on the fourth Sunday of the year (February 1, 1981). As a comparison between Matthew and Luke shows, there were probably four beatitudes in the common source (Q) of both gospels:

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.

These four original beatitudes were revolutionary. The first three make up one group: the poor. They are blessed because God is on their side, who with the arrival of Jesus, is here. That this being poor involves also a moral attitudes, the being poor in spirit, being detached from riches, is an addition of Matthew.

And this moral quality is especially stressed in the four beatitudes which only Matthew has: (1) Blessed are the meek (lowly), (2) blessed are the merciful, (3) blessed are the single-hearted, (4) blessed are the peacemakers. These are more "ordinary" virtues, idealizing the "small" virtues in life, which everybody, even a non Christian would admit as desirable, whereas nobody would declare a poor or a persecuted blessed. They can be blessed only because Christ identifies himself with them.

Since we meditated on the poor on the fourth Sunday, we can restrict ourselves today on the last four beatitudes.

HOMILY**YOU CAN BECOME A SAINT TOO**

1. a. The Feast of all the Saints is our feast. We are celebrating all the "small" saints whose name we do not know. Originally the Church was paying tribute to all the martyrs

whose name were unknown and because of this were not canonized. More and more all saints were invoked who did not make big headlines but are in heaven just the same and thus are an encouragement for us according to the word of St. Augustine: "Potuerunt hi, potuerunt hae, cur non et ego!" which in a free translation means: "If all these smaller saints in heaven (men and female) could make it, why not I!"

b. In this context the number of those sealed by God from Israel (144,000) and from all nations (a number nobody can count) in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 7) takes over a new meaning. In the original setting it shows that God saves a round number (perfect). Thousand is already an infinite number (how many people were dreaming of an empire and reign of a thousand years and never reached it), and 144 is the square of 12. The number coming from paganism, the Christian martyrs, is even clearer beyond measure: One cannot count them. We can, therefore, say also from this context as it is clearly formulated in 1 Tim. 2:4: "He (God) wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth." Or as the apostle puts it in 1 Thes. 5:9: "God has not destined us for wrath but for acquiring salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

c. This then is the consolation of the Feast of all Saints: I can become a saint. This is fact and not just a dream. How often is somebody in the family called the "black sheep", the one nobody wants, the one everybody avoids. God does not have such "black sheeps" unless we make ourselves such a "black sheep", by running away, by not responding to his call and love.

d. To become a saint is not an ideal for some few, outstanding people, something somebody else could not even dream about, something for a great church leader or an outstanding emperor, but for all of us. God is so infinitely perfect that millions and trillions of saints cannot exhaust and fully express his perfection. God does not make copies, but everyone of us shall become something unique, nobody else was before nor will be after us. God does not create twins because he is running out of ideas. Even twins are different. The number of every nation, race, people, and tongue is so great that nobody can count them. In as much as God is concerned, everybody shall be there. He does not exclude anybody. We exclude ourselves.

2. God does not only want us to become a saint. He also has given us what it takes to become a saint: He has made us his sons (and daughters), brothers and sisters of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2). We are not only creatures of God. Rather we are intimate

and close to him, since we are made according to God's image and likeness, which in the fullest sense is true because we are brothers and sisters of Christ by race, not by creation. "He know his own before ever they were ordained that they should be adapted to the likeness of his Son that he might be the eldest among a large family of brothers (and sisters)" (Rom. 8:29).

b. We are not just called sons of God, we *are* sons and daughters (1 Jn. 3:1). The fact that we are brothers and sisters of Christ is guarantee that we can reach our goal, that we can become a saint. With this God has given us what it takes to become a saint, although we do not know yet what it entails. Basically, however, we know it: We will be like Christ. "Become who you are!" We are Christ and shall become Christ more and more.

c. Thus we have to take ourselves the way we are and be satisfied with the health, talents and virtues God has given us. There are many "editions" of Christ: some outstanding, the others "ordinary". But they are all "embodiments" of Jesus. There is no sense in looking around and being jealous if somebody else has qualities I do not have. God has made me brother (or sister) of Christ and that is good enough, if I only apply myself within the talents and possibilities God has given me.

3. God wants all to be saved, or expressed differently, to become a saint. God has also given us what it takes to become a saint by making us Christ's brothers and sisters. And the concrete way to become this is also in our reach. The gospel gives us a key:

- a. *Blessed are the meek (lowly) they shall inherit the land* (Mt. 5:5)

This quality is opposed to anger and related to mercy. Such a person does not take revenge, but forgives out of the awareness that we are sinners ourselves. Jesus pictures himself as meek: "Come to me all of you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you . . . for I am gentle (meek) and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:28). Zachariah had already foretold him and the fulfillment is reported when Christ enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: "Your king comes to you meek (without display) astride an ass" (Mt. 21:5 = Zech.9:9). The apostle sums it up in Col. 3:13: "Clothe yourselves with heart-felt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another."

Only a man who is completely abnegated can be meek and kind. Meek and kind people are like buffers for angry people, like sand sacks that make bullets ineffective.

And precisely those meek, gentle people, who always give in will possess the land. This was originally the promise for the chosen people, to possess the land, given already to Abraham in Gen. 15:7. But since Isaiah (Is. 60:19-21) this expression took over an eschatological meaning: possess the heavenly Jerusalem: "Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... who gave us new birth... a birth to salvation which stands ready to be revealed in the last days" (1 Petr. 1:3-5).

b. *Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.*
(Mt. 5:7)

This beatitude answers the questions of how our justice must be toward our neighbors: "The just man is kindly (merciful) and gives" (Ps. 37:21) Jesus appreciates mercy more than sacrifices, quoting Hos. 6:6: "It is mercy I desire and not sacrifice" (Mt. 9:13). The prophet had denounced mere external sacrifices of the people. What God wanted from them was rather that they should feel with their neighbors, being able to walk in their shoes by being fair with wages and the distribution of social goods:

Thus mercy means concretely:

(1) Do not judge, nor condemn your neighbor, but forgive him, especially if he asks for it, for we are sinners also. And God will not forgive us, if we do not forgive our neighbors.

(2) Perform works of mercy, i.e., of charity. Only Matthew has the pericope of the Last Judgment which shows how mankind will be judged according to the fact that they were charitable (merciful) or not.

c. *Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God.*
(Mt. 5:8)

"Pure of heart" does not mean sexually pure, but to be of good conscience, to have the right intention and sincerity and simplicity of heart; in other words, to be single-hearted. Such a man does what he thinks and says; he is reliable. This quality we find in some Scriptural texts: "Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord?... He whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain, nor swears deceitful to his neighbor (Ps. 24:3.4). "Who shall sojourn in your tent?... He who walks blamelessly

and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1-2). Abimelech affirms: "In purity of heart (in good faith) and with clean hands" I did this (Gen. 20:5), namely taking the wife of Abraham as his wife, thinking it was Abraham's sister.

The single-hearted will see God, which for a Jew was seeing God in the Temple (Ps. 63:2.3): "I have gazed toward you in the sanctuary.") That's true for us too, and is fully materialized when we see him face to face.

d. *Blest are the peacemakers they shall be called sons of God* (Mt. 5:9)

The expression "peacemakers" (*eirēnopoioi*) is only here used in the NT. But the expression "to make peace" occurs in Eph. 2:15; Jam. 3:14-18. Here an action is required. In the other beatitudes always an attitude is prescribed. Peace was highly esteemed in Rabbinical literature. Thus we find the word: "Even the devil would not dare to attack idolators if they would have peace." In reality, however, peace was missing in many places. Different parties were quarelling about trifles, as it is today in many countries. Often enough just our *ego* is hurt and we could give in easily and there would be peace.

St. Augustine gives the advice: "In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, super omnia caritas." (In essential things unity; in doubtful cases freedom; and above all love.) Peace would be easier at times if we would not let it come to a fight. Somebody has to give in, has to sacrifice. If two drivers meet on a narrow (onelane) bridge, one of the two has to drive back and let the other pass first. If both insist that they were first a traffic jam will result. And to loose one's face is for most an unsurmountable obstacle to peace.

Christ brought us peace by his sacrifice on the cross. We must continue his work by overcoming our egoism.

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (November 8, 1981)

The last three Sundays of the year look towards the coming of Christ and thus are related with the first Sundays of Advent whose main idea in the beginning was also the eschatological coming of Christ in his parousia. Today we are told: "Have

your lamps burning when the Lord comes" (gospel)! This is true wisdom. True wisdom is found by those who look for her (first reading). At the parousia those who already died will not have a disadvantage over those who are still alive. The former will rise first and then all (those fallen asleep and risen and those who are still alive) will meet the Lord (second reading).

First Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16

The Book of Wisdom has three parts: Part I (Wisd. 1:1-5:24) speaks about Wisdom and the Impious Man: Wisdom is the source of temporal and eternal happiness. Part II (Wisd. 6:1-9:19) is an Encomium of Wisdom, speaking about its origin and value for rulers. Part III (Wisd. 10:1-19:20) outlines the Work of Wisdom in the History of Israel. Today's second reading is taken from the second part which in its first part contains an address to rulers to seek after wisdom (Wisd. 6:1-23).

Kings and rulers are admonished to look for wisdom. After all, authority has been given to them by the Lord; it's not their own merit or accomplishment. And thus they are also responsible to God (Wisd. 6:1-3). Injustice and unjust judgment are the greatest sin of a ruler (Wisd. 6:4-5). And God will judge them strictly. There is no difference between simple and high people (Wisd. 6:(6:6-7). Thus the rulers shall look for wisdom (6:8-11).

Wisdom can easily be found by those who love her. She is waiting at our door already in the morning and thus is found by those who seek her (6:12-14). Wisdom is looking for those who desire her (6:16). And thus she will meet the one who thinks of her (6:15).

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

Paul had preached about the Parousia of Christ. And the early Christians hoped that the Lord would come soon. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!" was their fervent prayer. It would be the climax of the history of the Church. But now some Christians in Thessalonica had died already. Would these dead Thessalonians not miss the Parousia?

To this question the apostle gives an answer in today's second reading: Those who are still alive when the Lord comes for the Parousia (St. Paul does not say that he still will be

alive ("we who live" would mean: "those who live"), although it could look that he thought of this possibility) will not have any advantage over those who already died. First those who died will rise and then all (those who died and have risen, and those who are still alive) will meet the Lord who comes for the Parousia. And we shall be with the Lord forever.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the ten virgins is proper to Matthew. Like many other parables it went through a long history of tradition and we can distinguish three different levels: (1) the level of the time of Jesus. He told the story to illustrate that those who hear his message of the coming kingdom and respond with repentance and faith will be accepted when he finally comes, while those who reject the message will find out their mistake too late. (2) At the level of the early Christian community the five foolish virgins stood for the Jewish community which rejected the Lord. (3) For the Church of Matthew and the evangelist the wise and foolish virgins become those in the Church who keep the commandments of the new lawgiver Christ respectively those who hear his word but do not do it. The introductory sentence ("then" in v. 1) connects it with the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mt. 24:1-25:46) which culminates in the coming of Christ at the Parousia for the last judgment. Thus Matthew adds at the end of the parable: "Keep your eyes open, for you know not the day or the hour" (25:13). Two more parables follow in Matthew: the parable of the talents and the parable of the sheep and goats. And all three have the same punchline as above outlined.

That it was not the original conclusion of the parable one can see from the fact that all virgins (wise and foolish) fell asleep, and yet nobody is blamed for it. The fault was that the five foolish had not enough oil to do their job: shedding light in the procession.

And as so often: the parable slowly took over more and more allegorical details. Many think that the late arrival of the groom would also belong to the allegory, not to the parable. Fact however seems to be that it belongs to the parable: the groom came so late because one could not agree about the price to be paid for the bride for a long time, which delayed everything. And this, on the other side, shows how highly appreciated the bride was.

HOMILY

BE PREPARED WHEN THE LORD COMES!

1. We do not know too much about Oriental marriages. Yet, one thing seems to be sure: Climax of the marriage is the nocturnal entry of the bridegroom into the paternal house, where the marriage takes place, (Joachim Jeremias. *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1972, 173) followed by the festive banquet. The bridegroom would fetch the bride in her home, and then the procession would go to the house of the father of the groom. Bridesmaids would carry torches and lighten the way and give everything and everybody a very festive mood.

2. Historical of such marriages seems to be also that the marriage of ten took place late at night. And what seems to be an allegorical feature in the parable, i.e., the long delay of the groom, is actually something that really happens with such marriages: "Even today the usual reason for delay is that agreement cannot be reached about the presents due to the relatives of the bride. To neglect this often lively bargaining might be taken to imply an insufficient regard for the relatives of the bride; on the other hand, it must be interpreted as a compliment to the bridegroom if his future relatives show in this way that they give away the bride only with the greatest reluctance" (Jeremias, *Parables* 173-174).

3. Our parable now takes one secondary feature, the activity of the bridesmaids and makes it the main point: "The kingdom of heaven can be likened to ten bridesmaids". And then we could continue with a paraphrase: Bridesmaids could and should know from experience that the groom often comes late because of the above reason. And since their job consists in accompanying groom and bride and lighten the way and put everybody in a festive mood with the flood of light, they have to have plenty of oil in store. Thus they have to be ready and prepared when he comes. If they do not have enough oil they will not be able to accompany groom and bride to the wedding. There is no sense in getting the oil later. With the late oil they can not lighten up the way of the marriage procession. It's just too late. And thus they will also miss marriage meal. They will be excluded.

Nothing in the parable is said in detail about groom or bride. The stars are the bridesmaids. And we are compared to such bridesmaids. That Christ is the groom is easy to guess. And heaven is compared to Christ's wedding and the following wedding meal. We will be admitted to this eternal banquet or excluded if our lamps are burning when Christ comes, if we are ready to follow him, when he arrives.

4. If the wise bridesmaids refuse to give some of their oil to the foolish ones, it is not because they are merciless and hard-hearted but because it is the only reasonable thing to do: they would not have enough oil themselves and the lighted procession could not take place at all, at least not for the whole duration. Similarly, if the groom refuses to let the foolish virgins enter the banquet hall, he does not want to deny that the five foolish maids did something for him, but they failed in their essential duty: to lighten the procession. The parable is not concerned with understanding and sharing of sympathy. Rather,

5. It is a parable of man's final end. When that end comes, in death for individuals, on the day of judgment for humanity, then there is no more time. Time has come to an end. One is then either prepared and equipped or one is not. What was neglected can then no more be made up. There is no longer time to compensate for what is lacking. The lesson: Be always prepared, be ready. There may be a too late! Certain things in life we can do only once. And in a true sense we can do everything just once. Whatever we do is in God's eyes a first performance, even a rehearsal. The second rehearsal for the same final performance is in God's eye a new act. Every act, every performance we can do just once.

6. It is not enough if we do something, it is not even enough to work hard. Rather, we must do the job assigned to us well. The virgins could not tell the groom that they had been waiting for him all evening, that they were interested in attending the wedding, that they just by chance did not think of taking enough oil along. Their main job consisted in accompanying the groom and the bride with their festive torches. To come later forfeited the purpose. Then they were no longer needed.

If we are teachers but do a lousy job in explaining things we cannot console ourselves if we can entertain students well. If we are educators but cannot keep discipline we fail in our essential duty. If we are counselors who can feel with a person but do not dare outline dangers and crises for him in his character we neglect something essential.

7. It is not enough to have good intentions, to mean well. We have to present facts. We all know, how disappointed we are if somebody lets us down. How disappointed must the groom have been when only half of the crew showed up. *Reliability* is something of the finest qualities in life.

8. The warning to be prepared holds also for mankind as a whole, not only for individuals. The early Christians were looking forward to the Parousia of Christ with anticipation and longing, praying everyday: "Maran atha!" = O Lord, come" (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20): For them this second coming was the climax of church history. And this attitude enabled them to make the best use of their time, to be prepared any time.

We today are probably not thinking very much of an early coming of Christ for the last judgment. Hardly anybody thinks seriously of the possibility of a sudden end of the world. And yet it would be so easy today, if one nut just would push the wrong button somewhere. The second coming of the Lord has become something distantly and completely foreign to our christianity today.

9. Nobody can be awake all the time. Thus even the wise virgin fell asleep. They did even well anticipating some rest to have more strength for the long night later. We cannot pray all the time either to be prepared when the Lord comes. But we can do our duty at all times and then we will be ready no matter when Christ comes. We will die the way we lived.

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (November 15, 1981)

Today we are exhorted to be faithful to duty and work (first reading and gospel). The faithful servants are rewarded (gospel). A faithful, worthy wife is beyond price (first reading). The independent theme of the second reading is: If we are watchful and sober, we will not be taken by surprise when the Lord comes.

First Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13.19-20.30-31

At first glance the first reading seems to be out of place and hard to fit in with the theme of the gospel which obviously speaks about watchfulness and the obligation to make the money

produce interest before the master returns. There is nothing about this theme in the first reading. One could perhaps find a connection in the last verse of the first reading: "Give her a reward of her labors" with the fact that the servants are given a share in their work. But this is not the main point of the parable. It rather seems that the composers of the liturgy let the first reading determine the main point of the gospel. And then we get the above theme: Be faithful to duty and work! The gospel brings an example from the life of men; the first reading pictures the woman who is "only" a housewife and mother. One can only hope that this ideal is not "too old fashioned" for modern advocates of equality between man and woman.

Proverbs 31:10-31 is a poem of 32 acrostic verses, i.e., each stanza, of two lines each, starts with the successive twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, from aleph till taw. There is no evidence of separate themes such as would justify a division into stanzas. Rather, where there are verses dealing with cognate matters these may occur at intervals, separated from each other by intervening material. So with vv. 13, 19, 24. The author had enough to do tackling the acrostic principle. And as he tackled the verses one by one he took no thought for what had gone before or what was coming after, except that he was guided by the overall subject of the poem and the picture of the woman he intended to portray.

- A good wife is of inestimable worth (v. 10).
- Her husband relies on her and derives good from her (vv. 11f).
- She makes garments of wool and flax (v. 13).
- She brings food from afar (v. 14).
- She rises early and feeds the household (v. 15).
- She examines a field and acquires it (v. 16a).
- With her earnings she plants a vineyard (v. 16b).
- She steels herself for work and makes the most of good trading conditions (vv. 17f).
- She spins (v. 19).
- She gives to the poor (v. 20).
- She clothes her household well (with scarlet, not "double", since scarlet keeps warm, not the double clothing) (v. 21). The Hebrew reads correctly *shanim* (scarlet), not *shenayim* (double).

- Her own wardrobe is made up of magnificent clothes (v. 22).
- Her husband is distinguished in the municipality (since he has no domestic worries because of his wife) (v. 23).
- She sells garments to merchants (v. 24).
- She is well-equipped for the uncertain future (v. 25).
- She is a wise and reliable counsellor (v. 26).
- She keeps a tight control over all domestic affairs and misses nothing (v. 27).
- She earns the praise and gratitude of her sons and husband (vv. 28f).
- She has a worth which transcends physical attractiveness and deserves credit for her accomplishments (vv. 30-31).

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Paul had explained that the Christians who had died would not miss the Parousia. Rather, they would rise first and then both (risen Christians and those who are still alive) would meet the Lord and be with him for all eternity. Today he explains to the Thessalonians when that will happen: "As regards specific times and moments, we do not need to write you. The Lord is coming like a thief in the night." These specific times and moments is the day of the parousia. Nobody knows when it will come. Only one thing is certain: it will come suddenly, like a thief at night. Or as sudden as a woman gets her pangs of childbirth.

The conclusion is obvious: Let us not be asleep but awake and sober so that the parousia will not take us by surprise. Since we are children of the day since baptism, we must live accordingly and not live as children of the darkness. Then we will never be surprised.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 25:14-30

As so often, this parable has a threefold setting:

(1) The setting at the time of *Christ*: The owner of an estate goes on a long journey and he leaves his money to three servants in trust, lest it would remain idle during his absence. They shall put it to wise use making capital gains. Two servants

do this and are commended. A third servant hoards the money and gives back the exact sum he had received without making gains. He is severely punished. Joachim Jeremias (*Parables* 61) and others think that Jesus had the Pharisees in mind with this third servant: Instead of being open to new things, especially to Christ's teaching, they wanted to preserve the tradition in its purity and thus did not do anything for the spiritual well being of the Jews, but thought only of their own benefit.

(2) In the early *Christian community* moralizing features were added, and thus v. 29: "Those who have will get more until they grow rich, while those who have not, will lose even the little they have." Added were also allegorizing features: The master stands for Christ, the departure signifies Christ's ascension; the delayed return figures the parousia; The expression "enter into the joy of the Lord" implies the entry into the Messianic banquet.

(3) *Matthew* finally placed the parable into the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mt. 24:1-25:46) which culminates into the coming of the Son of Man judging the Church. Here then the profitable servants are those who do the word of God and the unprofitable servant signifies those who hear it but do not do it.

Luke also has this parable (Lk. 19:12-27). Originally it was a parable told by Christ of a claimant to the throne (probably Archelaus) who (in 4 B.C.) went to Rome to claim the throne (for Judaea). But a delegation went after him to denounce him and resist his appointment. But Archelaus succeeded and came back suddenly punishing his enemies who had opposed him. Jesus drew the conclusion: So suddenly also will the Son of Man come for the last judgment. Soon the other parable of the talents was added into this short parable. In Luke the three servants get smaller amounts of money and are (besides keeping the money plus the earned money) placed in charge of ten and five cities.

There are several possibilities for a homily:

(1) As last Sunday one could proclaim the eschatological message of the gospel: Be ready, when the Lord comes after a long and unexpected delay and give an account of your stewardship.

(2) The second reading would suggest to preach about the parousia: Do not ask curious questions about the time, but rather live existentially, living as if the Lord would come any moment!

(3) The following homily takes the first reading and the gospel together as directed by the idea of the first reading: Be faithful to duty and work, especially looking forward to the coming of the Lord!

HOMILY

BE FAITHFUL TO DUTY AND WORK

1. "A man going on a journey called in his servants and handed his funds over to them according to each man's abilities" (Mt. 25:14). God has given us all a job to do here on earth according to our own capabilities. There are many different talents. Here in the parable ten, five and one. These are only round figures. In actual life there are many more. God has given us what we need; he knows what we can accomplish and do. Best is always the job that fits our abilities. To make a student or a son who has great practical skills, but lacks a speculative mind, a lawyer or a professor would cause only frustrations and inferiority complexes. Give him rather a vocational training. God does not put us in such a straitjacket.

2. The talents are God's talents, the abilities God gives. There is no reason to be self-opinionated. That the one servant received ten, the other five, the other one was the pure gift of the master. If a doctor succeeds in performing complicated operations he has no reason to boast. He can only say: "God gave me that calm hand." After all, God could easily take it away over night, as it actually happens. Vice-versa, nobody must despair if somebody else is more assigns to us. God demands only that we work according to our talents. And he rewards accordingly.

3. In making the world subject we must take the world as a whole. We must make sure that it bears fruit and offer them up to God. We must not exploit the world in a selfish way, onesidedly, caring only for ourselves and not thinking of our posterity. To make people go to the moon is a wonderful achievement, but only if in the long run it helps alleviate and ameliorate the conditions on earth. But if, on the contrary it increases only man's loneliness and makes some hoard everything and lets the other become poorer we do not follow God's order.

4. We shall develop all our talents not just the ones or the one we like and enjoy best, or even perhaps the one that costs us least work. We shall not just work for self gratification, but for God and our fellowmen. The parable was directed against the Pharisees, and thus Jesus could tell his hearers: "Your perfection must be greater than the one of the Pharisees" (Mt. 5:20). From the chiasitic structure of Matthew we know that Mt. 5-7 corresponds with Mt. 23-25. The disciples must be more faithful than the Jewish leaders in doing what God requires. Thus our parable could be a reference to a common Rabbinic outlook regarding the final judgment. They believed that a person would be saved on the day of judgment if the person's good actions totaled more than his bad actions.

5. The attitude of the third servant who is reprimanded shows that it is not enough merely to do one's appointed tasks and come before God with things evened out. God requires initiative in doing good. That servant refused to be the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). The first servant had that initiative. He put his whole heart into his work and before he knew it he had gained ten new talents, not for himself, but for the master.

6. Was the third servant lazy? The master calls him that (Mt. 25:26: "You worthless, lazy lout!"). Yes, in Luke he was even too lazy to dig a hole in the ground and hide the money there; he just put it in a napkin, which was very careless in addition: the money could have been easily stolen. But in Matthew the servant takes the pain of digging a hole into the ground. To put the talent into a bank would have been less work. Thus it seems he was not all that lazy. Rather he was afraid, as he himself says: "Out of fear I buried your talent in the ground" (Mt. 25:25). He did not want to run the risk of wrong speculations that his money would not bring in the expected interest. Then his master would become angry with him. But if he would give the money back without any loss, the master would have to be satisfied. But the master was not. We have to take a risk in our life, if we want to accomplish great things. Safety by all means is not the highest good. Otherwise we lose great opportunities and finally a meaningful existence. The master takes away the one talent because the servant is not able to administer anything.

7. Some people want to be free but shrug from the responsibility. There is no freedom unless we are willing to take the responsibility. The third servant had a doubtful and even guilty

conscience. He knew that he did not come up to his task and capabilities. But he did not want to admit it to himself, nor to his master. On the contrary, he threw the guilt at his master: "I knew you were a hard man. You reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter" (Mt. 25:26). Obviously he had the wrong picture of his master who generously gave the wise servants not only the entrusted talents but also the talents they had earned in addition as their own.

What picture of God do we have? Is he the God whom we fear, of whom we are scared? Is he for us a slave driver and are we his slaves? Or is he for us the Father who cares? And are we his children? Fear always cripples and paralyses. Only with a joyful heart can we do great things. Ever since Christ died for us on the cross we cannot say to God: "You expect hard work from us and you do not do anything. You are a slave-driver." Rather, God loves us so much that he gave his only Son for us.

If we have a bad conscience, it does not make sense to hide and blame others for our faults. Rather we have to clear off that bad conscience and be honest to God and our fellowmen. If we start distrusting God and almost everybody, chances are that there is something wrong with us.

8. The poem on the worthy housewife is a pearl of literature and shows, the female counterpart of how generous a person can be and of how we all appreciate and like such persons.

a. She knows that physical attractiveness is not what makes a wife the partner in life. It passes. What remains is her sincere love.

b. She is a good partner to her husband, his better half. Thus her husband relies on her and derives good from her (v. 11). Since she is a good manager of the household the husband is free to accept a job in the municipality as counselor and judge. And all respect him since his wife has a good reputation. (v. 23).

c. She is "just" a housewife, being "oldfashionate" enough to be working day and night for her family, her husband and the many employees (v. 18). She spins (v. 19), she makes garments of wool and flax (v. 13). All members of the household thus have what they need to put on; she uses good material (scarlet which really keeps a person warm v. 21) for all and herself (v. 22). She can even sell garments to merchants (v. 24). She takes care of the food and gets what she needs, even

from afar (v. 14). After all, love goes through the stomach. And we all have loved mama because she always had something good to eat. She is even well equipped for the future and does not have to worry about possible uncertainties (v. 25).

d. But she is more than "just" a housewife: She can administer well and even inspects and acquires new fields. She can manage the whole household and has an eye on everything (v. 27). Things go smoothly. All feel, there is somebody who cares.

e. But even more, she is a good advisor. (v. 26). All feel like talking to her: Her husband, the children, the servants. No wonder that all are full of praise (28f). Mothers are never looking for praise, even less do they demand it. But just because of this unselfishness do they get recognition and even more love. The fact that there is a "Mothers' Day" is one more proof for this.

f. She also has a heart for the poor (v. 20), (and many of us will remember their mother for that). There may not always be much. But there will be always something for those in need.

g. Mothers are not satisfied in doing their duty. They do everything they can do, their best. They do not hide their talent, but make it bear fruit.

Solemnity of Christ, the King of the Universe (November 22, 1981)

We conclude the ecclesiastical year with the feast of Christ the King. See some introductory remarks last year. The readings of this year A portray Christ as king who judges (first, and second reading and gospel). This, however, does not mean that he condemns. Rather, he cares for the sheep and for those going astray, feeding them (first reading). In his last judgment he identifies himself with the poor; they are his brothers (gospel). He rules between resurrection (ascension) and parousia, Father (second reading).

First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12.15-17

The Book of Ezekiel, written around 593-570 B.C., after the call of Ezekiel (1:1-3:21), brings in its first part (3:22-24:27) prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem from the time before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586; in its second part

(25:1-32:32) prophecies against the Gentiles. The third part (33:1-48:35) from the time after the fall of Jerusalem pictures in the first section (33:1-39:29) the new covenant and the resurrection of the nation. After an admonition to repeat (33:1-31) Ezekiel talks about the good shepherd (34:1-31). By and large the kings of Israel were false shepherds, looking only for their own profit (34:1-10). Thus Yahweh himself will be the shepherd of Israel (34:11-16). He will, however, also judge the sheep (34:17-22).

The first reading, as one can see concentrates on Yahweh as the good shepherd. And what is said about Yahweh as shepherd has been verified in Christ, taking Yahweh's place. Of the second part of the picture of Yahweh as shepherd, the sifting judgment (34:17-22), today's first reading brings only one verse (v. 17). Yahweh, and thus Christ looks for the scattered sheep (v. 11-12). He brings them back and pastures them (v. 15-16). He gives them rest (v. 15). He binds up the injured (v. 16), heals the sick (v. 16). The fat sheep he will destroy (v.16). So we read in the Hebrew text (which is unfolded in vv. 18-22. The Septuagint and the Vulgate (Greek and Latin translations) remove the apparent difficulty by translating: "the fat and the strong I will watch over."

Yahweh will judge, however, the sheep also. God's retribution is not limited to the rulers. His people has not formed the community based on solidarity, to which it was called, but has become guilty of unbrotherly behavior. The strong animals of the flock have pushed away the weak from the grazing and water, in order to arrive there first and have all the best; they did not leave the remains of the available food for the late-comers, but spoiled it wantonly and rendered it unusable. This was the anti-social guilt of Israel, especially in the time before the exile. The end of v. 17 is not quite clear. It seems that God does not judge between rams and goats, but rather between sheep (weak animals) and rams or goats (strong animals) as it illustrated in Mt. 25:32f. Probably (between) rams and goats" is a gloss which explains the strong animals as rams and goats.

Jesus himself recognized Ez. 34:11-16 as the model of his own task. The great shepherd discourse in John 10 regards him as the fulfiller of this prophecy.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26,28

In 1 Cor. 15 Paul speaks about the resurrection, a difficult topic for a Greek. After all, for Plato the ideal of a man was a being of a pure idea without body. How then could a Greek look

forward to the resurrection of the body, though transfigured, since it was the prison of the soul. In 15:1-11 Paul proves the reality of the resurrection of Christ by the many eyewitnesses. In 15:12-34 he gives the reasons for our own resurrection: (1) We are one with Christ by our regeneration, by our solidarity with Christ (15:12-28). (2) Those who are baptized for the dead show their belief in the resurrection (15:29). (3) A life, full of sacrifices, such as the apostles lead, would be folly if there were no resurrection (15:30-34). In 15:35-58 the apostles describes the manner of the body's rising and the fate of those Christians who are alive at the parousia.

Today we hear: Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of those who rise and thus we will follow, since we are intimately united with him (as the members to the head). In Adam all died, in Jesus all will rise and live.

Christ is ruling (as king) between his resurrection (ascension), which is the beginning of his exaltation, and the parousia. During that time he destroys every (hostile and averse to God) power. (Here we have the same Jewish world picture we also have in the letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.) Then at the parousia, after he has subjected everything, Christ subjects himself to the Father so that God may be all in all. The Father is the principle without principle, the beginning without beginning, whereas the Son is generated from the Father.

That Christ is also king during all eternity Paul does not speak about here in this context.

Reading of the Good News: Matthew 25:31-46

This pericope, a simile, not a parable, is proper to Matthew and forms the end of Christ's teaching. Next will come the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus prefers calling himself Son of Man in opposition to Messiah, since the former title does not have the political over- and undertones of Messiah. Jesus did not want to be the political hero freeing the Jews from the yoke of the Romans. "Son of Man" implies suffering and the coming on the clouds for the last judgment according to the Book of Daniel. This is Christ's first title. He is sitting on a royal throne, thus he is king (the second title) and Lord (the third title).

All nations will be assembled before him, not just the Jews or the Christians. He will judge them all. This judgment is compared to the separation a shepherd makes with his flock in the evening: During the day sheep and goats are pasturing together, intermingled. But in the evening the sheep prefer the open air, whereas the goats have to be brought inside, otherwise it would be too cold for them. The white of the sheep is used as symbol for goodness and thus they are placed on the right, the happy side, whereas the black color of the goats stands for badness.

In the application of the picture the good people are placed on the right side and enter the kingdom of the Father, whereas the bad one are excluded. The reason: the good ones have

- given food to the hungry,
- given drink to the thirsty,
- welcomed the stranger,
- clothed the naked.
- visited the sick,
- visited the person in prison.

The bad ones have not done this. And the great surprise, even to the people concerned, is that they have done or not done this to Christ himself because Christ was in these hungry, thirsty, strange, naked, sick and jailed persons, who are his least brothers.

Scholars do not agree as to who "these least brothers" are. Nocent, Regional Fuller, Senior, Obach-Kirk identify these "least brothers" with the missionaries sent out by Christ. Josef Schmid, Jeremias, Schweizer and others, however see in them every poor person, even those who did not hear anything about the gospel yet.

HOMILY

CHRIST THE KING IDENTIFIES HIMSELF WITH THE DISCIPLES, CHRISTIANS AND THE POOR

1. In our modern time we do not have much contact with kings. Most of us have grown in a democracy. What we hear about kings strikes us often as extravagant, old fashioned, outlandish and expensive. The expenses for their travels and

their household could be put to better use, so we think. And yet, there is more to a king, even on the mere human side, as countries that have almost an affection for the queen, like Holland, or England as the marriage of Prince Charles showed.

2. Ever since the time of David, the second Jewish King and the most liked of them all and in many ways the most perfect, although he had his faults, the king is compared to a shepherd. After all, that's what David was before he was anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). David was a good shepherd, defending his sheep from lions and bears (1 Sam. 17:34), risking his own life. And that's what David continued doing during most of his kingship: Defending Israel against her enemies, the Philistines and others so that his son Solomon could be ruling during a time of peace and prosperity.

3. The other kings of Israel were by and large bad kings because they were bad shepherds as Ezekiel tells us, taking advantage of the sheep, slaughtering them and using them for their king and all what we find in chapter 34 of Ezekiel was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the good king because he is the good shepherd, as we find it in chapter 10 of the gospel of John.

a. Christ as king and shepherd goes after the scattered and even lost sheep (Ez. 34:12-16). He brings them back to the fold. How often did Christ say that his mission was to call sinners, not the just (Mt. 9:13), that sick people need a doctor not the healthy ones (Mt. 9:12).

b. As good shepherd Christ pastures the sheep and gives them rest (Ez. 34:14-15). He feeds us daily with his flesh and blood.

c. He binds up the sick sheep and heals them (Ez. 34:16). Jesus heals us from our sins and exercises his authority more by showing mercy than by lording it over us.

d. But as Christ is kind and merciful, we must be loving too. To speak in the picture: Some strong sheep push away the weak from the grazing and the water, in order to arrive there first and have all the best. They do not leave the remains of the available food for the latecomers, but spoil it wantonly and render it unusable. This is a picture for the anti-social behavior of many Jews before the exile, the better-to-do people, the rich ones. Amos had to warn them that God would not even want their sacrifices if they were not willing to share with the poor. Here in the smile of the shepherd they are judged and condemned because of lack of love.

4. Christ is king not because he wants to be high above us, but because he identifies himself with us. This is also the main feature of the gospel of today. At the end of times all nations will appear before his throne. And he will separate them as a shepherd at night separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep with their long wool can stand the fresh and cool air of the night easily and even prefer to spend the night outdoor, whereas the goats are more sensitive and have to be brought inside. And here suddenly the simile becomes an allegory: White sheep signifies good people and thus they stand on the right, the lucky side, the black goats prefigure bad people and thus they are placed on the left, the unlucky side. The good people inherit the kingdom of the Father, the bad ones are cast out and go to hell.

The reason is: The good ones have shown kind acts, works of corporal mercy to the disciples of Christ who have been sent by him to preach the gospel. The clearest parallel text would be Mt. 10:40-42: He who welcomes you welcomes me, and he who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. I promise you that whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones (Greek: *mikroi* which means "little") because he is a disciple will not want for his reward."

The missionaries, sent by Christ take Christ's place. Whoever accepts them, accepts Christ. After all, they speak Christ's word, not their own message (1 Thes. 2:13). The missionaries have often been hungry and thirsty and appreciated food and drink. They often enough were strangers and were glad if somebody made them feel as one of them, not as strangers, coming from a foreign land. And how often did they loose almost everything, their clothing as well, and got sick. Yes, they were even called subversive and put in jail. How much did they appreciate a visit, a word of defense and clarification.

5. Christ the King identifies himself also with his brothers, all Christians. That Christ lives in every baptized person was the first insight of Paul at his conversion at Damascus. When a voice from heaven said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me" (Acts 9:4) he realized in a flash that Christ and Christians are identical. The union of Christ and the Christians is most intimate. Later on the apostle would explain this intimacy with the comparison of the head and the members of a body: We are so intimately united with Christ as the members of a body are united with the head. Christ is the head we the members (1 Cor. 12:12-27). That "brother" is used for the members of the ecclesiastical community and thus for christians we see in Mt. 18:15.21.35.

6. Christ the King, finally, identifies himself with every poor person, no matter if he be a Christian or not. We may often ask ourselves: "What about all the many people who never heard anything about Christ, who never heard the gospel preached to them? How will they be judged? Are they condemned because they never made an act of faith in Christ and thus could not be saved by their faith in Christ? Does not St. Paul say that we are saved by faith in Christ only (Rom. 3:23,28)?" Thus, it seems, Mt. 25:31-41 is concerned with the question: By what criterion will the heathen (v. 32) be judged? "Are they lost? (for such was the general contemporary opinion). The gist of Jesus' reply is: 'The heathen have met in my brethren; for the needy are my brethren; he who has shown love to them has shown it to me, the savior of the poor. Therefore, at the Last Judgment, the heathen will be examined concerning the acts of love which they have shown to me in the form of the afflicted, and they will be granted the grace of a share in the Kingdom, if they have fulfilled the Messiah's law (James 2.8), the duty of love'. Thus for them justification is available on the ground of love, since for them also the ransom has been paid (Mark 10:45: for many) (Jeremias. *Parables*, 209.f.)."

7. Christ the King has loved us and loves us. And he will grant entry into his kingdom if we have loved him in his messengers, his fellow Christians and his brothers, the poor.

First Sunday of Advent (November 29, 1981)

As we say last year, Advent commemorates the coming of the Lord at his parousia, his coming in the Church and his coming at Christians. In the new Missal our thoughts during the last three Sundays of the ecclesiastical year and on the first Sunday of Advent are directed toward the parousia. The remaining three Sundays of Advent prepare us for the arriving of Christ at Christmas. — As usual, with Advent a new cycle starts. This year 1981-1982 we have cycle B.

All three readings in Advent are grouped around the same theme. Today we meditate on the vigilant waiting for the Lord. May God, who is Father, come down (first reading). He and his Son will come down on the Day of the Lord (second reading). Thus we must watch (gospel).

First Reading: Isaiah 63:16b-17.19b;64:2b-7

Third Isaiah, the unknown author, ca. 538-510 B.C. wrote 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, for instance, the Temple was not rebuilt yet. The prophet would tell them that salvation would come in spite of all obstacles. Part I (Is. 56:1-59:20 + 61:1-6) outlines the obstacles and difficulties for salvation. Part II (60:1-62:12) pictures the future glory of Sion-Jerusalem. Part III (63:7-14) appeals to Yahweh for his afflicted people. After praise of Yahweh for his help in the past (63:7-14) the prophet cries out for his help in the misery of the present (63:15-65:11). From this second subdivision our first reading is taken.

Three times (for the first time in Jewish history) the prophet enunciates God as Father (Is. 63:16a,b; 64:7; the first is missing in today's reading). A direct address of God as Father would come only with Sir. 23:1-5. So far the patriarchs were called fathers. Ever since the Exodus, the time when God wrought awesome deeds they could not hope for (64:2), the Hebrews have experienced Yahweh as Father, that means as redeemer more than as creator. He has made them a nation through the Exodus and the covenant. And since the Exodus was not possible without creation, the Jews experienced Yahweh also as creator, as the potter who modelled all his vessels from clay (Is. 64:7).

But in spite of all this, the Hebrews sinned. They had to go to exile. And even now, after the return from exile, the Jews are guilty and sinful (64:4); they have withered like leaves (64:5), and God seems to hide himself (64:6).

Thus the prophet can only ask that God may once more rend the heavens open and come down (63:19). This verse reminds one of the other even more known Advent verse: "Let justice descend, O heavens, like dew from above, like gentle rain let the skies drop it down" (Is. 45:8).

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

The second reading is taken from the introduction of the First Letter to the Corinthians. Coming from the Greek capital Athens where Paul had failed (because of the lack of openness of the philosophers) it was a welcome surprise that the apostle

had such success among the Corinthians, although they came from low social conditions (1 Cor. 1:26ff). Thus the apostle can only thank God for making the Corinthians Christians and even more giving them many charisms (singled out are speech and knowledge).

Yet, they have and do not have yet. Thus they are looking forward to the parousia of the Lord, the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:8), a name which Paul takes over from Amos 5:18, Is. 2:12, Jer. 46:10, Ez. 13:5, Zeph. 1:7, Zech. 14:1. Since God is faithful (1:9) he will strengthen the Corinthians till the end. On this "not yet" the stress rests. The Corinthians shall not abuse the charisms as the corpus of the letter shows (1 Cor. 12; 14) but be an eschatological people, hoping and waiting for the final fulfillment at the parousia.

Reading of the Good News: Mark 13:33-37

The parable of today's gospel forms the finale of the second gospel before the passion and resurrection story of Jesus ending with a mighty fanfare: "To you all I say: 'Stay awake (*gregoreite*)!'"

Probably the simple parable run like this: "A man went out (for a dinner party, or his own wedding) during evening. And since he did not know when he would come back he asked the doorkeeper to stay awake so that he could let the master in on his return, even if this would be as late as early dawn."

This original parable Jesus could have addressed to the leaders of Israel (Jeremias. *Parables* 55) and to all disciples and hearers of Christ to accept him now when he puts them before the eschatological decision.

Mark added secondary features which he (1) took from the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30 cf. Lk. 19:12-17): "a man travelled abroad," and (2) from the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants (Mt. 24:43-51; cf. Lk. 12:39-46): "He placed his servants in charge, each with his own task."

After all, in actual reality one could not imagine, how all servants should stay awake (that's the job of the doorkeeper, not of the other workers who otherwise could not do anything all day long. And how could even a doorkeeper stay awake if the master would travel abroad? It would be easy to do so, though, in case the master goes out for one evening.

The one secondary feature of Mark (travelling abroad) applies the parable to Christ's ascension and identifies his return with the parousia. The other secondary feature applies the parable to the whole Christian community. They shall be disturbed by the delayed parousia, but shall watch. The feature of entrusting each servant with a different task disappears for all practical purposes. The main point of Mk. 13:35 and the only point of the parable in Mk. 13:33-37, however, is: Stay awake!

Luke 12:35-40 is a clear parallel to the original parable in Mark without the secondary features. The watchfulness in Luke is illustrated by (1) having the belts fastened around the waists so that one can walk and work any time, and (2) having the lamps burning ready so that one can see.

HOMILY

LORD, OUR FATHER, KEEP US ALERT FOR YOUR COMING!

1. Most of us have experienced God as close to us once in our life, e.g. on the day of first Holy Communion, the wedding day, the day of first vows, or ordination day. Then it is easy to think of him as Father. We experience him because he has entered into our life.

The Jews called their patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob their fathers and were slow in applying this title to Yahweh. Thus for the first time in their history Trito-Isaiah states God is the Father of Israel. He still does not use a direct address; that only Sirach 23:1-5 would do. They experienced Yahweh as Father because he had saved them and was thus a redeemer; he had entered their life in the Exodus and the covenant on Mt. Sinai. And whenever they could want to renew themselves they would recall that event. So even now after the return from exile when things did not happen as they had expected them to happen. The Temple was still in ruin and many other things were missing.

"O Lord, hold not back for you are our father. Were Abraham not to know us, nor Israel to acknowledge us, You Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever" (Is. 63:15b-16), is the first prayer addressed to God as Father. It does not yet say, as Sirach 23:1: "Lord, Father and Master of my life, permit me not to fall (by my tongue)", in other

words, it does not address God directly as Father, but it makes a statement about God as Father. But even so, for the first time in the Old Testament, God appears as Father, as redeemer who has entered the life of men and thus revealed himself as their Father.

2. But now, some years after the return from exile, it seems that Yahweh is far away, that he is hiding himself, that he is absent. The prophet knows that it is the fault of the Hebrews, that they have sinned. They are wandering from the Lord's ways (Is. 63:17). Yet, that first experience of Yahweh as Father carries the prophet through and he knows that God did not *become* Father because of the great event of the Exodus and the covenant. He only *revealed* himself as Father, as redeemer when he was entering their life. But he as their Father already because he made them, let them be born, formed them as a potter makes vessels from clay: "O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands" (Is. 64:7).

God is at times also absent from us. We have the impression he is so unreal. Many people even try to live as if God did not exist. With our modern technology it is so easy to fool oneself and think that we can do it all alone. God is apparently not necessary.

3. There is an historical time: world history goes to a climax till it finds its fulfillment in Christ. Everything and everybody was created by the Father with Christ in mind. Our life, too, has an historical time: We shall accomplish something concrete, become a definite personality. We are living in a "today" in a *kairos*, a unique time. Whatever we do, we can do just once. Whatever we do is a first performance. Even a rehearsal is in God's eyes a first performance. The second and third rehearsal for the same (human) performance is in God's—and thus in the real-view the first performance because we can do everything just once. And thus we have to use our time. Everything depends on this.

The Jews may have felt like this also during the time of the covenant on Mt. Sinai. And so we felt last year when the first Sunday of Advent was around. But we have failed as the Jews failed and we feel empty. We have the impression God is absent.

4. We can never do anything again. Lost is lost and missed is missed once and for all. But we can always make a beginning. There is not only an *historical* time, but there is also a year: to make a new beginning without lamenting too much

about missed opportunities. We grow, as it were, in many annual rings, like a tree, putting ring to ring. With the first Sunday of Advent we make a new ring in our life.

5. Trito-Isaiah asked Yahweh to rend the heavens and come down (Is. 63:19). We are asking the same during this time of Advent. This is true when the Lord comes for the parousia. But the Lord rends the heaven open in many small happenings, if we only have eyes to see. God breaks into our life in many small ways. And he who does not see the Lord in them, will miss him also when he comes for the parousia.

6. a. What Christ tells us in the last parable of Mark is: "Stay awake! Keep your eyes open! Be alert! Do not fall asleep!" It stands, as it were, in big letters, at the end of the report of Christ's public life so that one cannot overlook the warning. Thus we can pray: "Lord and Father, make us alert, open our eyes that we do not miss you when you intervene in our life and finally at the parousia!"

b. Whoever fall asleep behind the steering wheel and woke up in a hospital, bandaged all over, known what shock it is to fall asleep at the wrong time.

c. To stay awake in our life means to make the good intention in the morning and not just going to work without thinking or praying.

d. To keep our eyes open means not to be immersed in our activities, but to keep our head above our work.

e. To be alert implies to stop several times and think of what we are doing and catch ourselves if we start daydreaming. How often, for instance, do we read a page or even pages and suddenly we realize that we do not quite know what we read. There is only one thing to do: to go back to the last paragraph which we are able to recall and continue reading from there. The same is true for our spiritual life.

f. Luke 12:35 compares the alertness with servants who have their waist fastened with a belt. Then the long garment was in the right position so that they would not step on it. Father of the Church have often compared it with chastity or the spirit of sacrifice. We all know the expression "to tighten the belt". The time of Advent is not exactly a time of fast as the Lenten Season, but it certainly should be a time of checking our hidden inclinations and faults.

g. And finally the servants have their lamps burning to be able to lighten the way when the master returns. Our love must not grow cold but must remain warm.