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TUG OF WAR

Editorial

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

Leonardo Legaspi, O.P., D.D.

MISSION AND KENOSIS

Vicente Cajilig, O.P.

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TUG OF WAR

It may seem to some that the current conflict between the Church and the Government in the Philippines is more a verbal tug of war between the spokesmen of both sides, than a quarrel over real issues. Such a view is most unfortunate, because there are very important issues involved.

Our attention is being called to priests who have taken up arms to fight the government. But this is not the issue. Such priests have defied their ecclesiastical superiors and are beyond their control. The government is right in treating them as it would treat other rebels. Christ himself said, "All who take the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

The issue of respect for the human rights of detainees has also been raised. But again, the government, as well as the Church, is battling for human rights. It misreads signals, it commits errors, it fails to score. But such defects, maybe in a lesser degree, are not alien to the Church.

We may again bring up the question of defining what the government means by "subversion". But this will just once more end up as an academic exercise.

A truly important issue is that of discipline. It affects both the government and the Church. In the current discussion, it has been brought out that the government has excellent policies, laws and directives concerning the treatment of rebels to be hunted, subversives to be arrested, and detainees awaiting trial. But are they put into practice? Or do subordinate officers as well as the rank and file find means of circumventing the rules and simply do what they think fit? If the govern-

ment is truly honest in its commitment to human rights, it must find a way of imposing discipline on the courts, the military, the police, and others, so that the rules would truly be followed.

On its part, the Church, too, has been found lacking in discipline. Not that it does not have the right teachings. Not that the Pope has kept silent. Not that Bishops and Religious Superiors have not issued directives. The fact simply is, that when a priest or religious woman wants to follow his or her own ideas about social action or political activity, the ecclesiastical authorities lose control. It seems that, in our days, one continue to be a priest or a religious woman without being obedient to anybody.

The most important issue, however, is the practical cooperation of Church and government in solving the political, economic and cultural ills of our society. Too often, both sides wait until a crisis develops before they try to work together. Take the case of Fr. Conrado Balweg. He was ultimately compelled to join the NPA because he found no other way of opposing the construction of a mammoth pulp-making factory in Abra. For the government, this was something that would boost the economy of the region. For the Tingguians, Fr. Balweg's people, the project meant the end of their possession of ancestral lands and their traditional livelihood. It also meant an affront to what they considered sacred, their ownership of the land where their fathers lived, died, were buried, and where the present generation has been born. Confiscation of the land by the government is an insult to Tingguian honor. Why did the government make all the decisions? Why didn't the people have their say? Why couldn't the Church take a hand in this matter? Unless the government takes the outstretched hand of the Church in matters like this, two sides will tug the rope in opposite directions. Let us hope and pray that the rope does not break.

Continuation of the Apostolic Exhortation

(First part is in May-June 1982)

FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO

Relations with other educating agents

40. The family is the primary but not the only and exclusive educating community. Man's community aspect itself — both civil and ecclesial — demands and leads to a broader and more articulated activity resulting from well-ordered collaboration between the various agents of education. All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution proper to itself.¹⁰⁴

The educational role of the Christian family therefore has a very important place in organic pastoral work. This involves a new form of cooperation between parents and Christian communities, and between the various educational groups and pastors. In this sense, the renewal of the Catholic school must give special attention both to the parents of the pupils and to the formation of a perfect educating community.

The right of parents to choose an education in conformity with their religious faith must be absolutely guaranteed.

The State and the Church have the obligation to give families all possible aid to enable them to perform their educational role properly. Therefore, both the Church and the State must create and foster the institutions and activities that families justly demand, and the aid must be in proportion to the families' needs. However, those in society who are in charge of schools must never forget that the parents have been appointed by God himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely inalienable.

But corresponding to their right, parents have a serious duty to commit themselves totally to a cordial and active relationship with the teachers and the school authorities.

If ideologies opposed to the Christian faith are taught in the schools, the family must join with other families, if possible through family associations, and with all its strength and with

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

wisdom help the young not to depart from the faith. In this case, the family needs special assistance from pastors of souls, who must never forget that parents have the inviolable right to entrust their children to the ecclesial community.

Manifold service to life

41. Fruitful married love expresses itself in serving life in many ways. Of these ways, begetting and educating children are the most immediate, specific and irreplaceable. In fact, every act of true love towards a human being bears witness to and perfects the spiritual fecundity of the family, since it is an act of obedience to the deep inner dynamism of love as self-giving to others.

For everyone this perspective is full of value and commitment, and it can be an inspiration in particular for couples who experience physical sterility.

Christian families, recognizing with faith all human beings as children of the same heavenly Father, will respond generously to the children of other families, giving them support and love not as outsiders but as members of the one family of God's children. Christian parents will thus be able to spread their love beyond the bonds of flesh and blood, nourishing the links that are rooted in the spirit and that develop through concrete service to the children of other families, who are often without even the barest necessities.

Christian families will be able to show greater readiness to adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them. Rediscovering the warmth of affection of a family, these children will be able to experience God's loving and provident fatherhood witnessed to by Christian parents, and they will thus be able to grow up with serenity and confidence in life. At the same time the whole family will be enriched with the spiritual values of a wider fraternity.

Family fecundity must have an unceasing "creativity", a marvelous fruit of the Spirit of God, who opens the eyes of the heart to discover the new needs and sufferings of our society and gives courage for accepting them and responding to them. A vast field of activity lies open to families: today, even more preoccupying than child abandonment is the phenomenon of social and cultural exclusion, which seriously affects the elderly, the sick, the disabled, drug addicts, ex-prisoners, etc.

This broadens enormously the horizons of the parenthood of Christian families: these and many other urgent needs of our time are a challenge to their spiritually fruitful love. With families and through them, the Lord Jesus continues to "have compassion" on the multitudes.

III — PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

The family as the first and vital cell of society

42. "Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society", the family is "the first and vital cell of society".¹⁰⁵

The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.

Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role.

Family life as an experience of communion and sharing

43. The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society.

The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving". By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity.

Thus, the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable

¹⁰⁵ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love.

The family is thus, as the Synod Fathers recalled, the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and "values". As the Second Vatican Council states, in the family "the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and to harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social living".¹⁰⁶

Consequently, faced with a society that is running the risk of becoming more and more depersonalized and standardized and therefore inhuman and dehumanizing, with the negative results of many forms of escapism — such as alcoholism, drugs and even terrorism — the family possesses and continues still to release formidable energies capable of taking man out of his anonymity, keeping him conscious of his personal dignity, enriching him with deep humanity and actively placing him, in his uniqueness and unrepeatability, within the fabric of society.

The social and political role

44. The social role of the family certainly cannot stop short at procreation and education, even if this constitutes its primary and irreplaceable form of expression.

Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favour of the poor, or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization.

The social contribution of the family has an original character of its own, one that should be given greater recognition and more decisive encouragement, especially as the children grow up, and actually involving all its members as much as possible.¹⁰⁷

In particular, note must be taken of the ever greater importance in our society of hospitality in all its forms, from

¹⁰⁶ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

opening the door of one's home and still more of one's heart to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters, to concrete efforts to ensure that every family has its own home, as the natural environment that preserves it and makes it grow. In a special way the Christian family is called upon to listen to the Apostle's recommendation: "Practise hospitality",¹⁰⁸ and therefore, imitating Christ's example and sharing in his love, to welcome the brother or sister in need: "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward".¹⁰⁹

The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of *political intervention*: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. Along these lines, families should grow in awareness of being "protagonists" of what is known as "family politics" and assume responsibility for transforming society; otherwise, families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference. The Second Vatican Council's appeal to go beyond an individualistic ethic therefore also holds good for the family as such.¹¹⁰

Society at the service of the family

45. Just as the intimate connection between the family and society demands that the family be open to and participate in society and its development, so also it requires that society should never fail in its fundamental task of respecting and fostering the family.

The family and society have complementary functions in defending and fostering the good of each and every human being. But society — more specifically the State — must recognize that "the family is a society in its own original right"¹¹¹ and so society is under a grave obligation in its relations with the family to adhere to the principle of subsidiarity.

By virtue of this principle, the State cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 12:13.

¹⁰⁹ Mt. 10:42.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 30.

¹¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 5.

well perform on their own or in free association; instead, it must positively favour and encourage as far as possible responsible initiative by families. In the conviction that the good of the family is an indispensable and essential value of the civil community, the public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all those aids — economic, social, educational, political and culture assistance — that they need in order to face all their responsibilities in a human way.

The charter of family rights

46. The ideal of mutual support and development between the family and society is often very seriously in conflict with the reality of their separation and even opposition.

In fact, as was repeatedly denounced by the Synod, the situation experienced by many families in various countries is highly problematical, if not entirely negative: institutions and laws unjustly ignore the inviolable rights of the family and of the human person; and society, far from putting itself at the service of the family, attacks it violently in its values and fundamental requirements. Thus the family, which in God's plan is the basic cell of society and a subject of rights and duties before the State or any other community, finds itself the victim of society, of the delays and slowness with which its acts, and even of its blatant injustice.

For this reason, the Church openly and strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and the State. In particular, the Synod Fathers mentioned the following rights of the family:

- the right to exist and progress as a family, that is to say, the right of every human being, even if he or she is poor, to found a family and to have adequate means to support it;
- the right to exercise its responsibility regarding the transmission of life and to educate children:
- the right to the intimacy of conjugal and family life;
- the right to the stability of the bond and of the institution of marriage;
- the right to believe in and profess one's faith and to propagate it;

— the right to bring up children in accordance with the family's own traditions and religious and cultural values, with the necessary instruments, means and institutions;

— the right, especially of the poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political and economic security;

— the right to housing suitable for living family life in a proper way;

— the right to expression and to representation, either directly or through associations, before the economic, social and cultural public authorities and lower authorities;

— the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfil the family's role suitably and expeditiously;

— the right to protect minors by adequate institutions and legislation from harmful drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc;

— the right to wholesome recreation of a kind that also fosters family values;

— the right of the elderly to a worthy life and a worthy death;

— the right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life.¹¹²

Acceding to the Synod's explicit request, the Holy See will give prompt attention to studying these suggestions in depth and to the preparation of a Charter of Rights of the Family, to be presented to the quarters and authorities concerned.

The Christian family's grace and responsibility

47. The social role that belongs to every family pertains by a new and original right to the Christian family, which is based on the sacrament of marriage. By taking up the human reality of the love between husband and wife in all its implications, the sacrament gives to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God".¹¹³

¹¹² Cf. *Propositio*, 42.

¹¹³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

The social and political role is included in the kingly mission of service in which Christian couples share by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, and they receive both a command which they cannot ignore and a grace which sustains and stimulates them.

The Christian family is thus called upon to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters, through a "preferential option" for the poor and disadvantaged. Therefore, advancing in its following of the Lord by special love for all the poor, it must have special concern for the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family.

For a new international order

48. In view of the worldwide dimension of various social questions nowadays, the family has seen its role with regard to the development of society extended in a completely new way: it now also involves cooperating for a new international order, since it is only in worldwide solidarity that the enormous and dramatic issues of world justice, the freedom of peoples and the peace of humanity can be dealt with and solved.

The spiritual communion between Christian families, rooted in a common faith and hope and given life by love, constitutes an inner energy that generates, spreads and develops justice, reconciliation, fraternity and peace among human beings. In so far as it is a "small-scale Church" the Christian family is called upon, like the "large-scale Church", to be a sign of unity for the world and in this way to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the Kingdom and peace of Christ, towards which the whole world is journeying.

Christian families can do this through their educational activity — that is to say by presenting to their children a model of life based on the values of truth, freedom, justice and love — both through active and responsible involvement in the authentically human growth of society and its institutions, and by supporting in various ways the associations specifically devoted to international issues.

IV — SHARING IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The family within the mystery of the Church

49. Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: the family is placed at service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church.

In order to understand better the foundations, the contents and the characteristics of this participation, we must examine the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a "Church in miniature" (*Ecclesia domestica*),¹¹⁴ in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church.

It is, above all, the Church as Mother that gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family, by putting into effect in its regard the saving mission which she has received from her Lord. By proclaiming the word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family its true identity, what it is and should be according to the Lord's plan; by celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ for its sanctification to the glory of the Father; by the continuous proclamation of the new commandment of love, the Church encourages and guides the Christian family to the service of love, so that it may imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church: by virtue of the sacrament, Christian married couples and parents "in their state and way of life have their own special gift among the People of God".¹¹⁵ For this reason they do not only *receive* the love of Christ and become a *saved* community, but they are also

¹¹⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; Pope John Paul II, Homily for the opening of the Sixth Synod of Bishops (26 September 1980) 3: AAS 72 (1980), 1008.

¹¹⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

called upon to *communicate* Christ's love to their brethren, thus becoming a *saving* community. In this way, while the Christian family is a fruit and sign of the supernatural fecundity of the Church, it stands also as a symbol, witness and participant of the Church's motherhood.¹¹⁶

A specific and original ecclesial role

50. The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an "intimate community of life and love", at the service of the Church and of society.

Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family's sharing in the Church's mission should follow a *community pattern*: the spouses together as a couple, the parents and children as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world. They must be "of one heart and soul"¹¹⁷ in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them, and through their shared commitment to works of service in the ecclesial and civil communities.

The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its *state of life*. It is thus in the *love between husband and wife and between the members of the family* — a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness¹¹⁸ — that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.

The Second Vatican Council recalls this fact when it writes: "Families will share their spiritual riches generously with other families too. Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant will

¹¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁷ *Acts* 4:32.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 9: AAS 60 (1968), 486-487.

manifest to all people the Saviour's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This, the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together".¹¹⁹

Having laid the *foundation* of the participation of the Christian family in the Church's mission, it is now time to illustrate its *substance in reference to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King* — three aspects of a single reality — by presenting the Christian family as 1) a believing and evangelizing community, 2) a community in dialogue with God, and 3) a community at the service of man.

1) *The Christian family as a believing and evangelizing community*

Faith as the discovery and admiring awareness of God's plan for the family

51. As a sharer in the life and mission of the Church, which listens to the word of God with reverence and proclaims it confidently,¹²⁰ *the Christian family fulfils its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God*: it thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community.

Christian spouses and parents are required to offer "the obedience of faith".¹²¹ They are called upon to welcome the word of the Lord which reveals to them the marvelous news — the Good News — of their conjugal and family life sanctified and made a source of sanctity by Christ himself. Only in faith can they discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family, making them a sign and meeting-place of the loving covenant between God and man, between Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church.

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nour-

¹¹⁹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

¹²⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 1.

¹²¹ *Rom.* 16:26.

ished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state.

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the basic moment of the faith of the couple. This sacrament, in essence, is the proclamation in the Church of the Good News concerning married love. It is the word of God that "reveals" and "fulfils" the wise and loving plan of God for the married couple, giving them a mysterious and real share in the very love with which God himself loves humanity. Since the sacramental celebration of marriage is itself a proclamation of the word of God, it must also be a "profession of faith" within and with the Church, as a community of believers, on the part of all those who in different ways participate in its celebration.

This profession of faith demands that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and of the family. God, who called the couple *to* marriage, continues to call them *in* marriage.¹²² In and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them, revealing and presenting the concrete "demands" of their sharing in the love of Christ for his Church in the particular family, social and ecclesial situation in which they find themselves.

The discovery of and obedience to the plan of God on the part of the conjugal and family community must take place in "togetherness", through the human experience of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ.

Thus, the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence, its duty regarding permanent education in the faith.

The Christian family's ministry of evangelization

52. To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community. Let us listen again to Paul VI: "The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to

¹²² Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 25: AAS 60 (1968), 498.

their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighbourhood of which it forms part".¹²³

As the Synod repeated, taking up the appeal which I launched at Puebla, the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home.¹²⁴ This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan.

Particularly today, the Christian family has a special vocation to witness to the paschal covenant of Christ by constantly radiating the joy of love and the certainty of the hope for which it must give an account: "The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdoms of God and the hope of a blessed life to come".¹²⁵

The absolute need for family catechesis emerges with particular force in certain situations that the Church unfortunately experiences in some places: "In places where anti-religious legislation endeavours even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, 'the Church of the home' remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis".¹²⁶

Ecclesial service

53. The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness.¹²⁷

The family must educate the children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the

¹²³ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71: AAS 68 (1976), 60-61.

¹²⁴ Cf. Address to the Third General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin American (28 January, 1979), IV a: AAS 71 (1979), 204.

¹²⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 35.

¹²⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 68: AAS 71 (1979), 1334.

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 36: *loc. cit.*, 1308.

vocation received from God. Indeed, the family that is open to transcendent values, that serves its brothers and sisters with joy, that fulfils its duties with generous fidelity, and is aware of its daily sharing in the mystery of the glorious Cross of Christ, becomes the primary and most excellent seedbed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God.

The parents' ministry of evangelization and catechesis ought to play a part in their children's lives also during adolescence and youth, when the children, as often happens, challenge or even reject the Christian faith received in earlier years. Just as in the Church, the work of evangelization can never be separated from the sufferings of the apostle, so in the Christian family parents must face with courage and great interior serenity the difficulties that their ministry of evangelization sometimes encounters in their own children.

It should not be forgotten that the service rendered by Christian spouses and parents to the Gospel is essentially an ecclesial service. It has its place within the context of the whole Church as an evangelized and evangelizing community. In so far as the ministry of evangelization and catechesis of the Church of the home is rooted in and derives from the one mission of the Church and is ordained to the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ,¹²⁸ it must remain in intimate communion and collaborate responsibly with all the other evangelizing and catechetical activities present and at work in the ecclesial community at the diocesan and parochial levels.

To preach the Gospel to the whole creation

54. Evangelization, urged on within by irrepressible missionary zeal, is characterized by a universality without boundaries. It is the response to Christ's explicit and unequivocal command: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation".¹²⁹

The Christian family's faith and evangelizing mission also possesses this Catholic missionary inspiration. The sacrament of marriage takes up and repropose the task of defending and spreading the faith, a task that has its roots in Baptism and

¹²⁸ Cf. *1 Cor.* 12:4-6; *Eph.* 4:12-13.

¹²⁹ *Mk.* 16:15.

Confirmation,¹³⁰ and makes Christian married couples and parents witnesses of Christ "to the end of the earth",¹³¹ missionaries, in the true and proper sense, of love and life.

A form of missionary activity can be exercised even within the family. This happens when some member of the family does not have the faith or does not practice it with consistency. In such a case, the other members must give him or her a living witness of their own faith in order to encourage and support him or her along the path towards full acceptance of Christ the Saviour.¹³²

Animated in its own inner life by missionary zeal, the Church of the home is also called to be a luminous sign of the presence of Christ and of his love for those who are "far away", for families who do not yet believe, and for those Christian families who no longer live in accordance with the faith that they once received. The Christian family is called to enlighten "by its example and its witness... those who seek the truth".¹³³

Just as at the dawn of Christianity, Aquila and Priscilla were presented as a missionary couple,¹³⁴ so today the Church shows forth her perennial newness of fruitfulness by the presence of Christian couples and families who dedicate at least a part of their lives to working in missionary territories, proclaiming the Gospel and doing service to their fellowman in the love of Jesus Christ.

Christian families offer a special contribution to the missionary cause of the Church by fostering missionary vocations among their sons and daughters¹³⁵ and, more generally, "by training their children from childhood to recognize God's love for all people".¹³⁶

2) *The Christian family as a community in dialogue with God*

¹³⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

¹³¹ Acts 1:8.

¹³² Cf. 1 Pt. 3:12.

¹³³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 35; cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

¹³⁴ Cf. Acts 18; Rom. 16:3-4.

¹³⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 39.

¹³⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30.

The Church's sanctuary in the home

55. The proclamation of the Gospel and its acceptance in faith reach their fullness in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church which is a believing and evangelizing community is also a priestly people invested with the dignity and sharing in the power of Christ and the High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant.¹³⁷

The Christian family too is part of this priestly people which is the Church. By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by him in a dialogue with God through the prayer.

This is the *priestly role* which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way, the Christian family *is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world.*

Marriage as a sacrament of mutual sanctification and an act of worship

56. The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy: "This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity".¹³⁸

The gift of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration of the sacrament of marriage, but rather accompanies the married couple throughout their lives. This fact is explicitly recalled by the Second Vatican Council when it says that Jesus Christ "abides with them so that, just as he loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-

¹³⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

¹³⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 49.

bestowal... For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus, they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence, contribute jointly to the glory of God".¹³⁹

Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life.¹⁴⁰ This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound *conjugal and family spirituality* that draws its inspiration from the themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection, and sign, which were stressed more than once by the Synod.

Christian marriage, like the other sacraments, "whose purpose is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God",¹⁴¹ is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church. By celebrating it, Christian spouses profess their gratitude to God for the sublime gift bestowed on them of being able to live in their married and family lives the very love of God for people and that of the Lord Jesus for the Church, his bride.

Just as husbands and wives receive from the sacrament the gift and responsibility of translating into daily living the sanctification bestowed on them, so the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a "spiritual sacrifice".¹⁴² What the Council says of the laity applies also to Christian spouses and parents, especially with regard to the earthly and temporal realities that characterize their lives: "As worshippers leading holy lives in every place, the laity consecrate the world itself to God".¹⁴³

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59.

¹⁴² Cf. 1 Pt. 2:5; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 34.

¹⁴³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the

Marriage and the Eucharist

57. The Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected. The Second Vatican Council drew attention to the unique relationship between the Eucharist and marriage by requesting that "marriage normally be celebrated within the Mass".¹⁴⁴ To understand better and live more intensely the graces and responsibilities of Christian marriage and family life, it is altogether necessary to rediscover and strengthen this relationship.

The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with his blood on the Cross.¹⁴⁵ In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its "communion" and its "mission": by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is "given up" and in his Blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.

The sacrament of conversion and reconciliation

58. An essential and permanent part of the Christian family's sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the "newness" of the Baptism that constitutes them "saints". The Christian family too is sometimes unfaithful to the law of baptismal grace and holiness proclaimed anew in the sacrament of marriage.

Repentance and mutual pardon within the bosom of the Christian family, so much a part of daily life, receive their specific sacramental expression in Christian Penance. In the Encycli-

Church *Lumen Gentium*, 34.

¹⁴⁴ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 78.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Jn.* 19:34.

lical *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI wrote of married couples: "And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is abundantly poured forth in the sacrament of Penance".¹⁴⁶

The celebration of this sacrament acquires special significance for family life. While they discover in faith that sin contradicts not only the covenant with God, but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is "rich in mercy",¹⁴⁷ who bestows on them his love which is more powerful than sin,¹⁴⁸ and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion.

Family prayer

59. The Church prays for the Christian family and educates the family to live in generous accord with the priestly gift and role received from Christ the High Priest. In effect, the baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis of a priestly vocation and mission for the spouses and family by which their daily lives are transformed into "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ".¹⁴⁹ This transformation is achieved not only by celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments and through offering themselves to the glory of God, but also through a life of prayer, through prayerful dialogue with the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered *in common*, husband and wife together, parents and children together. Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. The words with which the Lord Jesus promises his presence can be applied to the members of the Christian family in a special way: "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they

¹⁴⁶ Section 25: AAS 60 (1968), 499.

¹⁴⁷ *Eph.* 2:4.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, 13: AAS 72 (1980), 1218-1219.

¹⁴⁹ *I Pt.* 2:5.

ask it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them".¹⁵⁰

Family prayer has for its very own object *family life itself*, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to his call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and home-comings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc. — all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family's history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God's unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.

Educators in prayer

60. By reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with him: "It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and the office of the sacrament of Matrimony, that from the earliest years children should be taught, according to the faith received in Baptism, to have a knowledge of God, to worship him and to love their neighbour".¹⁵¹

The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother — exercising their royal priesthood — penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface. Let us again listen to the appeal made by Paul VI to parents: "Mothers, do you prepare them, in conjunction with the priests, for the sacraments that they receive when they are young: Confession, Communion and Confirmation? Do you

¹⁵⁰ *Mt.* 18:19-20.

¹⁵¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 36: AAS 71 (1979), 1308.

encourage them when they are sick to think of Christ suffering, to invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the saints? Do you say the family Rosary together? And you, fathers, do you pray with your children, with the whole domestic community, at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life, an act of worship of singular value. In this way you bring peace to your homes: *Pax huic domui*. Remember, it is thus that you build up the Church".¹⁵²

Liturgical prayer and private prayer

61. There exists a deep and vital bond between the prayer of the Church and the prayer of the individual faithful, as has been clearly reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.¹⁵³ An important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church, both in the sense of preparing for it and of extending it into personal, family and social life. Hence, the need for gradual participation by all the members of the Christian family in the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and feast days, and of the other sacraments, particularly the sacraments of Christian initiation of the children. The directives of the Christian family when it listed the family among those groups to whom it recommends the recitation of the Divine Office in common.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, the Christian family will strive to celebrate at home, and in a way suited to the members, the times and feasts of the liturgical year.

As preparation for the worship celebrated in church, and as its prolongation in the home, the Christian family makes use of private prayer, which presents a great variety of forms. While this variety testifies to the extraordinary richness with which the Spirit vivifies Christian prayer, it serves also to meet the various needs and life situations of those who turn to the Lord in prayer. Apart from morning and evening prayers, certain forms of prayer are to be expressly encouraged, following the indications of the Synod Fathers, such as reading and meditating on the word of God, preparation for the reception of the sacraments, devotion and consecration to the Sacred Heart

¹⁵² General Audience Address, 11 August 1976: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIV (1976), 640.

¹⁵³ Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Institutio Generalis de Liturgia Horarum*, 27.

of Jesus, the various forms of veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grace before and after meals, and observance of popular devotions.

While respecting the freedom of the children of God, the Church has always proposed certain practices of piety to the faithful with particular solicitude and insistence. Among these should be mentioned the recitation of the Rosary: "We now desire, as a continuation of the thought of our predecessors, to recommend strongly the recitation of the family Rosary... There is no doubt that... the Rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to recite. We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer, the Rosary is a frequent and favoured manner of praying".¹⁵⁵ In this way, authentic devotion to Mary, which finds expression in sincere love and generous imitation of the Blessed Virgin's interior spiritual attitude, constitutes a special instrument for nourishing loving communion in the family and for developing conjugal and family spirituality. For she who is the Mother of Christ and of the Church is in a special way the Mother of Christian families, of domestic Churches.

Prayer and life

62. It should never be forgotten that prayer constitutes an essential part of Christian life, understood in its fullness and centrality. Indeed, prayer is an important part of our very humanity: it is "the first expression of man's inner truth, the first condition for authentic freedom of spirit".¹⁵⁶

Far from being a form of escapism from everyday commitments, prayer constitutes the strongest incentive for the Christian family to assume and comply fully with all its responsibilities as the primary and fundamental cell of human society. Thus, the Christian family's actual participation in the Church's life and mission is in direct proportion to the fidelity and intensity of the prayer with which it is united with the fruitful vine that is Christ the Lord.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, 52, 54; AAS 66 (1974), 160-161.

¹⁵⁶ John Paul II, Address at the Mentorella Shrine (29 October 1978): *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, I (1978), 78-79.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

The fruitfulness of the Christian family in its specific service to human advancement, which of itself cannot but lead to the transformation of the world, derives from its living union with Christ, nourished by the Liturgy, by self-oblation and by prayer.¹⁵⁸

3) *The Christian family as a community at the service of man*

The new commandment of love

63. The Church, a prophetic, priestly and kingly people, is endowed with the mission of bringing all human beings to accept the word of God in faith, to celebrate and profess it in the sacraments and in prayer, and to give expression to it in the concrete realities of life in accordance with the gift and new commandment of love.

The law of Christian life is to be found not in a written code, but in the personal action of the Holy Spirit who inspires and guides the Christian. It is the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus".¹⁵⁹ "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us".¹⁶⁰

This is true also for the Christian couple and family. Their guide and rule of life is the Spirit of Jesus poured into their hearts in the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony. In continuity with Baptism in water and the Spirit, marriage sets forth anew the evangelical law of love, and with the gift of the Spirit engraves it more profoundly on the hearts of Christian husbands and wives. Their love, purified and saved, is a fruit of the Spirit acting in the hearts of believers and constituting, at the same time, the fundamental commandment of their moral life to be lived in responsible freedom.

Thus, the Christian family is inspired and guided by the new law of the Spirit and, in intimate communion with the Church, the kingly people, it is called to exercise its "service" of love towards God and towards its fellow human beings. Just as Christ exercises his royal power by serving us,¹⁶¹ so also the Christian finds the authentic meaning of his participation in

¹⁵⁸ Cf. John Paul I, Address to the Bishops of the Twelfth Pastoral Region of the United States of America (21 September 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 767.

¹⁵⁹ Rom. 8:2.

¹⁶⁰ Rom. 5:5.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Mt. 10:45.

-the kingship of his Lord in sharing his spirit and practice of service to man. "Christ has communicated this power to his disciples that they might be established in royal freedom and that by self-denial and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves (cf. *Rom.* 6:12). Further, he has shared this power so that by serving him in their fellow human beings they might through humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign. For the Lord wishes to spread his kingdom by means of the laity also, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom, creation itself will be delivered out of its slavery to corruption and into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (cf. *Rom.* 8:12)".¹⁶²

To discover the image of God in each brother and sister

64. Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.

It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part. Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships.

Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister". In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served.

In order that the family may serve man in a truly evangelical way, the instructions of the Second Vatican Council must be carefully put into practice: "That the exercise of such charity may rise above any deficiencies in fact and even in appearance, certain fundamentals must be observed. Thus, attention is to

¹⁶² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 36.

be paid to the image of God in which our neighbour has been created, and also to Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person".¹⁶³

While building up the Church in love, the Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, really bringing about the "human advancement" whose substance was given in summary form in the Synod's Message to families: "Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practise love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility towards the whole of society".¹⁶⁴

PART FOUR

PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY: STAGES, STRUCTURES, AGENTS AND SITUATIONS

I — STAGES OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

The Church accompanies the Christian family on its journey through life

65. Like every other living reality, the family too is called upon to develop and grow. After the preparation of engagement and the sacramental celebration of marriage, the couple begin their daily journey towards the progressive actuation of the values and duties of marriage itself.

In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the Christian family too shares, in communion with the Church, in the experience of the earthly pilgrimage towards the full revelation and manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, it must be emphasized once more that the pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency. Every effort should be made to strengthen

¹⁶³ Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8,

¹⁶⁴ Cf. the Sixth Synod of Bishops' Message to Christian Families in the Modern World (24 October 1980), 12.

and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church.¹⁶⁵

The Church's pastoral concern will not be limited only to the Christian families closest at hand; it will extend its horizons in harmony with the Heart of Christ, and will show itself to be even more lively for families in general and for those families in particular which are in difficult or irregular situations. For all of them the Church will have a word of truth, goodness, understanding, hope and deep sympathy with their sometimes tragic difficulties. To all of them she will offer her disinterested help so that they can come closer to that model of a family which the Creator intended from "the beginning" and which Christ has renewed with his redeeming grace.

The Church's pastoral action must be progressive, also in the sense that it must follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development.

Preparation for marriage

66. More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life. In some countries, it is still the families themselves that, according to ancient customs, ensure the passing on to young people of the values concerning married and family life, and they do this through a gradual process of education or initiation. But the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. Many negative phenomena which are today noted with regret in family life derive from the fact that, in the new situations young people not only lose sight of the correct hierarchy of values but, since they no longer have certain criteria of behaviour, they do not know how to face and deal with the new difficulties. But experience teaches that young people who have been well prepared for family life generally succeed better than others.

This is even more applicable to Christian marriage, which influences the holiness of large numbers of men and women. The Church must therefore, promote better and more intensive

¹⁶⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Third General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America (28 January 1979), IV a: AAS 71 (1979), 204.

programmes of marriage preparation in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages.

Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main stages: remote, proximate and immediate preparation.

Remote preparation begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves as beings endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and in social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on. Also necessary, especially for Christians, is solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission, without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life.

Upon this basis there will subsequently and gradually be built up the *proximate preparation*, which — from the suitable age and with adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process — involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were a rediscovery of them. This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions. The religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life, such as stable work, sufficient financial resources, sensible administration, notions of housekeeping.

Finally, one must not overlook preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other

families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family.

The *immediate preparation* for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding, so as to give a new meaning, content and form to the so-called premarital enquiry required by Canon Law. This preparation is not only necessary in every case, but is also more urgently needed for engaged couples that still manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice.

Among the elements to be instilled in this journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage, as well as preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy.

The Christian family and the whole of the ecclesial community should feel involved in the different phases of the preparation for marriage, which have been described only in their broad outlines. It is to be hoped that the Episcopal Conferences, just as they are concerned with appropriate initiatives to help engaged couples to be more aware of the seriousness of their choice and also to help pastors of souls to make sure of the couples' proper dispositions, so they will also take steps to see that there is issued a *Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family*. In this they should lay down, in the first place, the minimum content, duration and method of the "Preparation Courses", balancing the different aspects — doctrinal, pedagogical, legal and medical — concerning marriage, and structuring them in such a way that those preparing for marriage will not only receive an intellectual training but will also feel a desire to enter actively into the ecclesial community.

Although one must not underestimate the necessity and obligation of the immediate preparation for marriage — which would happen if dispensations from it were easily given — nevertheless, such preparation must always be set forth and put into practice in such a way that omitting it is not an impediment to the celebration of marriage.

The celebration

67. Christian marriage normally requires liturgical celebration expressing in social and community form the essentially

ecclesial and sacramental nature of the conjugal covenant between baptized persons.

Inasmuch as it is a *sacramental action of sanctification*, the celebration of marriage — inserted into the liturgy, which is the summit of the Church's action and the source of her sanctifying power¹⁶⁶ — must be *per se* valid, worthy and fruitful. This opens a wide field for pastoral solicitude, in order that the needs deriving from the nature of the conjugal covenant, elevated into a sacrament, may be fully met, and also in order that the Church's discipline regarding free consent, impediments, the canonical form and the actual rite of the celebration may be faithfully observed. The celebration should be simple and dignified, according to the norms of the competent authorities of the Church. It is also for them — in accordance with concrete circumstances of time and place and in conformity with the norms issued by the Apostolic See¹⁶⁷ — to include in the liturgical celebration such elements proper to each culture which serve to express more clearly the profound human and religious significance of the marriage contract, provided that such elements contain nothing that is not in harmony with Christian faith and morality.

Inasmuch as it is a *sign*, the liturgical celebration should be conducted in such a way as to constitute, also in its external reality, a proclamation of the word of God and a profession of faith on the part of the community of believers. Pastoral commitment will be expressed here through the intelligent and careful preparation of the Liturgy of the Word and through the education to faith of those participating in the celebration and in the first place the couple being married.

Inasmuch as it is a *sacramental action of the Church*, the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community, with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present, according to the place and task of each individual: the bride and bridegroom, the priest, the witnesses, the relatives, the friends, the other members of the faithful, all of them members of an assembly that manifests and lives the mystery of Christ and his Church. For the celebration of Christian marriage in the sphere of ancestral cultures or traditions, the principles laid down above should be followed.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, 17.

Celebration of marriage and evangelization of non-believing baptized persons

68. Precisely because in the celebration of the sacrament, very special attention must be devoted to the moral and spiritual dispositions of those being married, in particular to their faith, we must here deal with a not infrequent difficulty in which the pastors of the Church can find themselves in the context of our secularized society.

In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator "in the beginning". Therefore, the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus, already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention.

On the other hand, it is true that in some places engaged couples ask to be married in church for motives which are social rather than genuinely religious. This is not surprising. Marriage, in fact, is not an event that concerns only the persons actually getting married. By its very nature it is also a social matter, committing the couple being married in the eyes of society. And its celebration has always been an occasion of rejoicing that brings together families and friends. It therefore, goes without saying that social as well as personal motives enter into the request to be married in church.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that these engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already really sharers in Christ's marriage Covenant with the Church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God's plan regarding marriage and therefore, at least, implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, the sacraments by words and ritual elements nourish and strengthen faith:¹⁶⁸ that faith forwards which the married couple are already journeying by reason of the uprightness of their intention, which Christ's grace certainly does not fail to favour and support.

As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; secondly, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, with grave harm to Christian communities, and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples; one would also fall into the danger of calling into question the sacramental nature of many marriages of brethren separated from full communion with the Catholic Church, thus contradicting ecclesial tradition.

However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty to take note of the situation and to make it clear to those concerned that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves.

Once more, there appears in all its urgency, the need for evangelization and catechesis before and after marriage, effected by the whole Christian community, so that every man and woman that gets married celebrates the sacrament of Matrimony not only validly but also fruitfully.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59.

Pastoral care after marriage

69. The pastoral care of the regularly established family signifies, in practice, the commitment of all the members of the local ecclesial community to helping the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission. In order that the family may be ever more a true community of love, it is necessary that all its members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise, in mutual service, and in active sharing in family life.

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community — the great family made up of Christian families — there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of the others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting-point and goal of all pastoral care. Thus, young families will not limit themselves merely to receiving, but in their turn, having been helped in this way, will become a source of enrichment for other longer established families, through their witness of life and practical contribution.

In her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service to life. She must likewise help them to harmonize the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society. When children are born and the married couple becomes a family in the full and specific sense, the Church will still remain close to the parents in order that they may accept their children and love them as a gift received from the Lord of life, and joyfully accept the task of serving them in their human and Christian growth.

II — STRUCTURES OF FAMILY PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral activity is always the dynamic expression of the reality of the Church, committed to her mission of salvation. Family pastoral care too — which is a particular and specific form of pastoral activity — has as its operative principle and responsible agent the Church herself, through her structures and workers.

The ecclesial community and in particular the parish

70. The Church, which is at the same time a saved and a saving community, has to be considered here under two aspects: as universal and particular. The second aspect is expressed and actuated in the diocesan community, which is pastorally divided up into lesser communities, of which the parish is of special importance.

Communion with the universal Church does not hinder but rather guarantees and promotes the substance and originality of the various particular Churches. These latter remain the more immediate and more effective subjects of operation for putting the pastoral care of the family into practice. In this sense, every local Church and, in more particular terms, every parochial community, must become more vividly aware of the grace and responsibility that it receives from the Lord in order that it may promote the pastoral care of the family. No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family.

Also to be seen in the light of this responsibility is the importance of the proper preparation of all those who will be more specifically engaged in this kind of apostolate. Priests and men and women religious, from the time of their formation, should be oriented and trained progressively and thoroughly for the various tasks. Among the various initiatives, I am pleased to emphasize the recent establishment in Rome, at the Pontifical Lateran University, of a Higher Institute for the study of the problems of the family. Institutes of this kind have also been set up in some dioceses. Bishops should see to it that as many priests as possible attend specialized courses there before taking on parish responsibilities. Elsewhere, formation courses are periodically held at Higher Institutes of theological and pastoral studies. Such initiatives should be encouraged, sustained, increased in number, and of course are

also open to lay people who intend to use their professional skills (medical, legal, psychological, social or educational) to help the family.

The family

71. But it is especially necessary to recognize the unique place that, in this field, belongs to the mission of married couples and Christian families, by virtue of the grace received in the sacrament. This mission must be placed at the service of the building up of the Church, the establishing of the Kingdom of God in history. This is demanded as an act of docile obedience to Christ the Lord. For it is he who, by virtue of the fact that marriage of baptized persons has been raised to a sacrament, confers upon Christian married couples a special mission as apostles, sending them as workers into his vineyard, and, in a very special way, into this field of the family.

In this activity, married couples act in communion and collaboration with the other members of the Church, who also work for the family, contributing their own gifts and ministries. This apostolate will be exercised in the first place within the families of those concerned, through the witness of a life lived in conformity with the divine law in all its aspects, through the Christian formation of the children, through helping them to mature in faith, through education to chastity, through preparation for life, through vigilance in protecting them from the ideological and moral dangers with which they are often threatened, through their gradual and responsible inclusion in the ecclesial community and the civil community, through help and advice in choosing a vocation, through mutual help among family members for human and Christian growth together, and so on. The apostolate of the family will also become wider through works of spiritual and material charity towards other families, especially those most in need of help and support, towards the poor, the sick, the old, the handicapped, orphans, widows, spouses that have been abandoned, unmarried mothers and mothers-to-be in difficult situations who are tempted to have recourse to abortion, and so on.

Associations of families for families

72. Still within the Church, which is the subject responsible for the pastoral care of the family, mention should be made of the various groupings of members of the faithful in which

the mystery of Christ's Church is in some measure manifested and lived. One should therefore recognize and make good use of — each one in relationship to its own characteristics, purposes, effectiveness and methods — the different ecclesial communities, the various groups and the numerous movements engaged in various ways, for different reasons and at different levels, in the pastoral care of the family.

For this reason, the Synod expressly recognized the useful contribution made by such associations of spirituality, formation and apostolate. It will be their task to foster among the faithful a lively sense of solidarity, to favour a manner of living inspired by the Gospel and by the faith of the Church, to form consciences according to Christian values and not according to the standards of public opinion; to stimulate people to perform works of charity for one another and for others with a spirit of openness which will make Christian families into a true source of light and a wholesome leaven for other families.

It is similarly desirable that, with a lively sense of the common good, Christian families should become actively engaged, at every level, in other non-ecclesial associations as well. Some of these associations work for the preservation, transmission and protection of the wholesome ethical and cultural values of each people, the development of the human person, the medical, juridical and social protection of mothers and young children, the just advancement of women and the struggle against all that is detrimental to their dignity, the increase of mutual solidarity, knowledge of the problems connected with the responsible regulation of fertility in accordance with natural methods that are in conformity with human dignity and the teaching of the Church. Other associations work for the building of a more just and human world; for the promotion of just laws favouring the right social order with full respect for the dignity and every legitimate freedom of the individual and the family, on both the national and the international level; for collaboration with the school and with the other institutions that complete the education of children, and so forth.

III — AGENTS OF THE PASTORAL CARE

As well as the family, which is the object but above all the subject of pastoral care of the family, one must also mention the other main agents in this particular sector.

Bishops and priests

73. The person principally responsible in the diocese for the pastoral care of the family is the Bishop. As father and pastor, he must exercise particular solicitude in this clearly priority sector of pastoral care. He must devote to it personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who, in the various diocesan structures, assist him in the pastoral care of the family. It will be his particular care to make the diocese ever more truly a "diocesan family", a model and source of hope for the many families that belong to it. The setting up of the Pontifical Council for the Family is to be seen in this light: to be a sign of the importance that I attribute to pastoral care for the family in the world, and at the same time to be an effective instrument for aiding and promoting it at every level.

The Bishops avail themselves especially of the priests, whose task — as the Synod expressly emphasized — constitutes an essential part of the Church's ministry regarding marriage and the family. The same is true of deacons to whose care this sector of pastoral work may be entrusted.

Their responsibility extends not only to moral and liturgical matters but to personal and social matters as well. They must support the family in its difficulties and sufferings, caring for its members and helping them to see their lives in the light of the Gospel. It is not superfluous to note that from this mission, if it is exercised with due discernment and with a truly apostolic spirit, the minister of the Church draws fresh encouragement and spiritual energy for his own vocation too and for the exercise of his ministry.

Priests and deacons, when they have received timely and serious preparation for this apostolate, must unceasingly act towards families as fathers, brothers, pastors and teachers, assisting them with the means of grace and enlightening them with the light of truth. Their teaching and advice must therefore always be in full harmony with the authentic Magisterium of the Church, in such a way as to help the People of God to gain a correct sense of the faith, to be subsequently applied to practical life. Such fidelity to the Magisterium will also enable priests to make every effort to be united in their judgments, in order to avoid troubling the consciences of the faithful.

In the Church, the pastors and the laity share in the prophetic mission of Christ: the laity do so by witnessing to the

faith by their words and by their Christian lives, the pastors do so by distinguishing in that witness what is the expression of genuine faith from what is less in harmony with the light of faith; the family, as a Christian community, does so through its special sharing and witness of faith. Thus, there begins a dialogue also between pastors and families. Theologians and experts in family matters can be of great help in this dialogue, by explaining exactly the content of the Church's Magisterium and the content of the experience of family life. In this way the teaching of the Magisterium becomes better understood and the way is opened to its progressive development. But it is useful to recall that the proximate and obligatory norm in the teaching of the faith — also concerning family matters — belongs to the hierarchical Magisterium. Clearly defined relationships between theologians, experts in family matters and the Magisterium are of no little assistance for the correct understanding of the faith and for promoting — within the boundaries of the faith — legitimate pluralism.

Men and women religious

74. The contribution that can be made to the apostolate of the family by men and women religious and consecrated persons in general finds its primary, fundamental and original expression precisely in their consecration to God. By reason of this consecration, "for all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse",¹⁶⁹ and they are witnesses to that universal charity which, through chastity embraced for the Kingdom of heaven, makes them ever more available to dedicate themselves generously to the service of God and to the works of the apostolate.

Hence the possibility for men and women religious, and members of Secular Institutes and other institutes of perfection, either individually or in groups, to develop their service to families, with particular solicitude for children, especially if they are abandoned, unwanted, orphaned, poor or handicapped. They can also visit families and look after the sick; they can foster relationships of respect and charity towards one-parent families or families that are in difficulties or are separated; they can offer their own work of teaching and counselling in the

¹⁶⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

preparation of young people for marriage, and in helping couples towards truly responsible parenthood; they can open their own houses for simple and cordial hospitality, so that families can find there the sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection, and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternal joy as members of the larger family of God.

I would like to add a most pressing exhortation to the heads of institutes of consecrated life to consider — always with substantial respect for the proper and original charism of each one — the apostolate of the family as one of the priority tasks, rendered even more urgent by the present state of the world.

Lay specialists

75. Considerable help can be given to families by lay specialists (doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, consultants, etc.) who either as individuals or as members of various associations and undertakings offer their contribution of enlightenment, advice, orientation and support. To these people one can well apply the exhortations that I had the occasion to address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaux of Christian Inspiration: "Yours is a commitment that well deserves the title of mission, so noble are the aims that it pursues, and so determining, for the good of society and the Christian community itself, are the results that derive from it... All that you succeed in doing to support the family is destined to have an effectiveness that goes beyond its own sphere and reaches other people too and has an effect on society. The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family".¹⁷⁰

Recipients and agents of social communications

76. This very important category in modern life deserves a word of its own. It is well known that the means of social communication "affect, and often profoundly, the minds of those who use them, under the affective and intellectual aspect and also under the moral and religious aspects", especially in the

¹⁷⁰ John Paul II, Address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureau of Christian Inspiration (29 November 1980), 3-4; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 2 (1980), 1453-1454.

case of young people.¹⁷¹ They can thus exercise a beneficial influence on the life and habits of the family and on the education of children, but at the same time they also conceal "snares and dangers that cannot be ignored".¹⁷² They could also become a vehicle — sometimes cleverly and systematically manipulated, as unfortunately happens in various countries of the world — for divisive ideologies and distorted ways of looking at life, the family, religion and morality, attitudes that lack respect for man's true dignity and destiny.

This danger is all the more real inasmuch as "the modern life style — especially in the more industrialized nations — all too often causes families to abandon their responsibility to educate their children. Evasion of this duty is made easy for them by the presence of television and certain publications in the home, and in this way they keep their children's time and energies occupied".¹⁷³ Hence "the duty... to protect the young from the forms of aggression they are subjected to by the mass media", and to ensure that the use of the media in the family is carefully regulated. Families should also take care to seek for their children other forms of entertainment that are more wholesome, useful and physically, morally and spiritually formative, "to develop and use to advantage the free time of the young and direct their energies".¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, because the means of social communication, like the school and the environment, often have a notable influence on the formation of children, parents as recipients must actively ensure the moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media, by discovering what effect they have on their children and by controlling the use of the media in such a way as to "train the conscience of their children to express calm and objective judgments, which will then guide them in the choice or rejection of programmes available".¹⁷⁵

With equal commitment parents will endeavour to influence the selection and the preparation of the programmes themselves, by keeping in contact — through suitable initiatives — with

¹⁷¹ Paul VI, Message for the Third Social Communications Day (7 April 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 455.

¹⁷² John Paul II, Message for the 1980 World Social Communications Day (1 May 1980): *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1 (1980), 1042.

¹⁷³ John Paul II, Message for the 1981 World Social Communication Day (10 May 1981), 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 May 1981.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Paul VI, Message for the Third Social Communications Day: AAS 61 (1969), 456.

those in charge of the various phases of production and transmission. In this way they will ensure that the fundamental human values that form part of the true good of society are not ignored or deliberately attacked. Rather they will ensure the broadcasting of programmes that present in the right light family problems and their proper solution. In this regard my venerated predecessor Paul VI wrote: "Producers must know and respect the needs of the family, and this sometimes presupposes in them true courage, and always a high sense of responsibility. In fact they are expected to avoid anything that could harm the family in its existence, its stability, its balance and its happiness. Every attack on the fundamental value of the family — meaning eroticism or violence, the defence of divorce or of antisocial attitude among young people — is an attack on the true good of man".¹⁷⁶

I myself, on a similar occasion, pointed out that families "to a considerable extent need to be able to count on the good will, integrity and sense of responsibility of the media professionals — publishers, writers, producers, directors, playwrights, newsmen, commentators and actors".¹⁷⁷ It is therefore also the duty of the Church to continue to devote every care to these categories, at the same time encouraging and supporting Catholics who feel the call and have the necessary talents, to take up this sensitive type of work.

IV — PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY IN DIFFICULT CASES

Particular circumstances

77. An even more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modelled on the Good Shepherd, is called for in the case of families which, often independently of their own wishes and through pressures of various other kinds, find themselves faced by situations which are objectively difficult.

In this regard it is necessary to call special attention to certain particular groups which are more in need not only of assistance but also of more incisive action upon public opinion

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ John Paul II, Message for the 1980 World Social Communications Day: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1 (1980), 1044.

and especially upon cultural, economic and juridical structures, in order that the profound causes of their needs may be eliminated as far as possible.

Such for example are the families of migrant workers; the families of those obliged to be away for long periods, such as member of the armed forces, sailors and all kinds of itinerant people; the families of those in prison, of refugees and exiles; the families in big cities living practically speaking as outcasts; families with no home; incomplete or single-parent families; families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs; the families of alcoholics; families that have been uprooted from their cultural and social environment or are in danger of losing it; families discriminated against for political or other reasons; families that are ideologically divided; families that are unable to make ready contact with the parish; families experiencing violence or unjust treatment because of their faith; teenage married couples; the elderly, who are often obliged to live alone with inadequate means of subsistence.

The families of migrants, especially in the case of manual workers and farm workers, should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity in diversity. As far as possible these people should be looked after by priests of their own rite, culture and language. It is also the Church's task to appeal to the public conscience and to all those in authority in social, economic and political life, in order that workers may find employment in their own regions and homelands, that they may receive just wages, that their families may be reunited as soon as possible, be respected in their cultural identity and treated on an equal footing with others, and that their children may be given the chance to learn a trade and exercise it, as also the chance to own the land needed for working and living.

A difficult problem is that of the family which is *ideologically divided*. In these cases, particular pastoral care is needed. In the first place it is necessary to maintain tactful personal contact with such families. The believing members must be strengthened in their faith and supported in their Christian lives. Although the party faithful to Catholicism cannot give way, dialogue with the other party must always be kept alive. Love and respect must be freely shown, in the firm hope that unity will be maintained. Much also depends on the

relationship between parents and children. Moreover, ideologies which are alien to the faith can stimulate the believing members of the family to grow in faith and in the witness of love.

Other difficult circumstances in which the family needs the help of the ecclesial community and its pastors are: the children's adolescence, which can be disturbed, rebellious and sometimes stormy; the children's marriage, which takes them away from their family; lack of understanding or lack of love on the part of those held most dear; abandonment by one of the spouses, or his or her death, which brings the painful experience of widowhood, or the death of a family member, which breaks up and deeply transforms the original family nucleus.

Similarly, the Church cannot ignore the time of old age, with all its positive and negative aspects. In old age married love, which has been increasingly purified and ennobled by long and unbroken fidelity, can be deepened. There is the opportunity of offering to others, in a new form, the kindness and the wisdom gathered over the years, and what energies remain. But there is also the burden of loneliness, more often psychological and emotional rather than physical, which results from abandonment or neglect on the part of children and relations. There is also suffering caused by ill-health, by the gradual loss of strength, by the humiliation of having to depend on others, by the sorrow of feeling that one is perhaps a burden to one's loved ones, and by the approach of the end of life. These are the circumstances in which, as the Synod Fathers suggested, it is easier to help people understand and live the lofty aspects of the spirituality of marriage and the family, aspects which take their inspiration from the value of Christ's Cross and Resurrection, the source of sanctification and profound happiness in daily life, in the light of the great eschatological realities of eternal life.

In all these different situations let prayer, the source of light and strength and the nourishment of Christian hope, never be neglected.

Mixed marriage

78. The growing number of mixed marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons also calls for special pastoral attention in the light of the directives and norms contained

in the most recent documents of the Holy See and in those drawn up by the Episcopal Conferences, in order to permit their practical application to the various situations.

Couples living in a mixed marriage have special needs, which can be put under three main headings.

In the first place, attention must be paid to the obligations that faith imposes on the Catholic party with regard to the free exercise of the faith and the consequent obligation to ensure, as far as is possible, the Baptism and unbringing of the children in the Catholic faith.¹⁷⁸

There must be borne in mind the particular difficulties inherent in the relationships between husband and wife with regard to respect for religious freedom: this freedom could be violated either by undue pressure to make the partner change his or her beliefs, or by placing obstacles in the way of the free manifestation of these beliefs by religious practice.

With regard to the liturgical and canonical form of marriage, Ordinaries can make wide use of their faculties to meet various necessities.

In dealing with these special needs, the following points should be kept in mind:

— In the appropriate preparation for this type of marriage, every reasonable effort must be made to ensure a proper understanding of Catholic teaching on the qualities and obligations of marriage, and also to ensure that the pressures and obstacles mentioned above will not occur.

— It is of the greatest importance that, through the support of the community, the Catholic party should be strengthened in faith and positively helped to mature in understanding and practising that faith, so as to become a credible witness within the family through his or her own life and through the quality of love shown to the other spouse and the children.

Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Matrimonia Mixta*, 45: AAS 62 (1970), 257-259; John Paul II, Address to the participants in the plenary meeting of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (13 November 1981): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 14 November 1981.

can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.

For this purpose, and also in order to highlight the ecumenical importance of mixed marriages which are fully lived in the faith of the two Christian spouses, an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony, even though this does not always prove easy.

With regard to the sharing of the non-Catholic party in Eucharistic Communion, the norms issued by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity should be followed.¹⁷⁹

Today in many parts of the world, marriages between Catholics and non-baptized persons are growing in numbers. In many such marriages the non-baptized partner professes another religion, and his beliefs are to be treated with respect, in accordance with the principles set out in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on relations with non-Christian religions. But in many other such marriages, particularly in secularized societies, the non-baptized person professes no religion at all. In these marriages there is a need for Episcopal Conferences and for individual Bishops to ensure that there are proper pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic partner and for the free exercise of his faith, above all in regard to his duty to do all in his power to ensure the Catholic baptism and education of the children of the marriage. Likewise, the Catholic must be assisted in every possible way to offer within his family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life.

Pastoral action in certain irregular situations

79. In its solicitude to protect the family in all its dimensions, not only the religious one, the Synod of Bishops did not fail to take into careful consideration certain situations which are irregular in a religious sense and often in the civil sense too. Such situations, as a result to today's rapid cultural

¹⁷⁹ Instruction *In Quibus Rerum Circumstantiis* (15 June 1972): AAS 64 (1972), 518-525; Note of 17 October 1973: AAS 65 (1973), 616-619.

changes, are unfortunately becoming widespread also among Catholics, with no little damage to the very institution of the family and to society, of which the family constitutes the basic cell.

a) *Trial marriages*

80. A first example of an irregular situation is provided by what are called "trial marriages", which many people today would like to justify by attributing a certain value to them. But human reason leads one to see that they are unacceptable, by showing the unconvincing nature of carrying out an "experiment" with human beings, whose dignity demands that they should be always and solely the term of a self-giving love without limitations of time or of any other circumstance.

The Church, for her part, cannot admit such a kind of union, for further and original reasons which derive from faith. For, in the first place, the gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person: such a giving, moreover, in the present state of things cannot take place with full truth without the concourse of the love of charity, given by Christ. In the second place, marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the Church, which is not a temporary or "trial" union but one which is eternally faithful. Therefore between two baptized persons there can exist only an indissoluble marriage.

Such a situation cannot usually be overcome unless the human person, from childhood, with the help of Christ's grace and without fear, has been trained to dominate concupiscence from the beginning and to establish relationships of genuine love with other people. This cannot be secured without a true education in genuine love and in the right use of sexuality, such as to introduce the human person in every aspect, and therefore the bodily aspect too, into the fullness of the mystery of Christ.

It will be very useful to investigate the causes of this phenomenon, including its psychological and sociological aspect, in order to find the proper remedy.

b) *De facto free unions*

81. This means unions without any publicly recognized institutional bond, either civil or religious. This phenomenon, which is becoming ever more frequent, cannot fail to concern

pastors of souls, also because it may be based on widely varying factors, the consequences of which may perhaps be containable by suitable action.

Some people consider themselves almost forced into a free union by difficult economic, cultural or religious situations, on the grounds that, if they contracted a regular marriage, they would be exposed to some form of harm, would lose economic advantages, would be discriminated against, etc. In other cases, however, one encounters people who scorn, rebel against or reject society, the institution of the family and the social and political order, or who are solely seeking pleasure. Then there are those who are driven to such situations by extreme ignorance or poverty, sometimes by a conditioning due to situations of real injustice, or by a certain psychological immaturity that makes them uncertain or afraid to enter into a stable and definitive union. In some countries, traditional customs presume that the true and proper marriage will take place only after a period of cohabitation and the birth of the first child.

Each of these elements presents the Church with arduous pastoral problems, by reason of the serious consequences deriving from them, both religious and moral (the loss of the religious sense of marriage seen in the light of the Covenant of God with his people; deprivation of the grace of the sacrament; grave scandal), and also social consequences (the destruction of the concept of the family; the weakening of the sense of fidelity, also towards society; possible psychological damage to the children; the strengthening of selfishness).

The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation. But above all there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young, instructing them concerning the conditions and structures that favour such fidelity, without which there is no true freedom; they must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the rich human and supernatural reality of marriage as a sacrament.

The People of God should also make approaches to the public authorities, in order that the latter may resist these

tendencies which divide society and are harmful to the dignity, security and welfare of the citizens as individuals, and they must try to ensure that public opinion is not led to undervalue the institutional importance of marriage and the family. And since in many regions young people are unable to get married properly because of extreme poverty deriving from unjust or inadequate social and economic structures, society and the public authorities should favour legitimate marriage by means of a series of social and political actions which will guarantee a family wage, by issuing directives ensuring housing fitting for family life and by creating opportunities for work and life.

c) *Catholics in civil marriages*

82. There are increasing of Catholics who, for ideological or practical reasons, prefer to contract a merely civil marriage, and who reject or at least defer religious marriage. Their situation cannot of course be likened to that of people simply living together without any bond at all, because in the present case there is at least a certain commitment to a properly-defined and probably stable state of life, even though the possibility of a future divorce is often present in the minds of those entering a civil marriage. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, such couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Nevertheless, not even this situation is acceptable to the Church.

The aim of pastoral action will be to make these people understand the need for consistency between their choice of life and the faith that they profess, and to try to do everything possible to induce them to regularize their situation in the light of Christian principles. While treating them with great charity and bringing them into the life of the respective communities, the pastors of the Church will regrettably not be able to admit them to the sacraments.

d) *Separated or divorced persons who have not remarried*

83. Various reasons can unfortunately lead to the often irreparable breakdown of valid marriages. These include mutual lack of understanding and the inability to enter into interpersonal relationships. Obviously, separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain.

Loneliness and other difficulties are often the lot of separated spouses, especially when they are the innocent parties. The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. It must give them much respect, solidarity, understanding and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation; and it must help them to cultivate the need to forgive which is inherent in Christian love, and to be ready perhaps to return to their former married life.

The situation is similar for people who have undergone divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties and the responsibilities of Christian life. In such cases, their example of fidelity and Christian consistency takes on particular value as a witness before the world and the Church. Here it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to admission to the sacraments.

e) *Divorced persons who have remarried*

84. Daily experience unfortunately shows that people who have obtained a divorce usually intend to enter into a new union, obviously not with a Catholic religious ceremony. Since this is an evil that, like the others, is affecting more and more Catholics as well, the problem must be faced with resolution and without delay. The Synod Fathers studied it expressly. The Church, which was set up to lead to salvation all people and especially the baptized, cannot abandon to their own devices those who have been previously bound by sacramental marriage and who have attempted a second marriage. The Church will therefore, make untiring efforts to put at their disposal her means of salvation.

Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situation. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing, and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid.

Together with the Synod, earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favour of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope.

However, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage.

Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance, which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples".¹⁸⁰

Similarly, the respect due to the sacrament of Matrimony, to the couples themselves and their families, and also to the community of the faithful, forbids any pastor, for whatever reason or pretext even of a pastoral nature, to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. Such ceremonies would give the impression of the celebration of a new sacramentally valid marriage, and would thus lead people into error concerning the indissolubility of a validly contracted marriage.

¹⁸⁰ John Paul II, Homily at the close of the Sixth Synod of Bishops, 7 (25 October 1980): AAS 72 (1980), 1082.

By acting in this way, the Church professes her own fidelity to Christ and to his truth. At the same time she shows motherly concern for these children of hers, especially those who, through no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate partner.

With firm confidence she believes that those who have rejected the Lord's command and are still living in this state will be able to obtain from God the grave of conversion and salvation, provided that they have persevered in prayer, penance and charity.

Those without a family

85. I wish to add a further word for a category of people whom, as a result of the actual circumstances in which they are living, and this often not through their own deliberate wish, I consider particularly close to the Heart of Christ and deserving of the affection and active solicitude of the Church and of pastors.

There exist in the world countless people who unfortunately cannot in any sense claim membership of what could be called in the proper sense a family. Large sections of humanity live in conditions of extreme poverty, in which promiscuity, lack of housing, the irregular nature and instability of relationships and the extreme lack of education make it impossible in practice to speak of a true family. There are others who, for various reasons, have been left alone in the world. And yet for all of these people there exists a "good news of the family".

On behalf of those living in extreme poverty, I have already spoken of the urgent need to work courageously in order to find solutions, also at the political level, which will make it possible to help them and to overcome this inhuman condition of degradation.

It is a task that faces the whole of society but in a special way the authorities, by reason of their position and the responsibilities flowing therefrom, and also families, which must show great understanding and willingness to help.

For those who have no natural family, the doors of the great family which is the Church — the Church which finds

concrete expression in the diocesan and the parish family, in ecclesial basic communities and in movements of the apostolate — must be opened even wider. No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who "labour and are heavy laden".¹⁸¹

CONCLUSION

86. At the end of this Apostolic Exhortation my thoughts turn with earnest solicitude:

to you, married couples, to you, fathers and mothers of families;

to you, young men and women, the future and the hope of the Church and the world, destined to be the dynamic central nucleus of the family in the approaching third millennium;

to you, venerable and dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood, beloved sons and daughters in the religious life, souls consecrated to the Lord, who bear witness before married couples to the ultimate reality of the love of God;

to you, upright men and women, who for any reason whatever give thought to the fate of the family.

The future of humanity passes by way of the family.

It is therefore indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavour to save and foster the values and requirements of the family.

I feel that I must ask for a particular effort in this held from the sons and daughters of the Church. Faith gives them full knowledge of God's wonderful plan: they therefore have an extra reason for caring for the reality that is the family in this time of trial and of grace.

They must show the family special love. This is an injunction that calls for concrete action.

¹⁸¹ Mt. 11:28.

Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always. Loving the family means identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it, in order to overcome them. Loving the family means endeavouring to create for it an environment favourable for its development. The modern Christian family is often tempted to be discouraged and is distressed at the growth of its difficulties; it is an eminent form of love to give it back its reasons for confidence in itself, in the riches that it possesses by nature and grace, and in the mission that God has entrusted to it. "Yes indeed, the families of today must be called back to their original position. They must follow Christ".¹⁸²

Christians also have the mission of *proclaiming with joy and conviction the Good News about the family*, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and to understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources and the importance of its mission in the City of God and in that of man.

The Church knows the path by which the family can reach the heart of the deepest truth about itself. The Church has learned this path at the school of Christ and the school of history interpreted in the light of the Spirit. She does not impose it but she feels an urgent need to propose it to everyone without fear and indeed with great confidence and hope, although she knows that the Good News includes the subject of the Cross. But it is through the Cross that the family can attain the fullness of its being and the perfection of its love.

Finally, I wish to call on all Christians to *collaborate cordially and courageously* with all people of good will who are serving the family in accordance with their responsibilities. The individuals and groups, movements and associations in the Church which devote themselves to the family's welfare, acting in the Church's name and under her inspiration, often find themselves side by side with other individuals and institutions working for the same ideal. With faithfulness to the values

¹⁸² John Paul II, Letter *Appropinquat Iam* (15 August 1980), 1: AAS 72 (1980), 791.

of the Gospel and of the human person and with respect for lawful pluralism in initiatives this collaboration can favour a more rapid and integral advancement of the family.

And now, at the end of my pastoral message, which is intended to draw everyone's attention to the demanding yet fascinating roles of the Christian family, I wish to invoke the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Through God's mysterious design, it was in that family that the Son of God spent long years of a hidden life. It is therefore the prototype and example for all Christian families. It was unique in the world. Its life was passed in anonymity and silence in a little town in Palestine. It underwent trials of poverty, persecution and exile. It glorified God in an incomparably exalted and pure way. And it will not fail to help Christian families — indeed, all the families in the world — to be faithful to their day-to-day duties, to bear the cares and tribulations of life, to be open and generous to the needs of others, and to fulfil with joy the plan of God in their regard.

Saint Joseph was "a just man", a tireless worker, the upright guardian of those entrusted to his care. May he always guard, protect and enlighten families.

May the Virgin Mary, who is the Mother of the Church, also be the Mother of "the Church of the home". Thanks to her motherly aid, may each Christian family really become a "little Church" in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life. May she, the Handmaid of the Lord, be an example of humble and generous acceptance of the will of God. May she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families.

May Christ the Lord, the Universal King, the King of Families, be present in every Christian home as he was at Cana, bestowing light, joy, serenity and strength. On the solemn day dedicated to his Kingship I beg of him that every family may generously make its own contribution to the coming of his King-

dom in the world — “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace”,¹⁸³ towards which history is journeying.

I entrust each family to him, to Mary, and to Joseph. To their hands and their hearts I offer this Exhortation: may it be they who present it to you, venerable Brothers and beloved sons and daughters, and may it be they who open your hearts to the light that the Gospel sheds on every family.

I assure you all of my constant prayers and I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to each and every one of you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the twenty-second day of November, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, in the year 1981, the fourth of the Pontificate.

¹⁸³ The Roman Missal, Preface of Christ the King.

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

By

Bishop Leonardo Legaspi, O.P., D.D.

Over the past fifteen years there has been a significant growth in the Philippine catechetical scene. One can point to a manifest increase in, and awareness of, the fundamental importance of catechesis, an acceptance of the need for proper catechesis in fostering practically every known ministry or movement in the Church: for family life, for social apostolate, for an authentic base level ecclesial community, for Bible prayer, etc. But when we cast our attention from the clear advances to the meager result, the initial enthusiasm gradually gives way to a feeling of discouragement.

What brought about this disparity? Various obstacles come to mind: financial problems, lack of adequately trained catechists, proper materials, and most especially a constantly growing population. But there is another element — one which to my mind is more serious because less perceptible to the untrained eyes — it is the *divergence in theory and practice over the nature, method and goal of catechesis*. Blurring of the traditional lines between evangelization and catechesis, between catechesis and theology results into divergences in practice, in confusion and even scandalous competition between methods and supporters of those methods.

The topic then is both important and relevant. I intend to develop the topic by touching on the following points:

- 1) The relation of catechesis to evangelization and theology;
- 2) The nature and goals of catechesis itself;
- 3) The case for catechesis.

I wish to go over these points taking several things into consideration: *first*, making use of the documents of the Church particularly the *General Catechetical Directory*, John Paul II's *Catechesis in our Time* and particularly the *National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines*, the draft document of the CBCP which carries the title *Maturing in Christian Faith*; in fact almost the entire paper is drawn from this document and

may very well be considered a presentation of its content on catechesis; *second*, in developing an understanding of catechesis we will always apply the theoretical understanding to the Philippine setting.

Evangelization and Catechesis

What is the relationship between evangelization and catechesis? The answer will depend on what *meaning* you are giving to the term evangelization.

Evangelii Nuntiandi considers evangelization as the "total process of bringing about the Good News to the whole of humanity." (n. 14). The *core* message of this activity is proclamation that salvation is offered by God to all as a gift of God's grace and mercy; and this salvation is found in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead. (EN. 27). Essentially then, its purpose is to hold all into that faith wherein we allow God to enter into our lives, accepting His ideas, adopting his values, living his ways which are fully revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this context, catechesis represents one of the "moments", a very remarkable one (C.T. 18). It is that moment when one's faith becomes living, conscious and active through the light of instruction (CD 14). It studies the mystery of Christ in all its dimensions so that people are "not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity (C.T. 5)."

Catechesis Tradendae provides a second slightly different and more limited meaning to evangelization, that is "as the *initial* conversion-bringing proclamation of the Gospel." In this sense, evangelization is a moment, the *first* moment in the pastoral and missionary activity of the Church. Its first use is that of leading unbelievers to make their first act of faith. The evangelist's purpose is to touch the heart of his hearers and turn them to God. So he is not primarily concerned with instruction or teaching, although his message may well include it.

In this *second* meaning, catechesis is seen as a *subsequent activity* with a very distinct purpose. This objective is two-fold: "that of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ" (C.T. 19). Here we have a *dialogue between believers*. Those who receive catechesis have at least

a spark of faith in them; its purpose is to help them towards a greater maturity of faith, especially in the way of understanding.

In catechesis then, faith is assumed to be both in the giver and the receiver of catechesis. One does not catechize a non-believer; you may explain your faith to him or defend it to him. You can preach the gospel to him. But catechesis goes inside the community of believers, the community of faith.

The activity of our Lord is very illustrative of this distinction between evangelization and catechesis. Christ preached the gospel to the poor in a simple way. He used parables from nature, examples from everyday life. He did this in order to give them some ideas of God's saving grace and to awaken in them living faith and hope, and to turn their hearts to God. But to his disciples he spoke differently. They were already his followers. They already had faith in him, however fragile. So he led them to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of his life and work. We see here in Christ's preaching and teaching the two processes of evangelization and catechesis.

Practical Implications

What practical implications would the preceding have for the Philippines? The draft of the *National Catechetical Directory* gives two practical implications of this distinction. *One*: "The basic problem of the Church in the Philippines," it says, "is a problem of catechesis, not of initial proclamation." The *other* is not to "relegate catechesis to one of the less important parish and diocesan ministries." (NCDP, Draft, nn. 61 and 62, p. 17). Therefore the catechists should not be downgraded either. They perform, in the Church an essential task.

Theology and Catechesis

Another form of the ministry of the word to which catechesis is closely related that it becomes easily confused with it is *theology*. Certainly both are at the service of the Church. But they differ from one another in terms of *goals, methods and criteria*.

The goal of theology is to seek an ever fuller understanding of the gospel message through reflection on the life of Christians and formal teachings of the Church. Theology presupposes an

effective catechesis which, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, leads individual christians and the community to maturity of faith. The more living, conscious and active the faith of the community the richer it is as a source for theology. Theology is faith seeking a fuller understanding of the gospel message, while catechesis seeks to nurture a richer living of that same message.

Theology's method is scientific in that it approaches the sacred and human sciences critically in an analytic and systematic fashion. Catechesis, on the other hand, uses these sciences more as resources to better proclaim the faith.

The *criteria* used to evaluate theology and catechesis also differ. Theology has to respond to the test of rigorous academic integrity while catechesis draws its criteria mainly from its fidelity to God's word, to the Church, and to the concrete People of God.

Practical Implication

The main corollary is a catechist is not expected to be a professional theologian; he has other qualities demanded by catechesis. In the words of NCDP: "catechesis in the Philippines... must concentrate on communicating the *essentials* of faith," not theological hypotheses. There has been a tendency to adopt without enough critical examination many untried hypotheses and theories imported from other lands. This has at times led to rather naive hopes for relatively instantaneous Christian renewals and conversions, consequent discouragement when such hopes prove illusory. Catechesis is *not* theology.

Similarly, catechesis is not the same as *instruction*. Instruction, that is, teaching or explaining the doctrines and practices of the faith, is part of it. But catechesis attempts more than instruction does. It is not content with aiming at an increase of knowledge. It tries to improve the quality of faith itself; making it more informed and better understood and so able to get stronger hold on a Christian's life.

Nature of Catechesis

Catechesis then is not evangelization nor is it theology although easily related to both. What is it really? It is, in the

words of Pope Paul II an "education in the faith... especially the teaching of Christian doctrine... imparted in an organic and systematic way with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life" (CT 18).

There are several important indications in this description deserving of some reflection.

There is for example the indication as to the *basic aim of catechesis* when it says: "...with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life." Catechesis aims to "put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ" (C. T. 5). The heart of catechesis is not a doctrine, or a moral principle, or an act of worship, but "a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth" (C.T. 5). To catechize, then, is to lead persons to study the mystery of Christ in all its dimensions, including the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself, the Truth."

The central place of instruction in catechesis is also underlined: "especially the teaching of Christian doctrine." This follows the consistent Catholic tradition that has always upheld the intelligibility of faith. Faith is a reasonable act, something that can be understood; not a *blind leap* in the dark. In other words, the "yes" of faith includes both the personal "surrender to the word of God and relying on it," as well as the later stage of "endeavoring to know better and better the profound meaning of this word" (C.T. 20).

A very relevant and timely indication is when the definition says: "...imparted in an organic and systematic way..." When the Bishops Conference of the Philippines met to lay out their pastoral plan for the next three years, it pinpointed as the most urgent need in the field of catechesis the *lack of an organic and systematic catechetical teaching*. Let us look into the elements which constitute a systematic catechesis.

Systematic Catechesis

When is catechesis systematic? First when it is programmed for a definite goal, not haphazard or improvised. Such programming takes into consideration not only the subject matter, the truths of the faith, but also the age, background and capacities of those to be catechized, as well as follow-up programs in religious education. Second, when it focuses on the essentials of the faith. That is not what this theology or that teaches, but what the Church teaches. It means not a bare skeleton outline,

but sufficiently complete so that the doctrines come alive in the lives of the catechized. Finally, it is systematic when it serves as an introduction to and development of the whole of Christian life. It means not only establishing coherence and mutual inter-relation of christian doctrines, but more so the inter-relating these christian truth with the daily life of the catechized, on both the individual as well as the social levels. This may be the greatest challenge to the catechists: to so instruct the catechized that they can see for themselves, their own daily acts, problems, hopes and dreams, in the light of basic Christian truths.

Specific Goals of Catechesis in the Philippines

This is systematic catechesis. It is the type of catechesis the Bishops went to see taking shape in the years to come. But what does this type of catechesis expect to accomplish? What are the desired specific goals of catechesis in the Philippines? Note that we are asking for the specific goals of catechesis, measureable goals. The general goal is, as we have said, to "put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ."

The following are the proposed specific goals of catechesis according to the draft document NCDP: I shall follow the enumeration with a brief explanation.

1. *To help our people understand more fully and more personally the inestimable riches of their christian faith*

There are at least two strong reasons for this goal: one is that ignorance of God's word and sound doctrine has never produced authentic disciples of Christ. The other is that the people have "the sacred and inalienable right of receiving the word of God, the whole of God, into which the Church does not cease to penetrate ever more profoundly" [ASS 68 (1971) 103]. In order to attain this, there should be the understanding of the sources of faith, namely, holy Scripture, tradition and the teaching of the Church.

2. *To educate the catechized in the basic principles and practice of christian morality.*

Among these principles is that which presents authentic christian faith as including an essential moral dimension, i.e. that "doing" is part of truly believing. Another is that Chris-

tian moral life is primarily a response to grace, a reaching out in love rather than simply avoiding sin, shrinking from evil. Another principle is the understanding of the use of conscience in making moral decisions. Like others, the Catholics use their conscience. But unlike others the Catholics do so as members of a community with a long tradition of moral wisdom, namely the Church which is the community which serves as authoritative guide not only through its past moral tradition, but also through its present moral directives.

3. *To develop the ability to pray and to participate actively in the Church's liturgy.*

This flows from the nature of faith itself in which both prayer and worship constitute an essential part. Catechesis should show the indispensable role of *personal prayer* for an authentic Christian life. One practical way to check the validity of personal prayer is the ability of the catechized to enter ever more maturely into the liturgical life of the local christian community.

4. *To create a sense of personal belonging to the Church, the community of disciples of Christ.*

All the baptized make up the Church and therefore share in the responsibility for its life here and in the years to come. This corrects the former common misunderstanding of identifying the Church with the bishops, priests and religious only.

5. *To educate the catechized in translating their christian faith into attitudes and values of daily life.*

This is integration of faith and life and it involves two related attitudes. First, to discern the daily events and choices of life in the spirit of faith; to discover how God's Spirit is at work in daily life (GC 62). Second, to translate the basic Gospel truths, moral principles, and spiritual attitudes into acts of daily "secular" life.

The Case of Catechesis

The present need for a systematic catechesis is not only due to the inherent pre-eminent position of this ministry in terms of the over all pastoral and missionary activity of the Church. That is quite evident. Nor even perhaps because of

the constantly growing baptized population whose faith may not surface beyond the implicit level of consciousness. I see the future even more challenging.

As we move toward greater modernization, urbanization and economic progress, the great and rapid social changes taking place will have considerable effect on the education in the faith.

For one, there is the Filipino's own personal search for self-identity and his place in community. Discontinuity in life style, changes in residence, new challenges all will put a severe strain on his traditional value and belief system and create new psychological conflicts and disturbances. The traditional tensions are indicative of the human condition-tensions between autonomy and dependence, between individuality and group work; between self-discipline and instant gratification; between justice and equality and superior-inferior orientation; between authentic moral responsibility and formal legalism and double standards. In real life, these dichotomies are never so clear and distinct; rarely do people choose consciously one side or the other. Rather their habitual ways of acting planning and reacting tend toward one pattern of living more than the other.

This offers to the ministry of catechesis a distinct challenge. This consists in bringing the riches of the christian faith to bear on the Filipino's search for self-identity today. Using the appreciable help of contemporary social science studies, we must bring the Gospel message, and the words, example and presence of Jesus Christ, into immediate grips which the often unconscious personal search for something deeper, more lasting more truly Filipino, than the typical publicity gimmicks or selling the latest fad.

Then there is the whole area of family life that is undergoing so many changing attitudes, values and norms, under modern economic and social pressures. Our increased expectations and consequent need for more money have pushed many Filipinos to overseas employment, separating families and producing many psychological strains and disturbances. The continuing move from rural areas to the cities has loosened the traditional bonds of folk catholicism. New customs in youth relations between the sexes; questioning of traditional roles and images of husband and wife, father and mother, man and

woman — again offer the catechetical ministry the opportunity to deepen the common Filipino's practical appreciation for the wisdom of the Gospel moral truths and values.

And there are still many more lines of change and development that will make a systematic catechesis not only important but undoubtedly indispensable for the life and vitality of Christian faith in this land.



ERRATA

In the September - October 1982 Issue

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW CODE OF CANON LAW

FOOTNOTE: P. 535

Per Filium a te exaltatum emitte spiritum Sanctum in Ecclesiam, ut ea sit unitatis totius humani generis sacramentum.

Preces Ad II Vesp. Dom. IV Paschas

ADDITIONAL: P. 537, line 3

after "Mother of the Church," as model for all Christians.

P. 538, line 3 from the bottom

after "criterion of jurisdiction."

Present norms of incardination and excardination should be so revised that, while this ancient institution still remains intact, they will better correspond to today's pastoral needs. Where a real apostolic spirit requires it, not only should a better distribution of priests be brought about but there should also be favored such particular pastoral works as are necessary in any region or nation anywhere on earth. To accomplish this purpose there should be set up international seminaries, special personal dioceses or prelatures (vicariates), and so forth, by means of which, according to their particular statutes and always saving the right of bishops, priests may be trained and incardinated for the good of the whole Church. (P.O. n. 10)

MISSION AND KENOSIS

By

Vicente Cajilig, O.P.

Few months before the 30th National Mission Assembly, Most Rev. Gaudencio Rosales, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Aid Societies (PMAS) already communicated to the diocesan directors of the said organization regarding the scheduled date of the convention-seminar: July 26-29, 1982. He as well invited the formators of the different seminaries and religious houses of formation to attend. This is the third time that the PMAS directors would sit together with men and women in charge of forming local and foreign missionaries.

In his communication, Msgr. Rosales was not explicit of the specific theme to be discussed in the four day meeting. The invited presupposed that the things that will be discussed will be the annual reports of the local directors and topics related to mission suggested in last year's convention.

And indeed, there were two speakers who were invited. One dealt on the Church: Mystery of Communion and Mission clearly discussed by Fr. Ted Bacani, Professor at San Carlos Seminary; and Missiology and some Contemporary Trends synthesized by Rev. Fr. Edgar Javier, a young SVD missiologist.

Both the topics were useful but Bishop Rosales had planned to invite one whom he thought could give what has been missing in all past endeavors to promote mission awareness before and much more after the International Mission Congress held in Manila three years ago. The bishop after successfully coordinating the International Congress and after serving for years as National Director of the PMAS should know what is importantly missing in all mission-oriented endeavors.

To point out this missing link, he did not invite internationally known experts of missiology; neither did he choose a veteran missionary who has for years been working actively in strict foreign mission land. Rather, Bishop Rosales invited somebody who ironically had no formal scientific and technical formation in missiology and not been actively (meaning: external involvement) living in any mission territory. The spe-

cial guest was one who has been a contemplative Carmelite for eight years. She is no other than Sr. Therese John Patrick (nee: Josefina Constantino).

The 62 years old Sr. Therese came with no prepared paper — though this did not mean that she has not prepared. In fact, she was so prepared, that she needed no paper. After all, what were those long years for! (By the way, she was out of the cloister only after her superior and the Cardinal gave permission.)

Sr. Therese' assignment was to fill what Bishop Rosales and many others felt has been missing in talks, seminars, conventions, etc. For Sr. Therese, what is missing is the life of KENOSIS.

Everybody of course knows that the idea of Kenosis is as old as the Founder of Christianity. But how this concept is realized in each Christian believer is a different consideration. As an idea it is old but as to how it is realized is and will always be new.

Sr. Therese in an uninterrupted over two-hour talk pointed out the event of kenosis in a believer, and especially in a believer who is a missionary. And she talked about it with a dynamism extraordinary for one over sixty. (She was not shy to tell her age unlike ordinary women.)

The good old sister talked dynamically fast but the underlying thought of kenosis can clearly be discerned.

1. She acknowledged the influence in her personal thoughts of St. Therese of Avila, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, and from some authors of oriental mysticism. She in fact, has written a thick resource volume on oriental mysticism.

2. Fundamental basis of kenosis attained through contemplation: "Give up all; what you have now is God." She taught this in a strikingly ordinary but effective way to one Thai novice. (Sr. Therese is the Mistress of Novices.) "Sister", addressing a novice, "what did you leave behind?" The novice answered

in a crooked english; "home, mother, father, sisters, friends, things". "And what do you have now?" Sr. Therese asked again. And the novice answered, "God".

3. She recognized the potential of the Filipinos to come to the height of contemplation because of nature. She said that a Filipino is gifted with contemplation.

4. Sr. Therese showed the way how a missionary (Filipino or otherwise) may move in his spiritual life by recourse to the classic steps of mysticism: rejection of sin, knowledge and love of the eucharist, embracing the cross, movement from intellectualism to simplicity, openness to the spirit without effort, acceptance of trials and contemplation, earthly "experience" of hell, subjective feeling of abandonment by God.

5. She alluded to the presence of the "seed-ground" in man's being. It means one has to develop the "human" in order to realize the "Christian".

6. There is no other pattern in Christian life than the "love of the cross".

7. What happens to the life of man when he comes to accept the Christian pattern? Man becomes totally dependent on God. The Christian says: "Tell me Lord what to do?" Hence the intellect, the will and the memory is divinized.

when the intellect is divinized, comes FAITH

when the will is divinized, comes CHARITY

when the memory is divinized, comes HOPE

8. The old nun confessed her continuous prayers and sacrifices for missionary vocation.

9. She narrated her rare opportunity a few years ago of going to China in Carmelite habit (3-day visit). She considered it a divinely sent opportunity. For long she has prayed for the Church of China.

10. She is considered as the first religious to come into China in habit after the exile of the missionaries from the

mainland in the fifties. In China, she learned later, that she met the well known Bishop Tang who looked for her later here.

11. One curious story: While in China, her habit called the attention of many in a store. One fellow traveler said, "Sister, look around you!" The Chinese were approaching her and touch her brown habit. Sr. Therese thought, "My habit is like the Vatican flag".

12. Given the chance, she would like to be a missionary in China. But only, she said, if God wills it. Her prayer and sacrifices for the missions, Sr. Therese was convinced, has not been without answer.

Those attending the talk of sister could not but feel surprised to realize that the one talking to them is one who in the ordinary parlance of the world is "inactive"; yet her witness clearly demonstrated that her "inactivity" has brought her to a land where she wants to serve as missionary.

The three bishops and some three scores of priests, nuns, seminarians and laymen listening with utmost attention shared but one feeling — that they now realize what has been missing has been re-discovered: KENOSIS which is indispensable to all lovers of mission.

BIBLICAL NOTES AND OUTLINES FOR HOMILIES

December 1982 - January 1983

by

FR. HERMAN MUELLER, S.V.D.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(December 5, 1982)

On the second Sunday in Advent we meditate in all three years (A, B, and C) on the preaching of John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord. This year brings this preaching in the version of Luke who places the preaching in the historical setting. To prepare the way of the Lord means in concrete to lay down every mountain and fill up every valley to make a road for the Lord (first reading and gospel), for the day of the Lord is coming (second reading).

FIRST READING: BARUCH 5:1-9

According to Bar. 1:1 the Book of Baruch was written by Baruch (= the blessed one), the son of Neriah (Jer. 32:12). Baruch was the secretary of Jeremiah with whom he went to Egypt. According to Bar. 1:2 the prophet went (from Egypt, if we take the Book of Jeremiah into consideration) to Babylon in the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, i.e. in 581 B.C. and then came back to Jerusalem, bringing his book with him. According to St. Jerome (*In Isaiam* 36,6f) both Jeremiah and Baruch died in Egypt. According to another tradition, Nebuchadnezzar, after he had conquered Egypt, brought both prophets to Babylonia in 583 B.C. according to Josephus (*Antiquitates* X, 9, 7); in 568 according to *Seder Olam Rabba* 26. According to a third tradition (which would correspond with Bar. 1:2) Baruch went to Babylonia after the death of Jeremiah, and died there in 574 B.C.

The authorship of the book is much discussed. But it seems that Part I [Bar. 1:1-3:8] Historical Introduction [1:1-14] and A Confession of Sins and a Prayer of the Exiles for Deliverance [1:15-3:8] was written by Baruch himself. Part II (A Panegyric on Wisdom 3:9-4:4) was outlined by a wisdom teacher as the typical literary form would suggest. Part III (The Consolation of Israel, i.e. of the Exiles 4:5.5:9) is related to Deutero Isaiah (Is. 40-54), is thus also from that time and was composed by an unknown author. A later redactor put all three parts, written by different authors, together. All three parts are inspired. The Book is deuterocanonical, thus not acknowledged by Jews and Protestants. The Letter of Jeremiah (Bar. 6:1-72) is another part, written by again another author, probably not by Jeremiah.

Today's first reading is taken from the third part. The exiles return from exile. Therefore, people in Jerusalem shall take off their robes of mourning, put on festive clothes (5:1-2) and put on the diadem of glory (5:2). Their name will be "peace of righteousness and glory of godliness", i.e. they will have just peace and godly glory; peace that comes from (God's) justice and glory originating in godliness. They shall rise and look: All children of Jerusalem come back from exile. They went into exile on foot, the return carried on a kingly litter (throne) (5:5-6).

To make such a return possible, all hills shall be levelled off and all valleys be filled up for a highway on which the exiles can return (5:7). Woods give shade (5:8). God leads Israel back with joy (5:9).

All this is applied to the coming of Christ at his Parousia, when we will go home.

SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 1-6.8-11

The community in Philippi was the first community Paul founded in (the present) Europe and his favorite community. Thus, the mutual relations were cordial which one can easily see from the letter. From the Philippians alone did the apostle accept material support. The letter was written in prison (Phil. 1:7.12f). Traditionally, this is believed to be Paul's imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 61-63). Thus, the letter would have been written during that time. More and more nowadays favor the opinion that it was written during Paul's imprison-

ment in Ephesus (ca. A.D. 56-57). Since the Letter to the Philippians topically is related to the Great Letters of Paul, (Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians) such a date is plausible, though not certain.

When the Philippians heard of Paul's imprisonment they sent Epaphroditos, a member of the community, to bring the apostle money. Epaphroditos fell critically ill while he was with Paul, and when the Philippians learned of this they were concerned about him. Thus, Paul sent Epaphroditos back right after his recovery giving this letter along.

That the Letter consisted originally of three different letters by Paul (a. 4:10-20; b. 1:1-3 + 4:4-7.21-23; c. 3:2-4:3) is by some authors, but is not proven.

It's more a chat among friends than a treaty as several other Pauline Letters are. The introduction (1:1-11) is a recollection of the Philippians and Paul's first reason for joy. Part I (Phil. 1:12-26) speaks about Paul's situation: inspite of his imprisonment he can preach, and whatever the final verdict will be (freedom or death), Paul is ready for both. This is a second and third reason for joy. Part II (1:27-2:18) brings Paul's advice to fulfill his joy by being one in mind, thought and love, being humble as Christ was. (2:6-11). Part III (2:19-3:1) outlines Paul's wish to contribute to this joy by sending the two missionaries Timothy and Epaphroditos. Part IV (3:2-4:1) brings an attack on Judaizers. Part V (4:2-9) adds a final exhortation to unity, joy and peace, followed by Part VI (4:10-20) in which Paul's thanks them for the gift they sent him.

Today's second reading is taken from the introduction. Paul always prays for his Philippians and he does it with joy. He thanks God that they have been active in accepting and spreading the gospel from the first day on. And the apostle is sure that God who began the good work will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, the Parousia (1:6). That good work is the spreading of the gospel (from the context) but also the state of grace in which the Philippians are now.

The apostle yearns for his Christians with the love of Christ (1:8). He prays that their love may abound more and more so that their knowledge may become deeper (and thus again the love greater) so that they may be pure and

blameless for the day of Christ, the Parousia (1:10), here mentioned a second time. And this is the reason for the selection of this reading for today. Thus, they will be filled with all righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ and serves for the glory and praise of God.

We see, for the second time the coming of the Lord refers to Parousia.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 3:1-6

Luke, the historian among the evangelists, places the appearance of John the Baptist in the historical setting, unique to Luke. There are six references of time: John started preaching. (1) in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, which is 27-A.D. according to the Seleucid calendar, where the year started on October 1. Augustus died August 19, A.D. 14, and the time from August 19 A.D. 14 till September 30 A.D. 14 counted as first year. The span from October 1, A.D. 15 till September 30, A.D. 16 made up the second year, etc. Romans, however would let year one go from August 19, A.D. 14 till August 18, A.D. 15. Thus, the fifteenth year of Tiberius would be A.D. 28-29.

- (2) Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea (26-36 A.D.).
- (3) Herod (Antipas) ruled as tetrarch of Galilee (4 B.C. till 39 A.D.). When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., Rome divided his kingdom among his three sons. Archelaus (Judaea, including Samaria and Idumaea), Herod Antipas (Galilee and Peraea), Philip (territory east and north-east of the lake of Galilee). The title "tetrarch" means literally "ruler of a fourth part of a region", but generally signified a satellite prince who ranked below a king in dignity. This title was given to Antipas and Philip, while Archelaus was supposed to get the title "king" but received only the title "ethnarch" by Augustus and was deposed by Rome because of disloyalty in A.D. 6. From that time on Judaea had a Roman governor. Salome received the other fourth part of Herod's kingdom.
- (4) Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis near the Lake of Galilee (4 B.C. till 34 A.D.).

- (5) Lysanias was tetrach of Abilene. His identity is not certain. Abilene lay north and east of Damascus. The name Lysanias seems to have been hereditary among the sovereigns of Abilene.
- (6) Annas and Caiphas were high priest. To be exact, Caiphas was high priest (18-36 A.D.) while Annas was still the power behind the throne, having been high priest before (6-15 A.D.) and being the father-in-law.

At that time, then the word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness (was he a monk at Qumran?) and he started preaching a baptism of repentance so that people because of their interior renewal could receive forgiveness of sin, and thus prepare themselves for the coming of Christ.

His coming was what Deutero Isaiah (Is. 40:3-5) lastly had in mind when he told the exiles in Babylon to prepare a way through the desert (so in Is. 40:3; Lk. 3:4 says "a voice cries in the desert") so that the king Yahweh (and thus in an applied sense Christ) can return to his glory in Jerusalem. The levelling off the mountains and the filling up of the valleys is expressed almost identically in Is. 40:4 and Bar. 5:7.

HOMILY

"PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD!"

We could sum up the many ideas of today's liturgy saying: "In God's time, the word of God came to John telling him to prepare the way for Christ."

1. *In God's time*, John the Baptist and thus Jesus Christ himself came. This is what Luke, the "historian" among the evangelists wants to tell us with his elaborate sentence of six indications of time. Thucydides, the Greek historian, introduced in a similar way his key event, the attack on Plataea which started the Peloponnesian War, about which Thucydides wrote. But for Luke it was not just an exact indication of time, as it was for Thucydides.

a. Rather most of these names Luke mentions should not have been there. After all, in the beginning of Israel's history, Yahweh himself was their God and ruler at the same time. It

was the time of theocracy, when God lead his people through Moses or one of the Spirit filled Judges. And when Samuel reluctantly granted the request of the people for a king (1 Sam. 8:19-22), it was made clear to them that the king was not a king in his own power as among the Gentiles, but only as servant (2 Sam. 7:18-29). But Samuel was right with his prediction: "The rights of the king who will rule you will be as follows: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariots . . . He will set them to do his plowing and his harvesting, and to make his implements of war . . . He will use your daughters as tent-makers, as cooks, and as bakers. He will take the best of your fields . . . He will tithe your crops and your vineyards . . . When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the Lord will not answer you (1 Sam. 8:11-18)." Yes, it became even worse, as this list of Luke shows.

b. Alien rulers had taken over, mainly Rome, and governed God's own country. How far away was this from theocracy. The kingdom of Herod the Great had been divided into four parts, among his three sons Archelaus, who received Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea, Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee and Paraea, Philipi whose territory Ituraea and Trachonitis lay around the Lake of Galilee, and Salome. Since Archelaus was accused of intriguing against Rome he was deposed and Rome took over directly by naming a procurator for Judaea. The one at the time of the Baptist and Jesus was Pontius Pilate.

c. And even worse, where there should have been only one high priest for life each time, coming from the Sadoquite family, the office had become a matter of politics for the highest bidder, and there were two high priests living at the same time: Caiphas, the high-priest in charge (18-36 A.D.) and Annas, his father-in-law, the power behind the throne because of his forceful character and because of the fact that he had been high-priest before (6-15 A.D.).

d. And yet, inspite of all these irregularities, it was God's time. It was not just chance that God sent his Son during the time of the Roman Empire. St. Paul formulates it this way: "When the fulness of time came God sent his own son, born of a woman, born under the law to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it, so that we might receive our status as adopted sons (Gal. 4:4)." Whatever one may say

about the shortcomings of the Roman Empire, it was providential for the arriving and the spread of Christianity. With the victory of Octavian, known as Augustus, at Actium in 31 B.C. a century of social turmoil and civil war came to an end. Augustus rescued the Roman world from disintegration and gave it the government that held it together for the next five centuries. He inaugurated the *Pax Romana*, that period from his date to about A.D. 180 in which the civilized European world enjoyed its longest period of domestic peace and a high level of prosperity as well, although many live in misery. The perfect system of Roman highways and the good postal service helped the spread of the Christian message.

2. When the time was fulfilled, the designated time had come, *the word of God came to John in the desert.*

a. God's word had chosen John before he was born: "Many of the sons of Israel will be brought back to the Lord their God (Lk. 1:16)," said the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, John's father. And John could apply to himself the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you a prophet to the nations I appointed you (Jer. 1:5)." Still before his birth and still under the heart of his mother Elizabeth, Christ under the heart of his mother Mary made John leap with joy (Lk. 1:41,43).

b. Now that same word of God came to him in the desert, where he had prepared himself, waiting for God's final call. The desert has always been and still is the place to meet God, to be open for his call.

c. John was a prophet, the last and the greatest of them all. A prophet, however, is the man of God's word. His greatness is measured by his faithfulness to this word. He must not add nor subtract anything.

3. *God's word came to John telling him to prepare the way of the Lord.*

a. John is the greatest of the prophets, but as any prophet he is only preparing the way of the Lord coming. It is one of the intentions of Luke to show the superiority of Christ over John already in the infancy narrative. With John a prophet is born, with Christ the savior of the world.

b. Luke shows that same intention also with the report of John's public appearance at the Jordan: The word of God

comes to John (Lk. 3:2). Jesus is the Son of God (Lk. 3:22), John is just called the son of Zechariah. For Jesus Luke brings the long genealogy (Lk. 3:23-38). John is the greatest of all born from a woman (Lk. 7:27), and yet the smallest born into the kingdom is greater than John (Lk. 7:28). And with Jesus this kingdom is here. John is a prophet, not the master, a man, not Son of God.

c. His greatness consists in preparing the way for the master, for the Son of God. The picture is taken from Is. 40:4 and Bar. 5:7. Whenever a king came for a state visit in the Orient, highways had to be made in the desert, hills and mountains levelled off and valleys filled up with soil and gravel.

A way makes it possible to travel. The Lord can come to us and we can go to the Lord. John the Baptist preached about Christ. Thus, people knew who the Lord is and what the Lord expected them and us to do.

d. We personally must prepare the way for the Lord, cutting off the hills of our pride and filling up our defects, our valleys with sincerity. We must give ourselves the way we are. Only then the Lord can come to us at Christmas, at any turn of our life, in any situation the Lord wants to come to us.

**FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
(December 8, 1982)**

See December 8, 1981.

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(December 12, 1982)**

This is *Gaudete* Sunday. We are told: Rejoice because the Lord is near not only because its Christmas and thus, Christ's first coming (Incarnation) is near but also because the imminent Parousia causes joy (first and second reading). Near the Lord is also in our personal life as he was when the Baptist started to prepare his public coming.

John the Baptist tells us what to do for his coming (gospel). This is a second theme. The other half of the gospel,

showing that Christ is greater than the Baptist, would be a possible third theme, which we saw in a similar way on the third Sunday of Advent, year B in Jn. 1:6-8.19-28.

FIRST READING: ZEPHANIST 3:14-18

Only twice during the cycle of three years we have a reading of the Book of Zephaniah on a Sunday: On the fourth Sunday of the year, cycle A (Zeph. 2:3; 3:12-13) and today. Zephaniah ("Yahweh has treasured, hidden") was the son of Cushi and a descendant of Hezekiah (Zeph. 1:1), possibly the king of Judah. The word of God came to him in the days of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), i.e. in the time after the Assyrian invasion in 701 under Sennacherib. Jerusalem had been miraculously saved, but the country was very much destroyed and Judah had to pay tribute to Assyria for the following years. Mainly king Manasseh had been very irreligious and had been killed many priests. It was a time of syncretism (worship of Baal) and astracultus (1:4), of corruption of priests and officials (1:8f; 3:3f), of materialism of the rich and the wealthy (1:12) and of self-sufficiency which did not want to listen (3:1f. 6f). Thus, Zephaniah was preparing the religious reform of Josiah.

Thus, the main theme of the book is an invitation to do penance, to fight against sin. In Part I (1:1-2:3) the threatening of the "Day of the Lord" against Judah and Jerusalem is depicted which has inspired the medieval hymn "*Dies irae*" in the Mass of the Dead. Part II (2:4-15) brings prophecies against the pagan nations of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria. Part III (3:1-20) elaborates on the punishment of Jerusalem and the promises of salvation. Dark as the colors of the book are, it finishes with an outlook on the future restoration. From this look on the kingdom of God in the future (3:9-20) is our first reading taken.

Zion, Israel shall shout for joy (a greeting taken up in the greeting of the angel to Mary "rejoice you highly favored one") (Lk. 1:28) because now God is in her midst. The time of war is over, the enemies of Israel are destroyed. Yahweh himself returns to Jerusalem and takes over as king. Thus, one is secure of oppressors.

All this is completely fulfilled when Christ comes.

SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

We saw last Sunday that joy is one predominant feature of the Letter to the Philippians. Today's second reading if taken from Part V: Final exhortation to unity, joy and peace (4:2-9). In the old Missal is was the traditional reading of Gaudete Sunday.

1. *We shall rejoice in the Lord.* Since the Lord is always with us we can always rejoice. Joy is not dependent on external circumstances. We can rejoice even in trials, suffering and persecutions as Paul does in prison. He has conquered fear (1:28-30), including the fear of death (1:20-26). Suffering can even be a reason for joy (Mt. 5:12).

2. *We shall be kind* (unselfish, having forbearance, being patient). The Greek word *epiekes* is hard to translate and thus, is translated in different ways, as indicated. We are kind if we change place with others and do more than is required. We are more than just making allowance for certain character traits and let for instance a person pass who according to strict regulations would not pass. Forbearance, patience is of course the quality most required in living together, and is often mentioned by Paul. An individual and a community falls short of what he or it is supposed to be and thus, we have to accept this fact patiently before we can improve. We must be willing to forgive any time. And the reason for all this is: the Lord is near. For Paul and the early Christians the Lord was coming soon for his Parousia. And that caused their joy, since it would be the climax of history.

3. *We shall dismiss all anxiety, but rather pray.* Care we shall, but not be worried as Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34). It does not pay since we cannot change things anyhow. We must trust in God the Father who cares for us more than the birds and the lilies and live one day at a time. But even more, we must pray. We can present our needs to God the Father. We can pray for ourselves, for forgiveness of the past, for things we need in the present, for help and guidance in the future. We can pray for others. But all our prayers must be accompanied with thanksgiving.

4. *The result will be peace* that surpasses all understanding. After all, it's a peace which only God give us, not a peace we can make.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 3:10-18

The pericope of today consists of two halves: (1) Lk. 3:10-14 The *Standespredigt* of the Baptist, his preaching to various classes of people: the crowds in general, the tax collectors, and the soldiers. This part is proper to Luke. (2) Lk. 3:15-18 John's Messianic preaching. The Baptist disclaims that he is the Messiah. To show the superiority of Christ over the Baptist is one intention of the Prologue of John and the infancy narrative of Luke (Lk. 1-2), but also of the public activity of Christ in Lk. 3.

John is not even worthy to perform the lowest service which no free man was expected to do but only a slave: to untie the sandals of his master. Christ is greater than John because John baptizes only with water and makes people repent of their sins. Christ, however baptizes with Holy Spirit and fire, administering the Sacrament of baptism and thus, giving us the Holy Spirit. The second word "and with fire" is added by Matthew and Luke. (Mark 1:8 does not have it.) John apparently expects Christ as judge and thus "fire" would refer to him as judge: Whoever does not accept him will be judged, punished as through fire.

This explanation is also suggested by the following comparison with a farmer. When a farmer had finished threshing, the corn lay mixed with the chaff on the threshing floor. Then he would toss the corn in the wind with a shovel. The grains of corn which were heavier would fall to the ground, while the chaff would be borne away with the wind. The chaff would be burned, the corn gathered into the barns.

In any case, the Holy Spirit is like fire, warning, illuminating the person who accepts him and Christ, burning the one who refuses to accept him.

The first half of Lk. 3:15-18 (3:15-16) is used in the version of John (Jn. 1:25-28) on the third Sunday of Advent, year B.

HOMILY**"WHAT THEN, MUST WE DO?"**

A. 1. Advent is the time of coming, the time of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ, for his coming at Christmas, for his coming at the Parousia, for his coming in different events in our life.

2. The Jews had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah for many hundred years. Before Christ the Messiah actually appeared, John the Baptist was sent ahead of him to prepare his way. People came to him at the Jordan, underwent the baptism of repentance and asked for God's forgiveness of their sins.

3. Being the greatest of all the prophets, being a man who dared telling the truth and even went into death for telling the truth to Herod Antipas the truth that he was not allowed to take the wife of his brother Philip as his wife (Mt. 14:5.10), would expect the Baptist to be strict and daring in his demands for people who came to him for advice. The more interesting it is to see that his advice is in the reach of people. He shows himself as a wise spiritual director. Since St. Luke is the evangelist of the kind and merciful, the evangelist with a social interest, we are not surprised to find the Baptist's advice in the third gospel, and only there.

B. 1. The first group mentioned coming to the Jordan are the people in general, the crowd, the average person, the man of the street. They ask: "What ought we to do (Lk. 3:10)?" The Baptist answers: "Let the man with two coats give him who has none. The man who has food should do the same (Lk. 3:11)." John does not ask to give away everything as Christ does with the young man, he does not require heroic virtue, but (only) compassion, active love, social awareness. Everybody shall share what he has. And nobody can say that he has nothing to share, how much or how little it might be: clothing and food are mentioned by the Baptist already. We might add time to spend listening to somebody with a problem; ideas we can share with a newcomer and a beginner in a job, whereas we might be oldtimer in that profession.

2. The second group of people which come to John are tax collectors, and they again ask what to do. Since tax collectors were working for the Romans they were hated by the Jews. They often enough show a personified avaricious love for money and dishonesty and were considered traitors to their own people. John does not propose a revolution in the system of taxes. He does not require the tax collectors to give up their profession altogether. All he asks them to do is not to take more than the fixed amount. Later on, Jesus adopted the same attitude as John in his dealings with the tax collector Zacchaeus.

We may not be tax collectors. But most of us have a job, some a job of the government. John would also tell us not

to take more than the fixed amount. If people need a government permission or any other public permission, we can delay it in order to get some extra money, a sign of good will, in plain English a bribery. We can make the issue of a driver's licence complicated, the release of some incoming goods, subject to taxes dependent upon some "small donation" or even part of the incoming good. John's answer is: "Do not take more than you are entitled to."

And that list we can enlarge easily. We can ask for something extra for a prompt service or make it very clear that we like it. And we can procrastinate services where we receive only the just pay.

3. Thirdly and lastly soldiers come to the Baptist and ask for advice. Their joy was equally detested by the Jews and Jews were dispensed from military service as Flavius Josephus tells us in *Antiquities* XIV, 10, 6 & 204. Again John does not demand from them to give up their profession and thus, their livelihood, although it was often considered incompatible with membership of Jewish and later Christian community and thus, these soldiers here were Gentiles, mercenaries of Herod Antipas. The influence of the Baptist went beyond the confines of Israel. Robbery with violence was a common thing for soldiers. John asks them not to rob people, not to extort by means of false accusations, not to abuse their power, not to intimidate people and thus, get something extra. They shall not be bully. They shall be satisfied with their pay although that often enough could be more.

This advice is so up-to-date that it could have been said in many countries in the year 1982. Where are not soldier who enjoy their power when they have a gun, intimidating people.

4. John's advice is in man's reach. We can share, we can be satisfied with our salary without exacting things and intimidating people, abusing our power. But John can also be blunt with those who do not want to listen. God has given us a certain time to act and follow his call. We must produce good wheat. If we are only chaff, God will condemn us like chaff is burnt after the threshing.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 19, 1982)

Today we meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation, as we did on the fourth Sunday of Advent in the years A and B, each time from different angels. Since the kings from David's

house did not do justice to their task, a new David will come from Bethlehem, who is from of old, from eternity, shepherding the rest (remnant) returning from exile (first reading). He enters the world, offering his body as sacrifice in perfect obedience, thus, abrogating the imperfect sacrifices of the old covenant (second reading). Having conceived on the Holy Spirit, Mary, the one who is to give birth (Mic. 5:2), hurries to Ain Karin and by her son under her heart makes John the Baptist in the womb of his mother jump for joy and Elizabeth recognize the greatness of the Incarnation which was made possible by Mary's faith (gospel).

FIRST READING: MICAH 5:1-4a HEBREW, NAB: 5:2-5a RSV

The counting of the verses should be 5:1-4a as the Hebrew text and the Neo Vulgate has it, not 5:2-5a as we find it in the Vulgate. — Only on this Sunday do we find a reading from the Minor Prophet Micah. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, preached in the Southern Kingdom from about 783-693 B.C. during the time of the kings Jotham (742-35 B.C.), Ahaz (735-15) and Hezekiah (715-687/6 B.C.). Thus, during his time happened the Syro-Ephraemitic War (735/34), the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722) and the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (701), all of which the prophet hardly mentions in opposition to Isaiah.

The Southern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Judah was poorer than the Northern Kingdom because in distinction to Israel, it had not much agriculture. Thus, it made up for this lack by industrializing the country, especially by exploiting the copper mines of the Arabah. — Judah enjoyed a rise of capitalism. But this material wealth caused many social injustices. The rich exploited the poor. And this social injustice Micah is especially criticizing in his book, as Amos and Hosea do. Thus, Micah warns the Jews that God will have to bring them into exile if they do not amend their ways, and the book alternates between threats and blessings (Part I: 1:2-2:12 Threats against Israel and Judah; Part II 4:1-5:14 Blessings; Part III 6:1-6:7 Threats; Part IV 7:8-26 Blessings).

Today's first reading is taken from the blessings promised. Since the kings by and large did not fulfill their God-given task, there will come a time when he will elect a new David, coming from the town of David, Bethlehem, the region of Ephrathah. ("Bethlehem" may be a later explanatory gloss, but the prophet

had certainly Bethlehem in mind). God had chosen the small (city) in opposition to the big (Jerusalem). But before the Messiah could come, there would be some more oppressions till finally she who is to give birth would bear him (cf. Is. 7. But in opposition to Is. 7:14 the prophet can hardly think of Hezekiah, since he is probably mentioned in Mic. 4:14 as besieged by Sennacherib). The Messiah's origin is from old (Mic. 5:1), from eternity.

The rest (remnant) shall return from exile, which the Messiah as shepherd will shepherd. The remnant shall reach to the ends of the earth, for the Messiah is peace in person.

SECOND READING: HEBREWS 10:5-10

As we saw on the Sundays 31-33 of year B, Part III of the Letter to the Hebrews (5:11-10:39) pictures Christ as the true high priest, describing his priesthood as higher than the Levitical priesthood. The third section of this third part (10:1-18) tells us that Christ's sacrifice is superior to the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, since it causes eternal salvation. (1) The old covenant is insufficient since sacrifices have to be repeated (10:1-3). (2) The exterior sacrifices of the Old Testament are replaced by the real sacrifice of Christ (10:4-10).

This last part makes up today's second reading. The sacrifices of the Old Testament are just sacrifices of animals, holocausts which cannot take away the sins of men. Christ's is a real sacrifice, because he dies freely in obedience to the Father. Thus, it's a sacrifice once and for all which does not have to be repeated.

Christ's offering of will, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews takes from Ps. 40:7-9 and adapts the text slightly. The psalm is a thanksgiving psalm (vv. 1-11) for having overcome the danger of death. Thus, the psalmist wants to thank the Lord, not with sacrifices, burnt offerings, but rather with an open ear (Ps. 40:7), with obedience in doing God's will (Ps. 50:9). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reads instead of "an open ear you have given me" "a body you have prepared for me (10:5)." Christ offers his body in perfect obedience to the will of the Father. This is the essence of his sacrifice. And this offering Christ made already coming into this world. The Incarnation is nothing sentimental, but points already to the cross.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 1:39-45

The Infancy Narrative of Luke consists of two diptychs: (1) the diptych of the annunciations (1:5-56) and (2) the diptych of the births (1:57-2:52). Luke shows that Christ is greater than the Baptist, Mary greater than Zechariah and Elizabeth. The annunciation of the birth of John (1:5-25) is followed by the annunciation of the birth of Jesus (1:26-38). Zechariah doubts the message of the angel that his wife shall bear a son (1:19). Mary, however, believes that the Lord is with her and that she shall conceive and bear a son (1:31) and thus she says: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say (1:38)." The angel gives her a sign for the mystery of the Incarnation: "Elizabeth your kinswoman has conceived a son in her old age (1:36)."

And thus, Mary sets out, proceeding in haste into the hill country to a Judah. According to a tradition since the sixth century this is identified with Ain Karim, six km. west of Jerusalem. The travel from Nazareth would take from three to four days. Mary goes in haste, obeying God's word to share the good news and to help.

Mary stays with her relative for three months. Does that mean she left just before the birth of John the Baptist? Hardly then, Elizabeth would have needed help even more. The arrangement of the two diptychs which contrasts Jesus and John, Mary and Zechariah with Elizabeth made it necessary that Mary was off the stage before the birth of the Baptist. In each diptych the two parents and the newborn child are featured, and it would destroy this careful balance to have Mary the parent of Jesus at the birth of John the Baptist. The historical reality was probably different.

HOMILY

**MARY THE MODEL OF PROCLAMATION
ELIZABETH THE GUIDE TO THE INCARNATION**

1. *Mary the model of proclamation.* One of the finest Advent pictures is Mary hurrying over the hills country to a town of Judah, talking to her divine son under her heart, intending to help her relative Elizabeth.

a. It all starts with a *great joy*. Christianity is the religion of joy because the Lord is here. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her: "Rejoice, highly favored (one) (*chaire kecharitōmenē*) (Lk. 1:28)!" She shall rejoice because she is chosen to be the daughter of Zion, in whose midst the king is, i.e. the Messiah comes and removes the guilt of Zion, brings people back from captivity and inaugurates the Messianic Kingdom as we find it in Zephaniah 3:14-15; Joel 2:21 and Zechariah 9:9. All these prophecies are fulfilled in Mary's becoming the mother of God. And this happens the moment she says her "yes" to the message of the angel. Then the Lord is with her in full reality. And wherever and as long as the Lord is there, we can rejoice, because we need nothing more but also nothing less than the Lord for true joy.

b. Joy has to be shared to become double joy. And the fundamental good news is the that the Lord is with us, ever since Christianity began, ever since Christ was conceived by his mother Mary. She hurries up into the hill country, across Samaria and Judea to a small town with the name Ain Karim. She hurries with joy to spread the good news that the Lord is there. She hurries because she has been told as a sign that the Incarnation is possible: "Know that Elizabeth your kinswoman has conceived a son in her old age; she who was thought to be sterile is now in the sixth month, for nothing is impossible with God (Lk. 1:36-37)." Not that she doubts God's power to bring about the Incarnation, to cause the virgin-birth. Rather, Mary realizes: Here is an old woman who for the first time will bear a child. Thus, she needs help as any expecting mother does; but twice since she is old. Mary obeys God's will. He has given her that sign. She is a person of charity.

c. She does not think she should lock herself up into her room, or even hide in her joy as Elizabeth does. Scripture says: "She, Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months (Lk. 1:24)." For Mary it is possible to combine prayer with activity, contemplation with work. She is contemplating on the great mystery under her heart all the time, hurrying over the hills. But she wants equally much to help her cousin Elizabeth. Loving our neighbor, we love God, and talking to him in our heart increases our capacity for work.

The 'time before Christmas is for many of us busy time. Work is piling up in preparation of the great feast. And similar busy times there are often during the year. We would want to go in seclusion as Elizabeth did. But we cannot. Mary shows the way: The busier we are in working for our friends

and relatives, the more we want to talk to Christ in our heart. Then we are prepared for his coming. Then the work does not suffocate us, but it becomes a prayer too.

d. Entering the house of Zechariah, Mary greets Elizabeth. She has not greeted anybody on the way, as Jesus later would advise his apostles whom he sent out to preach. "Do not greet anybody on the way (Lk. 10:4)!" Her goal is the proclamation to and help for Elizabeth. The good news must not be delayed. The result is: John the Baptist jumps for joy in the womb of his mother (Lk. 1:41-44). He jumps with joy in the presence of the Lord who is in the womb of his mother Mary. The Christian joy goes on, the only real joy which comes from the presence of the Lord. The Lord is now with John. And John right away becomes a prophet before he is even born, announcing Christ to his mother Elizabeth so that Elizabeth recognizes that Mary is with child and that this child is the Messiah, the Lord. And the whole chain of actions had been started rolling by the greeting of Mary.

How are our greetings? Empty formulas? Words to which we hardly pay any attention? Or do we omit greetings altogether, passing people without even noticing them, acting as if they did not exist? Carrying Christ in our heart our greetings can and should be powerful also.

e. John jumps with joy before the ark of the covenant as it were, Mary who carries Christ. David had done this, when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:2-11). And And the hills were jumping with joy when the Lord passed during the exodus (Ps. 113:4-6) in the ark of the covenant. Each time it was the Messianic joy.

2. *Elizabeth the guide to the Incarnation.* Christ was conceived in the womb of his mother by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35).

a. That same Holy Spirit is at work also in Elizabeth. The angel had told Zechariah: "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Lk. 1:15)." With the arrival of Jesus that prophecy is fulfilled. By the power of the Holy Spirit, John senses the presence of Jesus, and the Baptist by his jumping for joy announces the mystery of the Incarnation to his mother Elizabeth.

b. Elizabeth in turn singles out the mystery of the Incarnation to Mary and us. Not that Mary would have needed

it, but it is always good to hear a confirmation of our convictions and insights by others. God guides people through other people.

"Blest are you among women, and blest is the fruit of your womb" Elizabeth says (Lk. 1:42). Mary is blest more than other women. It is true this is not a strict superlative in Hebrew construction: "You are blessed most of all women" because that construction occurs also for other women: Judith in Judith 13:18 and Jael in Judges 5:24. But for all practical purposes we can take it as superlative: Mary is blessed more than any other women because the fruit of her womb is blessed, Jesus.

c. That fruit of Mary's womb is Lord, *kyrios*. "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth says (1:43). Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the mother of the Messiah, who is often called "Lord". And in the fullest sense he is Lord because he is God. Jesus is not just man but God-man, conceived in the womb of his mother. This is what the mystery of the Incarnation is all about.

d. Mary's divine motherhood, however is not just something physical. She is not mother of God only because she bore Christ physically. She also consented internally. The Incarnation was the work of the Holy Spirit, but Mary had to consent, Mary had to obey, Mary had to believe. Thus, Elizabeth singles out *Mary's greatness in her faith*. And this is the continuation of the above verse 41 talking about Mary's motherhood: "Blest is she who trusted that Lord's words to her would be fulfilled (1:45)." When the angel explained to Mary how the mystery of the Incarnation could take place, telling her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy off-spring to be born will be called Son of God (Lk. 1:35)" Mary consented in faith and obedience: "I am the servant of the Lord.. Let it be done to me as you say (1:38)." Ever since, Mary has been the good soil, keeping God's word in her faithful heart and bringing fruit in patience (Lk. 8:15). Luke praises her as mother of faith: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it (Lk. 11:28)."

CHRISTMAS — SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S BIRTH (December 25, 1982)

As mentioned last year, every priest may say three Masses on Christmas. The three Masses at midnight, at dawn, and

during the day are the same in the three different cycles of A, B, and C. This year we meditate only on the Mass during the day. The Mass at mid-night was explained in 1980, the Mass at dawn in 1981.

Unsurpassably John expresses the mystery of Christmas: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (gospel). The infinite God becomes a mortal man. Thus, God does not have to speak any longer through his prophets; he speaks to us through his own son (second reading). God returns to Jerusalem and thus, all nations shall see his salvation (first reading).

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 52:7-10

Second Isaiah, writing toward the end of the exile 538 B.C., speaks in Part I (Is. 40:1-49:13) about the deliverance from Babylon and in Part II (49:14-55:13) describes the new salvation for Zion-Jerusalem. Dispersed in between are the four Servant of Yahweh Songs (42:1-4 (5-7); 49:1-5a (5b-9a); 50:4-9 (10-11); 52:13-53:12). In Part II we are told (1) Yahweh did not forget his people nor Zion (49:14-50:3). (2) Zion's restoration is certain (51:1-52:12).

Our second reading is taken from this second section. A messenger announces to the people who remained in Jerusalem the return of Yahweh to his city Jerusalem. In and with the exiles God himself returns. He is Zion's king, being their God. Since this message is so beautiful one can call the feet of the messenger beautiful.

The watchmen in Jerusalem see the messenger coming and shout for joy because now the time of the ruins of Jerusalem is over. God has bared his arm, he has freed his people from the nations.

The salvation of Zion, however, will be not just for Israel, but for all nations. All the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of God.

This is fully true with Christ's coming.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 1:1-6

Today's second reading marks the instruction exordium of the Letter to the Hebrews (1:1-4) and the first two verses of the first Part (1:5-2:18) where the author speaks about Christ who is greater than the angels.

God spoke to us in different ways (laws) and prophets, but, now he speaks to us through his own son.

2. This son is the heir of the universe, since he is the Son (Gal. 4:7).

3. He is the creator of the world.

4. He is of the same nature as the Father, since he is "the reflection of the Father's glory" and "the exact representation of the Father's being." He belongs to the Father as the rays belong to the sun; he is the exact reproduction of the Father by being generated from him.

5. The Son sustains heaven and earth.

6. He is the redeemer.

7. He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven in majesty.

8. He is superior to the angels.

a. To no angel did God say as he does to his Son: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you (Ps. 2:7)".

b. To no angel, but to his Son did God say as God said to Solomon: "I will be your father and you shall be my son (2 Sam. 7:14)."

c. As Yahweh alone is adored by angels so it will be said about the Son: "Let all the angels of God worship him. (Deut. 32:43; Ps. 97:7)."

All in all, a fine picture of what Christ incarnate is, especially the first sentence: After God has spoken to us in many different ways (and we may extend this to his revelation in creation, in the Exodus, the giving of the Mosaic Law he speaks to, us now through his Son.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: JOHN 1:1-18

The Prologue of St. John is like an overture touching upon the most important topics John will unfold in his gospel. Most scholars nowadays believe that it originally was a pre-Johannine Christian hymn on the Logos into which John inserted verses about the Baptist to show that the Baptist was only witness to the light, not the light itself and some verses of transition. If we take these verses off we get a hymn with four strophes: Str. I: Logos

1. His divinity

2. His participation in creation

Str. II Logos asarkos as life and light of men.

Str. III Logos asarkos (= Divine Word before Incarnation)
as repelled by men (in history of Jews).

Str. IV Climax: Incarnation and distribution of graces.

Here is the hypothetical original hymn (left) with the
insertions (right):

I. v. 1 In the beginning was the Word;
the Word was in God's presence,
and the Word was God.

v. 2 He was present to God in the beginning.

v. 3 Through him all things came into being,
and apart from him nothing came to be.

II. Whatever came to be,

v. 4 in him was life,
and this life was the light of men.

v. 5 The light shines in darkness
the darkness did not grasp it.

v. 6 There was a man named John
sent by God,

v. 7 who came as a witness to testify
to the light, so that through him
all men might believe —

v. 8 but only to testify to the light
for he himself was not the light,

v. 9 He was the truelight
that coming into this world
enlightens every man.

III. v. 10 He was in the world,
and the world was made through him,
and the world knew him not.

v. 11 To his own he came,
yet his own did not accept him.

- v. 12 Any who did accept him,
he empowered to become
children of God.
These are they who believe
in his name
- v. 13 who were begotten not by
blood, nor by carnal desire,
nor by man's willing it, but
by God.

IV. v. 14 And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory of an only Son
coming from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

- v. 15 John testified to him by
proclaiming: "This is he
of whom I said, "The one who
comes after me ranks ahead of
me, for he was before me."

v. 16 And of his fulness
we all received
grace succeeding grace.

- v. 17 For while the law was given
through Moses, this grace and
truth came through Christ.
- v. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is
God the only Son, ever at the
Fathers's side, who has revealed
him.

HOMILY

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH

According to the early Church, and so especially according to St. Paul the most important event in Christ's life was his death and resurrection by which he redeemed us and by which he was made Lord. The Incarnation of Christ is practically

not mentioned. For St. John it is different. He knows the common doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection and its salvific meaning. But for him God's work of salvation starts much earlier, i.e. with the revelation of the Divine Word, climaxed in the Incarnation. With Christ's Incarnation, the Word is in our midst and we have access to the Father, to all the graces.

St. John in his doctrine on the Logos, the Divine Word, is heir of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament, especially Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and Wisdom. The early Christians knew of cause these books as well. Such an early Christian community composed the hypothetical hymn on the Logos which John took over as overture for his gospel and adapted it slightly by placing some verses of transition between hymn and gospel and mainly by contrasting the Logos with the Baptist who came as witness to the light but was not the light itself. We restrict ourselves in this homily to this original hymn.

1. The first strophe speaks about the Logos' divinity and his participation in creation (1:1.3).

a. The *divinity of the Logos* is expressed more descriptively than by definition. First, we must admire John for calling the second divine person "Word". In the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament wisdom and word are sometimes (not often) used as synonyms, e.g. in Sir 24:23 after a long description of the Wisdom we have the following sentence: "All this is the book of the agreements of God, and the law that will endure forever (commandment and law are clearly synonyms for word)." What then the Old Testament says about the divine wisdom, John applies to Christ, the divine wisdom, John applies to Christ, the divine wisdom, the Divine Word, as we will see: his creative activity, his function as revealer.

In the beginning was the Word. This reminds us at Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." It was the absolute beginning of everything, when there was nothing yet and God started creating. Then the Word already *was (en)*. *En* is the Imperfect in Greek, in opposition to the Aorist *egeneto* which is used whenever a human person appears on the scene like John the Baptist: "There was a man (came a man into being) (*egeneto*) sent from God, whose name was John (Jn. 1:6)." The Word is eternal.

The Word was in God's presence the Prologue continues. The Word is thus different from the Father, a different person.

And the Word was God. This sentence makes it clear that the Word is not only eternal, not only different from the Father, but the Word is God himself.

Here we can ask ourselves, why the second person in the Trinity is called Word? John does not elaborate. But it would seem Christ is called "Word" because his work is to reveal God to men. And this is founded upon the very nature of Christ, of the Logos, the Word, the second divine person. The Father knew himself perfectly, so perfectly that this knowledge was a divine person, the Word. The Word is in a certain sense the expression of the thought of the Father. Theology affirms that the Word of God proceeds from the Father by generation. We call him Son or Word. Since the Word proceeds from the thought of the Father we may call him Son.

The Father knows himself perfectly by expressing this self-knowledge in a Word, the second divine person. And ever since the Word reveals God to us in creation. All creation is a word spoken by God that wants to be understood. And ever since the Father spoke the Word, we make ourselves available to others so that they can understand us and we in turn can understand them. Here on earth only man can speak, who is created after his image and likeness, created through the Word.

b. *The Word's participation in creation* is expressed in Jn. 1:3: First it is said positively: "Through him (the Word) all things came into being." The Divine Word is the instrumental cause for everything that exists. Only God and His Word existed long before creation. Everything else began to be (*egeneto*) at a definite time through the Word. What the first half of the verse says positively the second says negatively according to antithetical parallelism: "Apart from him (the Word) nothing came to be."

How God's Word, God's Wisdom was at God's side when he created heaven and earth is developed in the Wisdom Books, e.g. Sir. 24:3. "When he established the heavens, I was there... When he assigned to the sea its limit... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him."

2. The second strophe (1:3b-4.9) pictures the *Divine Word* before the Incarnation, called Logos asarkos, *as life and light of men*. Since the original manuscripts had no punctuations, we are not sure where the period is, i.e. after v. 3b (as we have it) or after v. 3c (and apart from his nothing came to be whatever came to be.) But taking the punctuation as in above translation (*Whatever came to be in him was life*) we get the idea that the Divine Word is the exemplary cause for everything created, especially for me. We are created and modeled after the Divine Word. We are a word in miniature. As the Divine Word expresses the Father perfectly, so we shall be completely open to the Father, listen to him and respond in perfect love. If we do not know who we are, or what we shall do, a look at the Divine Word will tell us. We have to study the Divine Word.

And this life was the light of men (1:4). *He was the true light that enlightens every man* (1:9). The Divine Word is life for us; we are life from his life. At the same time this life gives us light, showing us the way to the Father. We are never in the dark.

3. The third strophe (1:10-11) pictures the Divine Word as working in the world, especially in the history of the Jews, already before the Incarnation, but as repelled by men. It is true, some apply these verses to the Incarnate Word, but then we would not understand why the Incarnation is mentioned only in v. 14.

He was in the world, and the world knew him not (v. 10). *To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him* (v. 11). That the Divine Word was already active in the world before the Incarnation we also gather from St. Paul in 1 Cor. 10:4. The Jews in the desert were fed by the manna and were drinking from the rock, which Moses hit so that wonderful clear water came out. This rock is for St. Paul, Christ himself: "All drank the same spiritual drink (they drank from the spiritual rock that was following them, and the rock was Christ)."

4. Strophe 4 (1:14.16) brings the climax: the Incarnation and the distribution of graces.

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us full of grace and truth (v. 14) With a lapidary sentence John embraces the two extremes of Christ: He is Word, and He became (*egeneto* is now used also for the Word) *flesh* at a definite time in history. *Flesh, sarx* in Greek, may sound

harsh. But the author wants to say that Christ really became man. He did not just take an apparent body as some heretics had it. Christ comprises the two extreme: the divinity and the humanity. Thus, he is the perfect mediator between God and men. He can feel with us and he can represent us before God.

He tented among us (1:14) Christ's stay on earth was relatively short as one lives only shortly in tents.

He was full grace and truth. In him God's mercy (grace) is personified. More love he could not have shown to us than to send his only Son into this world. Thus, he is reliable to his promises, full of truth. God reveals himself in the Word Incarnate as love, as divine reality and fidelity.

And of his fulness we all received grace succeeding grace (v. 16). The Divine Word is not stingy. He is fulness by nature, since he has everything the Father has. And thus, we can all get a share without diminishing his fulness. One grace of the Divine Word is greater than the other: His revelation in nature, his speaking through the Prophets and now finally his Incarnation. Of all these graces we receive a share.

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH (December 26, 1982)

Today the Church proposes the holy Family Jesus, Mary and Joseph as model of all family and societal life. As we saw, the first and second reading for the years A, B, and C, are the same. Only the gospel is different in each year. As Jesus, so we are born and raised up in a human family. The first reading is a commentary of the fourth commandment: "Honor your father and mother, especially when they are old." The second reading tells us: "Bear with one another, forgive and love one another; husband and wife — parents and children!" The will of the Father must be the directive of our family and personal life, even if we should not understand it (gospel).

FIRST READING: SIRACH 3:2-6.12-14 (in Greek, thus NAB)

The first reading comments on the fourth commandment to honor father and mother so that we may have a long life (Ex. 20:12). Long life was for a Jew in the Old Testament, who did not know much about life hereafter, the highest good.

In the strict sense, of course, only Christ atones for sins. But one can say that love of one's parents make up for many other sins.

Singled out is especially that children shall do good to parents, especially when they are old, when their minds fail, or if they should become senile. More details on December 28, 1980.

SECOND READING: COLOSSIANS 3:12-21

Much of the material is pre-Christian and pre-Pauline, which the apostle adapted and raised up, especially the "Haustafeln" (= household code which lists various members of the family and society and their respective duties in 3:18-21).

v. 12: In a family and in any community we shall show heartfelt *mercy, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.*

v. 13: We must *bear with one another, forgive one another* as Christ has forgiven and forgives us.

v. 14: Above all we must put *love* which keeps everything in the right position as a belt holds up the clothes so that one does not stumble.

v. 15: The result is *peace.*

v. 16: We must *listen to Christ's word,* and

v. 17: Do everything in the name of Jesus.

vv. 18-21: The household code probably derived from Stoic teaching via Hellenistic Judaism and passed into Greek-speaking Christianity.

— Wives be submissive to your husband! The apostle adds: "This is your duty in the Lord."

— But more important is: "Husband, love your wives! Avoid any bitterness towards them."

— "Children obey your parents!" But the apostle adds:

— Fathers, do not nag your children, lest they lose heart." For more details see December 28, 1981.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 2:41-52

This pericope, proper to Luke, marks the end of the infancy narrative in the third gospel, being the complementary episode to the second diptych of John's and Jesus' birth (Lk. 1:57-

2:52), telling us the finding of Jesus in the Temple (2:41-52), as we had a similar complementary episode for the first diptych of the annunciation of John's and Jesus' birth (1:5-56), telling us about the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (1:39-56).

And yet this pericope is in many ways different and is not prepared in the previous pericopes, as the visit of Mary with Elizabeth is for instance. According to literary form it is a biographical apophthegm: the illustration of a saying, the first Christological saying in the gospels. Jesus reveals himself in the Temple: "I must be in my Father's house." It is the only incident breaking the gospel silence of "the hidden years" of Jesus. In opposition to apocryphal gospels Mary and Joseph presume Jesus to act as any normal boy and would act. Luke does not, as apocryphal gospels do multiply all kinds of extravagant miracles, or as the pages of the boyhood accounts of other ancient heroes do: Cyrus, Alexander, Apolonius, or Moses.

The parents of Jesus go every year to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Ex. 23:14-17; 34:23f; Deut. 16:16f prescribed that every adult male Jew made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the three major feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Custom excused those who lived at a distance from all but the Passover. The rabbis were not in agreement whether or not women and children were required to make the pilgrimage (Strack-Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 2, 141-142). According to the Talmud (*Niddah* V, 6a) a boy reached manhood at the age of thirteen. But usually Jews would let a boy observe the custom of pilgrimage already a year earlier so that he would easily grow into the custom. This is what Jesus does.

The Passover feast lasted one week (Lev. 23:5-6). Nobody had to stay the whole week in Jerusalem. Required was only that nobody would leave before the second day of the feast. The Holy Family does more and stays the whole week.

It was custom to travel in groups. Thus, it could happen that neither Joseph nor Mary noticed that Jesus was not there, assuming him to be in a different group. There were about 120 km. from Jerusalem to Nazareth, the direct way, thus about three to four days.

Returning to Jerusalem which took the second day, they look for Jesus the third day and find him in the Temple.

HOMILY

CHRIST DOING THE FATHER'S WILL — CHRIST SUBJECT TO HIS PARENTS

As long as children are young, education problems are in most cases relatively small. Children accept the authority of parents without questioning them. They know that whatever they are and have they owe their parents. Parents have only the best of their children in mind.

Things become different in most cases as soon as the children become of age. Often enough parents in the eyes of the children are no longer the ones who are everything and know everything well. Rather they appear old-fashioned, out of tune with the time, people who want everything done their way, persons with whom one cannot or can only with difficulty discuss problems. And so children often prefer not going home, or talk things over with their friends, not with their parents. And may be one good day they even run away from home to the great surprise and sorrow of their parents. The result is: Parents do not know what to do. Parents do not understand their children and children do not understand their parents.

1. Can we learn something in such situations from the Holy Family? The New Testament does not want to give us a psychological picture of Jesus. Jesus is true God and true man. How can we claim to understand his behavior? The Bible does not give us a life of Christ. And so we can only try to understand what Luke wants to tell us in the gospel of today.

2. Children grow up in a family and learn to do God's will almost playingly, by getting used to a good custom. Such a good custom is for Jesus to participate in the pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the Feast of the Passover. He does it for the first time a year ahead of the prescribed age so that next year it would be quite easy for him. But then something unexpected happens: Jesus stays behind in the Temple without telling his parents anything. They notice his absence only the first evening when they want to take quarter for the nights, since it was custom to march in groups and so each parent could think Jesus was in the other group. Not finding Jesus, Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem. On the third day they find him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

3. Would not all parents expect their children to tell them about their plans, especially if the plans deviated from those of the parents. It would seem that Mary and Joseph thought the same way about their son Jesus. One can almost hear the disappointment of Mary and Joseph that Jesus failed to do this: "Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow (Lk. 2:48)?"

4. The parents do not scold Jesus. They only ask a question. They remain in dialogue. An answer of Jesus could clear off the difficulty. — To remain in dialogue will be in most cases the way to remove misunderstandings between parents and children. Arguing and scolding will make things worse. An even worse it is if parents tell children not to come home any more. The door should always remain open.

5. Christ's answer is unexpected: "Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house (Lk. 2:49)?" If Jesus caused his parents a lot of anxiety as Mary's answer implies, would it not have been normal for him to answer: "Sorry, mother, sorry, father, I did not mean to cause you any anxiety." Instead, Jesus gives the above answer, which his parents do not understand. It is good that Luke clearly says so: "They did not grasp what he said to them (Lk. 2:50)." The Father's will stand in the center of Christ's life. And although his earthly father Joseph, his foster-father, stands in front, Jesus Christ refers to God as his father. With this the parenthood of Joseph and Mary turns into the background, at least for a moment. How could the parents of Jesus understand that now where their son was of age was claimed back by his heavenly Father, that he now could start his public career as Messiah, preaching the good news.

6. They did not understand, for Luke clearly says so. The parents were disappointed since they did not understand Jesus' behavior. And Jesus must have been disappointed since his parents failed to understand why he behaved the way he did. For the first time Christ's divinity shines true. Whatever Mary understood at the annunciation about Christ's divinity, judging from today's pericope we have to assume that she had to grow into this mystery slowly.

7. And thus Luke hurries to add: "His mother meanwhile kept all these things (*dietērei*) in her heart (Lk. 2:51). This or a similar expression Luke adds, whenever there is a word Mary does not understand. So when she is deeply troubled by the angel's greetings "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter"

(Lk. 1:28). Thus she deliberates (*dielegizeto*), wonders, what this greeting means (1:29). — And when the shepherds bring the message of the angels: "Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests" (Lk. 2:14)," Mary again is surprised. How can she understand the importance of the birth of her son that deeply. But again, Luke adds: Mary treasured all these things (*synetērei*) and reflected on them (*sympallousa*) in her heart (2:19). And finally after a woman praises Jesus after he cast out a devil by praising his mother: Blest is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you (Lk. 11:27)," Jesus answers by outlining the real greatness of Mary which did not consist so much in her natural motherhood but in her faith: "Blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it (*phyllassonates*) (Lk. 11:29)."

8. It is obvious that here the exemplarity of Jesus' behavior has its limits. A son or a daughter could not refer to Jesus when he or she does something his or parents do not understand. The only thing that is binding all of us equally is the will of God. As long as a child is honestly looking for God's will in his decision for the future profession and vocation, in her decision for the marriage partner he and she refer to Christ, but only then if God's will it, the last motive. And parents equally must try to ascertain God's will for the career of their children.

9. Hardly has Luke pictured Jesus as completely different from his parents, he makes him completely human again, when the evangelist adds: "He (Jesus) went down with them (his parents) then, and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them (Lk. 2:51)." Was it as a recompensation for their meekness, in order to make up for the hardship? Was it in order to show the importance of Christ's hidden life? It is one of the greatest mysteries which we will only later understand why Christ spent most of his earthly years in that small village of Nazareth, certainly more than thirty years and spent only one to three years for his public preaching. Most of us would have done it the other way around. Great things grow in stillness. And simple obedience has shaped characters.

10. "Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men (Lk. 2:52) is the last sentence of the infancy narrative in Luke. In a similar way Luke had said it already after Jesus returned from the presentation in the Temple (Lk. 2:40). As already mentioned,

it will not be easy for us to reconcile both statements, the one in the Temple and this last sentence of the pericope. But for Luke they were no contradiction. And thus we have to assume that even a God-man could grow in wisdom. And for us, today on the feast of the Sacred Family it is important to see that Jesus grew in a family and thus we must do the same.

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD (January 1, 1983)

The Octave Day of Christas received a new title and thus a new accent, the divine motherhood of Our Lady. The main thrust however is still the birth of Christ in which the saving act of God is inaugurated. In civil life it is the beginning of the new year. Pope Paul VI made the day of prayer for peace.

All three readings are the same for cycle A, B, and C. In the son born of a woman (second reading), Mary, who named Him Jesus (gospel), who is Yahweh, we are blessed (first reading) and made sons (second reading).

FIRST READING: NUMBERS 6:22-27

This very old blessing was said by priests (v. 23). within a sanctuary, in an act of worship (so Ps. 118:26) or when the participants were dismissed (2 Sam. 6:18; Lev. 9:22). *God* lastly blesses us (v. 27). For details see January 1, 1981.

SECOND READING: GALATIANS 4:4-7

This passage is a pre-Pauline credal formula which Paul expanded by the words: "born under the law to redeem those under the law" which was a particular preoccupation of the Apostle. This leaves us with the formula:

God sent forth his Son

— born of a woman —

so that we might receive our status as adopted sons.
The Son was sent that we might become sons in the fulness of time. Here we have in nutshell the importance of Christ's birth at Christmas. Christ became human through a human birth that we might be elevated to divine sonship in him.

God's Son is born of a woman. Mary is not mentioned by name, but here we have the first reference to her in Scripture. She is the mother of God, the *theotokos* as later theologians would call her, especially at the council of Ephesus (431 A.D.).

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 2:16-21

This is the same gospel as the one of the Christmas Mass at dawn with the difference that it starts at verse 16 instead of verse 15, and that it goes on to include verse 21, the circumcision and naming of Christ. This is the climactic verse of today's reading. By wanting to be circumcised, Christ placed himself under the law (Gal. 4:4) and he received the name "Jesus" = God (Yahweh) saves, who blesses us (Num. 6:24-27).

For details see January, 1981.

As we saw last year, the homily could meditate on (1) The Son of God, born of Mary makes us sons (as we did January 1980); (2) the meaning of blessing, suggested by the first reading; (3) freedom from the law, proposed by the second reading; (4) the concept of "name" as suggested by the first reading and the gospel (as we did last year). (5) Suggested by the fact that we start a new year and the second reading, we meditate today on the meaning of time. Christ came when the time was fulfilled (Gal. 4:4).

HOMILY

OUR "TODAY" HAS COME

We have started a new civil year. It is true, this is not a new liturgical year. Yet the civil year is so uppermost in our mind that practically everybody today thinks of it. Taking the lead of a word in today's second reading: "When the time was fulfilled, Christ was born of the woman," (Gal. 4:4) we meditate on the importance of time.

Man lives his life in time, and in changing times. The Bible, the revelation of the revelation of the transcendent God, begins and ends with a reference to time: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1)," and "Amen, I come

quickly (Rev. 22:20)." Thus God is not understood in an abstract manner in the Bible, in His eternal essence, as it is the case with Plato and Aristotle, but in His intervention here below which make the history of the world a sacred history.

I. *Cosmic Time*

In Greek and Roman mythology the gods and goddesses are part of the primordial time. The gods included in one beginning with the entire cosmos as if they were themselves only imperfectly withdrawn from the category of time. A struggle had caused the gods to come to blows, and the appearance of the world and of men was the final result of this struggle.

In Genesis, however, the transcendence of God is affirmed in a radical fashion: "In the beginning God created (Gen. 1:1)." There is our time, which is good like the rest of creation. But at this time God already existed. What unrolls in time and then directs the destiny of man with regard to a mysterious end. With the universe God also creates time. He himself lives in eternity, beyond time.

1. *Measures of time.* God the creator has established the rhythms which nature obeys: the alternation of day and night (Gen. 1:5), the moments of the stars which command one another (1:4), and the recurrence of the seasons (8:22). The fact that these cycles recur at regular intervals is a sign of the order which He has put in His creation (cf. Sir. 43). All peoples have taken these cycles as a basis for the measurement of time. The Old Testament knows the solar and the lunar calendar. The divisions of the year into twelve months corresponds to the solar cycle. But the month, by its name and divisions, follows the lunar cycle since it begins by the new moon (Sir. 43:6ff).

2. *Sacralization of time.* For the Priestly Source (P) in Gen. 1 cosmic time is not a purely profane thing. God places sun, moon, and the stars as "sanctuary lights", as it were, into the universe. The sun shall govern the day, the smaller lights govern the night (Gen. 1:6; Ps. 136:7-8). As a matter of fact, even for the pagans the cycles were sacred because they thought divine powers ruled them and called the Sunday (day of the sun), Monday (day of the moon), Tuesday (day of Zeus), etc. The Priestly Source wants to tell us that God created

everything with great sovereignty. And since Christ's resurrection there is only *one* day: Easter, the day of Christ's resurrection and thus Sunday, and everyday is a little Easter.

A tree grows in many annual rings, and so man matures year after a little more. That rhythm of day and night, week and week, month and month, year and year is beneficial. And with this sentiments we accept this new year 1983. This does not hinder that at times we also feel the monotony of time.

II. *Historical Time*

1. *Cosmic cycles and historical time*

As we saw, cosmic time is of a cyclic nature. History, however does not obey the law of eternal return. It is fundamentally oriented by the design of God which is unveiled and manifested in it. It is marked by events which have a unique character and which are not repeated and are deposited in the memories of men. And so mankind becomes capable of progress. Historical time has its own measures and important events. In primitive Israel it was measured by the generations, called *Toledoth*, as we see it in the Book of Genesis. Beginning with the monarchy, time was reckoned in *reigns* and later with *eras*. In history, therefore, is an upward line, our life and the history of mankind goes up to a certain fulfillment.

2. *The time of Jesus, the fullness of time.*

World history comes to a climax with Christ's birth. "When the appointed time (fulness of time) came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law to redeem the subjects of the Law (Gal. 4:4)." "God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship (Eph. 1:9-10)."

3. *The time of the Church.*

Everything was made through the Word (Jn. 1:2), already in the beginning (Jn. 1:1; Gen. 1:1), and He should be the head of mankind. Time has therefore a unique function for everybody. Our life is placed in a definite span of time. The decisive event of time has come in Jesus. Nevertheless,

it has not yet borne all its fruits. The last time has only begun, and from the resurrection onward it is expanded in a way which the prophets had not explicitly foreseen. It is the time of the Church, the time of the Spirit (Jn. 16:5-15; Rom. 8:15ff) the time in which the gospel is proclaimed. And just as in the Old Testament, the plan of salvation unrolled in accordance with the mysterious will of God, so the time of the Church also obeys a certain plan. There will be (1) *a time of the pagans* including two aspects: (a) On the one hand, "Jerusalem (symbol of all the ancient Israel) will be trampled by the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24). (b) On the other hand, these same pagans will gradually be converted to the gospel (Rom. 11:25). (2) Finally there will come the *time of Israel*: then in turn "all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26), and then will come the end. Such, in its complete unfolding, is the mystery of time which covers all human history. Jesus, who dominates it, is alone capable of opening the book with the seven seals in which the destinies of the world have been written (Rev. 5).

The time of the Church is of itself sacred from the very fact that it belongs to the "future world". Nonetheless, it is clear that in order to be effective the *sacralization of time* by men must be marked by *visible signs*, the "*sacred times*" and the *religious feasts*. Christ's coming is the unique historical event which the Church actualizes again and again on Sundays, the day of the Lord (Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Today again we have come together for this day of the Lord.

4. Our "today"

Historical time means unique time, never to return. The Book of Deuteronomy is very much interested in this "today". All in all we find it seventy times. "Hear O Israel, the statutes and ordinances which I speak in your hearing this day and you shall learn them and be careful to do them (Deut. 4:1)." "Know that Yahweh your God is the true God, the faithful God who keeps the covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments . . . which I command you this day (Deut. 7:9-11). In the hearing of the word that is proclaimed today and in his contemplation of the history of the fathers, man's decision about his future is made. It is the unique "today" given to everybody. "Today when we hear his voice we must act and not harden our heart (Ps. 95:8).

The New Testament calls this unique "today" the *kairos*, the unique time span assigned and given to us. Thus, John says: "The time (*kairos*) is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand and we must turn to Christ (do penance) (Mk. 1:15).

This time, this today is the time of salvation, as Jesus tells Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to this house (Lk. 19:9)," the time we must act and use well to workout our salvation. It is only short.

We started the year of salvation 1983. We ask the Lord for the grace to use it well to accomplish what he has assigned to us in our life.

(For details of these thoughts see: Hans Walter Wolff. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 83-92).

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (January 2, 1983)

The Feast of the Epiphany originated in the East (when one looks from Rome). Originally it was a commemoration of the Lord's baptism which was the first epiphany — appearance, self-manifestation of the Lord. Later came the second epiphany over the water of Cana changed into wine. And when the feast spread to the West, it became primarily a commemoration of the revealing of Jesus to the magi. It is the feast of the universal Church. In the persons of the magi the first non-Jews come to the Lord who reveals himself to them (gospel). The prophecy of Isaiah 60 (first reading) is starting to be fulfilled: "They all (nations) gather together, they come to you." Yes, in Christ the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body (second reading).

Since all three readings are the same in the years A, B, C, all three readings were explained in 1980 and 1981, we shall restrict ourselves to a summary.

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 60:1-6

Trito Isaiah (Is. 56-66) encourages the returned exiles that the promised salvation would come in spite of all obstacles and the slow rebuilding of the Temple, if people would only be truly pious.

The first reading consists of two parts: (1) Is. 60:1-3: Through the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, light has come and the glory of the Lord has been revealed. This is even more true with the Incarnation of Christ which replaces the return from Babylon and inaugurates God's act of salvation. (2) Is. 60:4-6: This return of the Jews is followed by an eschatological pilgrimage of the Gentiles to Jerusalem that will follow the rebuilding of the city. This promise is going to be initially fulfilled with the coming of the magi.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 3:2-3a.5-6

The doctrinal part of Ephesians (Eph. 1:3-3:21) speaks about the mystery of the recapitulation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. And this is in line with the mystery of Epiphany. From all eternity God has decreed to pull down the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:15) by the death of Christ. In Him all nations shall have access to the Father (2:18). The mystery shall now be proclaimed in the gospel (3:3). It has been revealed to the Apostle and it is his privilege to proclaim the gospel: "In Christ Jesus, the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the gospel" (3:6).

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: MATTHEW 2:1-12

This gospel represents midrashic history: by reflecting on especially Old Testament texts, the evangelist tries to picture Christ as the true Moses and the true Israel (Jacob): as Moses was almost killed by Pharaoh but escaped by divine protection so Jesus the true Moses escaped the hands of King Herod. There is an historical nucleus in the pericope; the small details, however, are more used to make a theological point than to give us information about the exact when and where of history.

Under Herod the Great (thus before 4 B.C. when Herod died) *magi* (wise men, sages, experts of astronomy) followed a supernatural phenomenon (the star does not seem to be a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in 7 B.C., since it does not behave like a star) and come from the east (Mt. 2:1). That could be Persia, since the name "magi" originated there. It could be Babylonia because of the knowledge of the stars. It could be Arabia because of the gifts which are often found there. Matthew was not interested in these questions.

The number of the three magi has been concluded from the three gifts. Popular piety only has made them kings applying to them Ps. 72:10 and Is. 60:3. The names Gaspar, Melchor and Balthasar go only back to the sixth century.

The inquiry of the sages about a newborn king cause great disturbance in Herod because of fear for his throne and for the people because of fear of a new outbreak of wrath of Herod.

Herod summons the chief priests and scribes and gets the information of Micah 5:1 combined with 2 Sam. 5:2: "And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel (Mt. 2:6)."

Undisturbed by hostility and indifference the sages go on to Bethlehem, find the child and Mary, do him homage, offer him gifts and following the advice given in a dream they return home by another way.

HOMILY

PEOPLE AROUND THE CRIB

On the Feast of Epiphany the Lord revealed himself for the first time to non-Jews. The magi were the first non-Jews to find the way to the crib. They came after the Jewish shepherds. It is rewarding to meditate a little on the people around the crib: on those who found the way to Jesus and those who did not.

I. There are first those who could and should have gone to Bethlehem, but did not.

1. *Herod the Great* was one of those invited to the crib. But he did not go.

a. World history has been generous to him, giving him the name "the Great", which only few figures in history received. He was a good organizer, it is true. He had a passion and talent for building. He was even pious. But his piety was not sincere. It was more a matter of politics than of religion. He built the new Temple not really because he wanted to worship Yahweh there but because being an Idumean, a half-Jew, he

wanted to win over the Jews. He was scrupulous not to eat pig-meat as it was forbidden for Jews in the Law (Lev. 11:7; Deu. 14:8). But he would have no scruples to kill almost anybody so that his friend Augustus in Rome coined the play on words: "I would rather like to be a pig (*hys* in Greek) than a son (*hysios* in Greek) of Herod."

b. That leads us to his second fault: He was power hungry and jealous. He did not want to share his authority with anybody. Whomever he suspected as a possible danger to his throne he would remove and kill: his brother-in-law Aristobulus (35 B.C.), his uncle and brother-in-law Josephus (34 B.C.), Hycanus II, the grandfather of his wife Marianne (30 B.C.), his wife Marianne (29), his mother-in-law Alexandra (28), his sons Alexander and Arisrobulus (7) and his oldest son Antipater, few days before his own death in 4 B.C.

Superficial and external piety which is done more to please others than the Lord will not do to find Christ. Holding on to one's own positions and building up one's own little kingdom will not leave any room for Christ. Herod even tried to kill Jesus, but missed him. Yet, he killed him in the sense that he never saw eye to eye with him. The Lord may invite us at times. But if we make our own regulations and conditions of how to meet him, we may miss him altogether.

2. The *Pharisees* and *Scribes* had all the chances to go to the crib. (a.) They knew Scripture well. They had studied the word of God for years and could even quote where the Messiah would be born: "You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel (Micah 5:1'1:4)." But the knowledge, did not move them. It was only information for them, not a message that stimulated them to act according to the insight.

The main purpose of studying Scripture shall not be to become an expert in certain details, although we shall study according to our talents. The main purpose shall be to meet the Lord and get to love him. It must not be a dead knowledge, mere information so that we could win a contest on quotations on Scripture. Rather, it must move us to action as any message does. Mere information does not suffice.

The Scribes thought, they knew it all and they could not find anything new in Scripture. This way they did not find the Lord. If we shall find the Lord and find him in Scripture

in particular, we have to have a certain awe, a conviction that we know very little yet, that Scripture is infinite and that we can always find new meaning, that we will find the Lord by digging deeper.

b. The Scribes refused to be guides to Jesus, they gave mere information: "Go to Bethlehem, straight ahead toward the south seven kilometers. Follow your nose, you cannot miss it," they told the magi. They refused to go along and thus never found Christ.

We must do ourselves what we tell others. Only then things become clear to us, only then do we find the Lord. By guiding others we guide ourselves. A message, not a mere information, given others will become a message for ourselves.

II. And there are those who found the way to Bethlehem.

1. The shepherd were the first.

a. They were doing their ordinary daily or nightly work, watching over their sheep when the angels approached them and told them the good news of Christ's birth.

To be busy with our daily work and doing it faithfully is usually the best preparation to meet the Lord. And so it was not hard to convince the shepherds to go to the crib: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us (Lk. 2:13)", they say. So they did not delay and went in haste (Lk. 2:16). They did make long objections but acted.

Good News wants to be shared. The best way of keeping our faith is to spread it: The shepherds reported to all around the crib what they had heard from the angels: By the birth of this child God is honored in heaven, his glory is revealed, and all people whom he has chosen will receive peace (Lk. 2:14). They are not scandalized by the humble appearance of the child, wrapped in swaddling clothes (Lk. 2:12), but rather seeing the child they understand the message of the angels (Lk. 2:17).

Sharing the good insights God gives us, the insights will become deeper. Our faith will not stagnate. Any instrument, any car that is used regularly will stay in good condition. But if it is not used regularly, it soon will rust and be out of order.

c. The shepherds were simple, uneducated people. And yet they were educated in the best sense, putting their knowledge into action, turning it into love of the Lord. Any knowledge, small or big is as good as it becomes love.

2. The wise men were the second group that found the way to the crib. a. Again they were called doing their ordinary job as experts of the stars. Most prophets, most men of God, including the apostles were called during their professional work. If we want to find the Lord, we will find him while doing our professional work.

b. In contrast to the shepherds, they were learned people. But both had in common that they returned everything they had to the Lord, admitting that all they had and were, they had accepted from God, that they were open to God's message who speaks in a language we can understand.

c. The magi were not held back by the indifference of the scribes nor by the hostility of Herod. But they went, following the God-given insight.

3. And there was *Mary*. She had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus her child was the Son of the Most High. But she had to grow into this mystery also, she had to believe that this little child was the Son of God.

a. She was not just physically the mother of Jesus, but became mother by her faith. Especially Luke stresses again and again how Mary was listening to God's word. When the angel appeared to her and told her: "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women (Lk. 1:28)", she was deeply troubled, since she could not understand how she could be daughter of Zion. But she wondered, she deliberated (*dielogizeto*) what this greeting meant (Lk. 1:29).

b. And so again when the first preachers of the good news in the New Testament, the shepherds come to her and report everything they have heard from the angels, as we saw above, it is sad: "All who heard it were astonished at the report given them by the shepherds (Lk. 2:18)." But Luke adds: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart (Lk. 2:19)."

4. What is our reaction? Are we open when the Lord calls us? Who is our model of those around the crib?

FEAST OF THE LORD'S BAPTISM
(January 9, 1983)

For the Eastern Church Christ's life was (theologically speaking) a series of ephiphanies (revelation) of which the baptism of the Lord was the first and most important one. Since in the West the story of the magi was so popular, the baptism of Christ could only take the place of the following Sunday, which is now the first Sunday of the year.

The first and second reading of the cycles A, B, and C are the same. Only the gospel is different each year, but different only in the sense that the same report of Christ's baptism is taken from the parallel report of the three Synoptic gospels, this year from Luke. Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by the Baptist (gospel) in order to take upon himself the sins of mankind and to be revealed as the Son of God and thus start his public career as Servant of Yahweh. This was foretold by Isaiah 42 (first reading) and outlined by Peter (Acts 10:35-43) in his speech in the house of Cornelius (second reading).

Since the new *Ordo Lectionum Missae* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981) one may also take *ad libitum* Is. 40:1-5.9-11 as first reading and Titus 2:1-14; 3:4-7 as second reading. This first reading is also taken as first reading of the 2nd Sunday of Advent, year B, and the second reading is taken in the Midnight Mass at Christmas year A, B, and C (Titus 2:11-14) and in the Mass at dawn (years A, B, and C) (Tit. 3:4-7).

All lessons have been explained in the indicated places. Here is just a summary of the lessons *ad libitum*.

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 42:1-4.6-7. AD LIBITUM
ISAIAH 40:15-9-11

Deutero Isaiah, an anonymous prophet during the last years of the Babylonian exile (587-538), delivered his message to fellow exiles in the captivity (Is. 40-55). The first part opens with an Introduction (Is. 40:1-11), announcing the return from exile. He shall comfort his people with the good news of return (40:1).

He hears a voice of a herald going ahead of the king (v.3) in the desert. When the Israelites return from Babylon to Jerusalem, a way has to be made through the desert. That

means hills have to be levelled, valleys to be filled with soil. A road shall be built for Yahweh, the king, from Babylon to Jerusalem (v. 4).

Yahweh returns on this way, taking Israel along as booty of triumph, in a second exodus (v. 5).

Again the prophet hears a voice telling him to preach (v. 6), although he is only like grass (vv. 6-8). He shall tell Zion (Jerusalem) to go up on a high mountain (v. 9) and proclaim that Yahweh is there, returning with power to Jerusalem (v. 10). He is like a good shepherd carrying the sheep in his arms (v. 11).

**SECOND READING: ACTS 10:34-38. AD LIBITUM:
TITUS 2:11-14; 3:4-7**

This is the good news: God has appeared; in particular his grace (Titus 2:11), his kindness and love (3:4), in the person of Christ in order to save us (2:11). Thus we can forsake all worldly desires (2:12) and can live with prudence (which has everything under perfect control), justice (giving both to God and men that which is their due) and reverence (making us live in the awareness that this world is a temple of God) (2:12). We live from the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ (2:13).

And repeating it again with slightly different words the apostle states: Christ has redeemed us and has made us his people that wants to do what is right (2:14).

Christ *appeared* (3:4). The result is: He has put us into a new relationship with God, which is a grace and a gift from God nobody can deserve, coming from God's kindness and goodness (3:4-5). In concrete, we are saved by baptism (3:5), which gives us a new birth through the renewal of the Holy Spirit (3:5). By this regeneration which is the only reincarnation possible (not the one people sometimes speak of) we become heirs of eternal life already now, although we still hope (3:7).

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 3:15-16.21-22

This year we read the account of the baptism of Jesus according to the third Synoptic gospel: Luke. He has the shortest report of the baptism. As we saw, Christ's baptism

shows (1) how Jesus, although he is without sin, places himself in line with all the sinners to take away symbolically (later on in reality) the sin of mankind. (2) At the same time Christ's baptism marks the inauguration of the public ministry of Jesus with clear divine approval: A voice from heaven (the Father) is heard: You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests (Lk. 3:16)."

Luke, the good stylist, has in this case a very poor sentence: Now it came to pass when all the people had been baptized, Jesus also having been baptized and being in prayer (present tense), that heaven was opened..." He stresses more the humiliation of the baptism, and diminishes a little bit the glory after the baptism by reporting the event so briefly and omitting the note that Jesus went out of the water immediately (as Mark has it). He is the evangelist of the passion.

Jesus is *praying* when the Holy Spirit comes. Luke seems to connect the marvelous event with this prayer, thus making it a little more human. Luke, the evangelist of prayer, tells us that Christ *begins* His public life with prayer. Prayer is not something that comes occasionally, but something that must direct our life. With prayer we must start the day, every important action.

The Spirit descends in *bodily form* (so only Luke). This is an additional proof that the event probably was a public demonstration from heaven of the character of Jesus (and not merely an interior vision of Jesus or of Jesus and John). Was it an animal? Or was it rather a special light with the form of a dove? Most would prefer the latter. Others think of Hosea 11:1 and Ps. 68:14: The dove represents the new people of Israel, the eschatological community, which is now going to be established by Christ. The Holy Spirit enables Christ to start his public career as Messiah as he enabled the prophets and Judges.

HOMILY

THE LORD APPEARED

Of the two sense organs man has: eye and ear, the ear is stressed much more than the eye in the Bible, the hearing much more than the seeing. Again and again we will find the expression: "Listen, Israel!" But hardly ever does the expression

occur "See, Israel!" We are here on earth more to hear when God speaks to us than to see. The seeing is reserved for eternity, when we will see God as he is.

And yet in certain key passages it is said that God *appeared*, as we have it in today's second reading (Titus 2:11.13; 3:4). Here the term *epiphanein* is used, which has become the technical term for the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. And the baptism of Christ was the first and most important epiphany, i.e., revelation. In this homily we want to meditate a little on how God has revealed himself in his Word, his Second Divine Person, from the beginning of creation till he finally appeared in his Incarnation and his life on earth so that John in 1 Jn. 1:1 can write as purpose of his writings, especially of course of his gospel: "This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched we speak of the word of life."

I. *Nature, the appearance of God*

1. God is distinct from man and high above him. He is transcendent. But he has revealed himself in a world, he has created the sensible and the visible by a word, by the divine Word. And this is so because God the Father knew himself so perfectly that this self-knowledge is divine person, the Divine Word. Thus God goes on revealing himself in his Divine Word, the second person in the Blessed Trinity.

2. The invisible God becomes visible in his creation. The Father created everything through the Divine Word as we see it stated in some Wisdom Books: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, established the heavens by understanding... When he established the heavens I was there, when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep. When he made firm the skies above, when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth (Proverbs 3:19; 8:27-30). John in his prologue formulates it this way: "Through him (the Divine Logos) all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be. Whatever came to be in him was life (Jn. 1:3-4)." And so we can even understand the report of Genesis as this Divine Word by which the Father created everything. "God said, "Let there be light and there was light... God said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters... God said," Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place and let the dry

land appear (Gen. 1:3.6.9)." It is true, "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host (Ps. 33:6)."

3. The result is that everything visible is good; man is even very good (Gen. 1:31). The material world is not a degradation and fall as it is for a Platonist and a Neo-Platonist. For such a Greek philosopher one must go out and turn away from the sensible in order to know the intelligible. The sensible world is only a shadow. Concrete reality bears no message. — In the Bible however, all things visible are meaningful and and all creation is a discourse with a vocabulary everyone can understand, because they are created by the Divine Word. In a true way the invisible God is visible in his creation.

4. Thus, we understand why all visible things can and shall be a symbol to understand the transcendent God. The gratuity of rain, for instance, recalls the gratuity of the word of God and its almost infallible fertility: "And I will make them a blessing round about my hill and I will send down the rain... there shall be showers of blessing" (Ez. 34:26). "As the rain comes down from heaven and makes the earth fertile so shall my word be... It shall not return to me void (Is. 55:10)." Salt preserves everything, makes it tasty and clean. Thus the apostle gives the advice: "Let your speech, while always attractive, be seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer (Col. 4:6)." The Church has taken over this language of the signs into her liturgy for the sacraments. Since we are dirty with sins, we have to be washed clean by the water of baptism. Since we live God's own divine life since baptism, that life has to grow. And as our natural life grows by eating bread, food, this divine life has to grow by taking Eucharistic bread and drinking consecrated wine. As sportsmen use oil for strengthening purposes, we anoint an ordinand during the sacrament of ordination and anoint a sick during his sickness that he may be fortified.

5. St. Paul elaborates how the visible creation is the guide to the invisible creator so that nobody is excused who does not find God: "Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made. Therefore, these men (who do not know God) are inexcusable (Rom. 1:20)."

6. That same apostle goes on telling us that this Divine Word, Jesus Christ was already working in the history of the chosen people before the Incarnation when he explained how

the Jews in the desert were eating the manna and were drinking water from the rock. And Paul goes on saying: "And the rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4)."

John expresses the same idea in his prologue: "To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him (Jn. 1:11)," which according to many scholars refers to the Divine Word before the Incarnation since the Incarnation is referred to only in Jn. 1:14.

Thus we see, there is nothing bad in matter, inasmuch as God has made it, inasmuch as it is the manifestation of the invisible God, inasmuch as it is a sign that leads us to a fuller understanding of the transcendent God. But it becomes only if we take matter as something absolute. There is unity between matter and spirit.

II. *The human body, the human person is an appearance of the invisible God.* Lastly again, because we are created by the Divine Word. For a Platonist, the body is only the prison of the soul. Flight from the body is the only way for a soul to become like God. For a man of the Bible even union of man and woman are a knowledge: "Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain (Gen. 4:1)" is no euphemism but reality. For a Greek philosopher, man consists of body and soul. There is dischotomy.

1. But for the Bible the man is either *basar*, *sarx*, flesh, or he is *ruah*, *pneuma*, spirit. But flesh does not just mean "flesh", even less a "fleshly" person, but the whole human person as he is as such good since God makes him. Thus Adam can exalt when God creates Eve, his partner for life: "This is now finally flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone (Gen. 2:23). "She is the other half of Adam, the better half, so that Adam is no longer alone.

Then of course flesh has the connotation of frailty, limitation. So when the psalmist says: 'He (God) remembered that they (men) were flesh, a passing breath that returns not. (Ps. 78:39)."

But flesh stands for sinfulness only if and when man relies on his being flesh only and forgets that he is also spirit.

2. Man is also spirit, spirit from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. And since this is so we can do "all things in him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:14)." Especially St. Paul unfolds

this supernatural dimension of man. The spirit is that within man which permits an encounter with the Spirit of God: "The Spirit becomes witness with our spirits that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16)."

III. Christ's Incarnation and his life on earth are *the* epiphany, *the* appearance of God among us. Having seen and heard him we have seen and heard the Father. This is the good news of Christmas, the good news of the Feast of the Epiphany and the Sunday of the baptism of Christ. It was a relatively short appearance. And so John wrote down what he saw that we could profit from his vision. Reading the gospel we can hear Christ and in a sense see him, if we have faith. The appearance of Christ goes on.

FEAST OF THE SANTO NIÑO
Proper Feast in the Philippines
(January 16, 1983)

The beginning of Christianity in the Philippines is connected with the image of the Santo Niño. The story has it that Ferdinand Magellan, the discoverer of Cebu in April 1521 gave a statuette of the Santo Niño to the native queen Juana as her baptismal gift at the mass baptism of natives, led by King Humabon. Slowly the image got a chapel, then a church which in 1965 became the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño in Cebu. On the third Sunday in January each year the fiesta of the Señor Santo Niño is celebrated which in the course of the years was extended to a Feast Proper for the Philippines.

The first and second readings are the same in the years A, B, and C. Only the gospel is different. This year it is Luke. The first two readings have been explained in 1980 and in 1981, the gospel we saw on the Feast of Holy Family. Thus here follows only a summary.

The liturgy of today tells us: A Son is given to us (first reading), a child and yet the king of peace and almighty God. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings from heaven in Jesus (second reading). He is obedient to his parents, and yet he is the Son of the Father who does his will and stays in the Temple (gospel).

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 9:1-6

This is the same reading as in the first Mass at Christmas, which we saw in Christmas 1980. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel slowly was transformed into Assyrian territory during the time of Tiglath-pileser III in 734 and 732, Isaiah awakened hope of his people by an oracle of salvation (Is. 8:23-9:6): (1) There will come a change for the better in the future (8:23). (2) People will walk in light again (9:1-2). (3) A kingdom of peace shall be inaugurated (9:3-4). (4) The savior king will be enthroned (9:5). He will be (a) Wonder-Counselor, (b) God-Hero (Mighty God), (c) Father-Forever, (d) Prince-of-Peace. (5) The new king will rule as a second David.

Today's liturgy stresses the aspect that Christ, although being God-Almighty and king of peace became a little child.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 1:3-6,15-18

The Apostle opens his doctrinal part (Eph. 1:3-3:21) where he speaks about the mystery of the recapitulation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ by telling us that this mystery to make all men members of God's family was conceived by God from all eternity (Eph. 1:3-14). That means in particular: (1) We are chosen, all of us not only the Jews. God's choice is always bountiful: he blesses us with every blessing anybody could look for. The purpose of his choice is to make us holy and blameless, to set us apart, to make us different (Eph. 1:3-4). (2) In concrete, God's plan consists in making us adopted sons (1:5-6). (3) The Apostle thanks God for the faith of his readers and asks him to give them wisdom and insight in God's plan. A Christian must have an enlightened faith; unreflected religious has little worth.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 2:41-52

As we saw on the Feast of the Holy Family, here Christ is presented to us as the one completely different from his parents: With twelve years he is for all practical purposes of age. And the Father lays his hands on him. Thus, Jesus must be in his Father's house, he must do the Father's will. And in that sense the bonds connecting him with his foster-father

Joseph and his mother Mary recede into the background. But that comes so suddenly that even Mary does not understand her own son.

On the other hand, he goes back with them to Nazareth and is subject to them for many more years; as a matter of fact, for almost all of his life, since his public career lasted only one to three years. Seen in the context of today's feast we would stress the aspect: Although Jesus is the Son of God the Father, he humiliated himself and was subject to his parents.

HOMILY

BECOMING LITTLE AS A CHILD

A. In order to understand why we worship Christ as a little child we have to clear away two wrong notions.

1. First, it is said that to Filipinos the historical grown-up Christ is unknown and thus also their spirituality has not fully matured. Thus they venerate the "Santo Niño" or the "Santo Entiero" (Christ interred). The great formative and decisive years of Jesus' life, the years between his helpless infancy and his virile resolution to die in order that others may live, is strangely passed over. The miracle working Infant seems never to grow to real manhood. But the Christ Child could be important to us only if we see him announcing good news to the poor, calling laborers to his side, when we see him laying down his life to set others free. Two who put the argument this way are Douglas Elwood and Patricia Ling Magdamo in their book *Christ in the Philippine Context* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971), p. 5-6.

Whatever the merit of this statement might be, fact is (as studies have shown as one at the University of San Carlos in Cebu in 1973) that for most students and thus educated, grown-up Christ as friend, the grown-up Christ, is the predominant figure.

2. Another wrong notion came up (at least for some) ever since St. Therese of Lisieux recommended her "Little Way": we want to be like children before God; and many equated child with innocence: Children are innocent; we shall

become as innocent as children before God. Are children that innocent so that one can equate child with innocence? A grammar school teacher once was hoarse and could hardly talk. Thus, before class he appealed to the kindness of the children telling them: "Children, I can hardly speak today. So please keep quiet so that you can understand me." The result was the opposite of what the teacher had expected: The children made such a noise that one could not understand anything and the teacher had to drop the class. The insight of the teacher was: Children are as good and bad as grown-ups; they are just grown-ups in the beginning stage.

B. 1. When Jesus said: Unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3)", the point of comparison was not so much the innocence of children, but rather the insignificance. Children did not have to say anything in public in the time of Christ. Only grown-ups counted. In our own opinion and estimation, we must therefore be as insignificant as children were held in public in the time of Jesus.

2. In the Old Testament we have the same picture: For the Priestly author (P) in Gen. 5, the patriarchs are most venerable because we all descend from them. Consequently, the author gives them all a long age, most of them are nine-hundred years or so, not thousand, that would be perfect. Only old people are venerable, because they have experience; young people do not count. The patriarchs therefore, cannot have died young. But Jesus tells us: In your own eyes you must consider yourselves as insignificant as children are held among us.

3. This is what Jesus did himself: He humbled himself and became a little child. In that sense and in the context of today, the Feast of the Santo Niño, we can read the famous pre-Pauline Christological hymn of Phil. 2:6-7:

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not deem equality with God something to be
grasped at.

Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave,
being born in the likeness of men, becoming a small
boy as we.

But because of his humiliation, God exalted him after his greatest humiliation on the cross and made him Lord.

4. This is what Catholics like Sta. Therese of Avila and others at the time of the discovery of the Philippines wanted to stress: Great are not the kings and rulers of our time if they glory in their power, or even if they lord it over people (cf. Mt. 20:25), but rather the one who humbles as the Lord did. Great is the man who is as a little child. Thus, to worship Christ as Santo Niño, rightly done, does not keep us away from maturing. To be like a child is not something physical but something moral, something that takes us all our life to learn.

5. Are we *open* or are we conceited? Do we things because we fear somebody might get to know us? Do we want to appear witty to cover our emptiness? Are we boisterous because we want that people take us more intelligent than we are? Do we put up a front nobody shall see behind?

Children usually give themselves the way they are. They do not have all the prejudices of the grown-ups. Children of different races play together and feel at home everywhere. Only grown-ups put up walls of segregation between black and white. Grown-ups feel easily intruded on when visitors come. Children are more outgoing.

6. Connected with this openness is the *admission of our limitations* and our dependency. Children know that all they are and have, they owe their parents. And they readily admit it. They do not have to make a special effort.

Grown-ups often try to act as if they could do everything themselves; they fear they would loose something admitting their own limitations. Or if they admit a shortcoming and some limitations, they do it in order to be recognized for humility or in the hope that somebody would say: "Oh no, you are much more intelligent and capable than you try to admit."

And yet, as creatures we are limited and the admission of it is the starting point of every prayer, of any religious act. God can fill us with his grace only if we show our bareness.

7. Children naturally expect and *accept help* from their parents. They are dependent. It is true we should try to stand on our feet; we should not ask others to help us doing things we can do ourselves. An old proverb has it: "Help yourselves then God helps you!" When somebody because of an accident lost his right arm and the doctor made the last stitches of the operation afterwards, he said: "Let nobody in

your life ever help you." What the doctor meant was: "Do not pity yourself! Do yourself, what you can do yourself! Otherwise you will not be happy."

But this does not mean that we should not accept help from others. We should be humble as children to accept help. To accept help, to accept gifts from somebody is often the finest gift we can make somebody. Lastly, we cannot make any gift to God but only accept his gift with a grateful and open heart.

Somebody who accepts help from others can accomplish much more in his life than he could ever do alone.

8. Children relatively easily keep in *dialogue* with their parents. They tell them everything they experience during the day. They talk about their plans and dreams, their wishes and hopes, which they formulate in requests and which they cloth in thanks in case they received something from their parents.

Prayer is the name for such dialogue with God. A child-like person prays, talking to God about everything he encounters during the day: joys and sorrows, accomplishments and disappointments, plans and hopes; he prays for help in difficulties, thanks the Lord for all the wonders he showers on him every day, and asks for forgiveness for all the wrongs he does. The last, asking forgiveness admitting that we have done something wrong is probably also easier for a child to admit than for a grown-up person.

9. And here we are at the last quality of a child: It's *trust*. A little stubborn or mischievous as he might be at times, in the long run he will trust his parents.

We are like children if we trust in God who is our Father. The first that is reported of the young Jesus as we see in the gospel of today is that he trusted in God his Father and wanted to be in his house. Trust is one of the finest qualities in personal relations.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(January 23, 1982)

Today we meditate on the authority of the word of God. The Jews in the time of Nehemiah accepted the law of God and obeyed the word of God (first reading). Jesus begins his

work, bringing the Good News to the poor (gospel). — In the independent theme of the second reading Paul illustrates our closeness with Christ and one another by the comparison of a human body.

FIRST READING: NEHEMIAH 8:2-4a.5-6.8-10

This is the only Sunday on which a reading is taken from the Book of Nehemiah. With Ezra and 1 and 2 Chronicles it belongs to the History of the Chronicler who wrote in the postexilic age (after 538 B.C.). He does not so much want to present a summary of past events as give a reinterpretation of Israel's past. Although Israel and her kings have been unfaithful and thus, God brought them into exile as reported in the Deuteronomist's History (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings), there is still hope for Israel's future. The Chronicler attaches this hope (1) to the Temple in Israel's midst and (2) to the Messiah.

The history reported in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah centers around the events after the return of the Jews from exile. If we assume that Ezra 7:7.8 "the seventh" year is a scribal error for "thirty-seventh" year, we get the following historical sequence:

a) Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 B.C. the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, who was king of Persia from 465 till 424 B.C.

b) He remained from 445 B.C. to 433 B.C.

c) Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 428 B.C., the 37th year of Artaxerxes I.

d) Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem between 433 B.C. and 424 B.C. Therefore Ezra, the priest and religious reformer, and Nehemiah the political reformer, governor and rebuilder of the walls of Jerusalem, were contemporaries. We remember that the Jews returned from exile in three different groups: (1) 538/7 first return under Zerubbabel and Joshua, (2) 445 B.C. the second group under Ezra and Nehemiah, (3) 398 the third return in the time of Artaxerxes II. The Temple had been rebuilt by Zerubbabel (520-515 B.C.).

The Plan and content of the two books is:

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| I. Return from the exile and reconstruction of the Temple | Ez. 1-6 |
| II. Organization of the community by Ezra and Nehemiah | Ez. 7-Neh 13 |
| 1. Mission and personality Ezra | Ez. 7-10 |
| 2. Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem | Neh. 1-7 |
| 3. Religious reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra | Neh. 8-13 |

The religious reform Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor want to bring about can be realized by a falling back on the Word of God. Thus Ezra, the scribe, brings the book of the law of Moses (Neh. 8:1) and reads from it to the assembled people who are standing out of reverence. We have to leave open if he had the whole Pentateuch or only a part of it. But it would seem that he read from the Pentateuch as it had been edited by the priests during the exile in Babylon, resp. after the return. By shouting "Amen" (8:6), people expressed their willingness to follow the law. Then the law was explained among smaller groups (8:7), so that people could ask questions. People wept either because of the punishment which those will receive who do not follow the law, or because the law was hidden so long. But people were encouraged to rejoice on the Feast of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and over the fact that people had the word of God (again) and wanted to follow it (8:9). Out of joy they should share their food with poor people (8:10).

The reading has been chosen because of the similarity with the reading from Scripture by Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth.

SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-30

In a community as Corinth with factions (Peter, Paul, Apollos, Christ — 1 Cor. 1:12), a strong desire for charisms which could easily get out of control and would be overstressed, the apostle underlined the need for unity. This he did in the immortal chapter 12 of the first letter to the Corinthians. Our unity with Christ and one another is so intimate as the unity of a head of a body to its members. And ever since Paul, we

speak of the Body of Christ or Mystical Body of Christ, although Paul never used the term "mystical" which does not mean "unreal" but "mysterious", "great" that one can only marvel at the reality: We live the same life as Christ, are like him, the difference that he is Son of God by nature, we by adoption; we are all one. Only Paul uses this comparison. (John uses the comparison of vine and branches - Jn. 15 - for the same reality.) It will be difficult to say where he took the picture from. Some think he was inspired by the Old Testament, others that he took it from the pre-Christian Gnosis. We can assume that his first Christian experience before Damascus helped along also. When Christ told him: "Saul, why do you persecute me (Acts 9:4)?" he realized in a flash that persecuting the Christians is the same as persecuting Christ, thus intimately united are both.

Unfolded in detail the comparison yields the following insights:

(1) *all different members of the body are necessary for the whole* v.14-16;

(2) *the members are dependent on the help of the others* v. 17-22;

(3) *one cannot say which member is more important; the humblest receive even more care (attention)* v. 23-25;

(4) *fundamentally all are equal. If one member suffers, all suffer; if one is well, all are feeling well.* v. 26;

(5) *there is a hierarchy of functions: 1. apostles, 2. prophets, 3. teachers, 4. miracle workers, 5. healers, 6. assistants, 7. administrators, 8. those speaking in tongues.* v. 27-30;

(6) *the highest of all the gifts is love* 12:31-13:13.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 1:1-4; 4:14-21

The pericope is made up of two parts: (1) the prologue of the third gospel (1:1-4) and (2) Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum (4:14-21). It could look as if these two parts are put together arbitrarily. But they both talk about God's word in different ways:

Luke is the only New Testament writer who uses a prologue, in his gospel and in the Acts. John's Prologue is different, since it is an overture, containing in a nutshell all

the most important ideas of the whole gospel. Luke's prologue is just an introduction to the gospel with a dedication as it was customary among Greek writers. This proves that Luke is very educated. The Prologue is composed in the finished style of the ancient Greek classics. Luke is not an eyewitness of Christ's life, but belongs to the second generation. Like other non-Jews he experienced in a spiritual way the events of the life of Christ, "which have been fulfilled among us." Some people already wrote a gospel. That encouraged Luke to do the same. But he wants to go back to the beginning (even before the birth of Christ); and he wants to write "an orderly account", not a collection of unconnected sayings as for instance the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. Orderly it is also in the sense that he reports events just once, omitting duplicates. Luke wants to do real research work so that his readers will have rational certainty about the historical facts. Yet Luke does not want to give us a "history of Christ", although he is called "the historian" among the evangelists and he calls his gospel a "narrative" in opposition to "gospel", which Mark wants to present (Mk. 1:1). He brings a gospel, too, arranging his material according to the main theological ideas.

This becomes clear right away with the preaching of Jesus in Nazareth. It could look as if Jesus started his public preaching career in Nazareth. But from Lk. 4:23 ("do here the works you did on Capernaum") we can conclude that the sequence in Mark comes closer to the historical reality: Jesus preached first in Capernaum and near the Lake before he preached in Nazareth. Luke anticipates what is going to happen and puts it as an overture in front Christ's public career what John formulates with the words: "He came into his own but his own received him not (Jn. 1:11)."

On this occasion we learn for the first time something about the religious services in the synagogue in the New Testament which reminds us of the report in Nehemiah: First came prayers, then a reading from the law and then from the prophets. Often there was no regular minister in our sense, but a paid official, called *chazzan*, who looked after the buildings, and the scrolls and announced the Sabbath with three blasts of a silver trumpet and often was teaching in the synagogue school. He also called upon a reader for the reading from the prophets, who would translate the reading and make some comments. Prominent members or visitors were

invited to do so (cf. Acts 13:15: Paul was invited). The reading was concluded with a blessing from Num. 6:24-26. This custom gave Jesus a chance to read and preach the good news.

HOMILY

HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE

Today's first reading and the gospel lend themselves for a meditation on the Word of God, its greatness and importance and its use for our practical life.

1. The Jews after the exile had the good fortune to hear from a copy of the law, i.e. the Pentateuch, the five Books of Moses, read to them for the first time in a long time. The scribe Ezra, the great reformer read to them. Out of reverence all people remained standing. It had taken many hundred years, somewhere from the tenth century before Christ till after the exile in 538 for the Pentateuch to be composed. First it had started with gifted singers in the North and in the South who in the evening at the campfires had been singing about the story of Israel and the beginning of mankind which later became two different sources each for the North and the South with narrative and legal material: in the South the Yahwistic Source (J) and the Priestly Source (P), in the North the Elohist Source (E) and the Deuteronomical Source (D). After the exile it had been put together by a priestly school. And now Ezra was reading from this scroll for apparently the first time to all the people. People wept. Why had they not heard from the word of God before! Were they worried about the sanctions mentioned in the law of Moses for not observing God's commandments or was it more that they realized that they knew so little about God's word!

At that time people partly could have been excused for not knowing Scripture so well. After all, it took many centuries till all the different books were written. We saw it in details for the Pentateuch. For other books it was similar. And when the inspired authors had written their books, individual persons did not have a copy of their own yet. As a matter of fact, hardly any could have afforded having one's own copy, since it would have been too expensive. There were no books yet; only scroll existed, and each scroll contained one book.

When the apostle writes to Timothy: "When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, and books, especially the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13)," "books" here probably refers to documents written on papyrus, the ordinary writing material at that time. But they were scrolls which were rolled, not yet documents in bookform as we have them now. "Parchments" refers to scrolls written on more precious material, parchment, as Scripture at that time already was. Only the invention of codices in the first century A.D. made it possible to have several books together and the invention of print at the beginning of the sixteenth century A.D. made it possible that everybody could get his own copy of the Bible.

We have to ask ourselves: Is the Bible for me as unknown as it was for the Jews at the time Ezra? The excuses at that time are not valid for us. We have easier access to the word of God, we can have our own copy. And if we do not read the Bible, it's our own fault.

2. The *Bible* is a *book of the community* of believers, in the time of Ezra of the synagogue, in our time of the Church. Ezra read the word of God to all people, explained it and people prayed. The teaching is given to the people assembled. By hearing the word of God together in an assembly, the Jews were more committed than when studying it privately. At the time of Jews, this procedure was understandable already because of the fact that not everybody had his own copy of the law, of the Bible.

We have our copy. And yet, also in our time the Bible is the book given to the Church, given to the care of the Church. The Church shall explain it to us, although on the other hand, the Bible is above the Church, rightly understood. This does not mean that we shall not read the word of God privately. On the contrary, the more we hear the word of God in church, during the Mass and during homilies given to us, the more we will also want to get more familiar with what God has to tell us privately. But nobody can say: I have the Bible and I explain the Bible myself and do not have to go to church.

3. Even *Jesus himself went to the synagogue regularly* on the Sabbaths (Lk. 4:16) to pray and to meditate on the word of God as it was read to him. Living in the small town of Nazareth he could attend the second part of Jewish religious services, the sacrifices only once, or at the most three times a years, during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

We are more fortunate than he was. There is a church in almost every small town. And there we can attend Mass, at least every Sunday, listen to God's word, to a homily which explains it to us, pray and offer Christ's sacrifice all in one. Is it for us a need, something we are looking forward to, or is it just a matter of good custom, or worse, something we easily omit for any pretense of being busy with something else?

4. The reading of the word of God meant *reform* for the Jews in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. They knew that they had deserted God and therefore had to go into the exile of Assyria and Babylonia. And now that they had returned, things were slow coming. The Samaritans tried to disturb them wherever they could, hindering the rebuilding of the Temple and the city walls. The Jews realized: true progress and well-being could come only by meditating on the word of God and putting it into action.

Our religious services shall be well prepared and so shall be the homilies. But as helpful as these things might be, the most important part right after God's part we play ourselves. Are we resolved to put into action what we hear, or do we just look for some nice sensational feelings?

5. For *St. Luke* to write his gospel meant to do serious *research work*. He was not quite satisfied with the way some other had written their gospel. Probably, he meant some extra-canonical gospels like the Gospel of Thomas with loose sayings of the Lord. Luke wanted some *rational certainty* for our faith. After all, our faith shall be enlightened; we shall not believe blindly. The risk of faith always remains when we embrace God in faith, but the faith can be made reasonable that we understand it makes good sense to believe. And that service Luke wanted to do for his readers.

According to our talents we also shall study Scripture and do some research work to get a deeper insight into the different facts, customs and happenings.

6. To do so Luke needed also some material help. This is, as some assume, although we are not absolutely sure, the reason why Luke dedicated his work to *Theophilus*, a distinguished and probably well-to-do member of the Christian community for which Luke wrote. Theophilus would be Luke's sponsor helping in defraying the expenses for research work and writing.

Good selfless friends are also helpful in getting greater access to the word of God and in helping spread it.

7. But more than anybody and anything also Christ and Luke relied on the *Holy Spirit* for the understanding of the word of God. Christ had been baptised by the Baptist in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Lk. 3:22), investing him with power for his public career. That same Holy Spirit drove him into the desert to be tested (Lk. 4:1). In the power of the Holy Spirit he returned to Galilee (Lk. 4:14), and reading from Is. 61:1f, he could say that the Holy Spirit was now upon him in a special way reading and explaining Scripture.

The Holy Spirit inspired Scripture and holds the key for the understanding of Scripture. Nothing is more important then, than to turn to him for guidance when reading Scripture.

8. *Joy* will be the result of listening to and reading Scripture as it was for the Jews when they heard the reading of the law in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (January 30, 1982)

A prophet is rejected. This, Jeremiah experienced (first reading). And this was the first Christ learned when he preached in the synagogue in Nazareth (gospel). But because of his call (first reading) a prophet can endure it. And the irony is that he (Christ) is rejected because of his broadmindedness, his universality, preaching salvation to all people (gospel). As usual, the second reading brings a theme of the own: Paul speaks about the greatness of charity (love).

FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 1:4-5.17-19

It would have been better if the first reading would include also verses six till ten. Verses eleven till sixteen (double vision) are justly omitted since they interrupt the clear line of the call.

As with Isaiah and Ezekiel, so also with Jeremiah (and lastly, any prophet) the call makes the prophet what he is. The prophet (1) is called, (2) "consecrated" and (3) sent, commissioned to preach. By nature Jeremiah was not eager to preach, being rather shy and withdrawn and even melancholic. And

since a prophet has to tell the truth, if people like it or not, it was even the harder for Jeremiah. He lived in a very difficult time (628-586 B.C.). Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Babylon. People became more and more unfaithful to God's word. The prophet had to warn against wrong alliances and advocate submission to the superpower Babylonia in order to avert the worst. This earned him the reproach of treason. In reality, he remained faithful to the Jewish cause, God's cause, remained amidst the ruins of Jerusalem, but was later forced to go into exile in Egypt and there was murdered by his own countrymen, according to an old tradition.

But God's call strengthens him. Jeremiah shall not be afraid of opposition and own timidity, but rather preach what God tells him (1:7-8). God's word has power (1:9-10). And thus the prophet will become a pillar of iron, a wall of brass (1:17), even if all are against him. He shall not be prophet for Israel alone but for all nations (1:5).

SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31-13:13

The Corinthian community was a charismatic community. Many were looking for the different charisms. Paul tells his Corinthians that charisms are good and useful if they are used for the well being of the community and not for own gratification, and if there is order and discipline (1 Cor. 12:1-11). The most important charism is not speaking in tongues as many apparently think, but prophesy. The different members endowed with charism form the one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-31). But Paul shows even a better way than charisms: Love stands high above all gifts of the Spirit. And so in 1 Cor. 12:31-13:13, Paul unfolds the encomium on love.

It would look as if this *agapē* = love is a human virtue without reference to Christology. Thus, there is no clarification about its object. It is not clearly said if it means God's love for man or man's love for God or his fellowmen. It is valid for both. And so the description is akin to Wisdom Literature and some think that this encomium (= song of praise) is pre-Pauline which the apostle made his own and elaborated on:

- (1) *He who has no love has nothing* (13:1-3), even if he should know all secrets, would have great faith and even die a martyr (if that were possible).

(2) *He who has love has everything* (13:4-7).

The qualities of love are:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------|------|-------------------------------------|
| v. 4 | 1. patient | | 8. not prone to anger |
| | 2. kind | | 9. not brood over injuries |
| | 3. not jealous | v. 6 | 10. not rejoice in what is wrong |
| | 4. not put on airs | | 11. rejoices with the truth |
| | 5. not snobbish | v. 7 | 12. no limit to forbearance |
| v. 5 | 6. not rude | | 13. no limit to its trust |
| | 7. not self-seeking | | 14. hopes everything |
| | | | 15. no limit to its power to endure |

(3) *He who has love has eternal life* (13:8-12)

Prophecies, tongues, knowledge cease. Our present knowledge and faith are in comparison to the future knowledge like a child and a mature man or like a picture we see in a mirror. In heaven we will see face to face, made possible by love.

(4) *Coda* (13:13) *Love remains forever.*

Three things remain on earth: Faith, hope and love. Faith gives way to vision (2 Cor. 5:7), hope to possession (Rom. 8:24), but love remains forever.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 4:21-30

Today's gospel brings the reaction of people to Jesus' first preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. The last sentence (Lk. 4:21) is repeated: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," with Christ's reading, the text of Is. 61:1-2 is fulfilled: Christ, full of the Holy Spirit starts preaching the good news to the poor.

The reaction seems to be first favorable but soon turns into the opposite. They finally reject him because (1) he cannot be more than they are. But they are simple people from Nazareth. How could he be more! They know (that's at least what they think) him too well, him and his folks. It is a common experience that no prophet is appreciated in his own hometown; (2) he should have started preaching in Nazareth and not in Capernaum; (3) he should have performed miracles in their midst, not just somewhere else; (4) he omitted the part 'to announce a day of vindication by our God (Is. 61:2b)."

The result is: People of Nazareth want to get rid of Jesus and kill him, throwing him from the hill on which the city is built. The evangelist does not ask, how that was possible since it would have taken a walk of more than two kilometers to reach that peak outside of Nazareth.

We saw already last Sunday that this event probably did not take place at the beginning of Jesus' activity but belongs to Luke's theology. He wants to show, as he does in his second work the Acts, that the gospel was preached to the nations when and because his own people rejected him.

HOMILY

JESUS THE MERCIFUL AND UNIVERSAL PROPHET (SAVIOR)

One intention of the gospel of St. Luke is to show Jesus as the merciful and the universal savior. It is true, the Jews according to God's design are and shall be the chosen people, as especially St. Paul outlines in Rom. 9.11. And so even Jesus himself limited his activity to the Jews and went only by way of exception to the pagans. Thus he says: "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24)." The healing of the pagan centurion's servant (Lk. 7:1-10 par) and of the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman (Mk. 7:24-30) are exceptions. Paul first went to the Jews and preached the good news to them. And only then, when they would not listen to him did he go to the pagans (cf. Acts 13:46). Luke with today's gospel wants to show that the Jews would lastly reject Jesus and thus, the gospel would go to the nations. We can ask ourselves: Did it have to happen that way? Could the Jews not have accepted the gospel from the beginning already? Did and do they have to be stimulated to jealousy, seeing that pagans join the Church as Paul puts it in Rom. 9-11? This gives us an opportunity to meditate on the call to universalism, mercy for all, and on the other hand criticism of those who do not follow God's call, as we find it in the life of Jeremiah and Jesus, and call which results in narrow-mindedness as it happened with the Jews.

I. Every man of God is *called* by God in a special way.

1. He is *elected* out of many, often irrespective of his qualities.

a. *Jeremiah* humanly speaking was not the best qualified to preach, at least if we can believe his words: "Ah, Lord, God! I know not how to speak; I am too young (Jer. 1:6)." He was bashful, shy, withdrawn, melancholic. Nonetheless, God called him as a "prophet to the nations" (1:5).

b. *Israel* was called to be the chosen people of God, God elected it not because of any particular merits but because of God's special love. Ezekiel describes it very vividly: "By origin and birth you are of the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite" (Ez. 15:3)." That means, there is no reason to brag: the forefathers were half pagan. "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 to 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... I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you; you became mine (Ez. 15:4-9)." By nature, Israel was not worth to be looked at. It was like a child that the mother did not want but threw away. But God liked the child and made it his own. — Every elected person will have to say the same with variations.

c. The case was of course different with Christ: He is elected because he is God's own Son. But in this way he is elected even more than anybody else.

2. A *prophet* is a man of the *Holy Spirit*, endowed with the Holy Spirit, called to be a man of the Holy Spirit.

a. This becomes only indirectly clear with *Jeremiah*. Spirit and word of God belong intimately together. But *Jeremiah* is "consecrated" prophet in a ceremony where the Lord extends his hand, touches his mouth and says: "See, I place my words in your mouth! This day I set you over nations and over kingdoms (Jer. 1:9-10).

That this also indirectly means to be endowed with the Holy Spirit becomes clear by *Jeremiah's* antitype, John the Baptist. This is announced to his father Zechariah with the words: "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Lk. 1:15)." The fulfilment is reported in Lk. 1:41: Mary with Jesus under her heart enters the house of Elizabeth and greets her. The result is: "The baby (John

the Baptist) leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." The Baptist and his mother are full of the Holy Spirit. And what is said of him is true also with his type Jeremiah, with any prophet.

b. *Jesus* was conceived of the Holy Spirit as the angel Gabriel announced to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (Lk. 1:35)." That same Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and he went to the Jordan to be baptized by John (Lk. 3:21-22). By the same Holy Spirit Christ was led into the desert to be tested by the devil (Lk. 4:1); and Jesus "returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee (Lk. 4:14), went to the synagogue of Nazareth and started preaching: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to bring glad tidings to the poor (Lk. 4:18 = Is. 61:1)."

3. Especially the Holy Spirit urges a prophet to *preach to all nations*, and that means to be *merciful* and *universal*. The good news is for all, not just for the Jews.

a. In the case of Jeremiah, the universality of a prophet was expressed in his call: "I place my words in your mouth! This day I set you over nations and over kingdoms (Jer. 1:9-10)."

b. It is discussed why the Jews were disappointed with Jesus in Nazareth. Certainly did they not accept his claim to be sent by the Father. How could somebody they knew so well, as they thought, be more than they themselves! They also had liked that Jesus would have started his career in Nazareth, and that he would have performed miracles in their midst. But it was probably also because he changed the message of Isaiah 61:1-2 slightly, but significantly by omitting the part: "to announce a day of vindication by our God (Is. 61:2b):" That means in the context of Isaiah, God will punish Israel's enemies as Isaiah describes it in Is. 34:8 (Yahweh will punish Bosra and Edom) and Is. 63:4 ("a day of revenge was in my mind" (Yahweh says).

Christ is the merciful savior. He is not going to take revenge on Israel's enemies, and thus, he omits that particular part of the prophet Isaiah. And thus, scholars (like Joachim Jeremias. *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*. London: SCM Press, 1957, p. 44f) think, this was the reason why people in Nazareth were astonished, not so much "because of his words full of

charm" (as most translation put it), but "because he spoke of the mercy of God." Why should, in their opinion, the enemies of Israel get away with their sins!

II. To be *called*, was for many Israelites a reason to become *exclusivistic*. Salvation was only for them and nobody else.

1. Gladly would they apply all the texts of "the Day of the Lord" which speak of God's wrath to other enemies and just wait for the day.

2. Easily would they consider themselves alone called by God and look down on others. This blocked their openness to Christ and his word so that finally, they did not accept him.

3. The prophets and Jesus *the* prophet recognized that being called and elected in a special way is only God's gift, no reward for personal good acts. And everybody who is called is usually called for somebody else, to lead others to the Lord.

4. And that means: to have the courage to tell people their faults, to use constructive criticism, as all the prophets told people their sins and what they would have to change, even if this meant death as a martyr for themselves as most prophets died as martyrs and as Christ did.

5. But a truly called person and prophet equally much believed in God's mercy which gives everybody a chance to change for the better, believed that God can move the hearts and that his salvation is not only for the few elected and called in a special way, but for all.

6. Everybody who has been called by God will gladly consider his election as God's grace and gift and will be glad when God calls others too and shows his mercy to all.

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