

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS



THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF PEACE

Jaime Card. Sin

## DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF THE LAITY

Ciceron Tumbocon, D.D.

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LITURGY

Camilo Marivoet, C.I.C.M.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIOCESAN BISHOP AND HIS PRIESTS

Ricardo Card. Vidal



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# Prayer for National Renewal

MARIAN YEAR 1985

Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, we turn to you in this hour of trial. Our people suffer today as perhaps they have not suffered in times past. Poverty and hardship, joblessness and hunger, division, ideological strife, hatred and violence, the shedding of blood, salvaging and terrorism, oppression and corruption, the misuse of power, violations of dignity and rights of so many, especially of women and children, the selfish pursuit of idols of gain, pleasure and egoism — we see all this around us until our hearts grow numb or indifferent, and our sense of honor and justice, the spirit of compassion and caring die within us.

We profess to follow the Gospel of your Son, but are so unfaithful to what He asks of us. We recite His Beatitudes, but balk at making them truly our path of life. We speak of Truth and Justice, but they are often empty words in our dealings with one another. We affirm Equality and Freedom, but deny them in our deeds.

We call ourselves one people, but there is among us very little unity of common faith and purpose, or sharing in solidarity. We do not labor together, in struggle and sacrifice, that our nation may be made whole, under God, our common Father, and in Jesus Christ his Son. We know this hour of uncertainty and trial calls us all to seek the ways of conversion and repentance.

Lead us back to Your Son, Mother of our Redeemer, through penitence and conversion, to purity and honesty, to integrity in our personal lives, to the renewal of our families, in the Gospel, to the respect for life, love and fidelity in our homes, our homes on whose wholeness the wholeness and unity of our nation rests.

Lead us back to Your Son, Mother of our Saviour, through a search for true justice in our society, through dedication to

the pursuit of human dignity and human rights, through concern and caring for every man, woman and child among us, through earnest compassion for the poor and the powerless, the little ones among us who have so little in life, and so little to look forward to in the future, for themselves and their children.

Holy Virgin Mary, as we remember and honor, the 2000th anniversary of your birth, we turn to you in this hour of trial, and beg you to turn to us, to listen graciously to our prayer.

We, your daughters and sons, rededicate our lives and our people to you, we entrust our future to your hands. We ask you, help us heal the wounds of our nation, help us find light and wisdom, renewed purpose and courage, through penitence and suffering, so that we may struggle, ready to sacrifice ourselves, our time and our energies, our very lives, without fear, but shunning the ways of violence and blood, seeking TRUE PEACE, through RECONCILIATION rooted in JUSTICE, founded in our FAITH IN EACH OTHER and our FAITH IN GOD.

*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known, that anyone who has sought your protection, implored your help or begged your intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, we turn to you, O Virgin of Virgins, Our Mother. To you we now cry, before you we stand, sinful and sorrowing, but hoping and trusting, too. O mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer us. Amen.*

#### **B E F 1985 Cover:**

The cover of this year's Boletín Eclesiástico features the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God whose 2000th Birthday we are celebrating. The figure in geometric presentation symbolizes Mary as our constant companion in our pilgrimage of hope. Through her, humanity is brought closer to Jesus; she who is a powerful intercessor of God's grace. Thus, the triangular figure points to heaven, to symbolize that she leads men towards God.

Sem. Reynaldo Cruz

## FEATURES

# the foundations of peace\*

It is, indeed, an honour and a pleasure for me to be invited into your distinguished company, and even more to be asked to share with you some of my thoughts. To be sure, I confess the feelings of apprehension of being asked to speak to an audience of lawmakers, professors, researchers, corporate officers and others who have made their mark in the civil society. After all, beneath these red robes of a cardinal there is not a man with pretensions to great learning, but only a shepherd of souls and—it is my earnest hope—a man of God.

There is today a universal aspiration, an anxious search for peace. Our century has been devastated by two World Wars. The First World War, you will recall, was touted as the War to end all wars. But the Peace Treaty which ended that war in 1919 did not put an end to all wars. It only ignited the time fuse that twenty years later exploded in a more vast and bloodier Second World War.

The Second World War has not officially come to an end. There was a cessation of hostilities when Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan surrendered unconditionally in 1945. But there never was a Declaration, let alone a Treaty of Peace. Indeed, the cessation of hostilities was quickly followed by a Cold War over the division of spoils and spheres of influence. Today, the Cold War is perceptibly getting hotter, and the whole world trembles in an agony of uncertainty on the brink of annihilation in a nuclear Third World War.

There obviously is something fundamentally wrong if peace has eluded us practically all throughout our century. In retrospect we can easily see what was wrong with Versailles. There was no justice in that Treaty; there were instead vindictiveness, oppression and humiliation. Versailles did not pour oil but rubbed salt on raw wounds.

Many people are not clear about the difference between these two words: vindicative and vindictive. Only one letter, the letter "a", distinguishes vindicative from vindictive. Yet there is a world of difference between the two. Vindicative denotes justice; vindictive denotes injustice.

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\* An After Luncheon Address to National Press Club in Washington, 29 May 1985.

"Vindictive" restores what is due, restores what has unjustly been taken away. Honour, for instance, is vindicated when a person's good name is restored, when the charges against him are exposed as calumnies. But a person's honour is not vindicated by maiming or killing the slanderer. That would be vindictiveness, not vindication.

The popular name for vindictiveness is revenge. And revenge is the antithesis of justice. Justice is objective. It has an objective criterion and measure which justice may not step beyond. That objective criterion and measure is the thing that is "due". Justice awards every man his due, even if that man is your enemy and lies helpless at your feet. Justice exacts retribution, but that retribution is always strictly measured and always keeps inviolate the human rights and the human dignity of the conquered foe.

On the other hand, vindictiveness is purely subjective. Its criterion and measure are the wounded feelings of the aggrieved party. Justice keeps a tight rein on a man's emotions, but vindictiveness allows free reins to bruised feelings. Vindictiveness exacts punishment without measure, without any regard for the rights and dignity of the offender, and ceases only when the hurt and anger of the aggrieved party are entirely spent. Yet vindictiveness often comes under the guise of justice. Shylock, keeping strictly to the letter of his contract, demanding only his pound of flesh, no more no less, was not asking for justice; he was seeking revenge.

Versailles failed because it embodied vindictiveness, if cloaked with the legality of a treaty. But legality without justice, or legality at the service of injustice is only an euphemism for raw force. And when the people humiliated and oppressed by the unjust peace felt they had grown strong enough, they simply threw the Peace Treaty into the waste basket.

It is no good to say that Fascism, Nazism, or Communism are the causes of wars. These "isms" do not exist by themselves. They exist only in persons who are slaves to inordinate ambitions and desires. Wars and dictators are like boils. They are not causes but effects of the underlying rottenness of injustice. It does no good to treat the boil and let the rottenness remain. Versailles was simply an exercise in cosmetic surgery; nothing more. That was why it failed to restore peace.

What is peace? I can think of no better definition than that given 15 centuries ago by that great genius St. Augustine,

bishop of Hippo. Peace is *the tranquility of order*. Tranquility is the absence of disturbance. But not every absence of disturbance qualifies as tranquility. Tranquility is the natural result or property of order. When things keep to their proper places, they are in order; there is no disturbance; there is peace. But when something gets out of its proper place, the order is disturbed. The disturbance can be contained only by force. There is a semblance of peace but no true peace because it is a violent peace.

Order in human affairs is effected and maintained by justice. It follows that peace directly and immediately rests on the foundation of justice. With acute insight, Aristotle defined man as, not merely a social animal, but distinctively and precisely as a political animal, the only political animal on this earth. The POLIS, as such, is based not on mutual need, but on justice and law. In other words, individual insufficiency may drive men, as it drives other beasts, to form communities; but man's rational and free nature demands that the human community, as human, be established on the foundation of justice and law.

Justice first, then law. For justice and law are not one and the same thing. They are two different things. Justice is the reality; law, the reflection and mirror of that reality. Justice is the end; the law only the instrument for achieving justice. Divorced from justice, the law degenerates into legality, becomes a mockery of justice, a mantle to clothe injustice with a semblance of respectability.

By the same token, freedom without justice is serfdom; freedom for injustice is slavery. Let such freedom perish! Democracy without justice is tyranny; democracy for injustice is totalitarianism. Let such democracy perish!

Where do we find the essential, absolute, irreducible values of justice? In the TEN COMMANDMENTS. The Commandments of God are religious laws; yes. The Commandments of God are moral laws; yes. But let us not forget that the Ten Commandments are also social and political laws. For the ancient nation of Israel, the Ten Commandments constituted the TORAH, that is to say, THE LAW par excellence, the fundamental law of the land, or in modern terms, the CONSTITUTION governing the religious, moral, social and political life of ancient Israel.

The Ten Commandments are that HIGHER LAW which the more sober secularist jurists have constantly recognized as



the foundation upon which human constitutions and legal systems are built and from which they derive their intrinsic validity and force. The Father of your country, George Washington, openly acknowledged religion and morality as the two pillars of government. Remove the unconditional hold that religion and morality have on the human conscience, and what is left for all human enactments to rely on other than force? And force is, at best, a dubious guarantee. The same force that upholds human statutes can be employed to subvert and overthrow them.

And now let me ask how can any government that through increasingly liberal divorce laws, assiduously subverts the moral validity of something as fundamental as the institution of marriage, how can this same government demand from its citizens the conscientious observance of any other contractual or institutional obligations? And if conscience will not serve as an ubiquitous enforcer of the law, what shall do it if not brute force?

And how can any nation that, through legalization of contraception and abortion on demand, denies the inherent sacredness of human life, and subordinates it to the convenience and pleasure of others; how can this same nation convince its citizens of the sacredness of any other laws? How can it convince them that they may not subordinate the laws to their personal convenience and pleasure?

But if peace rests on justice, justice itself rests on love. For what induces me to give my neighbour his due? The answer will be clear if we rephrase the question equivalently in terms of its contradictory. What causes me to deny my neighbour his due and appropriate it for myself? Obviously, the fact that I prefer myself to, or love myself more than, my neighbour. Behold here the fertile soil on which injustice breeds, thrives and multiplies. Love of self will twist the law unto its own benefit, and will corrupt the civil power into a tool of oppression in the pursuance of self-promotion.

But if I were to love my neighbour as myself, then I would be as zealous of what is owed him as I am of what is owed me. And if every man were to love his neighbour thus, then truly the reign of Justice would be universal. Justice thus grows out of love, and without love justice quickly withers. If love for my neighbour does not prevent it, I will use and manipulate him for my own ends; and that, you will agree, is the very essence of exploitation and oppression.

I have just referred to the Ten Commandments as the essential distillation of all human constitutional and statutory law. Taken as they stand, they are precepts of justice. But the Ten Commandments are reducible to two. And at this ultimate and irreducible level, they are transformed into the two great commandments of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind: this is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well." (Mat. 22:37)

Justice and love are the twin foundations of peace. Justice is needed to prevent love from turning into foppish sentimentality; and love is needed to temper the harshness of justice and to prevent it from degenerating into unrelenting vindictiveness.

It is not only unfortunate, but tragic, that the children of men have had so minimal an experience of loving and caring for one another, and so large an exposure and habituation to hating and destroying one another. But this makes it all the more imperative that hatred and vendetta give way to pardon and love.

Do not say that this is all very fine and very noble, but very idealistic and very impractical. I will tell you what is impractical. It is impractical to expect selfish men to behave unselfishly. It is impractical to expect vindictive men to behave forgivingly. It is impractical to expect greedy men to behave generously. It is impractical to expect peace to coexist with selfishness and vindictiveness and greed; nay, not impractical, but IMPOSSIBLE.

Selflessness is not impractical; it is only difficult. Forgiveness is not impractical; it is only difficult. Generosity is not impractical; it is only difficult. And to give up in the face of difficulty, without even trying, is—forgive me for being blunt—arrant cowardice. We are afraid to love; but we are not afraid to hate. Why? Because by hating we harm others, but by loving we become vulnerable ourselves. We are afraid to love because love is a risk, nay, love is the certainty of getting badly hurt.

In the beginning, there was emptiness, and darkness hovered over the void. But the Spirit of God called forth light out of the darkness, order out of chaos, and the cosmos out of the void. The Spirit of God moves today over the chaos and darkness

created by men who call themselves realistic and practical. The Spirit of God is tapping the reservoirs of idealism and goodness hidden in the hearts of people and renewing the face of the earth.

I see the working of the Spirit in three great movements that cut across the continents. The first is the political movement—"political", for want of a better word—which incarnates the fight for justice in the world, the work for development that is truly human, the struggle for the liberation of the poor, the margined, the victims of oppression everywhere on this earth.

The second is the dialogical movement that brings together the great religions of mankind, not in a spirit of confrontation, but in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation. Only last month, on the 1st of April, I had the privilege of addressing the Asian Inter-Religious Youth Forum, the first of its kind, held in Manila. It was jointly organized by the Bataan Christian Youth Civic Circle, the Focolare Movement, and the Buddhist lay association Rishso Kossei-Kai of Japan. This three-day forum brought together various Protestant denominations, Catholics, Buddhists, and Muslims in an earnest endeavour to pool together the vast amount of truth and good found in all the religious faiths and place it at the service of world peace. It was a beautiful experience.

And last, but not least, the mystical movement—"mystical" in the broadest sense—that is, the great reawakening and rediscovery of prayer sweeping throughout the Christian world, of which the most visible aspect is the Charismatic movement. There is the search for interiority, for intimacy with God. Everywhere in the world we meet with Christians alive—even aflame—with the fire of the Spirit, joyfully singing the praises of the Lord. We are witnessing rebirth of contemplation in the old and in the young; in private, religious, and lay people. The words of the Scripture are being fulfilled: "They shall draw living waters from the springs of the Saviour."

The Spirit of God is alive and at work among us. Here is the reason for our hope. Herein is anchored our optimism. I believe in the power and practicality of love. *Emmet Foz* has said it beautifully:

There is —  
no DIFFICULTY that enough  
LOVE WILL not CONQUER;

no DISEASE that enough LOVE  
 WILL not HEAL;  
 no DOOR that enough LOVE  
 WILL not OPEN;  
 no GULF that enough  
 LOVE WILL not BRIDGE;  
 no WALL that enough LOVE  
 WILL not THROW DOWN;  
 no SIN that enough  
 LOVE WILL not REDEEM.

It makes no difference  
 how deeply seated may be the trouble,  
 how hopeless the outlook,  
 how muddled the tangle,  
 how great the mistake:  
 a sufficient realization of  
 LOVE WILL DISSOLVE IT ALL.

If only YOU could LOVE enough,  
 YOU would be the happiest and  
 most powerful being in the world!

I am an incurable believer in the power of LOVE, because  
 I am a believer in God — AND GOD IS LOVE!

† JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN, D.D.

## HOMILETICS . . .

(Continued from 732)

### II. *Colossians* III, 12-21.

The word and the peace of Jesus Christ made functional within the family dealings is the foundation of happiness at home. When everything is done in the name of Jesus, then every moment of life becomes a joyful hymn of thanksgiving to God.

### III. *Ecclesiastes* III, 3-7, 14-17a.

God created each human being in His image and likeness, and so, we all have the divine dignity. With the institution of the family, when the mission of becoming the creator of another man was granted, an honor close to the honor of the Creator Himself was added. And man has to keep such honor.

# THE COUNCIL OF THE LAITY IN THE DIOCESE OF CABANATUAN \*

Bago ang lahat, gusto kong sabihing ako'y maligayang-maligaya sa umagang ito sapagkat kapiling kayo. Salamat sa Diyos na tumawag sa atin bagama't hindi tayo karapat-dapat. Maganda ang araw na ito sapagkat ibabahagi natin sa isa't-isa pati na pintig ng ating puso. Allow me therefore to share with you, some of the "selected" beatings on my heart as your Bishop, pastor and friend.

*Firstly*, I believe that all of us whether priests, sisters, or laymen have as goal of our fundamental struggle, *holiness*. Hence, our becoming men and women of God is our absolute priority. Tanging and taong banal ang makapag-papabanal. Tanging ang taong may bago at malinis na puso ang makapag-papabago at makapag-lilinis. We can only succeed in bringing God to others, only when we have first found and known Him deeply and intimately in our own hearts. And only after we have irrevocably committed ourselves to Him, can we commit ourselves purely and genuinely to others.

*Secondly*, I believe and affirm with our Holy Father that "Catholic leaders should train an ever growing member of lay people, aware of their fundamental and specific vocation, to be builders of a world more fitted to the dignity of every individual and of all human beings." In the spirit of Vatican II, I dare say that what the Church needs in order to hasten the process of renewal, is to find and form mature and dedicated laymen, who are willing to live in the service of the Gospel. This of course, is not meant to replace the clergy and the religious order, but to complement, not to transfer responsibility but to share, not to destroy an old structure but to fulfill. What we dream of, after all, is a Christian witness in every home, in every office, in every factory, in every school, in every corner of our world. This is the place of the layman, and this I am convinced he could very well accomplish, with enlightenment and guidance. Hindi ba't ang bawat Kristiyano ay tumanggap ng hamon na maging liwanag ng daigdig at maging asin ng lupa?

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\* Address by Most Rev. Ciceron SM. Tumbocon, D.D., Bishop of Cabanatuan, 3 August 1985.

*Thirdly*, I believe in the enormous power of all our mandated organizations and allow me please to thank you for your heroic but many times unknown service for the Church. Keep up the good work, and strive to live up to the charism and spirit of your organization. For only a very clear sense of mission in every member, guarantees the authenticity of every organization. An organization is an effective channel of apostolate, but it will be an empty channel without truly devoted Christians constituting it. Una sa lahat ang tapat na pagnanasang makapaglingkod. Daan lamang ang organisasyon sa paglilingkod. Motives of joining any organization for prestige, business connections and past-time, must undergo cleansing and clarification. I believe therefore that it is not really a matter of quantity but quality in terms of membership. Along this line of charism, I believe too, that we are different parts of one indivisible whole. If we can open our hearts, appreciate and accept each other's strength and charism, if we can stop imposing our personal perspective and idealism on others and simply share what we believe in, and if we could be more compassionate and mutually understanding of each other's weakness and fault, then I believe without hesitation that we could be more effective ministers of God's light and love. Tayo'y ibat-ibang bahagi ng iisang kawatwan lamang. Iba't-iba rin ng uri at paglilingkod. Huwag nating hangarin na lahat ng tao'y maging katulad natin sa pananaw at paglilingkod. It is our openness that could spell unity in the midst of diversity.

*Fourthly*, I believe that it is high time for us, to make a decisive and collective move in favor of our youth. The youth comprise a stunning 56% of the population. In the words of Pope Paul VI, "their increasing number and growing presence in society, and likewise the problems assailing them, should awaken in every one the desire to offer them with zeal and intelligence, the Gospel ideal as something to be known and lived". The devil is roaring like a lion, devouring many with his deadly pangs in the form of drugs, pornography and confusing ideologies. We must act in haste. We must return to them, warning them of these diabolical traps, but loving them for all the splendid gifts that are theirs, urging them to place those gifts at the service of their brothers, inviting them to seek their fulfillment in the freedom which Christ offers to them".

*Fifthly and finally*, I believe that we must all turn to Mary, our Mother and Model, at this time of untold suffering in our land. Let us ask for her intercession and let us ask her to give

(Continued on page 673)

# RECENT TENDENCIES IN THE FIELD OF PASTORAL ACTIVITY

— a statistical study of the overall trends —

In conjunction with the recent publication of the new edition of the Church's Statistical Annual for 1983, we present our translation of the following article:

## OVERALL PICTURE

The components of the overall trends of priests (positive in the case of ordinations, negative in the case of deaths or withdrawals) exhibit both over a long period (one decade) and a shorter one certain dynamic characteristics which merit careful description and evaluation.

As regards ordinations, Table I illustrates that, taken all together, they first showed a decrease (that extended from 1973 to 1979 both in terms of absolute figures and in terms relative to the number of priests present) and then a continual increase which appears to be proceeding with an accelerated rhythm as seen in the annual variation in percentage: +0.4 per cent between 1979 and 1980; + 1.8 per cent between 1980 and 1981; +1.2 per cent between 1981 and 1982 and +4.2 per cent between 1982 and 1983.

The most recent year (1983) is characterized not merely by that greater relative increase but also by the fact that for the first time since 1973 the continual decrease in the ordinations of religious is arrested, giving way to an increase of 3.8 per cent. Thus the recent overall developments in the area of ordinations are no longer based simply upon the ascending movement of diocesan ordinations but also, for 1983, upon that of religious ordinations, though it is obviously premature to speak of an inversion of the tendency in their regard.

**TABLE 1 — PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD**

Year	Number of Ordinations			Ordinations per 100 Priests		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total	Diocesan	Religious	Total
1973	4,405	2,764	7,169	1.65	1.69	1.66
1974	4,321	2,551	6,872	1.63	1.58	1.61
1975	4,139	2,488	6,627	1.57	1.55	1.56
1976	3,786	2,410	6,196	1.45	1.52	1.48
1977	3,866	2,168	6,034	1.49	1.36	1.44
1978	3,824	2,094	5,918	1.48	1.33	1.42
1979	3,840	1,925	5,765	1.48	1.22	1.33
1980	3,860	1,927	5,787	1.50	1.23	1.40
1981	3,981	1,908	5,889	1.56	1.23	1.43
1982	4,113	1,844	5,957	1.61	1.20	1.46
1983	4,296	1,914	6,210	1.69	1.25	1.53

Based upon a somewhat superficial analysis of the geographical provenience of the ordinations (which precedes a more careful one which will be conducted in terms of rates) it appears that the greatest contribution to the number of diocesan ordinations seen between 1982 and 1983 should be ascribed to Africa, which realized an increment of 37.6 per cent.

Unfortunately the numerical gains in the positive component are contrasted and outweighed by the number of deceased alone, as seen in Table 2.

The clearest indications of this fact are deduced from a reading of the figures showing the number of deceased per 100 priests. The figures for 1983 are the highest of the entire ten-year period, both overall and in each of the two categories, diocesan and religious.

Regarding the latter, one notes that until 1976 the rate of ordinations exceeded the death rate, but that subsequently the negative figure showed a continued relative increase.

Overall the rate of ordinations was inferior to that of deaths by only 0.02 per cent in 1973, but with the passage of time the deficit deepened, reaching a difference of 0.28 per cent in 1982 and 0.27 per cent in 1983.



**TABLE 2—DEATHS OF PRIESTS IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD**

Year	Number of Deaths			Deaths per 100 Priests		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total	Diocesan	Religious	Total
1973	4,922	2,337	7,259	1.84	1.43	1.68
1974	4,727	2,252	6,979	1.79	1.39	1.64
1975	4,820	2,240	7,060	1.83	1.40	1.67
1976	4,331	2,373	6,704	1.66	1.50	1.60
1977	4,517	2,303	6,820	1.74	1.45	1.63
1978	4,388	2,360	6,748	1.70	1.49	1.62
1979	4,350	2,382	6,732	1.68	1.51	1.62
1980	4,345	2,431	6,776	1.69	1.56	1.64
1981	4,383	2,463	6,846	1.71	1.59	1.67
1982	4,653	2,462	7,115	1.83	1.60	1.74
1983	4,773	2,552	7,325	1.88	1.67	1.80

There is an obvious connection between the phenomenon described and the increase in the average age of priests. In order to formulate hypotheses regarding the future tendency and particularly to argue on a technical basis as to whether and when there will be a future inversion of the tendency, it would be useful to have at one's disposition data concerning the age of priests in the various areas of the world.

Between 1982 and 1983 the greatest increase in the number of deaths among diocesan priests is found in Africa, though it must be noted that this observation is based upon quite a small number of cases.

Withdrawals, on the decline overall, reveal an intrinsic differentiation because while for diocesan priests the decrease proceeds without exception from 1973, for religious priests one observes a resumption after 1981 with a relative variation of +17.6 per cent between 1981 and 1982 and of +21.1 per cent between 1982 and 1983 (Table 3). In addition, within the framework of the decrease among diocesan priests Africa and Oceania are territorial exceptions, although the increases registered there are modest.

**TABLE 3—PRIESTLY WITHDRAWALS IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD**

Year	Number of Withdrawals			Withdrawals per 100 Priests		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total	Diocesan	Religious	Total
1973	1,868	1,822	3,790	0.70	1.12	0.88
1974	1,778	1,686	3,464	0.67	1.04	0.81
1975	1,560	1,441	3,001	0.59	0.90	0.71
1976	1,329	1,350	2,679	0.51	0.85	0.64
1977	1,429	1,077	2,506	0.55	0.69	0.60
1978	1,253	784	2,037	0.48	0.50	0.49
1979	1,056	520	1,576	0.41	0.34	0.38
1980	901	660	1,561	0.35	0.43	0.38
1981	800	460	1,260	0.31	0.30	0.31
1982	685	541	1,226	0.27	0.35	0.30
1983	603	655	1,258	0.24	0.43	0.31

Taking together the three components of the overall flux there results a negative balance of 2,373 units for 1983, very close to that of last year (2,384) and not far from the minimum negative balance registered in 1981 (2,217 units). These figures are far from that registered in 1973 (3,880), but they do not seem headed for further reductions in the short term. Even if the increase in the number of ordinations and the decrease in that of deaths is maintained, the balance will continue to be dominated by the dimension of the number of deaths until such point as the progressive ordination of new priests causes the average age of priests to drop.

In a broader period, that from 1973 to 1983, the balance can be calculated in an analytical way through high algebra of the ordinations, deaths and withdrawals registered in the arc of time. The calculation provides a picture of considerable interest.

The negative balances are in fact circumscribed almost exclusively by Europe, while they appear—but to a much lesser extent—in North America. The rest of the American continent furnishes modest positive contributions, while the contributions of Southeast Asia and of Africa are more elevated and determinant (thus limiting the losses at a worldwide level).

Passing from a retrospective to a prospective vision, it is clear that a knowledge of the status of major seminarians has a weighty influence upon forecasts. As is seen in Table 4, their number has progressively increased, from 1976 for those registered in diocesan centres and from 1975 for those registered in religious centres. Overall, 1982 shows an increase of 6.36 per cent over 1981, and 1983 one of 5.5 per cent over 1982. The major contributions to that last variation come from Africa, Central America and South America, where the increment passed the threshold of 10 per cent.

The differences of territorial dynamic just indicated regarding major seminarians, and previously for the components influencing the trends of priests, have changed the geography of the pastoral presence in the course of a few years, and they lay the groundwork for further modifications in the immediate future.

**TABLE 4 — MAJOR SEMINARIANS IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD**

Year	Major Seminarians Enrolled in Various Centres		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total
1973	41,545	22,250	63,795
1974	40,307	21,248	61,555
1975	39,047	21,095	60,142
1976	38,918	21,450	60,368
1977	39,422	21,591	61,013
1978	40,978	21,692	62,670
1979	43,212	21,777	64,989
1980	44,143	21,899	66,042
1981	46,649	21,984	68,633
1982	49,380	23,621	73,001
1983	52,019	25,025	77,044

The picture of vocations is completed by considering the total number of novices in the religious institutes of pontifical right (Table 5).

Male novices have been increasing from 1980, and in 1983 their number had grown by 24.1 per cent with respect to that

date and by 5.9 per cent with respect to the previous year. For women novices the increment extends from 1976 and the figures for 1983 show a variation in percentage of +60.2 per cent with respect to the minimum point and of +9.5 per cent with respect to the previous year.

Favourable considerations emerge regarding the evolution of the permanent diaconate as well. Their number went from 1,239 in 1973 to 10,275 in 1983 with a continual growth that between 1982 and 1983 is marked by an increase of 9.5 per cent (against 13.3 per cent the first year). It should be noted that currently 66.3 per cent of all deacons are found in North America and that in this zone the increment recently realized is above the mean (10.6 per cent), even though only slightly.

**TABLE 5 — MALE AND FEMALE NOVICES IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES OF PONTIFICAL RIGHT**

Year	Male			Female
	To be Priests	Others	Total	
1973	5,674	2,001	7,675	12,521
1974	5,837	1,981	7,818	11,744
1975	6,075	2,040	8,115	11,276
1976	5,987	2,054	8,041	11,049
1977	6,116	2,120	8,236	11,441
1978	6,241	2,065	8,306	11,758
1979	5,870	2,007	7,877	12,786
1980	5,767	1,877	7,644	13,932
1981	6,449	2,076	8,525	14,772
1982	6,944	2,014	8,958	16,164
1983	7,428	2,062	9,490	17,699

As in preceding years, slight decreases continue to characterize lay male religious with temporary and permanent vows and professed women religious (temporary and permanent). For the former (of whom approximately 50 per cent reside in Europe and 30 per cent on the American continent) the year 1983 shows a drop of 2.8 per cent with respect to 1982 and of 11.7 per cent

with respect to 1977. Exceptions to the general pattern are represented by increases in the last year in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Women religious decreased by 0.6 per cent with respect to 1982 and by 5.9 per cent with respect to 1977, but in the last year they increased in Africa, in the Caribbean, in South America and in Asia.

As can be seen incidentally in the analysis of this overall picture, the situation described up to now on the world level is the product of the juxtaposition of more restricted dynamisms which can sometimes differ notably one from another.

### THE NUMBER OF PRIESTS AND MAJOR SEMINARIANS IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD

The number of priests world-wide decreased by approximately 6.2 per cent between 1973 going from 433,089 to 406,376. Since the total number of priests in 1982 was 408,945 the re-

**TABLE 6 — PRESENT NUMBER OF PRIESTS IN THE  
CATHOLIC WORLD**

Geographical Area	1975			1983		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total	Diocesan	Religious	Total
<b>AFRICA</b>	4,993	13,392	18,385	6,813	10,589	17,402
<b>AMERICA</b>						
— North	43,342	29,407	72,749	42,267	27,272	69,539
— Central	7,556	4,391	11,947	8,124	4,377	12,501
— Caribbean	822	1,864	2,686	959	1,506	2,465
— South	14,472	20,624	35,096	15,229	18,946	34,175
<b>TOTAL AMERICA</b>	66,192	56,286	122,478	66,579	52,101	118,680
<b>ASIA</b>						
— Middle East	1,207	1,333	2,540	1,059	1,260	2,319
— South East	10,589	12,852	23,441	13,500	12,328	25,828
<b>TOTAL ASIA</b>	11,796	14,185	25,981	14,559	13,588	28,147
<b>EUROPE</b>	181,245	79,178	260,423	162,994	73,535	236,529
<b>OCEANIA</b>	3,015	2,807	5,822	2,894	2,724	5,618
<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	267,241	165,848	433,089	253,839	152,537	406,376

duction over the very short term was only 0.6 per cent. These two observations suffice to show how and when the regressive trend has been recently contained (Table 6).

In comparing the figures for the beginning and the end of the ten-year span — taking into account the percentages of composition per sub-continent — one notes modest variations which are summed up in a gain of one percentage point both for the Americas (diffused throughout all the subterritories of the continent) and for Asia (especially Southeast Asia) compared to a two-point reduction for Europe. More articulated observations can be made regarding the variations which took place between 1982 and 1983.

In the ten-year period the diocesan clergy increased in number in Africa, South America and Asia, while it remained practically constant in Central America and Oceania. The greatest decrease is seen in Europe, while in North America the drop is quite modest. Overall, the diocesan clergy saw a negligible reduction of 0.4 per cent. Religious clergy, on the other hand, suffered a decrease of approximately 1.1 per cent which is divided among all the sub-continent (with the exception of Southeast Asia and Oceania), peaking in North America at 2 per cent, double the overall mean.

The resultant of these two components gives rise to very modest territorial variations which in general are contained between — 1 and +1 per cent.

If the same analysis made concerning priests is repeated for major seminarians, one finds that their number in 1983 exceeds by 20.8 per cent that of 1973 and by 5.5 per cent that of 1982 (Table 7).

Between 1973 and 1983 the composition of the percentages of major seminarians throughout the various sub-continent showed much more profound modifications than that of priests.

Africa in fact gained four percentage points, going from 6.7 per cent to 10.7 per cent, while the most notable decreases are seen in Europe (from 41.1 to 35.4 per cent) and especially in North America (from 19.2 to 10.9 per cent). In South America

the incidence upon the world total grows from 8.8 to 17.2 per cent, and on account of these two inverse movements (those of North and South America) the total percentage of major seminarians in the Americas remains practically unaltered for the decade.

**TABLE 7 — MAJOR SEMINARIANS IN DIOCESAN AND RELIGIOUS CENTRES**

Geographical Area	1973			1983		
	Diocesan	Religious	Total	Diocesan	Religious	Total
AFRICA	3,788	449	4,237	6,880	1,393	8,273
AMERICA						
— North	7,191	5,073	12,264	5,406	2,988	8,394
— Central	2,623	1,169	3,792	3,403	1,770	5,173
— Caribbean	250	83	333	480	271	751
— South	2,947	2,640	5,587	8,172	5,111	13,283
TOTAL AMERICA	13,011	8,965	21,976	17,461	10,140	27,601
ASIA						
— Middle East	239	203	442	234	153	387
— South East	5,867	3,911	9,778	8,642	4,819	13,461
TOTAL ASIA	6,106	4,114	10,220	8,876	4,972	13,848
EUROPE	18,005	8,240	26,245	18,272	8,186	26,458
OCEANIA	635	482	1,117	530	334	864
WORLD TOTAL	41,545	22,250	63,795	52,019	25,025	77,044

Between 1982 and 1983 the number of major seminarians grew in all the subcontinents with respect to both religious and diocesan clergy, a few and modest exceptions (in the Middle East for both categories and in Oceania for religious alone).

At this point it may be useful to jointly consider the territorial distribution in 1973 and in 1983 of priests, major seminarians and Catholics, in order to evidence both the modifications which have taken place over time and the imbalances which were thus created.

In 1983 the relative abundance of priests with respect to Catholics was accentuated in both North America and Europe. The parallel imbalances with regard to seminarians were diminished in those two areas, while that in Southwest Asia was further accentuated.

In those areas suffering from a shortage of priests relative to Catholics in 1973 (South and Central America) the same shortages are seen in 1983, to an analogous or greater extent. In the same way, the shortage of seminarians in Central America worsened, while in South America it was attenuated.

Africa finds itself in a position similar to that of Southeast Asia in 1983, because before a percentage of Catholics equivalent to 8.0 per cent one notes relatively fewer priests (4.3 per cent as in 1973) and—a novelty with respect to ten years prior—a sharply increased percentage of seminarians (10.7 per cent).

A quantification of the disproportions can be obtained by adding up the absolute values of the differences between the percentage of priests and the corresponding percentage of Catholics for all the sub-continental areas. An analogous index can be constructed by substituting the percentage of major seminarians for that of priests.

For priests the index goes from 63.4 per cent in 1973 to 70.2 per cent in 1983, indicating an accentuation of the divergences in the territorial distribution of priests relative to Catholics. For seminarians the corresponding values are 48.0 per cent and 33.8 per cent; beyond indicating a tendency towards equilibrium, they show that the territorial disproportions are generally less marked in the case of seminarians than in that of priests.

### THE PASTORAL BURDEN

Hypotheses can be drawn from the preceding considerations regarding the opportuneness of favouring a movement of priests from one area to another in order to reduce the disparity of the pastoral burden.

The size of the pastoral burden can be measured in a first approximation from the relation between the number of Catholics and the number of priests. On a world-wide level this index rose from 1,586 in 1973 to 2,032 in 1983.



The median world-wide values in both 1973 and 1983 are greatly exceeded by the pastoral burdens of Central America (5,556 and 7,542, respectively), the Caribbean (6,160 and 7,580) and South America (5,327 and 6,805).

In Africa the index remained above the median and in the decade went from 2,401 to 3,796, while the situation appears more balanced in Asia (1,925 and 2,459).

Below the world median are found in Europe (1,005 in 1973 and 1,164 in 1983), Oceania (836 and 1,114) and North America (773 and 909).

A second approximation of the pastoral burden can be calculated by taking into account the fact that priests are helped in their activities by deacons, professed religious who are not priests (men and women), lay missionaries and catechists. Considering these various components as equivalent, a second evaluation of the pastoral load derives from the relation between the number of Catholics and the number of pastoral workers (meaning by this term the sum of priests and their collaborators).

With this index one observes a certain re-shuffling of positions. With respect to the world median in 1983, equal to 490 Catholics per pastoral worker, the worst situation is found in Central America (1,941), followed by South America (1,631) and the Caribbean (1,380). Below the world median, in addition to the areas which the first index already indicated as being more favoured (Europe with 353 Catholics per worker, North America with 351 and Oceania with 211), are found in Asia (377) and Africa (282).

The differences registered by the two methods depend on the great variability in the number of collaborators per priest in the individual areas. While on a global level every priest counts on an average of 3.1 assistants, that figure rises to 12.5 in Africa, where more than two-thirds of all catechists are found (172,132 out of 257,909 overall).

### **THE INCREASE OF PRIESTS AND PRIESTLY VOCATIONS PER GEOGRAPHICAL AREA**

An analysis of the local evolution of the components of the trends of priests (ordinations, deaths and withdrawals) can only be carried out regarding diocesan clergy.

In Africa there was a sudden increase in the number of ordinations in 1983 (37.6 per cent more relative to the 1982 figure) which could be traced to some nations which were already making consistent contributions, namely Nigeria, Uganda and Zaire: in fact, together they accounted for half of the ordinations in the whole continent for that year.

In North and Central America the preceding process of decline seems by now to be contained, while in the Caribbean and South America there is a movement of growth to which the most consistent numerical contributors are Columbia, Argentina and Brazil.

In Asia in 1983 no phenomena substantially different from the previous year are registered. In Europe ordinations in Italy and Poland are less than those for 1982, though not significantly; in Spain there is a radical decrease; while in West Germany a new local maximum is reached which sharply surpasses the figures of the last few years.

**TABLE 9 — NUMBERS OF ORDINATIONS, DEATHS AND WITHDRAWALS OF PRIESTS (based on 100)**

Geographical Areas	1973			1983		
	Ordinations	Deaths	Withdrawals	Ordinations	Deaths	Withdrawals
AFRICA	4.4	1.1	0.5	6.9	1.1	0.5
AMERICA						
— North	2.1	1.7	1.3	1.5	1.9	0.4
— Central	3.0	1.3	1.1	2.3	1.2	0.3
— Caribbean	1.8	1.7	1.0	5.4	0.5	0.2
— South	1.9	1.4	1.9	3.7	1.4	0.4
TOTAL AMERICA	2.2	1.6	1.4	2.1	1.7	0.4
ASIA						
— Middle East	1.6	2.4	0.2	2.3	1.8	
— South East	3.3	1.0	0.6	4.1	1.0	0.3
TOTAL ASIA	3.2	1.1	0.5	4.0	1.0	0.3
EUROPE	1.3	2.0	0.5	1.1	2.1	0.2
OCEANIA	2.3	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.4	0.8
WORLD TOTAL	1.6	1.8	0.7	1.7	1.9	0.2

In Oceania ordinations continue to follow a pattern established over the years, remaining at a level of between 43 and 50 per year.

In relative terms—that is, related to the total number of priests—ordinations in Africa increased by two and one-half percentage points between 1973 and 1983 (from 4.4 to 6.9 per cent). In the Americas the noticeable increase in the rate of ordinations in South America, and even more sharply in the Caribbean, did not succeed in compensating for the decrease registered in the other areas of the continent. Thus the overall figures for 1973 and 1983 are practically equivalent for the Americas (Table 9).

To the increase in Asia are counter-balanced the reductions in Europe and more sharply, in Oceania.

Because of the interplay of these contrasting patterns, the rate of ordinations of 1.6 (per 100 priests) in 1973 remained substantially identical (1.7) in 1983.

The mortality rate among priests, as has already been noted, further increased in 1983. The absolute values show that the phenomenon is concentrated in North America (in particular in the United States) and in Europe (with maximum frequency in France and Italy). Between 1973 and 1983 the rate world-wide rose from 1.8 to 1.9 per cent, but significant variations were seen in the Caribbean (from 1.7 to 0.5 per hundred priests) and in the Middle East (from 2.4 to 1.8).

The world rate of withdrawals in 1983 is only 0.2 per cent (much smaller than the 0.7 per cent of 1973); with respect to that average value the highest rates are seen in Oceania (0.8 per cent), Africa (0.5 per cent) and the Americas (0.4 per cent).

As regards major seminarians, we have already noted the process of decline and then the subsequent recovery which has taken place from 1973 to the present. Repeating the analysis in a more detailed way at the territorial level, one sees from the historical series of absolute values that between 1970 and 1975 only Africa, South America and, more modestly, the Caribbean showed an increase in vocations. In 1975 Europe began a weak recovery, Oceania followed an oscillating movement, and only in North America did a decline persist, and even there it was gradually disappearing.

The increment of 5.5 per cent which took place between 1982 and 1983 had as its major contributors Central America.

(+10.9 per cent), the Caribbean (+14.7 per cent) and South America (+11.1 per cent).

The consideration of the relative values illustrated in Table 10 and obtained by relating the number of seminarians to the number of inhabitants or to the number of Catholics, furnishes further data which are not too dissimilar for the one or the other type of index.

**TABLE 10 — MAJOR SEMINARIANS COMPARED TO THE CIVILIAN AND CATHOLIC POPULATION**

Geographical Areas	Major Seminarians per					
	1 Million Inhabitants			1 Million Catholics		
	1970	1975	1983	1970	1975	1983
<b>AFRICA</b>	10.1	11.1	16.0	87.8	90.6	125.2
<b>AMERICA</b>						
— North	63.9	44.4	32.3	259.8	184.2	132.9
— Central	60.3	40.9	51.7	64.5	43.9	54.9
— Caribbean	12.9	16.4	25.1	21.3	26.3	40.2
— South	27.0	28.4	51.7	29.8	31.3	57.1
<b>TOTAL AMERICA</b>	47.1	36.4	42.7	78.6	59.3	67.5
<b>ASIA</b>						
— Middle East	5.7	3.6	3.1	373.4	209.5	167.3
— South East	9.2	8.1	9.1	209.5	195.8	201.2
<b>TOTAL ASIA</b>	8.9	7.8	8.7	214.8	196.3	200.0
<b>EUROPE</b>	78.8	54.5	57.6	131.0	92.3	96.1
<b>OCEANIA</b>	64.2	48.3	36.3	277.9	194.9	138.0
<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	25.5	21.9	23.7	111.5	84.8	93.3

Highly evidenced, in fact, is the continual growth — at first slow, and then more accelerated — which has characterized the rates in Africa, the Caribbean and South America between 1970 and 1983. The recovery which one notes in Central America and in the entire continent as well is not yet observable in North America.

To complete the world picture, one can add the recent slow recovery which Europe seems to be undergoing to the negligible variations observable in Asia, while in Oceania the tendency towards decline persists.

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## POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

# RECONCILIATIO ET PAENITENTIA

### JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY AND FAITHFUL ON RECONCILIATION AND PENANCE IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH TODAY

(Continuation)

#### PART THREE

### THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

#### Promoting Penance and Reconciliation

23. To evoke conversion and penance in man's heart and to offer him the gift of reconciliation is the specific mission of the Church as she continues the redemptive work of her divine Founder. It is not a mission which consists merely of a few theoretical statements and the putting forward of an ethical ideal unaccompanied by the energy with which to carry it out. Rather it seeks to express itself in precise ministerial functions, directed towards a concrete practice of penance and reconciliation.

We can call this ministry, which is founded on and illumined by the principles of faith which we have explained, and which is directed towards precise objectives and sustained by adequate means, *the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation*. Its point of departure is the Church's conviction that man, to whom every form of pastoral activity is directed but principally that of penance and reconciliation, is the man marked by sin whose striking image is to be found in King David. Rebuked by the prophet Nathan, David faces squarely his own iniquity and confesses: "I have sinned against the Lord",<sup>115</sup> and proclaims: "I know my transgression, and my sin is ever before me".<sup>116</sup> But

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<sup>115</sup> 2 Sam. 12:13.

<sup>116</sup> Ps. 51 (50):3.

he also prays: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow",<sup>117</sup> and he receives the response of the divine mercy: "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die".<sup>118</sup>

The Church thus finds herself face to face with man — with the whole human world — wounded by sin and affected by sin in the innermost depths of his being. But at the same time he is moved by an unrestrainable desire to be freed from sin and, especially if he is a Christian, he is aware that the *mystery of pietas*, Christ the Lord, is already acting in him and in the world by the power of the Redemption.

The Church's reconciling role must therefore be carried out in accordance with that intimate link which closely connects the forgiveness and remission of the sin of each person with the fundamental and full reconciliation of humanity which took place with the Redemption. This link helps us to understand that, since sin is the active principle of division — division between man and the nature created by God — only conversion from sin is capable of bringing about a profound and lasting reconciliation wherever division has penetrated.

I do not need to repeat what I have already said about the importance of this "ministry of reconciliation",<sup>119</sup> and of the pastoral activity whereby it is carried out, in the Church's consciousness and life. This pastoral activity would be lacking an essential aspect of its being and failing in an indispensable function if the "message of reconciliation"<sup>120</sup> were not proclaimed with clarity and tenacity, in season and out of season, and if the gift of reconciliation were not offered to the world. But it is worth repeating that the importance of this ecclesial service of reconciliation extends beyond the confines of the Church to the whole world.

To speak of *the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation*, then, is to refer to all the tasks incumbent on the Church, at all levels, for their promotion. More concretely, to speak of this pastoral activity is to evoke all the activities whereby the Church, through each and every one of her members — pastors and faithful, at all levels and in all spheres, and with all the means at her disposal, words and actions, teaching and

<sup>117</sup> Ps. 51 (50):7.

<sup>118</sup> 2 Sam. 12:13.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:19.

prayer — leads people individually or as groups to true penance and thus sets them on the path to full reconciliation.

The Fathers of the Synod, as representatives of their brother Bishops and as leaders of the people entrusted to them, concerned themselves with the most practical and concrete elements of this pastoral activity. And I am happy to echo their concerns, by associating myself with their anxieties and hopes, by receiving the results of their research and experiences, and by encouraging them in their plans and achievements. May they find in this part of the present Apostolic Exhortation the contribution which they themselves made to the Synod, a contribution the usefulness of which I wish to extend, through these pages, to the whole Church.

I therefore propose to call attention to the essentials of *the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation* by emphasizing, with the Synod Assembly, the following two points:

1. The means used and the paths followed by the Church in order to promote penance and reconciliation.
2. The Sacrament par excellence of penance and reconciliation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROMOTION OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION: WAYS AND MEANS

24. In order to promote penance and reconciliation, the Church has at her disposal two principal means which were entrusted to her by her Founder himself: catechesis and the Sacraments. Their use has always been considered by the Church as fully in harmony with the requirements of her salvific mission and at the same time as corresponding to the requirements and spiritual needs of people in all ages. This use can be in forms and ways both old and new, among which it will be a good idea to remember in particular what we can call, in the expression of my Predecessor Paul VI, *the method of dialogue*.

#### **Dialogue**

25. For the Church, dialogue is in a certain sense a means and especially a way of carrying out her activity in the modern world.

The Second Vatican Council proclaims that "the Church, by virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all people... stands forth as a sign of that fraternal solidarity which allows honest dialogue and invigorates it". The Council adds that the Church should be capable of "establishing an ever more fruitful dialogue among all those who compose the one People of God",<sup>121</sup> and also of "establishing a dialogue with human society".<sup>122</sup>

My Predecessor, Paul VI, devoted to dialogue a considerable part of his first Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, in which he describes it and significantly characterizes it as the *dialogue of salvation*.<sup>123</sup>

The Church in fact uses the method of dialogue in order the better to lead people — both those who through Baptism and the profession of faith acknowledge their membership of the Christian community and also those who are outside — to conversion and repentance, along the path of a profound renewal of their own consciences and lives, in the light of the mystery of the redemption and salvation accomplished by Christ and entrusted to the ministry of his Church. Authentic dialogue, therefore, is aimed above all at the rebirth of individuals, through interior conversion and repentance, but always with profound respect for consciences and with patience and at the step-by-step pace indispensable for modern conditions.

Pastoral dialogue aimed at reconciliation continues to be today a fundamental task of the Church in different spheres and at different levels.

The Church in the first place promotes an *ecumenical dialogue*, that is, with Churches and ecclesial communities which profess faith in Christ, the Son of God and only Saviour. She also promotes dialogue with the other communities of people who are seeking God and wish to have a relationship of communion with him.

At the basis of this dialogue with the other Churches and Christian communities and with the other religions, and as a

<sup>121</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 92.

<sup>122</sup> Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 13; cf. Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8; Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 11-12.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, III: AAS 56 (1964), 639-659.



condition of her credibility and effectiveness, there must be a sincere effort of permanent and renewed dialogue within the Catholic Church herself. She is aware that, by her nature, she is the *sacrament of the universal communion of charity*,<sup>124</sup> but she is equally aware of the tensions within her, tensions which risk becoming factors of division.

The heartfelt and determined invitation which was already extended by my Predecessor in preparation for the 1975 Holy Year<sup>125</sup> is also valid at the present moment. In order to overcome conflicts and to ensure that normal tensions do not prove harmful to the unity of the Church, we must all apply to ourselves the word of God; we must relinquish our own subjective views and seek the truth where it is to be found, namely the divine word itself and in the authentic interpretation of that word provided by the Magisterium of the Church. In this light, listening to one another, respect, refraining from all hasty judgments, patience, the ability to avoid subordinating the faith, which unites, to the opinions, fashions and ideological choices which divide — these are all qualities of a dialogue within the Church which must be persevering, open and sincere. Obviously, dialogue would not have these qualities and would not become a factor of reconciliation if the Magisterium were not heeded and accepted.

Thus actively engaged in seeking her own internal communion, the Catholic Church can address an appeal for reconciliation to the other Churches with which there does not exist full communion, as well as to the other religions and even to all those who are seeking God with a sincere heart. This she has been doing for some time.

In the light of the Council and of the Magisterium of my Predecessors, whose precious inheritance I have received and am making every effort to preserve and put into effect, I can affirm that the Catholic Church at every level is committed to frank ecumenical dialogue, without facile optimism but also without distrust and without hesitation or delays. The fundamental laws which she seeks to follow in this dialogue are, on the one hand, the conviction that only a spiritual ecumenism — namely an ecumenism founded on common prayer and in a common

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1. 9. 13.

<sup>125</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Paterna cum Benevolentia*: AAS 67 (1975), 5:23.

docility to the one Lord — enables us to make a sincere and serious response to the other exigencies of ecumenical action.<sup>126</sup> The other law is the conviction that a certain facile irenicism in doctrinal and especially dogmatic matters could perhaps lead to a form of superficial and shortlived coexistence, but it could not lead to that profound and stable communion which we all long for. This communion will be reached at the hour willed by Divine Providence. But in order to reach it, the Catholic Church, for her part, knows that she must be open and sensitive to all “the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren”;<sup>127</sup> but she also knows that she must likewise base a frank and constructive dialogue upon a clarity regarding her own positions, and upon fidelity and consistency with the faith transmitted and defined in accordance with the perennial tradition of her Magisterium. Notwithstanding the threat of a certain defeatism, and despite the inevitable slowness which rashness could never correct, the Catholic Church continues with all other Christian brethren to seek the paths to unity, and with the followers of the other religions she continues to seek to have sincere dialogue. May this inter-religious dialogue lead to the overcoming of all attitudes of hostility, distrust, mutual condemnation and even mutual invective, which is the precondition for encounter at least in faith in one God and in the certainty of eternal life for the immortal soul. May the Lord especially grant that ecumenical dialogue will also lead to a sincere reconciliation concerning everything that we already have in common with the other Christian Churches: faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, our Saviour and Lord; a listening to the word; the study of Revelation, and the Sacrament of Baptism.

To the extent to which the Church is capable of generating active harmony — unity in variety — within herself, and of offering herself as a witness to and humble servant of reconciliation with the other Churches and ecclesial communities and the other religions, she becomes, in the expressive definition of Saint Augustine, a “reconciled world”.<sup>128</sup> Then she will be able to be a sign of reconciliation in the world and for the world.

The Church is aware of the extreme seriousness of the situation created by the forces of division and war, which today

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7-8.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 96, 7: *PL* 38, 588.

constitutes a grave threat not only to the balance and harmony of nations but to the very survival of humanity, and she feels it her duty to offer and suggest her own unique collaboration for the overcoming of conflicts and the restoration of concord.

It is a complex and delicate dialogue of reconciliation in which the Church is engaged, especially through the work of the *Holy See* and its different *organisms*. The Holy See already endeavours to intervene with the leaders of nations and the heads of the various international bodies, or seeks to associate itself with them, conduct a dialogue with them and encourage them to dialogue with one another, for the sake of reconciliation in the midst of the many conflicts. It does this not for ulterior motives or hidden interests — since it has none — but “out of a humanitarian concern”,<sup>129</sup> placing its institutional structure and moral authority, which are altogether unique, at the service of concord and peace. It does this in the conviction that as “in war two parties rise against one another” so “in the question of peace there are also necessarily two parties which must know how to commit themselves”, and in this “one finds the true meaning of a dialogue for peace”.<sup>130</sup>

The Church engages in dialogue for reconciliation also through the Bishops in the competency and responsibility proper to them, either individually in the direction of their respective local Churches or united in their Episcopal Conferences, with the collaboration of the priests and of all those who make up the Christian communities. They truly fulfil their task when they promote this indispensable dialogue and proclaim the human and Christian need for reconciliation and peace. In communion with their Pastors, the laity who have as “their own field of evangelizing activity . . . the vast and complicated world of politics, society . . . economics . . . (and) international life”,<sup>131</sup> are called upon to engage directly in dialogue or to work for dialogue aimed at reconciliation. Through them too the Church carries out her reconciling activity. Thus the fundamental pre-supposition and secure basis for any lasting renewal of society and for peace between nations lies in the regeneration of hearts through conversion and penance.

<sup>129</sup> Pope John Paul II, Speech to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (15 January 1983), 4. 6. 11: AAS 75 (1983), 376. 378 f. 381.

<sup>130</sup> Pope John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the 16th World Day of Peace (1 January 1983), 6: *Insegnamenti* VI, 1 (1983), 7.

<sup>131</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 70: AAS 68 (1976), 59 f.

It should be repeated that, on the part of the Church and her members, dialogue, whatever form it takes (and these forms can be and are very diverse, since the very concept of dialogue has an analogical value) can never begin from an attitude of indifference to the truth. On the contrary, it must begin from a presentation of the truth, offered in a calm way, with respect for the intelligence and consciences of others. The dialogue of reconciliation can never replace or attenuate the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel, the precise goal of which is conversion from sin and communion with Christ and the Church. It must be at the service of the transmission and realization of that truth through the means left by Christ to the Church for the pastoral activity of reconciliation, namely catechesis and penance.

### Catechesis

26. In the vast area in which the Church has the mission of operating through dialogue, *the pastoral ministry of penance and reconciliation* is directed to the members of the body of the Church principally through an adequate *catechesis* concerning the two distinct and complementary realities to which the Synod Fathers gave a particular importance and which they emphasized in some of the concluding *Propositiones*: these are penance and reconciliation. Catechesis is therefore the first means to be used.

At the basis of the Synod's very opportune recommendation is a fundamental presupposition: what is *pastoral* is not opposed to what is *doctrinal*. Nor can pastoral action prescind from doctrinal content, from which in fact it draws its substance and real validity. Now, if the Church is the "pillar and bulwark of the truth"<sup>132</sup> and is placed in the world as Mother and Teacher, how could she neglect the task of teaching the truth which constitutes a path of life?

From the Pastors of the Church one expects, first of all, *catechesis on reconciliation*. This must be founded on the teaching of the Bible, especially the New Testament, on the need to rebuild the covenant with God in Christ the Redeemer and Reconciler. And, in the light of this new communion and friendship, and as an extension of it, it must be founded on the teaching concerning the need to be reconciled with one's brethren,

<sup>132</sup> 1 Tim. 3:15.

even if this means interrupting the offering of the sacrifice.<sup>133</sup> Jesus strongly insists on this theme of fraternal reconciliation: for example, when he invites us to turn the other cheek to the one who strikes us, and to give our cloak too to the one who has taken our coat,<sup>134</sup> or when he instills the law of forgiveness: forgiveness which each one receives in the measure that he or she forgives,<sup>135</sup> forgiveness to be offered even to enemies,<sup>136</sup> forgiveness to be granted seventy times seven times,<sup>137</sup> which means in practice without any limit. On these conditions, which are realizable only in a genuinely evangelical climate, it is possible to have a true reconciliation between individuals, families, communities, nations and peoples. From these biblical data on reconciliation there will naturally derive a *theological catechesis*, which in its synthesis will also integrate the elements of psychology, sociology and the other human sciences which can serve to clarify situations, describe problems accurately, and persuade listeners or readers to make concrete resolutions.

The pastors of the Church are also expected to provide *catechesis on penance*. Here too the richness of the biblical message must be its source. With regard to penance this message emphasizes particularly its value for *conversion*, which is the term that attempts to translate the word in the Greek text, *metánoia*,<sup>138</sup> which literally means to allow the spirit to be overturned in order to make it turn towards God. These are also the two fundamental elements which emerge from the parable of the son who was lost and found: his "coming to himself"<sup>139</sup> and his decision to return to his father. There can be no reconciliation unless these attitudes of conversion come first, and catechesis should explain them with concepts and terms adapted to people's various ages and their differing cultural, moral and social backgrounds.

This is a first value of penance and it extends into a second: penance also means *repentance*. The two meanings of *metanoia* appear in the significant instruction given by Jesus, "If your brother repents (= returns to you), forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent', you must forgive him".<sup>140</sup> A good catechesis

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:23 f.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:38-40.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:12.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:43 ff.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Mt. 18:21 f.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Mk. 1:14; Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Lk. 3:8.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Lk. 15:17.

<sup>140</sup> Lk. 17:3 f.

will show how repentance, just like conversion, is far from being a superficial feeling but a real overturning of the soul.

A third value is contained in penance, and this is the movement whereby the preceding attitudes of conversion and repentance are manifested externally: this is *doing penance*. This meaning is clearly perceptible in the term *metánoia*, as used by John the Baptist in the texts of the Synoptics.<sup>141</sup> *To do penance* means, above all, to re-establish the balance and harmony broken by sin, to change direction even at the cost of sacrifice.

A catechesis on penance, therefore, and one that is as complete and adequate as possible, is absolutely essential at a time like ours, when dominant attitudes in psychology and social behaviour are in such contrast with the threefold value just illustrated. Contemporary man seems to find it harder than ever to recognize his own mistakes and to decide to retrace his steps and begin again after changing course. He seems very reluctant to say "I repent" or "I am sorry". He seems to refuse instinctively, and often irresistibly, anything that is penance in the sense of a sacrifice accepted and carried out for the correction of sin. In this regard I would like to emphasize that *the Church's penitential discipline*, even though it has been mitigated for some time, cannot be abandoned without grave harm both to the interior life of individual Christians and of the ecclesial community, and also to their capacity for missionary influence. It is not uncommon for non-Christians to be surprised at the negligible witness of true penance on the part of Christ's followers. It is clear, however, that Christian penance will only be authentic if it is inspired by love and not by mere fear; if it consists in a serious effort to crucify the "old man" so that the "new" can be born by the power of Christ; if it takes as its model Christ, who though he was innocent chose the path of poverty, patience, austerity and, one can say, the penitential life.

As the Synod recalled, the pastors of the Church are also expected to provide *catechesis on conscience and its formation*. This too is a very relevant topic, in view of the fact that, in the upheavals to which our present culture is subjected, this interior sanctuary, man's innermost self, his conscience, is too often attacked, put to the test, confused and obscured. Valuable guidelines for a wise catechesis on conscience can be found both in the Doctors of the Church and in the theology of the Second Vatican Council, and especially in the documents on the Church

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Mt. 3:2; Mk. 1:2-6; Lk. 3:1-6.

in the modern world<sup>142</sup> and on religious liberty.<sup>143</sup> Along these same lines, Pope Paul VI often reminded us of the nature and role of conscience in our life.<sup>144</sup> I myself, following his footsteps, miss no opportunity to throw light on this most lofty element of man's greatness and dignity,<sup>145</sup> this "sort of *moral sense* which leads us to discern what is *good* and what is *evil* . . . like an inner eye, a visual capacity of the spirit, able to guide our steps along the path of good". And I have reiterated the need to form one's own conscience, lest it become "a force which is destructive of the true humanity of the person, rather than that holy place where God reveals to him his true good".<sup>146</sup>

On other points too, of no less relevance for reconciliation, one looks to the pastors of the Church for catechesis.

On the *sense of sin*, which, as I have said, has become considerably weakened in our world.

On *temptation and temptations*: the Lord Jesus himself, the Son of God, "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin",<sup>147</sup> allowed himself to be tempted by the Evil One<sup>148</sup> in order to show that, like himself, his followers too would be subjected to temptation, and in order to show how one should behave when subjected to temptation. For those who beseech the Father not to be tempted beyond their own strength<sup>149</sup> and not to succumb to temptation,<sup>150</sup> and for those who do not expose themselves to occasions of sin, being subjected to temptation does not mean that they have sinned, rather it is an opportunity for growing in fidelity and consistency through humility and watchfulness.

Catechesis is also expected on *fasting*: this can be practised in old forms and new, as a sign of conversion, repentance

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 8. 16. 19. 26. 41. 48.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2. 3. 4.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. among many others the addresses at the General Audiences of 28 March 1973: *Insegnamenti* XI (1973) 294 ff.; 8 August 1973: *ibid.* 772 ff.; 7 November 1973: *ibid.* 1054 ff.; 13 March 1974: *Insegnamenti* XII (1974) 230 ff.; 8 May 1974: *ibid.* 402 ff.; 12 February 1975: *Insegnamenti* XIII (1975) *ibid.* 290 ff.; 13 July 1977: *Insegnamenti* XV (1977), 710 ff.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Angelus* of 17 March 1982: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 860 f.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, Address at the General Audience of 17 August 1983, 1-3: *Insegnamenti* VI, 2 (1983), 256 f.

<sup>147</sup> Heb. 4:15.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12 f.; Lk. 4:1-13.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4.

and personal mortification and, at the same time, as a sign of union with Christ crucified and of solidarity with the starving and suffering.

Catechesis on *almsgiving*: this is a means of making charity a practical thing, by sharing what one possesses with those suffering the consequences of poverty.

Catechesis on the *intimate connection* which links the overcoming of divisions in the world with perfect communion with God and among people, which is the eschatological purpose of the Church.

Catechesis on the *concrete circumstances* in which reconciliation has to be achieved (in the family, in the civil community, in social structures) and particularly catechesis on the *four reconciliations* which repair the four fundamental rifts: reconciliation of man with God, with self, with the brethren and with the whole of creation.

Nor can the Church omit, without serious mutilation of her essential message, a constant catechesis on what the traditional Christian language calls the four *last things of man*: death, judgment (universal and particular), hell and heaven. In a culture which tends to imprison man in the earthly life at which he is more or less successful, the pastors of the Church are asked to provide a catechesis which will reveal and illustrate with the certainties of faith what comes after the present life: beyond the mysterious gates of death, an eternity of joy in communion with God or the punishment of separation from him. Only in this eschatological vision can one realize the exact nature of sin and feel decisively moved to penance and reconciliation.

Pastors who are zealous and creative never lack opportunities for imparting this broad and varied catechesis, taking into account the different degrees of education and religious formation of those to whom they speak. Such opportunities are often given by the biblical readings and the rites of the Mass and the Sacraments, as also by the circumstances of their celebration. For the same purpose many initiatives can be taken such as sermons, lectures, discussions, meetings, courses of religious education, etc., as happens in many places. Here I wish to point out in particular the importance and effectiveness of the old-style *popular missions* for the purposes of such catechesis. If adapted to the peculiar needs of the present time, such missions can be, today as yesterday, a useful instrument of religious education also regarding penance and reconciliation.



In view of the great relevance of reconciliation based on conversion in the delicate field of human relationships and social interaction at all levels, including the international level, catechesis cannot fail to inculcate the valuable contribution of *the Church's social teaching*. The timely and precise teaching of my Predecessors from Pope Leo XIII onwards, to which was added the substantial contribution of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council and the contributions of the different Episcopates elicited by various circumstances in their respective countries, has made up an ample and solid body of doctrine. This regards the many different needs inherent in the life of the human community, in relationships between individuals, families, groups in their different spheres, and in the very constitution of a society that intends to follow the moral law, which is the foundation of civilization.

At the basis of this social teaching of the Church there is obviously to be found the vision which the Church draws from the word of God concerning the rights and duties of individuals, the family and the community; concerning the value of liberty and the nature of justice, concerning the primacy of charity, concerning the dignity of the human person and the exigencies of the common good, to which politics and the economy itself must be directed. Upon these fundamental principles of the social Magisterium, which confirm and repropose the universal dictates of reason and of the conscience of peoples, there rests in great part the hope for a peaceful solution to many social conflicts and, in short, the hope for universal reconciliation.

## The Sacraments

27. The second divinely instituted means which the Church offers for the pastoral activity of penance and reconciliation is constituted by the *Sacraments*.

In the mysterious dynamism of the Sacraments, so rich in symbolism and content, one can discern one aspect which is not always emphasized: each Sacrament, over and above its own proper grace, is also a sign of penance and reconciliation. Therefore in each of them it is possible to relive these dimensions of the spirit.

Baptism is of course a salvific washing which, as Saint Peter says, is effective "not as a removal of dirt from the body

but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience".<sup>151</sup> It is death, burial and resurrection with the dead, buried and risen Christ.<sup>152</sup> It is a gift of the Holy Spirit through Christ.<sup>153</sup> But this essential and original constituent of Christian Baptism, far from eliminating the penitential element already present in the baptism which Jesus himself received from John "to fulfill all righteousness",<sup>154</sup> in fact enriches it. In other words, it is a fact of conversion and of re-integration into the right order of relationships with God, of reconciliation with God, with the elimination of the original stain and the consequent introduction into the great family of the reconciled.

Confirmation likewise, as a ratification of Baptism and together with Baptism a Sacrament of initiation, in conferring the fullness of the Holy Spirit and in bringing the Christian life to maturity, signifies and accomplishes thereby a greater conversion of the heart and brings about a more intimate and effective membership of the same assembly of the reconciled, which is the Church of Christ.

The definition which Saint Augustine gives of the Eucharist, as *sacramentum pietatis, signum unitatis, vinculum caritatis*,<sup>155</sup> clearly illustrates the effects of personal sanctification (*pietas*) and community reconciliation (*unitas* and *caritas*) which derive from the very essence of the Eucharistic mystery, as an unbloody renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, the source of salvation and of reconciliation for all people.

However, it must be remembered that the Church, guided by faith in this great Sacrament, teaches that no Christian who is conscious of grave sin can receive the Eucharist before having obtained God's forgiveness. This we read in the instruction *Eucharisticum Mystrium* which, duly approved by Paul VI, fully confirms the teaching of the Council of Trent: "The Eucharist is to be offered to the faithful also 'as a remedy, which frees us from daily faults and preserves us from mortal sin' and they are to be shown the fitting way of using the penitential parts of the liturgy of the Mass. The person who wishes to receive Holy Communion is to be reminded of the precept: 'Let a man examine himself' (1 Cor. 11:28). And the Church's cus-

<sup>151</sup> 1 Pet. 3:21.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Rom. 6:3 f.; Col. 2:12.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Mt. 3:15.

<sup>155</sup> Saint Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus*, 26, 13: CCL 36, 266.

tom shows that such an examination is necessary, because no one who is conscious of being in mortal sin, however contrite he may believe himself to be, is to approach the Holy Eucharist without having first made a sacramental confession. If this person finds himself in need and has no means of going to confession, he should first make an act of perfect contrition".<sup>156</sup>

The Sacrament of Orders is intended to give to the Church the pastors who, besides being teachers and guides, are called to be witnesses and workers of unity, builders of the family of God, and defenders and preservers of the communion of this family against the sources of division and dispersion.

The Sacrament of Matrimony, the exaltation of human love under the action of grace, is a sign of the love of Christ for the Church. But it is also a sign of the victory which Christ grants to couples in resisting the forces which deform and destroy love, in order that the family born from this Sacrament may be a sign also of the reconciled and reconciling Church for a world reconciled in all its structures and institutions.

Finally, the Anointing of the Sick, in the trial of illness and old age and especially at the Christian's final hour, is a sign of definitive conversion to the Lord and of total acceptance of suffering and death as a penance for sins. And in this is accomplished supreme reconciliation with the Father.

However, among the Sacraments there is one which, though it has often been called the Sacrament of *Confession* because of the accusation of sins which takes place in it, can more appropriately be considered by antonomasia the *Sacrament of Penance*, as it is in fact called. And thus it is the *Sacrament of conversion and reconciliation*. The recent Synod particularly concerned itself with this Sacrament because of its importance with regard to reconciliation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

28. In all its phases and at all its levels, the Synod considered with the greatest attention that sacramental sign which represents and at the same time accomplishes penance and

<sup>156</sup> Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 35: AAS 59 (1967), 560 f.

reconciliation. This Sacrament in itself certainly does not contain all possible ideas of conversion and reconciliation. From the very beginning, in fact, the Church has recognized and used many and varying forms of penance. Some are liturgical or paraliturgical and include the penitential act in the Mass, services of atonement and pilgrimages; others are of an ascetical character, such as fasting. But of all such acts none is more significant, more divinely efficacious or more lofty and at the same time easily accessible as a rite than the Sacrament of Penance.

From its preparatory stage, and then in the numerous interventions during the sessions, in the group meetings and in the final *Propositiones*, the Synod took into account the statement frequently made, with varying nuances and emphases, namely: *the Sacrament of Penance is in crisis*. The Synod took note of profound catechesis, but it also recommended a no less profound analysis of a theological, historical, psychological, sociological and juridical character of penance in general and of the Sacrament of Penance in particular. In all of this Synod's intention was to clarify the reasons for the crisis and to open the way to a positive solution, for the good of humanity. Meanwhile, from the Synod itself the Church has received a clear confirmation of its faith regarding the Sacrament which gives to every Christian and to the whole community of believers the certainty of forgiveness through the power of the redeeming blood of Christ.

*It is good to renew and reaffirm this faith* at a moment when it might be weakening, losing something of its completeness or entering into an area of shadow and silence, threatened as it is by the negative elements of the above-mentioned crisis. For the Sacrament of Confession is indeed being undermined, on the one hand by the obscuring of the moral and religious conscience the lessening of a sense of sin, the distortion of the concept of repentance, and the lack of effort to live an authentically Christian life. And on the other hand, it is being undermined by the sometimes widespread idea that one can obtain forgiveness directly from God, even in an habitual way, without approaching the Sacrament of reconciliation. A further negative influence is the routine of a sacramental practice sometimes lacking in fervour and real spontaneity, deriving perhaps from a mistaken and distorted idea of the effects of the Sacrament.

It is therefore appropriate to recall the principal aspects of this *great Sacrament*.

**"Whose sins you shall forgive"**

29. The Books of the Old and New Testament provide us with the first and fundamental fact concerning the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. In the Psalms and in the preaching of the Prophets, the name *merciful* is perhaps the one most often given to the Lord, in contrast to the persistent cliché whereby the God of the Old Testament is presented above all as severe and vengeful. Thus in the Psalms there is a long Sapiential passage drawing from the Exodus tradition, which recalls God's kindly action in the midst of his people. This action, though represented in an anthropomorphic way, is perhaps one of the most eloquent Old Testament proclamations of the divine mercy. Suffice it to quote the verse: "Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again".<sup>157</sup>

In the fullness of time, the Son of God, coming as the Lamb who takes away and bears upon himself the sin of the world,<sup>158</sup> appears as the one who has the power both to judge<sup>159</sup> and to forgive sins,<sup>160</sup> and who has come not to condemn but to forgive and save.<sup>161</sup>

Now this power to "forgive sins" Jesus confers, through the Holy Spirit, upon ordinary men, themselves subject to the snare of sin, namely his Apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained".<sup>162</sup> This is one of the most awe-inspiring innovations of the Gospel! He confers this power on the Apostles also as something which they can transmit — as the Church has understood it from the beginning — to their successors, charged by the same Apostles with the mission and responsibility of continuing their work as proclaimers of the Gospel and ministers of Christ's redemptive work.

<sup>157</sup> Ps. 78 (77):38 f.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Jn. 1:29; Is. 53:7, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:27.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Mt. 9:2-7; Lk. 5:18-25; 7:47-49; Mt. 2:3-12.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:17.

<sup>162</sup> Jn. 20:22; Mt. 18:18; cf. also, as regards Peter, Mt. 16:19. Blessed Isaac of Stella in one of his talks emphasizes the full communion of Christ with the Church in the forgiveness of sins: "The Church can forgive nothing without Christ and Christ does not wish to forgive anything without the Church. The Church can forgive nothing except to a penitent, that is to say, to a person whom Christ has touched with his grace: Christ does not wish to consider anything forgiven in a person who despises the Church": *Sermo 11 (In dominica II post Epiphaniam, 1)*: PL 194, 1729.

Here there is seen in all its grandeur the figure of the minister of the Sacrament of Penance, who by very ancient custom is called the confessor.

Just as at the altar where he celebrates the Eucharist and just as in each one of the Sacraments, so the priest, as the minister of Penance, acts "in persona Christi". The Christ whom he makes present and who accomplishes the mystery of the forgiveness of sins is the Christ who appears as the *brother of man*,<sup>163</sup> the merciful High Priest, faithful and compassionate,<sup>164</sup> the Shepherd intent on finding the lost sheep,<sup>165</sup> the Physician who heals and comforts,<sup>166</sup> the one Master who teaches the truth and reveals the ways of God,<sup>167</sup> the Judge of the living and the dead,<sup>168</sup> who judges according to the truth and not according to appearances.<sup>169</sup>

This is undoubtedly the most difficult and sensitive, the most exhausting and demanding ministry of the priest, but also one of the most beautiful and consoling. Precisely for this reason and with awareness also of the strong recommendation of the Synod, I will never grow weary of exhorting my brothers, the Bishops and priests, to the faithful and diligent performance of this ministry.<sup>170</sup> Before the consciences of the faithful, who open up to him with a mixture of fear and trust, the confessor is called to a lofty task which is one of service to penance and human reconciliation. It is a task of learning the weaknesses and falls of those faithful people, assessing their desire for renewal and their efforts to achieve it, discerning the action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, imparting to them a forgiveness which God alone can grant, "celebrating" their reconciliation with the Father, portrayed in the parable of the Prodigal Son, reinstating these redeemed sinners in the ecclesial community with their brothers and sisters, and paternally admonishing these penitents with a firm, encouraging and friendly "Do not sin again".<sup>171</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Mt. 12:49 f.; Mk. 3:33 f.; Lk. 8:20 f.; Rom. 8:29: "the first-born among many brethren".

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Heb. 2:17; 4:15.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Mt. 18:12 f.; Lk. 15:4-6.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Lk. 5:31 f.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Mt. 22:16.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Acts 10:42.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Jn. 8:16.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. the Address to the Penitentiaries of the Roman Patriarchal Basilicas and to the priest confessors at the closing of the Jubilee of the Redemption (9 July 1984): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9-10 July 1984.

<sup>171</sup> Jn. 8:11.

For the effective performance of this ministry, the confessor must necessarily have *human qualities* of prudence, discretion, discernment and a firmness tempered by gentleness and kindness. He must likewise have a serious and careful preparation, not fragmentary but complete and harmonious, in the different branches of theology, pedagogy and psychology, in the methodology of dialogue, and above all in a living and communicable knowledge of the word of God. But it is even more necessary that he should live an intense and genuine spiritual life. In order to lead others along the path of Christian perfection the minister of Penance himself must *first* travel this path. More by actions than by long speeches he must give proof of real experience of lived prayer, the practice of the theological and moral virtues of the Gospel, faithful obedience to the will of God, love of the Church and docility to her Magisterium.

All this fund of human gifts, Christian virtues and pastoral capabilities has to be worked for and is only acquired with effort. Every priest must be trained for the ministry of sacramental Penance from his years in the seminary, not only through the study of dogmatic, moral, spiritual and pastoral theology (which are simply parts of a whole), but also through the study of the human sciences, training in dialogue and especially in how to deal with people in the pastoral context. He must then be guided and looked after in his first activities. He must always ensure his own improvement and updating by means of permanent study. What a wealth of grace, true life and spiritual radiation would be poured out on the Church if every priest were careful never to miss, through negligence or various excuses, the appointment with faithful in the confessional, and if he were even more careful never to go to it unprepared or lacking the necessary human qualities and spiritual and pastoral preparation!

In this regard I cannot but recall with devout admiration those extraordinary apostles of the confessional such as Saint John Nepomucene, Saint John Vianney, Saint Joseph Cafasso, Saint Leopold of Castelnuovo, to mention only the best known confessors whom the Church has added to the list of her saints. But I also wish to pay homage to the innumerable host of holy and almost always anonymous confessors to whom is owed the salvation of so many souls who have been helped by them in conversion, in the struggle against sin and temptation, in spiritual progress and, in a word, in achieving holiness. I do not hesitate to say that even the great canonized saints are generally the

fruit of those confessionals, and not only the saints but also the spiritual patrimony of the Church and the flowering of a civilization permeated with the Christian spirit! Praise then to this silent army of our brothers who have served well and serve each day the cause of reconciliation through the ministry of sacramental Penance!

### The Sacrament of forgiveness

30. From the revelation of the value of this ministry and power to forgive sins, conferred by Christ on the Apostles and their successors, there developed in the Church an awareness of the *sign of forgiveness*, conferred through the Sacrament of Penance. It is the certainty that the Lord Jesus himself instituted and entrusted to the Church — as a gift of his goodness and loving kindness<sup>172</sup> to be offered to all — a special Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism.

The practice of this Sacrament, as regards its celebration and form, has undergone a long process of development, as is attested to by the most ancient sacraments, the documents of Councils and Episcopal Synods, the preaching of the Fathers and the teaching of the Doctors of the Church. But *with regard to the substance of the Sacrament* there has always remained firm and unchanged in the consciousness of the Church *the certainty* that, by the will of Christ, forgiveness is offered to each individual by means of sacramental absolution given by the ministers of Penance. It is a certainty reaffirmed with particular vigour both by the Council of Trent<sup>173</sup> and by the Second Vatican Council: "Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offences committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer works for their conversion".<sup>174</sup> And as an *essential element of faith* concerning the value and purpose of Penance it must be reaffirmed that our Saviour Jesus Christ instituted in his Church the Sacrament of Penance so that the faithful who have fallen into sin after Baptism might receive grace and be reconciled with God.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Tit. 3:4.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, Sessio XIV *De sacramento Poenitentiae*, cap. I and Canon 1: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 703 f., 711 (DS 1668-1670. 1701).

<sup>174</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, Sessio XIV, *De sacramento Poenitentiae* cap. I and Canon 1: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., 703 f., 711 (Ds 1668-1670, 1701).



The Church's faith in this Sacrament involves certain other fundamental truths which cannot be disregarded. The sacramental rite of Penance, in its evolution and variation of actual forms, has always preserved and highlighted these truths. When it recommended a form of this rite, the Second Vatican Council intended to ensure that it would express those truths even more clearly,<sup>176</sup> and this has come about with the new *Rite of Penance*.<sup>177</sup> For the latter has made its own the whole of the teaching brought together by the Council of Trent, transferring it from its particular historical context (that of a resolute effort to clarify doctrine in the face of the serious deviations from the Church's genuine teaching), in order to translate it faithfully into terms more in keeping with the context of our own time.

### Some fundamental convictions

31. The truths mentioned above, powerfully and clearly confirmed by the Synod and contained in the *Propositiones*, can be summarized in the following convictions of faith, to which are connected all the other affirmations of the Catholic doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance.

I. The first conviction is that, for a Christian, *the Sacrament of Penance is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism*. Certainly, the Saviour and his salvific action are not so bound to a sacramental sign as to be unable in any period or area of the history of salvation to work outside and above the Sacraments. But in the school of faith we learn that the same Saviour desired and provided that the simple and precious Sacraments of faith would ordinarily be the effective means through which his redemptive power passes and operates. It would therefore be foolish, as well as presumptuous, to wish arbitrarily to disregard the means of grace and salvation which the Lord has provided and, in the specific case, to claim to receive forgiveness while doing without the Sacrament which was instituted by Christ precisely for forgiveness. The renewal of the rites carried out after the Council does not sanction any illusion or alteration in this direction. According to the Church's intention, it was and is meant to stir up in each one of us a *new impulse* towards

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 72.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Rituale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II instauratum, auctoritate Pauli VI promulgatum. Ordo Paenitentiae*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1974.

the renewal of our interior attitude: towards a deeper understanding of the nature of the Sacrament of Penance; towards a reception of the Sacrament which is more filled with faith, not anxious but trusting; towards a more frequent celebration of the Sacrament which is seen to be completely filled with the Lord's merciful love.

II. The second conviction concerns *the function of the Sacrament of Penance* for those who have recourse to it. According to the most ancient traditional idea, the Sacrament is a kind of *judicial action*; but this takes place before a tribunal of mercy rather than of strict and rigorous justice, which is comparable to human tribunals only by analogy,<sup>178</sup> namely in so far as sinners reveal their sins and their condition as creatures subject to sin; they commit themselves to renouncing and combatting sin; accept the punishment (*sacramental penance*) which the confessor imposes on them and receive absolution from him.

But as it reflects on the function of this Sacrament, the Church's consciousness discerns in it, over and above the character of judgment in the sense just mentioned, a *healing of a medicinal* character. And this is linked to the fact that the Gospel frequently presents Christ as healer,<sup>179</sup> while his redemptive work is often called, from Christian antiquity, "*medicina salutis*". "I wish to heal, not accuse", Saint Augustine said, referring to the exercise of the pastoral activity regarding Penance,<sup>180</sup> and it is thanks to the medicine of Confession that the experience of sin does not degenerate into despair.<sup>181</sup> *The Rite of Penance* alludes to this healing aspect of the Sacrament,<sup>182</sup> to which modern man is perhaps more sensitive, seeing as he does in sin the element of error but even more the element of weakness and human frailty.

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<sup>178</sup> The Council of Trent uses the attenuated expression "*ad instar actus iudicialis*" (Sessio XIV *De sacramento Poenitentiae* cap. 6: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., 707 (DS 1685), in order to emphasize the difference from human tribunals. The new Rite of Penance makes reference to this function. Nos. 6 b and 10 a.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Lk. 5:31 f.: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" concluding: "I have... come to call... sinners to repentance"; Lk. 9:2: "And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal". The image of Christ the physician takes on new and striking elements if we compare it with the figure of the Servant of Yahweh, of whom the Book of Isaiah prophesies that "he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" and that "with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:4 f.).

<sup>180</sup> Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 82, 8: *PL* 38, 511.

<sup>181</sup> Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 352, 3,8-9: *PL* 39, 1558 f.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 6 c.

Whether as a tribunal of mercy or a place of spiritual healing, under both aspects the Sacrament requires a knowledge of the sinner's heart, in order to be able to judge and absolve, to cure and heal. Precisely for this reason the Sacrament involves, on the part of the penitent, a sincere and complete confession of sins. This therefore has a *raison d'être* not only inspired by ascetical purposes (as an exercise of humility and mortification) but one that is inherent in the very nature of the Sacrament.

III. The third conviction, which is one that I wish to emphasize, concerns *the realities or parts* which make up the sacramental sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Some of these realities are *acts of the penitent*, of varying importance but each indispensable either for the validity, the completeness or the fruitfulness of the sign.

First of all, an indispensable condition is the rectitude and clarity of the *penitent's conscience*. People cannot come to true and genuine repentance until they realize that sin is contrary to the ethical norm written in their inmost being;<sup>183</sup> until they admit that they have had a personal and responsible experience of this contrast; until they say not only that "sin exists" but also "I have sinned"; until they admit that sin has introduced a division into their consciences, which then pervades their whole being and separates them from God and from their brothers and sisters. The sacramental sign of this clarity of conscience is the act traditionally called the *examination of conscience*, an act that must never be one of anxious psychological introspection but a sincere and calm comparison with the interior moral law, with the evangelical norms proposed by the Church, with Jesus Christ himself who is our Teacher and Model of life, and with the heavenly Father, who calls us to goodness and perfection.<sup>184</sup>

But the essential act of penance, on the part of the penitent, is *contrition*, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin commit-

<sup>183</sup> Even the pagans recognized the existence of "divine" moral laws which have "always" existed and which are written, in the depths of the human heart, cf. Sophocles (Antigone, vv. 450-460) and Aristotle (*Rhetor*, Book I, Chap. 15, 1375 a-b).

<sup>184</sup> On the role of conscience cf. what I said at the General Audience of 14 March 1984, 3: *Insegnamenti*, VII, 1 (1984), 683.

ted, together with a resolution not to commit it again,<sup>185</sup> out of the love which one has for God and which is reborn with repentance. Understood in this way, *contrition* is therefore the beginning and the heart of *conversion*, of that evangelical *metánoia* which brings the person back to God like the Prodigal Son returning to his father, and which has in the Sacrament of Penance its visible sign and which perfects attrition. Hence "upon this contrition of heart depends the truth of penance".<sup>186</sup>

While reiterating everything that the Church, inspired by God's word, teaches about *contrition*, I particularly wish to emphasize here just one aspect of this doctrine. It is one that should be better known and considered. *Conversion* and *contrition* are often considered under the aspect of the undeniable demands which they involve and under the aspect of the mortification which they impose for the purpose of bringing about a radical change of life. But we do well to recall and emphasize the fact that *contrition* and *conversion* are even more a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one's true identity which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depth of self and thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved,<sup>187</sup> which the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing.

We therefore understand why, from the earliest Christian times, in line with the Apostles and with Christ, the Church has included in the sacramental sign of penance *the confession of sins*. This latter takes on such importance that for centuries the usual name of Sacrament has been and still is that of *Confession*. The confession of sins is required, first of all, because the sinner must be known by the person who in the Sacrament exercises *the role of judge*. He has to evaluate both the seriousness of the sins and the repentance of the penitent; he also exercises *the role of healer*, and must acquaint himself with the condition of the sick person in order to treat and heal him. But the individual confession also has the value of a *sign*: a sign of the meeting of the sinner with the mediation of the Church

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, Sessio XIV *De sacramento Poenitentiae*, cap. IV *De contritione*: *Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. cit., 750 (DS 1676-1677). Of course, in order to approach the Sacrament of Penance it is sufficient to have *attrition*, or imperfect repentance, due more to fear than to love. But in the sphere of the Sacrament, the penitent, under the action of the grace that he receives, "*ex attrito fit contritus*", since penance really operates in the person who is well disposed to conversion in love: cf. Council of Trent. *ibid.*, ed. cit., 705 (DS 1678).

<sup>186</sup> *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 6 c.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Ps. 51 (50):12.

in the person of the minister; a sign of the person's revealing of self as a sinner in the sight of God and the Church, of facing his own sinful condition in the eyes of God. The confession of sins therefore cannot be reduced to a mere attempt at psychological self-liberation, even though it corresponds to that legitimate and natural need, inherent in the human heart, to open oneself to another. It is a liturgical act, solemn in its dramatic nature, yet humble and sober in the grandeur of its meaning. It is the act of the Prodigal Son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by him with the kiss of peace. It is an act of honesty and courage. It is an act of entrusting oneself, beyond sin, to the mercy that forgives.<sup>188</sup> Thus we understand why the *confession of sins* must ordinarily be individual and not collective, just as sin is a deeply personal matter. But at the same time this confession in a way forces sin out of the secret of the heart and thus out of the area of pure individuality, emphasizing its social character as well, for through the minister of Penance it is the ecclesial community, which has been wounded by sin, that welcomes anew the repentant and forgiven sinner.

The other essential stage of the Sacrament of Penance this time belongs to the confessor as judge and healer, a figure of God the Father welcoming and forgiving the one who returns: this is *the absolution*. The words which express it and the gestures that accompany it in the old and in the new *Rite of Penance* are significantly *simple in their grandeur*. The sacramental formula "I absolve you..." and the imposition of the hand and the sign of the Cross made over the penitent show that *at this moment* the contrite and converted sinner comes into contact with the power and mercy of God. It is the moment at which, in response to the penitent, the Trinity becomes present in order to blot out sin and restore innocence. And the saving power of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus is also imparted to the penitent as the "mercy stronger than sin and offence", as I defined it in my Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*. God is always the one who is principally offended by sin — "*tibi soli peccavi!*" — and God alone can forgive. Hence the absolution that the priest, the minister of forgiveness, though himself a sinner, grants to the penitent, is the effective sign of the intervention of the Father in every absolution and the sign of the

<sup>188</sup> I had occasion to speak of these fundamental aspects of penance at the General Audiences of 19 May 1982: *Insegnamenti* V, 2 (1982), 1758 ff.; 28 February 1979: *Insegnamenti* II (1979), 475-478; 21 March 1984: *Insegnamenti* VII, 1 (1984), 720-722. See also the norms of the Code of Canon Law concerning the place for administering the Sacrament and concerning confessionals (Can. 964, 2-3).

"resurrection" from "spiritual death" which is renewed each time that the Sacrament of Penance is administered. Only faith can give us certainty that *at that moment* every sin is forgiven and blotted out by the mysterious intervention of the Saviour.

*Satisfaction* is the final act which crowns the sacramental sign of Penance. In some countries the act which the forgiven and absolved penitent agrees to perform after receiving absolution is called precisely the *penance*. What is the meaning of this *satisfaction* that one makes or the *penance* that one performs? Certainly it is not a price that one pays for the sin absolved and for the forgiveness obtained: no human price can match what is obtained, which is the fruit of Christ's Precious Blood. Acts of satisfaction — which, while remaining simple and humble, should be made to express more clearly all that they signify — mean a number of valuable things: they are the sign of the *personal commitment* that the Christian has made to God, in the Sacrament, to begin a new life (and therefore they should not be reduced to mere formulas to be recited, but should consist of acts of worship, charity, mercy or reparation). They include the idea that the pardoned sinner is able to join his own physical and spiritual mortification — which has been sought after or at least accepted — to the Passion of Jesus who has obtained the forgiveness for him. They remind us that even after absolution there remains in the Christian a dark area, due to the wound of sin, to the imperfection of love in repentance, to the weakening of the spiritual faculties. It is an area in which there still operates an infectious source of sin which must always be fought with mortification and penance. This is the meaning of the humble but sincere act of satisfaction.<sup>189</sup>

IV. There remains to be made a brief mention of *other important convictions* about the Sacrament of Penance.

First of all, it must be emphasized that nothing is more personal and intimate than this Sacrament, in which the sinner stands alone before God with his sin, repentance and trust. No one can repent in his place or ask forgiveness in his name. There is a certain solitude of the sinner in his sin and this can be seen dramatically represented in Cain with sin "crouching at his door", as the *Book of Genesis* says so effectively, and with the distinctive mark on his forehead;<sup>190</sup> in David, admonished by the

<sup>189</sup> I dealt with this subject concisely at the General Audience of 7 March 1984: *Insegnamenti*, VII, 1 (1984), 631-633.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Gen. 4:7, 15.

prophet Nathan;<sup>191</sup> or in the Prodigal Son when he realizes the condition to which he has reduced himself by staying away from his father and decides to return to him.<sup>192</sup> Everything takes place between the individual alone and God. But at the same time one cannot deny the social nature of this Sacrament, in which the whole Church — militant, suffering and glorious in heaven — comes to the aid of the penitent and welcomes him again into her bosom, especially as it was the whole Church which had been offended and wounded by his sin. As the minister of Penance, the priest, by virtue of his sacred office, appears as the witness and representative of this ecclesial nature of the Sacrament. The individual nature and ecclesial nature are two complementary aspects of the Sacrament which the progressive reform of the Rite of Penance, especially that contained in the *Ordo Paenitentiae* promulgated by Paul VI, has sought to emphasize and to make more meaningful in its celebration.

V. Secondly, it must be emphasized that the most precious result of the forgiveness obtained in the Sacrament of Penance consists in reconciliation with God, which takes place in the inmost heart of the son who was lost and found again, which every penitent is. But it has to be added that this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his own true identity. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way attacked and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.

As a result of an awareness of this, at the end of the celebration there arises in the penitent a sense of gratitude to God for the gift of divine mercy received, and the Church invites the penitent to have this sense of gratitude.

Every confessional is a special and blessed place from which, with division wiped away, there is born new and uncontaminated a reconciled individual — a reconciled world!

VI. Lastly, I particularly wish to speak of one *final consideration*, one which concerns all of us priests, who are the ministers of the Sacrament of Penance.<sup>193</sup> The priest's celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the other Sacraments,

<sup>191</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 12.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Lk. 15:17-21.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 18.

his pastoral zeal, his relationship with the faithful, his communion with his brother priests, his collaboration with his Bishop, his life prayer — in a word, the whole of his priestly existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason he fails to receive the Sacrament of Penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion. If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his *priestly being* and his *priestly action* would feel its effects very soon, and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor.

But I also add that even in order to be a good and effective minister of Penance the priest needs to have recourse to the source of grace and holiness present in this Sacrament. We priests, on the basis of our personal experience, can certainly say that, the more careful we are to receive the Sacrament of Penance and to approach it frequently and with good dispositions, the better we fulfill our own ministry as confessors and ensure that our penitents benefit from it. And on the other hand this ministry would lose much of its effectiveness if in some way we were to stop being good penitents. Such is *the integral logic* of this great Sacrament. It invites all of us priests of Christ to pay renewed attention to our personal confession.

Personal experience in its turn becomes and must become *today* an incentive for the diligent, regular, patient and fervent exercise of the sacred ministry of Penance, to which we are committed by the very fact of our priesthood and our vocation as pastors and servants of our brothers and sisters. Also with this present Exhortation I therefore address an earnest invitation to all the priests of the world, especially to my Brothers in the Episcopacy and to pastors of souls, an invitation to make every effort to encourage the faithful to make use of this Sacrament. I urge them to use all possible and suitable means to ensure that the greatest possible number of our brothers and sisters receive the "grace that has been given to us" through Penance for the reconciliation of every soul and of the whole world with God in Christ.

### Forms of celebration

32. Following the suggestions of the Second Vatican Council, the *Ordo Paenitentiae* provided three rites which, while always keeping intact the essential elements, make it possible



to adapt the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance to particular pastoral circumstances.

The first form — *reconciliation of individual penitents* — is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament, and it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or to be neglected. The second form — *reconciliation of a number of penitents with individual confession and absolution* — even though in the preparatory acts it helps to give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the Sacrament, is the same as the first form in the culminating sacramental act, namely, individual confession and individual absolution of sins. It can thus be regarded as equal to the first form as regards the normality of the rite. The third form however — *reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution* — is exceptional in character. It is therefore not left to free choice but is regulated by a special discipline.

The first form makes possible a highlighting of the more personal — and essential — aspects which are included in the penitential process. The dialogue between penitent and confessor, the sum of the elements used (the biblical texts, the choice of the forms of "satisfaction", etc.) make the sacramental celebration correspond more closely to the concrete situation of the penitent. The value of these elements is perceived when one considers the different reasons that bring a Christian to sacramental Penance: a need for personal reconciliation and readmission to friendship with God by regaining the grace lost by sin; a need to check one's spiritual progress and sometimes a need for a more accurate discernment of one's vocation; on many other occasions a need and a desire to escape from a state of spiritual apathy and religious crisis. Thanks then to its individual character, the first form of celebration makes it possible to link the Sacrament of Penance with something which is different but readily linked with it: I am referring to *spiritual direction*. So it is certainly true that personal decision and commitment are clearly signified and promoted in this first form.

The second form of celebration, precisely by its specific dimension, highlights certain aspects of great importance: the word of God listened to in common has a remarkable effect as compared to its individual reading, and better emphasizes the ecclesial character of conversion and reconciliation. It is particularly meaningful at various seasons of the liturgical year and in connection with events of special pastoral importance. The only point that needs mentioning here is that for celebrating

the second form there should be an adequate number of confessors present.

It is therefore natural that the criteria for deciding which of the two forms of celebration to use should be dictated not by situational and subjective reasons but by a desire to secure the true spiritual good of the faithful, in obedience to the penitential discipline of the Church.

We shall also do well to recall that, for a balanced spiritual and pastoral orientation in this regard, great importance must continue to be given to teaching the faithful also to make use of the Sacrament of Penance for venial sins alone, as is borne out by a centuries-old doctrinal tradition and practice.

Though the Church knows and teaches that venial sins are forgiven in other ways too—for instance, by acts of sorrow, works of charity, prayer, penitential rites—she does not cease to remind everyone of the special usefulness of the sacramental moment for these sins too. The frequent use of the Sacrament—to which some categories of the faithful are in fact held—strengthens the awareness that even minor sins offend God and harm the Church, the Body of Christ. Its celebration then becomes for the faithful “the occasion and the incentive to conform themselves more closely to Christ and to make themselves more docile to the voice of the Spirit”.<sup>194</sup> Above all it should be emphasized that the grace proper to the sacramental celebration has a great remedial power and helps to remove the very roots of sin.

Attention to the actual celebration,<sup>195</sup> with special reference to the importance of the word of God which is read, recalled and explained, when this is possible and suitable, to the faithful and with them, will help to give fresh life to the practice of the Sacrament and prevent it from declining into a mere formality and routine. The penitent will be helped rather to discover that he or she is living a salvific event, capable of inspiring fresh life and giving true peace of heart. This careful attention to the celebration will also lead the individual Churches to arrange *special times for the celebration of the Sacrament*. It will also be an incentive to teaching the faithful, especially children and young people, to accustom themselves to keeping to these times, except in cases of necessity, when the parish priest must always show a ready willingness to receive whoever comes to him.

<sup>194</sup> *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 7 b.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, 17.

**Celebration of the Sacrament with General Absolution**

33. The new liturgical regulation and, more recently, the new *Code of Canon Law*,<sup>196</sup> specify the conditions which make it lawful to use "the rite of reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution". The norms and regulations given on this point, which are the result of mature and balanced consideration, must be accepted and applied in such a way as to avoid any sort of arbitrary interpretation.

It is opportune to reflect more deeply on the reasons which order the celebration of Penance in one of the first two forms and permit the use of the third form. First of all, there is the reason of *fidelity* to the will of the Lord Jesus, transmitted by the doctrine of the Church and also the reason of *obedience* to the Church's laws. The Synod repeated in one of its *Propositiones* the unchanged teaching which the Church has derived from the most ancient tradition, and it repeated the law with which she has codified the ancient penitential practice: the individual absolution constitutes the *only ordinary way* in which the faithful who are conscious of serious sin are reconciled with God and with the Church. From this confirmation of the Church's teaching it is clear that *every serious sin must always* be stated, with its determining circumstances, *in an individual confession*.

Then there is a reason of the pastoral order. While it is true that, when the conditions required by canonical discipline occur, use may be made of the third form of celebration, it must not be forgotten that *this form cannot become an ordinary one*, and it cannot and must not be used — as the Synod repeated — except "in cases of grave necessity". And there remains unchanged the obligation to make an individual confession of serious sins before again having recourse to another general absolution. The Bishop therefore, who is the only one competent in his own diocese to assess whether the conditions actually exist which Canon Law lays down for the use of the third form, will give this judgment *with a grave obligation on his own conscience*, with full respect for the law and practice of the Church, and also taking into account the criteria and guidelines agreed upon — on the basis of the doctrinal and pastoral considerations explained above — with the other members of the Episcopal Conference. Equally, it will always be a matter of genuine pastoral concern to lay down and guarantee the conditions that make

<sup>196</sup> Canons 961-963.

recourse to the third form capable of producing the spiritual fruits for which it is meant. The exceptional use of the third form of celebration must never lead to a lesser regard for, still less an abandonment of, the ordinary forms, nor must it lead to this form being considered an alternative to the other two forms. It is not in fact left to the freedom of pastors and the faithful to choose from among these forms the one considered most suitable. It remains the obligation of pastors to facilitate for the faithful the practice of integral and individual confession of sins, which constitutes for them not only a duty but also an inviolable and inalienable right, besides being something needed by the soul. For the faithful, the use of the third form of celebration involves the obligation of following all the norms regulating its exercise, including that of not having recourse again to general absolution before a normal integral and individual confession of sins, which must be made as soon as possible. Before granting absolution the priest must inform and instruct the faithful about this norm and about the obligation to observe it.

With this reminder of the doctrine and the law of the Church I wish to instil into everyone the lively sense of responsibility which must guide us when we deal with sacred things like the Sacraments, which are not our property, or like consciences, which have a right not to be left in uncertainty and confusion. The Sacraments and consciences, I repeat, are sacred, and both require that we serve them in truth.

This is the reason for the Church's law.

### **Some more delicate cases**

34. I consider it my duty to mention at this point, if very briefly, a pastoral case that the Synod dealt with — in so far as it was able to do so — and which it also considered in one of the *Propositiones*. I am referring to certain situations, not infrequent today, affecting Christians who wish to continue their sacramental religious practice but who are prevented from doing so by their personal condition, which is not in harmony with the commitments freely undertaken before God and the Church. These are situations which seem particularly delicate and almost inextricable.

Numerous intervention during the Synod, expressing the general thought of the Fathers, emphasized the coexistence and

mutual influence of two equally important principles in relation to these cases. The first principle is that of compassion and mercy, whereby the Church, as the continuer in history of Christ's presence and work, not wishing the death of the sinner but that the sinner should be converted and live,<sup>197</sup> and careful not to break the bruised reed or to quench the dimly burning wick,<sup>198</sup> ever seeks to offer, as far as possible, the path of return to God and of reconciliation with him. The other principle is that of truth and consistency, whereby the Church does not agree to call good evil and evil good. Basing herself on these two complementary principles, the Church can only invite her children who find themselves in these painful situations to approach the divine mercy by other ways, not however through the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, until such time as they have attained the required dispositions.

On this matter, which also deeply torments our pastoral hearts, it seemed my precise duty to say clear words in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, as regards the case of the divorced and remarried,<sup>199</sup> and likewise the case of Christians living together in an irregular union.

At the same time, and together with the Synod, I feel that it is my clear duty to urge the ecclesial communities, and especially the Bishops, to provide all possible assistance to those Priests who have fallen short of the grave commitments which they undertook at their ordination and who are living in irregular situations. None of these brothers of ours should feel abandoned by the Church.

For all those who are not at the present moment in the objective conditions required by the Sacrament of Penance, the Church's manifestations of maternal kindness, the support of acts of piety apart from sacramental ones, a sincere effort to maintain contact with the Lord, attendance at Mass, and the frequent repetition of acts of faith, hope, charity and sorrow made as perfectly as possible, can prepare the way for full reconciliation at the hour that Providence alone knows.

### CONCLUDING EXPRESSION OF HOPE

35. At the end of this document, I hear echoing within me and I desire to repeat to all of you the exhortation which the

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Ez. 18:23.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Is. 42:3; Mt. 12:20.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 84: AAS 74 (1982), 184-186.

first Bishop of Rome, at a critical hour of the beginning of the Church, addressed "to the exiles of the dispersion . . . chosen and destined by God the Father . . . : Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind".<sup>200</sup> The Apostle urged: "Have unity of spirit . . .". But he immediately went on to point out the sins against harmony and peace which must be avoided: "Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing". And he ended with a word of encouragement and hope: "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right?"<sup>201</sup>

At an hour of history which is no less critical, I dare to join my exhortation to that of the Prince of the Apostles, the first to occupy this See of Rome as a witness to Christ and as Pastor of the Church, and who here "presided in charity" before the entire world. In communion with the Bishops who are the successors of the Apostles, and supported by the collegial reflection that many of them, meeting in the Synod, devoted to the topics and problems of reconciliation, I too wish to speak to you with the same spirit of the fisherman of Galilee when he said to our brothers and sisters in the faith, distant in time but so closely linked in heart: "Have unity of spirit . . . Do not return evil for evil . . . Be zealous for what is right".<sup>202</sup> And he added: "It is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong".<sup>203</sup>

This exhortation is completely permeated by words which Peter had heard from Jesus himself, and by ideas which formed part of his "Good News"; the new commandment of love of neighbor; the yearning for and commitment to unity; the beatitudes of mercy and patience in persecution for the sake of justice; the repaying of evil with good; the forgiveness of offences; the love of enemies. In these words and ideas is the original and transcendent synthesis of the Christian ethic, or more accurately and more profoundly, of the spirituality of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.

I entrust to the Father, rich in mercy, I entrust to the Son of God, made man as our Redeemer and Reconciler, I entrust to the Holy Spirit, source of unity and peace, this call of mine, as father and pastor, to penance and reconciliation. May the Most

<sup>200</sup> Cf. 1 Pt. 1:1 f.; 3:8.

<sup>201</sup> 1 Pt. 3:9, 13.

<sup>202</sup> 1 Pt. 3:8, 9, 13.

<sup>203</sup> 1 Pt. 3:8, 9, 13.

Holy and Adorable Trinity cause to spring up in the Church and in the world the small seed which at this hour I plant in the generous soil of many human hearts.

In order that in the not too distant future abundant fruits may come from it, I invite you all to join me in turning to Christ's Heart, the eloquent sign of the divine mercy, the "propitiation for our sins", "our peace and reconciliation",<sup>204</sup> that we may draw from it an interior encouragement to hate sin and to be converted to God, and find in it the divine kindness which lovingly responds to human repentance.

I likewise invite you to turn with me to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Jesus, in whom "is effected the reconciliation of God with humanity . . . , is accomplished the work of reconciliation, because she has received from God the fullness of grace in virtue of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ".<sup>205</sup> Truly, Mary has been associated with God, by virtue of her divine Motherhood, in the work of reconciliation.<sup>206</sup>

Into the hands of this Mother, whose "Fiat" marked the beginning of that "fullness of time" in which Christ accomplished the reconciliation of humanity with God, to her Immaculate Heart — to which we have repeatedly entrusted the whole of humanity, disturbed by sin and tormented by so many tensions and conflicts — I now in a special way entrust this intention: that through her intercession humanity may discover and travel the path of penance, the only path that can lead it to full reconciliation.

To all of you who in a spirit of ecclesial communion in obedience and faith<sup>207</sup> receive the indications, suggestions and directives contained in this document and seek to put them into living pastoral practice, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 2 December, the First Sunday of Advent, in the year 1984, the seventh of my Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II

<sup>204</sup> Litany of the Sacred Heart, cf. 1 Jn. 2:2; Eph. 2:14; Rm. 3:25; 5:11.

<sup>205</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address at the General Audience of 7 December 1983, No. 2: *Insegnamenti*, VI, 2 (1983), 1264.

<sup>206</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address at the General Audience of 4 January 1984: *Insegnamenti*, VII, 1 (1984), 16-18.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26.

POST SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
"RECONCILIATIO ET PAENITENTIA"

**THE  
CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT  
WITH GENERAL ABSOLUTION**

by  
**Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger**

"Public absolutions" have existed in the Church since ancient times. They have occupied a precise place in her life since the Middle Ages and have continued up to the present, at least in the *Indulgentiam* of the act of contrition at the beginning of the Mass. Their precise significance was not defined at the beginning. At first, they referred to those sins which were not subject to penance or to the sacrament of confession. Later, the great absolutions (especially those *in articulo mortis*) were understood rather on the level of indulgences, but always appeared as an expression of the concern for salvation of the Church which accompanies us and sustains us continually with her prayer: before God, the Holy One, we are always unworthy; the closer we draw to him, the more we feel and recognize this unworthiness. This is why, before receiving Holy Communion, we say: "Lord, I am not worthy"; this is why at the same moment the Church calls our attention to the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. Only because the holy Church prays for us can we dare to approach the fire of the burning bush.

These "absolutions" accompany the Sacrament of Penance, assist it, complete it, without being a substitute for it. They assure us that God is a God of forgiveness, and they are aimed at freeing man from the creature fear which always risks crushing him, despite the certainty of redemption. There has existed moreover for centuries another element which must not be confused with these absolutions: a casuistry regarding the question, "In what conditions can the true and proper sacramental absolution of confession be administered when a regular personal confession of sins is not possible?" It may be the case, for



example, of a deaf mute who for a long time cannot get in touch with a priest who understands sign language: of someone who does not understand the language of the country; of a situation in which the confession begun cannot be completed; and so on. In practice, it is a case of an anticipation of the absolution, where the clear will to confess exists but cannot be carried out at that moment. This casuistry took on a new dimension during the two World Wars of our century: under the direct threat of death to which thousands of individuals were exposed before the battle the situation described existed for the entire group; anticipation of absolution no longer referred to an individual, but to a community of men, and as a consequence it was called "general absolution". We can now define precisely its content: it is the anticipation of sacramental absolution before the confession of sins for a group of persons who, because of a situation of urgent need, do not have the possibility to confess but intend to do so and need absolution.

With the conferring of the power of general absolution, the Church had respected the right transmitted to her to interpret and administer the sacraments, and had made clear an aspect of her power, of which she was not aware previously. In the dispute about the communion of the laity under both species which took place at the Council of Trent, the Church had emphasized her right to develop and modify during the course of history the way of administering the sacrament, but at the same time she had recognized the limits of her right: her right is bound to the Lord's will, she can deepen her knowledge of it, but cannot change it. The ecclesiastical regulation of the administration of the sacraments is therefore always *salva illorum substantia*—bound to the fundamental will and the fundamental form handed down by the Lord (DS 1728). The development of sacramental and liturgical law therefore has always a twofold character in the Church: above all, it is a service of the Lord's will, humble obedience to him, an ever renewed listening to his will. On the other hand, it is concern for men, commitment to make the Lord's gift accessible to them. These two intentions can apparently enter into conflict. It often seems that men may be approached only by drawing away from biblical tradition (it is sufficient to think of the question of divorced persons who remarry); but the Church knows that a lesser fidelity cannot even be a greater service for men, because in that case instead of administering the gift of the Lord, she would be trying to replace it.

On the basis of this concept, the Church has further developed the form of the sacrament of confession after the Second

Vatican Council. She has declared that, apart from wars, situations may arise in which a collective anticipation of absolution for a group of persons desiring and needing confession is necessary and therefore justified. In fact, on 16 June 1972, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued norms which define this case of necessity and therefore clarify in what conditions such a "general absolution" is lawful and can be granted, without the Church thereby usurping a right which was not transmitted to her by the Lord. The *Ordo Paenitentiae*, published by the Congregation for Worship on 2 December 1973, is based on these norms and incorporates them into liturgical law. The new Code of Canon Law has accepted these norms in Can. 961-963, and in part has defined them more precisely. The fact that the liturgical *Ordo Paenitentiae* has placed it as a third liturgical form alongside the two forms of personal confession even though they are inserted differently in the ecclesial community, has led some to see it no longer as an anticipation of absolution in an emergency situation in which confession can only take place later, but as a proper and independent form of the sacrament which would now be placed quite rightly beside the classic form of personal confession. On the other hand, it would be sufficient to read the text itself to recognize that such an interpretation would be a misunderstanding. But the misunderstanding had already become in some cases a practice, and that is now corrected by the Apostolic Exhortation; the Exhortation makes very clear that general absolution "can never become an ordinary form" and that the obligation of personal confession is not eliminated by it, but only postponed.

But for what reason? Could not general absolution precisely make it clear that sin is always a community phenomenon? In sin, in fact, we always fail also in regard to others, we build "structures of evil" by which we ourselves remain marked. Is it possible to demolish them except in a community way? Could not community absolution be accompanied by a profound moral shock, by a purification? The Exhortation replies with the necessary brevity, beginning both from the theological as well as the anthropological aspect of the problem, and points out the intrinsic unity of them. The theological aspect consists in asking ourselves: What can we do starting from the Lord? This of course must be the principal question, because sacraments can exist only starting from the Lord—without him they cannot exist. No one can say, of his own authority: "I forgive you your sins"; it would be a sign of monstrous and absurd arrogance. When Jesus' enemies became angry because he claimed the power to forgive sins, he did not deny that only God can

do so. The forgiveness of sins was instead the most definite way to manifest his divinity. Only in a state of trembling can a priest pronounce the words, "I absolve you of your sins", because he is saying something which he could never say of his own authority. He places himself at the disposal of another, rather, he does not speak with his own power but with that of the Sacrament of Holy Orders through which he was incorporated into the priestly unity of the Church with her Lord. He must also know that he can pronounce these words (just as "This is my body") only by basing himself on this sacramental unity with the Church and on her unity with the Lord. Otherwise he is blaspheming God. To depart from the Church's norms is not therefore a kind of infraction of the highway code, it is not a small revision of general norms which is due to a particular situation. No one can arrogate to himself the right to act in Christ's name. This can be conferred on him only in the sacrament; and only within the sacrament, rather, on the basis of the Church's power, can he use it, or better, place himself at its service. And the Church herself must know that in this matter her highest law is obedience and fidelity. Logically, the Church is not required to demonstrate the limits of this power, but has this obligation when she avails herself of powers which come to her from the Lord. Whoever confers on the Church new powers that she did not know until then, has therefore the obligation to demonstrate their limits.

In other words, whoever affirms that the Church can absolve also grave sins in a collective absolution must demonstrate from where she receives this right. Up to the present, no one has ever proven, and no one will ever be able to prove such a right of the Church. The Church cannot simply say: "I absolve you"; (plural); she can only say, in response to the confession of sins, "I absolve you" to an individual. She must remain in this humility. On this point the Apostolic Exhortation is a great expression of the obedience and fidelity of the Church, whose Magisterium "is not superior to the Word of God, but serves it" (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* II, 10). Moreover, the Catholic Church is in full accord with the Orthodox Church, which as early as the end of the seventh century in the Quinisext Council, considered as ecumenical in the East, in regard to the personal and determinate confession of sins, formulated definitions similar to those in the Council of Trent, even though there was not a precise precept of regular confession.

The question now remains: is what is theologically right also anthropologically reasonable, and should it be maintained

at the pastoral level? In this regard we find a convincing statement at the end of section 33 of the Apostolic Exhortation. The Pope says here that, with his appeal to fidelity and obedience, he wants "to instil into everyone the lively sense of responsibility which must guide us when we deal with sacred things like the Sacraments, which are not our property, or like consciences, which have a right not to be left in uncertainty and confusion. The Sacraments and consciences, I repeat, are sacred and both require that we serve them in truth. This is the reason for the Church's law".

Previously, the Pope had emphasized that personal confession is "not only a duty but also an inviolable and inalienable right, besides being something needed by the soul". The Church's legal system which is founded on the Lord's will, is not therefore a positivistic exterior command, but is enlightened interiorly in its anthropological form. I find it marvellous how sacrament and conscience are united as the two realities of the Sacred thing, which is being discussed here. Respect for the sacrament is at the same time respect for the conscience; in the former and the latter we touch what God reserves to himself alone; and to both one and the other we correspond only with the truth. The conscience can be shaken to the extent of not recognizing or no longer wishing to recognize its own right and its own need. Nevertheless, truth consists not in confirming conscience in its silence, but in healing it. The Lord's will is not directed against man, but makes his blinded and sick ego come to its senses. And if the Lord's will at first glance seems strange, this does not at all mean that we must act differently: instead, it means that we must change in order to come to our senses.

A conscience which remains silent is a sick conscience: a man unable to recognize his guilt and who continues to suffer from it is not a liberated man, but a spiritual cripple (A. Görres). In order to become just, man needs to recognize his guilt, needs to evaluate it correctly (to have sorrow for what he did wrong and to have remorse for it); but in order to see that he has reason for being sorrowful for his action, he needs the glance of the Lord, who turns to him and looks at him. So that his sorrow may not become desperation, he needs not only the glance but also the word of the Lord: your sin has been forgiven. Analysis is not enough: meeting is necessary, the word of salvation which no man can give us by his own power is necessary. In no other place do faith, the sacrament, absolution become so per-

sonal as in penance, which is as personal as conscience; and since we can be saints only by starting from the conscience, we cannot remove this place of extreme personalization of the Christian without offending something decisive.

On the occasion of the Katholikentag in Munich, the psychologist A. Gorres, collaborator of the Synod as an expert, stated in an extremely incisive manner the anthropological aspect of our question: "I am convinced that, at least from the psychological point of view, the abandonment of personal confession is a great loss and a grave damage because of the fact that unbiased help is needed to treat guilt and feelings of guilt... But that another man gives me absolution in the name of God and of the community is a personalization of salvation, a decisive experience; to renounce it would be neither wise nor useful. We cannot adhere without damage to a similar spiritualism, to a similar renouncement of physical signs".

With this a partial answer is given to that aspect of the problem posed at the beginning, which can be summarized in this way: Must not the community dimension of sin find correspondence also in the sacrament of confession? Without doubt the answer must be affirmative. But this dimension is already present at the moment in which man does not remain locked up in himself with his sin, but recognizes it. The priest to whom he reveals it is not an individual, private person; he represents the Church. This coming out from the most intimate and the most personal of oneself is a radical opening to the community, a most radical rejection of any autoegotism that a simple community celebration could be. But another thing must be added: the act of penance also belongs to the sacrament of confession. And unfortunately this has diminished more and more, receding ever more into the private and inmost being.

When Jonah came to Nineveh and called for repentance, everyone knew what penance was: penitential clothing was worn, they fasted and prayed. When the Muslims celebrate Ramadan, they know what is to be done, and they also know that penance can become a concrete reality for a people only if it has a common form and a time established in the course of the year. Among us, alas, penance has lost almost all community form. When Christians are called to do penance, they no longer know exactly what it means: perhaps they will name a commission, or they will give way to subjective feelings. It is necessary to re-establish the rights of the classic triad: fasting, prayer and

almsgiving. Christians must once again be capable of a community expression to manifest openly their distance from the obvious things of the world.

In this sense, the correct equilibrium must be sought between the personal factor and the social factor in penance. If general absolution were made a normal form of the sacrament, the relationship between the two would be reversed. What should be specifically personal—confession and absolution—would become collectivized; and what requires a community form—the lifestyle of penance and the entry of conversion into life—would be redirected to sentiment. But in this way no form of Christian life can grow, no Christian change of the world can take place through which conversion may penetrate the social dimension. Precisely opposed to these attempts, we need today a radical personal responsibility, to which personal confession corresponds. On the other hand, we again need a public and community way of living in which Christians accept the call to conversion and thus strive to give a new face to the world. The Apostolic Exhortation born of the Synod should represent an effective impulse in this direction.

## THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF THE LAITY

*(Continued from page 616)*

us the courage to stand at the Calvary, where Jesus is crucified and the grace, so that we may never abandon Him. In the same way, let us beg for the same courage and strength so that we may patiently and hopefully stand in JESUS' name at the Calvary of many of our people, crucified in poverty and political confusions. Let us ask her to teach us the way of peace. In the midst of poverty and escalating violence, let us ask Mary our Mother, to help us "present outstretched and friendly hands without hatred and rancor, even as we now show great determination, and never waver in the defense of truth and justice. We know that we cannot sow seeds with clenched fists. To sow, we must open our hands!" In the words of St. Augustine, "it is better to gain peace by means of peace and not by means of war".

I invite you now to say a prayer for our Diocese and for our country.

Hail Mary...

## LITURGY

# The Role of Women in the Liturgy

At the Convention for the Presidents and secretaries of national/international liturgical commissions held in Rome, October 23-28, 1984, many of the reports presented paid much attention to the role of women in the liturgy, and the question is often posed in liturgical and pastoral periodicals. Where do we stand at present, and what are the implications for the Philippines?

### 1. Women and the ordination to the priesthood

The claim to the ordination of women to the priesthood is often voiced at present rather stridently, particularly in Western countries — most emphatically in several of the Anglo-Saxon ones — as a right based on the equality of men and women. Advocates take as their basic text Gal. 3:28: "...there are no more distinction... between male and female... but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Hence, it is said, denying ordination to women would amount to sex discrimination and go therefore against basic human rights.

Indeed, the question at issue took on momentum in close relationship with the growing concern for human rights and the eradication of all forms of discrimination. Almost the whole argumentation was not directly theological but rather socio-cultural: In the concrete cultural and social context of his time, it was impossible for Jesus and the apostles even to consider the appointment of women to the priesthood. See Karl Rahner in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 1977, pp. 291-301, in an article abridged in *Theologie der Gegenwart*, 20/3, 1977, pp. 181-182. It is also noteworthy that the decision to ordain women was taken at first in those Churches that sprang from the Reformation which rejected the sacramentality of the priesthood. Some sects had done this earlier, but major Churches took this initiative not earlier than the Fifties of the present century: Lutherans in Sweden and France, then Anglicans. Catholics raised this ques-

tion for the first time only near the end of Vatican II (like Card. Daniélou; see "La decisión de no admitir la mujer al presbiterado, ¿arcaísmo o fidelidad?" in *Phase* n. 102, 1977, pp. 515-534).

As the debate grew, Pope Paul VI appointed in 1973 a study commission to determine "the role of women in the Church and in the world." In early 1976, the experts from the Biblical Commission answered the three questions submitted to the Commission as follows:

- a. Does the New Testament clearly and definitely deny or affirm that women can be ordained priests? All consultants said no.
- b. Are there indications in the New Testament that the ordination of women is possible? Yes: 12; no: 5.
- c. Are there indications in the N.T. against it? Yes: 5; No: 12.

See *Phase*, art. cit., p. 526.

The International Theological Commission, however, submitted a report against the ordination of women. It was that report that formed the basis of the Declaration *Inter Insigniores* of October 15, 1976, emanating from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. It unequivocally affirms the official stand of the Church in a way that, though not directly involving the Magisterium itself as to its theological reflection on the matter, nevertheless teaches as a norm the fact that only men have been called and can be ordained to the priesthood:

The Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider itself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.

Four key arguments are given in the Declaration: a. The constant tradition of the Church, which has only admitted men to the priesthood and the episcopate. Such a tradition, extant in both the East and the West, is *normative* for the Church. b. This tradition is based on the example of Christ, who took only men to be priests, and on the practice of the apostles. c. An argument of convenience, as the S.C. says, is the following: The minister acts in the name and the person of Christ by virtue of the sacramental character of the priesthood. Now, how could people recognize in a priest the true image of Christ if



the priest were not a man, like Christ, who was and remains a man? d. The living teaching authority of the Church, which considers a break with tradition in a matter as grave as this as inadmissible, since we are dealing here with a sacrament, and such a break would be against God's plan. The S.C. further answers objections by stating that the quality of rights recognized by society and holding good also for Christians is not a sufficient ground for a right to ordination; Gal 3:28 applies to the universality of the call to divine adoption, not to ministry. For ministry is not a human right by itself but a call by the Church: the Church has to authenticate the call to a ministry as a constitutive part of a vocation, but the Church does not issue this call to women.

This official stand of the Church is also reflected in the new Code of Canon Law, Canon 1024: "Only a baptized man can validly receive sacred ordination."

Pope Paul VI took the same position in his letters to Dr. Frederick Donald Cogan of the Anglicans — "We write" of November 30, 1975, and "As the tenth" of March 23, 1976 — wherein the Pope sees the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion as an obstacle to dialogue with Anglicanism (See *Documents on the Liturgy*, Doc. nos. 161 and 162, pp. 350-351). Pope John Paul II stressed this point once more in his address to leaders of other Christian denominations in the Netherlands at Utrecht on May 13, 1985 (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition of June 3, 1985, p. 8).

For *Inter Insigniores*, see *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 69 (1977), pp. 98-116; main portions in *Doc. Lit.*, Doc. n. 321, pp. 804-810.

At the Rome meeting of October 1984, only the Swedish episcopate asked for a re-study of the question of the ordination of women.

## 2. The Diaconate for Women?

The canon quoted above applies also to the diaconate, as this is recognized as a sacramental order. The post-Vatican documents on the diaconate speak only of men for this order: Pope Paul VI, *Motu proprio Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* of June 18, 1976 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 309, pp. 780-783), and Paul VI, *Motu proprio Ad Pascendum* of August 15, 1972 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 319, pp. 798-802).

However, now that the diaconate has been restored also for men who do not intend to become priests, the question is also raised why not make the diaconate accessible to women, the more so that historically the Church has had women deacons in its early history, up to the first centuries of the Middle-Ages.

There are questions regarding the diaconate for women: Was the diaconate for women the same as that for men, or only an analogous ministry and, rather likely, restricted to certain services to be rendered to women only? And was the diaconate for women considered sacramental?

The declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the ministerial priesthood for women deliberately excludes the question of the diaconate for women. The S.C., as its Commentary commissioned by the S.C. for the Doctrine of Faith says, wants this matter to be studied in depth before it will be ready to make any pronouncement on this matter (for this Commentary, see *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition of Feb. 3, 1977, p. 10).

For the Philippines, our bishops are reluctant at this time to ordain even men as permanent deacons. Hence, the diaconate for women is at this time not relevant for us.

### 3. The instituted ministries of the lectorate and acolytate

In the present discipline of the Church, only men can be officially instituted as lectors and acolytes. This is clearly stated in Paul VI, *Motu Proprio Ministeria quaedam* of August 15, 1972, n. VII: (see *Dec. Lit.* n. 340, pp. 9081912)

In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, institution to the ministries of readers and acolytes is reserved to men.

There are, however, new foundations laid for asking whether these ministries might not be opened to women. First, these two ministries have now been clearly distinguished from the sacramental orders: they are nonsacramental, and now seem as essentially lay ministries, no longer requiring the clerical state. Second, they are no longer seen as mere steps toward sacramental orders but as existing (as in the early Church) in their own right. Third, they can be exercised as to their functions by lay people: by men, and for most of their functions, also by women.

The functions open to women (without institution) in this regard are the following:

- a. proclaim the readings, except the gospel

See Gen. Instr. Roman Missal (GIRM), n. 70, in the second editio typica of March 27, 1975; *Doc. Lit.* n. 208, pp. 465-533. At first (in the 1970 edition) this was to be done by women outside the sanctuary, but later it was added that the bishops' conference could assign to them "a suitable place" even within the sanctuary, as also for announcing the intentions of the general intercessions; see also the *Ordo Missae*; SCDW, Instruction *Constitutione apostolica* of October 20, 1969, on gradually implementing the Roman Missal, in n. 8.e. where it is said that they need the authorization of the conference of bishops: *Doc. Lit.* n. 209, pp. 534-537; the response in *Notitiae* 9, 1973, p. 16, explaining some provisions of *Ministeria quaedam*; SCDW, Third Instruction *Liturgicae Instaurationes* of Sept. 5, 1970 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 52, pp. 159-167), n. 7a.

- b. announce the intentions of the general intercessions (see also a. for the place)

See: GIRM, n. 70; the Third Instruction, n. 7b.

- c. lead the liturgical assembly in singing

See: Third Instruction, n. 7c.

- e. be a choir member

See: S.C. of Rites, Instruction *Musicam sacram* of March 5, 1967 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 508, pp. 1293-1306), n. 22, allowing also mixed choirs "where the situation really so requires, even of all women." This had long been forbidden but not always observed!

- f. read commentaries to help people understand the rite better

Usually churches will have a combination of c. and f., in what we commonly call the "commentator," who gives directives for the participation of the people, leads the singing too, and gives here and there a "comment," not necessarily read.

See: Third Instruction, n. 7b.

- g. "attend to other functions customarily filled by women in other settings, as a service to the congregation, for example ushering, organizing processions, taking up collections."

See: Third Instruction, n. 7e.

- h. act as special minister of communion in cases foreseen: help distribute communion in church, take communion or viaticum to the sick, give communion at Sunday services without a priest, even presiding at such services if demanded by circumstances.

See: S.C. for the Discipline of Sacraments, Instruction *Fidei Custos* of April 30, 1969 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 259, pp. 641-643, never officially published but only sent to individual bishops or bishops' conferences), nos. 3 and 5. Here women come in the last place as candidates, must be of "outstanding piety" and may function only "in cases of necessity, that is, whenever other fit persons cannot be found." Also: the response in *Notitiae* 9, 1973, p. 16 (without these restrictions); S.C. for the Discipline of Sacraments, Instruction *Immensae Caritatis* of Jan. 29, 1973 (*Doc. Lit.* n. 264, pp. 650-654), in n. IV, the order of preference says: "reader, major seminarian, man religious, woman religious, catechist (not specified whether male or female), one of the faithful—a man or a woman." It also says that the local Ordinary may change the order of preference at his prudent discretion.

Now that the lectorate and the acolytate are clerly not belonging to the holy orders and the clerical state, and that the faithful see women too act as special ministers of communion and even at times as presiders at Sunday services without a priest, and that they may exercise, without any institution, practically all of the functions of these instituted ministries, excluding only service at the altar, the question is asked more and more: "Why, then, are women still excluded from these instituted ministries?" "This came very strongly to the fore at the Rome meeting of October 1984. The Holy See was explicitly asked by many countries to consider broadening *Ministeria quaedam* so as to open the instituted lectorate and acolytate to women. New Zealand (and some other countries not specifically named) ever defer implementing *Ministeria quaedam* UNTIL it will include women. Spoke out further in favor: 27 out of 32 English-speaking countries (5 African nations did not join in the request for cultural reasons, as women are not accepted in these roles in their respective countries), the German language group, (Canada both the French and the English sections), the whole French-speaking group, plus several other countries in their individual reports. Also the general reports on ministries by Fr. Pierre-Marie Gy, collected from a reading of the

individual reports, first as a preliminary report and then as a summary, brought this matter to the attention of the Sacred Congregation as a matter of importance.

What about the Philippines?

We have very few instituted lectors and acolytes besides those preparing for the priesthood. But where we institute them, should we not include women too? Perhaps one caution is to be stated, not in order to discriminate against women: where we accept instituted women as lectors and acolytes, we should keep working in the first place to have men in these ministries because we know from experience that in our culture men are less eager to openly profess their religion than women and to come forward for liturgical functions: women are also more assiduous for church attendance. For these reasons we must find a delicate balance so as not to exclude women from these ministries while trying to involve the men as much as we can.

#### 4. Women or girls serving at the altar

Tied in with the previous question is that of women serving at the altar. The faithful see women act as special ministers of communion and approaching the altar for it. Why could they not serve at the altar too?

What does present legislation say?

In a letter from Consilium, *L'heureux developpement*, of January 25, 1966 (*Notitiae* 2, 1966, pp. 157-161), Cardinal Lercaro wrote to the presidents of bishops' conferences in n. 7, regarding those who consider it lawful to allow women and girls to serve at the altar:

... A woman has a right and a duty to a *munus liturgicum*, and quite how far this goes has yet to be accurately studied, but that under the present legislation women have no *ministerium* at the altar is certain. The *ministerium* depends on the will of the Church, and the Church has never extended this liturgical *ministerium* to women. Accordingly, any arbitrary innovation in this field is a grave infraction of church discipline and should be firmly eliminated.

Says the Third Instruction of September 5, 1970, in n. 7: In conformity with norms traditional in the Church, women (single, married, religious), whether in churches, homes, convents, schools or institutions for women are barred from serving the priest at the altar.

The attempt by Fr. John M. Huels, O.S.M., in his article, "Female Altar Servers: The Legal Issues," *Worship* vol. 57, n. 6, 1983, pp. 513-525, trying to justify women serving at the altar within the present legislation looks like an exercise in acrobatics and is not at all convincing.

Aime-Georges Martimort, in "La question du service des femmes a l'autel," *Notitiae* n. 162, January 1980, pp. 8-16, states that the motive underlying the tradition of banning women from the altar was, although rarely acknowledged openly, that the lower ministries were linked to the priesthood so as become the normal steps to it. He says that the question of admitting them around the altar is to be studied seriously, and that in connection with the other questions (like those around *Ministeria quaedam*), and for this, he says, we need a climate of serenity.

Several reports from national liturgical commissions presented at the Rome convention of October 1984 did not mention this question explicitly because they considered it included in or anent to their remarks on *Ministeria quaedam*. A few, though, mentioned it explicitly as worthy of attention in the summaries of their reports; perhaps in the longer reports it was mentioned in more instances. France, Hungary and the U.S.A. mentioned it emphatically: the Netherlands reported it as a fact.

What about the Philippines?

Regarding this point there seems to be no acute problem in our country. Yet at seminars and conferences the point has been mentioned several times, not in general but for specific instances in which women or girls should be allowed to serve at the altar, like the following:

Why do boys have come and serve at the altar:

- in girls' schools or institutions for women?
- in religious houses for women, even more so for cloistered nuns, could the sisters not serve?
- sometimes in homes, when for example a priest has a Mass for someone who is sick?

## CASES AND INQUIRIES

### 1. UNIFORMITY IN LITURGY

*I am an old priest. In my Seminary days, our mentors used to emphasize the faithfulness we should show in following the Church's laws, specially in Liturgy. We were taught to keep uniformity with utmost diligence, since performing the ceremonies in the various rites enhances the solemnity of our worship to God and helps the faithful to feel and appreciate the greatness of our religion.*

*After Vatican II concelebration takes place quite often and, sad to say, uniformity does not seem to shine anymore as it should. It is easy to see that not all the concelebrants perform the actions in the same manner depriving the sacred celebration of its beauty. For instance, before the consecration, some priests extend both hands toward the offerings while others extend only their right hand. Other discrepancies could be mentioned as well. At times things like these come up in our conversations, but it seems that no definite solution is given. May I request the Boletín to answer whether or not the indicated action is properly determined by the Church's legislation; and what ways can be suggested in order to keep uniformity in the public performance of divine worship.*

*A priest*

It is true, as our consultant says, that uniformity in performing the liturgical ceremonies helps the faithful to appreciate and love public divine worship. I suppose that at present the seminarians and young priests are also taught the proper way to perform the various actions of divine worship with uniformity, as we were taught in old times. The particular action pointed out in the case as performed differently by the concelebrants is only one example of the lack of uniformity which should be corrected, in order to show our interest in performing the liturgical rites in the way the Church wants us to do. Perhaps there are other discrepancies, as the consultant observes, which should be eliminated as well.

By reading the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, chapter IV, n. II, we can see in detail what is to be done by all concelebrants during the Holy Sacrifice. No 180 reads as follows: "*Ab Haec ergo dona usque ad Et supplices, omnes concelebrantes omnia simul proferunt, hoc modo:*

a) "*Haec ergo dona manibus ad oblata extensis.*

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) *Verba Domini, manu dextera, si opportunum videtur, ad panem et ad calicem extensa . . .*"

It is clear, therefore, that before the consecration, while saying the words *Let Your Spirit come*, the concelebrants should stretch both hands towards the offering (*manibus ad oblata extensis*). But while saying the words of the Lord, for consecration, each concelebrant should extend his right hand only towards the bread and towards the chalice (*manu dextera ad panem et ad calicem extensa*).

With regards to the second question, i.e., what way can be suggested in order to keep uniformity in the public performance of divine worship, the new Code prescribes in canon 279, § 2, the following:

"Priests are to attend pastoral courses to be arranged for them after their ordination, in accordance with the provisions of particular law. At times determined by the same law, they are to attend other courses, theological meetings or conferences, which offer them an occasion to acquire further knowledge of the sacred sciences and of pastoral methods."

The 1917 Code prescribed that in the city where the Bishop resides and in each vicariate forane there should be conducted meetings of priests in order to discuss moral and liturgical problems. A Bishop can even now organize such gatherings in accordance with canon 279 of the new Code whereby the diocesan priests may refresh and further their ecclesiastical studies. Likewise, the days of recollection and holy retreats are excellent occasions in order to discuss this kind of problems. There should be a plan in each diocese in order to improve the priestly formation of the diocesan clergy. I am sure that such a plan exists in all dioceses. How it is carried out is another matter.

EXCELSO GARCIA, O.P.



## 2. REPORTING TO THE FAITHFUL ON FINANCIAL MATTERS

*Should bishops, pastors, rectors of churches and directors of ecclesiastical institutions report to the faithful about their stewardship on fiscal matters?*

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This query touches on the rights of the faithful to be informed on the possessions or temporalities of their respective churches and the corresponding method of management.

The faithful, when not a part of management, can not demand an accounting of the material assets and/or liabilities of their parish, diocese... and on the management system thereof, as a matter of right.

The situation will, of course, change whenever funds or means used for a given project have been raised by or provided for by the faithful themselves. In cases such as these, a spirit of openness and a demand for accountability are called for: "Administrators should report to the faithful about goods offered by them to the Church in accordance with norms and methods to be specified in particular laws" (c. 1287, 2).

Indeed, failure to report to the people directly concerned by reason of their personal involvement in certain pastoral projects could hardly be justified. In some instances, this lack of reporting has not only discouraged the faithful from further participation, but has even served to cover up for a weak system of financial administration.

Commonly, however, most of the faithful do not feel close enough to their pastors and churches nor are they familiar with the objectives of diocesan, parochial projects to find a financial report of much interest to them. However, in a spirit of christian brotherhood and with the intent and for purposes of greater cooperation and more effective support, administrators will do well in keeping the faithful posted on the material resources of the various institutions and churches, of the needs to be met and of the manner in which the money raised to meet them has been administered.

FLORENCIO TESTERA, O.P.

## CANON LAW

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIOCESAN BISHOP AND HIS PRIESTS

Canon 384 of the new Code of Canon Law describes the relationship of the diocesan Bishop with his clergy. In this relationship, according to said canon, there are four (4) points which deserve our careful consideration.

Let us, therefore, consider this relationship point by point, and then, let us share with each other our own experiences.

- 1 — *"To have a special concern for the priests, to whom he is to listen as his helpers and counsellors."*

This means that the Bishop considers his priests not only as his helpful cooperators in leading a particular church, but first of all, as sheep of the flock entrusted to him on whom he must bestow his pastoral care in order to foster their supernatural life in Christ.

According to the Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, "in the same way as Jesus showed His love for His disciples especially at the time when he made them ministers of His true and mystical Body, so also a Bishop through whom the Lord Jesus Christ, supreme High Priest is present in the midst of the faithful can hardly fail to realize that he should show his greatest love and chief concern for priests and seminarians. Led by a sense of duty and sincere and invincible charity he gives willing assistance in every way to help priests to esteem the loftiness of their priestly vocation, to live serenely, to spread joy to those about them and to fulfill their duties faithfully" (n. 107).

For this reason, it is a sacred duty of the Bishop to know his priests, not only casually, but also, as much as possible, individually and intimately; so that he also knows their character and talents, their likes and dislikes, their spiritual life, zeal and plans, their health and economic situation, their family and whatever concerns them. To this effect, the Bishop should make it easy for his priests to see him, and he himself looks for occasions to visit them in their own places of work. With a fatherly and at the same time a brotherly attitude and in sincere, friend-

ly dialogue, he converses with them and also about matters pertaining to the life of the whole diocese, so that the entire presbyterium has the feeling that is carrying the burden of the diocese along with the Bishop (n. 111).

Towards his priests, the Bishops shows himself a teacher, a father, a friend and a brother — rather than as one who presides over them and acts as judge. The Bishop is always ready with kindness, understanding, pardon and help. He does what he can that they may also develop a corresponding friendship toward their Bishop and to place full trust in him (n. 107).

2 — *“To defend their rights and ensure that they fulfill the obligations proper to their state.”*

Again, according to the Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop, the relationship between the Bishop and his priests should be so conformed to the charity of Christ and be imbued with its spirit that even those very necessary juridical bonds deriving from the divine constitution of the Church may even on the exterior appear to everyone as the natural and true consequences of that supernatural bond by which each one is joined with Christ. The Bishop and his priests are to be mutually so joined that “the world may believe” (Jn. 17, 21) in their evangelical work and that they may bring forth much fruit (Jn. 15, 8).

The love of the Bishop as shepherd (pastoral charity) always ready to defend, even to the extent of sacrifice, the rights of his priests will strengthen the bond of lawful obedience of his priests. This obedience, far from being lessened, is rather made more attractive if the Bishop while preserving justice and charity indicates whenever possible the reasons of his orders to those concerned (n. 107). He must also remind them that whatever is done by a priest with the Bishop's own mandate is rightly to be considered an apostolic work. This mandate confers dignity, grace and heavenly merit on the work of the priest.

The pastoral charity of the Bishop makes his priests of one will with the Bishop and renders apostolic labor successful. Harmony with the Bishop as the first dispenser and moderator of the apostolic office renders the pastoral action of priests more abundantly fruitful since obedience shown to the Bishop in the spirit of faith makes for closer conformity with Christ —

whom all are equally held to obey — since Christ was made obedient for us even to death (Phil. 2,8), and exercises and makes present his ministry of invisible Head of the Church especially through the visible hierarchy (n. 108).

It is recommended that, aside from the friendly individual contact of the Bishop with his priests, the Bishop brings all his priests together for special meetings to examine questions regarding the care of souls, to compare experiences, to sustain them in their efforts and to stimulate their activity (n. 111).

It is here where the Bishop can foster and publicly manifest his high esteem for his priests, showing his confidence in them, giving them due praise and offering inducements that support and encourage. He is ready to favor their just projects, to respect their rights and to see to it that they are respected by others. He defends them against unjust oppressors and never gives a ready ear to gossip about them, and extremely rarely and only with an informed conscience does he act. He quickly settles quarrels lest prolonged distress give rise to hatred; instead, let fraternal charity have the foremost place. When his priests are sick he consoles them personally or at least by letter. When one of them has died he officiates personally at the funeral, if this is possible; otherwise his delegate does so (n. 113).

3. *"To see that they have the means and the institutions needed for the development of their spiritual and intellectual life."*

Again, the Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop states: "Certainly the primary support the Bishop should give his priests concerns their spiritual life and the faithful performance of their mission. He sees to it that they have ample opportunity for the things which help their growth in holiness: in the first place, the opportunity of frequenting a place apart for prayer, the annual retreat, and a sufficient number of experienced and respected confessors and spiritual directors. If necessary, confessors and spiritual directors could travel to different parts of the diocese to be at the service of priests who live far from cities.

When giving assignments to his priests the Bishop carefully considers the condition of each individual so as not to burden him with work that might by its nature or amount be detri-

mental to his spiritual progress. He does not plunge priests who have scarcely left the seminary into all the duties of the ministry but introduces them gradually through an appropriate period of apprenticeship" (n. 110).

In order that the priests may experience and foster the sense of communion and solidarity the Bishop must encourage conferences for the sake of studies, piety and fraternal joy at certain fixed times. The Bishop is to favor associations of priests that promote holiness in the exercise of the ministry according to Gospel examples (n. 109).

To promote the learning of priests so that their knowledge and pastoral activity may constantly meet new needs, the Bishop must take care to inaugurate opportune projects, for example:

- a) *a pastoral year*, immediately following ordination during which he will be able to see to it that the young men recently ordained may be trained in matters and disciplines they will also need to handle easily and effectively the new forms of apostolate which our age has introduced.
- b) Most especially a few years after their ordination, *annual courses* in which they will be given an opportunity to acquire a fuller knowledge of pastoral practice and theological training especially in biblical, dogmatic, liturgical, ascetic, and social assistance fields.
- c) Likewise *seminars* on new methods of pastoral action in which priests, after listening to the lectures of experts gather into smaller groups to search out and evaluate ways of applying the proposed ideas to practical pastoral action in a variety of places and circumstances.
- d) *Monthly meetings* for the study and discussion of special theological, moral, liturgical and pastoral questions, especially those which arise from experience and practical living.
- e) Attendance at some regional or national *Institute of Pastoral Studies*.

The Bishop must try as much as possible to be present among his priests on the various occasions, or at least to make a visit, strengthening bonds of charity and making his priests genuinely conscious of their responsibility to the whole diocese. It is a worthwhile example for the priests, if the Bishop himself

sometimes joins them in attending this "aggiornamento" (updating) course (n. 114). By attending these courses, the Bishop has an opportunity also to discover the talents and abilities of individual priests, to arouse their sense of responsible cooperation and to foster in them a healthy spirit of initiative (n. 115).

In the choice, removal and transfer of parish priests, as well as in accepting resignations, the Bishop, while taking into consideration the knowledge and the piety, apostolic zeal and other virtues and abilities of the priest necessary for the proper exercise of the care of souls, must also observe the supreme law which is the "salus animarum" (n. 206).

4. *"To ensure that they are provided with adequate means of livelihood and social welfare."*

In this connection, canon 281 also reminds the Bishop of this obligation to his priests: "Since clerics dedicate themselves to the ecclesiastical ministry, they deserve the remuneration that befits their condition, taking into account both the nature of their office and the conditions of time and place. It is to be such that it provides for the necessities of their life and for just remuneration of those whose services they need (sacristanes, campanero, etc.). Suitable provision is likewise to be made for such social welfare as they may need in infirmity, sickness or old age."

According to the Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, the same remuneration must be given to all priests who are in the same circumstances. For example, the same remuneration for all parish priests, regardless of the size of the parish. Because all the priests have the same basic needs.

The remuneration, with due regard for the spirit of evangelical poverty, should suffice for their proper sustenance, for the maintainance of their apostolic liberty, and to make possible for them to assist the poor in some way (n. 117).

For this purpose, the Bishop together with all his priests must remind the people of the whole diocese of every one's duty to contribute to the decent support of the sacred ministers and lay workers of the Church. The Bishop must also foster the spirit of solidarity among his priests through mutual benefit societies, a fund from which they can borrow at a very low interest, through some common fund which can take care of the obligations and needs of clergy and lay people who are serving the Church (n. 117).

In the Philippines, we have already the CBCP National Pension Plan for Bishops and priests only who automatically receive a monthly pension upon reaching the age of 65 years. Steps have already been taken to include the Hospitalization Plan also.

For the decent support, we have the arancel system and the Sunday Collections. Study is being made to introduce the sponsor system recommended by Vatican II, namely, a bigger parish adopts or sponsor a smaller parish, or a Religious Community of men or women helps in meeting the needs of a poor parish.

### *Priests Who are in Difficulties*

The Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (n. 112) mentions several kinds of priests who are in difficulties:

1. *The sick, the poor and the aged* — The Bishop must show his special love and concern and readily come to help them and console them.

2. *The priests all alone in an isolated island, mountains or remote places* — The Bishop must be magnanimous and generous to them and show special understanding. To keep them safe from trouble, he must take prompt and prudent measures and must see to it that they do not stay too long in those places.

3. *The intractable priests* — The Bishop must deal with them with all the patience but at the same time with all firmness — *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* — in order to avoid scandal to the people and also to save their priesthood, and to maintain ecclesiastical discipline in the diocese.

4. *The priests who have left the sacred ministry* — The Bishop must deal generously with them and must take precautions to prevent scandal to the people and that the priestly ministry is not brought into contempt.

Anchored on these four points, the bishop-priest relationship can only be *close but open*: open enough for dialogue, close enough for discipline.

I have shared with you my insights, wise or otherwise. Now share with me yours. They could not be other than wise.

RICARDO CARDINAL VIDAL  
Archbishop of Cebu

## DOCUMENTATION

### 1. APPOINTMENT OF MSGR. PEDRO MAGUGAT

Joannes Paulus Episcopus  
Servus servorum dei

venerabili Fratri PETRO MAGUGAT, Episcopo hactenus titulo Scilitano atque Vicario Castrensi in Insulis Philippinis, ad novam Ecclesiam Urdanetensem translato, salutem et Apostolicam Benedictionem. Ita Ecclesiis particularibus providere cupientes, ut apte a suo quaeque Episcopo aedificetur in veritate et sanctitate, censemus primum pastorem iam nunc constituentum esse pro dioecesi Urdanetensi recens a nobis condita. Ex sententia igitur Venerabilium Fratrum Nostrorum S.R.E. Cardinalium Congregationis pro Episcopis negotiis praepositorum, quam ratam habemus, vi et potestate Nostra Apostolica Te, venerabilis Frater, simul atque ab omni Scilitanae Ecclesiae vinculo absolvimus, per easdem has Litteras memoratae dioecesis URDANETENSIS eligimus Episcopum ad eamque sacris officiis vinctum iuribusque auctum transferimus eique praeficimus. Ante tamen quam eiusmodi laboris pastoralis initium facias, etsi a nova fidei professione a novoque fidelitatis iureiurando Te eximimus, res postulat ut canonicam officii possessionem capias necnon de hac tui electione Urdanetensem clerum ac populum certiores reddas; a quibus Ipsi iam nunc petimus ut Te iusta pietate colant ac sequantur tuisque ducis consiliis dociles fruantur, adeo ut, pro sua quisque parte operam Tecum sociando, dioecesanis faveant inceptis. Quod reliquum est, Nos Tibi, venerabilis Frater, dum de nova dignitatis accessione vehementer gratulamur, pariter suademus ut, tui muneris plane conscius, indefessus sis Evangelii praeco atque, quam plurimos ad agnitionem veritatis adducendo, Ecclesiam Tibi commissam digne prospereque gubernes. Datum Romae apud S. Petrum, die altero et vicesimo mensis Aprilis, anno Domini millesimo non-gentesimo octogesimo quinto, Pontificatus Nostri septimo.

Joannes Paulus II

Josephus Delton Prot. Apost.



## **SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO EPISCOPIS**

### **2. APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR OF THE MILITARY VICARIATE OF THE PHILIPPINES**

#### **Decretum**

Cum Vicariatus Castrensis Insularum Philippinarum, cuius regimen gerebat Exc.mus P. D. Petrus Magugat, Episcopus titularis Scilitanus, per ipsius translationem ad Ecclesiam cathedralem Urdanetensem, noviter erectam, vacans exstet, Summus Pontifex IOANNES PAULUS, Divina Providentia PP. II, praesenti Congregationis pro Episcopis decreto, nominat ac constituit Administratorem Apostolicum "ad nutum Sanctae Sedis" eiusdem Vicariatus, donec aliter provideatur, praefatum Praesulem, eique iura et onera tribuit quae huic muneri, ad normam legum ecclesiasticarum, competunt.

Contrariis quibusvis minime obstantibus.

Datum Romae, ex Aedibus Congregationis pro Episcopis,  
die 3 mensis maii anno 1985.

**BERNARDINUS CARD. GANTIN,**  
Praefectus

† **LUCAS MOREIRA NEVES, O.P.**  
Archiepiscopus tit. Feraditan, Maior  
a Secretis

## SANCTITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

by Fr. Pablo Fernandez, O.P.

### *Doña Maria Candelaria: Dominican Professed Tertiary*

#### Introduction:

When Fr. Lorenzo Fondevila, O.P.<sup>1</sup> arrived in Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya in 1822, everybody was talking about the virtues of a native woman named *Doña Maria Candelaria*. This impelled him to find out everything about her. The following memories were presented to Rev. Fr. Provincial Fray Carlos Arbea, who was in his last year of his second term. Indeed, it was a source of consolation for him to know that in the Igorot Missions, there were remarkable exemplars of sanctity such as this. His summarized report is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

Great is the mercy of the Lord our God and His care for those whom He has predestined, even if they are infidels. He gives them the means needed for the fulfillment of His will. One such predestined soul was a native girl named Luta, who on her birth had been at the brink of death. Her mother, Piditan, together with her father, Serang, were traversing with great difficulty the great mountains of Pituy when, unable to bear the pangs of childbirth, Piditan gave birth to a child on the way. Her parents died without the grace of baptism. However, due to God's ways, Luta was brought down from Pituy to Bambang by the missionary who occasionally visited the mountains where the infidels lived. It was from this mission-

<sup>1</sup> About him Father Ocio says: "A most zealous missionary of Nueva Vizcaya from 1825 or before, he was Vicar of Bambang, which is indebted to him for its remarkable growth, inspite of its unhealthy climate that carried many of its inhabitants to their grave. By dint of many labors and sacrifices, he was able to bring down from the mountains a considerable number of Igorots, whom he provided with an abode and the means for their decent support" (Cfr. Hilario Ma. OCIO, O.P., *Compendio de la Reseña Biográfica*, Manila, 1895, pp. 594-595).

<sup>2</sup> This Report was translated from Spanish and summarized by UST seminarians Reynold Corcino and Adalbert Barut under the supervision and direction of Father Pablo Fernández, O.P.

ary that she learned the rudiments of Christian doctrine. On July 5, 1767, she was baptized by the Rev. Fr. Domingo Caro,<sup>3</sup> who gave her the Christian name — María Candelaria. Nothing was recorded about her life in the years immediately following her baptism, but it can be said with all certainty that she led a good Christian life (as attested to by witnesses) and as evidenced by the fact that she had a good husband. Besides it was Fr. Caro himself who had taken on himself the responsibility of instructing and directing the neophytes.

In 1768, she married Don Pedro Galban, also a child of infidel parents, from whom she had a baby girl who died at an early age. Both lived a good Christian life. As a matter of fact, her husband was made a "gobernadorcillo", which is a proof, if we bear in mind the customs and mentality of the people in that particular place and time, that he was really a good Christian. This also indicated that Doña Maria was a virtuous woman, because in the election of gobernadorcillos, not only the good qualities of the candidate were taken into account but those of his wife as well.

It was believed that they made a vow of conjugal chastity after their first-born child died. They did not have more children and it seems that they decided to live as brother and sister, loving each other in Jesus Christ and practicing works of piety. This was probably due to their deep reverence for the sacrament of matrimony which they lived according to the words of the Apostle Paul: "Those who have wives should live as though they had none."

There was another pious woman — Doña Rosa de Sta. María — who harboured a great admiration for Doña María's sanctity. She was a Dominican tertiary and was given the task of educating the girls in the town. When she died, the responsibility was passed to Doña Maria, for she was well-known for her good life, deep intelligence and generosity. What she taught in school was reflected in her pupils. With great zeal, she guided and inculcated in their minds the love for God and the aversion from material things. Every feast day after hearing mass, she would go to school to explain to her pupils the message of the priest's sermon. In her explanation, she would often cry so much so that her pupils would be more moved by

<sup>3</sup> Father Domingo Caro was Vicar of Bambang<sup>1</sup> since 1773. This town, says Father Ocho owes him all that is good therein, which is not little: convent, church, schools, streets, rice-fields. All is due to the vigilance and activity of that man of God (*Ibid.*, p. 460).

her than by the priest himself. On many instances, she would read books for them and, with tears rolling down her cheeks, she would say: "Woe to me and to you girls, if we do not imitate the lives of the saints."

She had a gentle character which won the sympathy of those who met her. Her modesty was remarkable. She did not wear anything superfluous. Her way of dressing was so decent that nothing in her could suggest vanity. She had a great desire that women be chaste and, in fact, there were young girls who imitated her, and through her advice, decided to bind themselves with the vow of chastity.

Her great devotion to the most Blessed Virgin was unusual. At midnight, she would get up to pray the Holy Rosary. At about 3:00 a.m., she would then wake up everybody in the house and invite them to pray together. She gave praise to her beloved Blessed Virgin by singing her poems in the vernacular. Very often she would request the girls to sing these poems too, and in many instances, she would raise up her eyes to heaven with tears flowing down her cheeks. This phenomenon made the Religious conclude that her prayer life was above the ordinary.

Her love for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was also remarkable. She went to Mass everyday even when she was sick. On such occasions, if it was a feast, so as not to miss what the priest preached, she was wont to request her servants to listen carefully to the sermon so that they would repeat it to her.

She was also very devoted to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. On Fridays of Lent, she would mortify her body by scourging herself, and the instrument that she used, according to the testimony of her confessors, was worn out because of its frequent use. She abstained from meat on every Friday and also on days of abstinence during the year and every day of Lent.

It is said that "actions speak louder than words" (*obras son amores*), and so from the charity she had for her neighbors we may infer her deep love for God. Her charity did not only stop at helping her neighbors in their bodily needs, but extended itself to the spiritual needs as well, including the poor souls in Purgatory. During All Souls Day, she would give four pesos as alms and four cavans of rice to the poor. On feast days, she would gather the poor in her house and feed them

and in times when people lacked food due to bad crops, she would call them when they passed by her house and gave them one 'dean' or two 'gantillas' of rice according to the need of each person. Her charity to her neighbors did not last only for one or two days but went on through the year. Because of this, God was so pleased that He even increased her temporal goods.

Her compassion for her neighbors was unique, in particular toward the sick whom she visited and comforted. She would stay in their houses overnight looking after their needs and comforting them with her advices. Whenever she learned that somebody was suffering from leprosy, she would bring him to her house and attend by herself to his needs. She would encourage such ones to be patient and to suffer their pains with Christian resignation. But most especially, she is best remembered for her prayer which was for her a source of consolation: "Lord, if you increase our hardships, increase also our patience in whatever trials you are pleased to send us."

Her zeal for the conversion of the infidels was great. She worked for this not only by instructing them but also by giving her time going up to their villages to bring them down to Bambang so that they would also share the benefits that God had bestowed on her. In this, she was tireless. She underwent a lot of sufferings and inconveniences yet she was not intimidated by hardships for all her concern was to free her fellowmen from the bondage of Satan. Indeed, she can truly be called a "missionary" in her own right.

During leisure time, she would gather the newly baptized and the not yet baptized to instruct them thoroughly, since she was especially gifted for this. Sometimes, she would read to them the lives of the saints, setting before their eyes their exemplary deeds. She really had a great concern for the infidels and for that matter she possessed a special talent to win their will. A proof of this was something that was witnessed by Fr. Rocamora:<sup>4</sup> One time she got angry with the "celador" because an infidel died without baptism. In his presence, she said: "It is all your fault because you have not been patient enough; for all you do is to ask the infidel whether he wants to receive baptism and if he says no, you leave him and don't bother anymore."

<sup>4</sup> Father Francisco Rocamora was destined to Nueva Vizcaya soon after his arrival in the Philippines in 1805, where he was Vicar Provincial and missionary of Dupax from 1806 until 1841. He died in 1851 (*Ibid.*, pp. 567-568).

Fr. Rocamora acknowledged that she had a grace in doing it and, since she mastered the language well and was well-versed in the instruction of the catechumens, she was given the task to do this kind of work which she accomplished so well. It was indeed a blessing to have some zealous people who can be entrusted with the task of evangelizing the infidels. Such blessing was the God-given charism of Doña María Candelaria.

This is all we have been able to gather about the life of Doña María. In this way, although imperfectly, we can portray her interior life for, as the saying goes: "operibus credite".

In my opinion, much could have been written about her interior life had her spiritual directors not died already. But more than anything else, we can say with all certainty that this virtuous woman died with great resignation after a long illness, during which she received her beloved Jesus several times, that is, whenever Fr. Rocamora dropped in Bambang. We must believe that, holy and devout as she was of the Holy Rosary of Mary, she went to celebrate with Her feast in Heaven as she had foretold beforehand.

She had been born about the year 1755 and went to receive her eternal reward in 1816.

## WORSHIPPING WITH MARY

*(Continued from page 706)*

ways live in the temple of the presence of the Lord, in the temple of the grace and life.

At Baptism we were also presented to the Church as new members, and to the people of God as to our spiritual family, and to the world as Christ's witnesses.

Baptism opens the door of another temple, the temple of the Eucharist, a temple we are expected to enter regularly. The Eucharist fills us with the Spirit of Christ, and thus we slowly and progressively become Christ-like. When at the Offertory of the Mass we 'present' ourselves, our lives, our work ... to the Lord, we are expected to do it with the love and faith with which Mary offered Jesus in the Temple.

Strengthened by the Eucharist, we shall be able to leave the 'Egypt' of sin and settle in the 'Galilee' of God's grace and peace.

## MEDITATIONS

# WORSHIPPING WITH MARY

Guillermo Tejon, O.P.

"They went into the house and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt and worshipped him" (Mt. 2:11).

The Magi searched for, and found Jesus. But they did not find him alone. They also found Mary.

The Gospels do not record any conversation between Joseph and Mary and their distinguished guests. However, we can be sure that the Magi talked about the star, and their journey, and about how happy they were to have found the king they were looking for. And we can also be sure that they asked many questions about the baby: name, date of birth, parents, special signs, etc. And who but Joseph, and especially Mary, could answer their questions? And who but Mary showed the baby to the visitors from the East? As the Magi worshipped Jesus, we can imagine Mary worshipping with them.

The story of the Magi is the story of every Christian. In a sense, we are all Magi because we all search for Christ the Saviour. And whenever we find him, we also find Mary his mother.

We search for, and find, Christ in many things and ways: in the Word of God, in the sacraments, in the Church, in prayer, in neighbour... But we search for, and find, him especially in the celebration of the great Mystery of Christ which is the Eucharist.

As the Mystery of Christ, the Eucharist is never an isolated or private celebration. It is the official and on-going offering and worship of the universal Church. This official and on-going offering and worship takes place in the Liturgy (from the Greek *leitourgia* = public worship) and is spread out through the whole liturgical year or calendar.

Starting with Advent, the Liturgy takes us on a travelogue or journey on the Mystery of Christ (his person, his life, his work). This Mystery slowly reveals itself as the Paschal Mys-

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tery (the mystery of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ), from the announcement of Jesus' coming to his birth, to his infancy and life in Nazareth, to his public ministry, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension, his sending of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' proclamation as the king of the new creation. As the Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 102, says, "Within the cycle of a year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord."

And who should accompany us on this journey but the saints who, as faithful disciples of the Lord, followed in his steps and are given to us as models; and especially Mary who, more closely than anyone else, accompanied Jesus in life, shared in the mystery of his death and resurrection, and now reigns glorious with him in heaven?

Mary is the mother of Jesus, and as such we venerate her. But she is also the first Christian who, redeemed by her Son, found salvation in him; the disciple who eagerly learned from him. As a disciple, Mary can teach us much, not with words, but with her presence and the example of her life.

In *Marialis Cultus*, 16, Paul VI says that Mary, the 'attentive Virgin' and the 'Virgin in prayer' is "a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries."

Let us, therefore, follow Jesus throughout the liturgical year, with Mary at our side; and with her at our side, let us share in the Mystery of Christ and worship him as Lord, and through him, the Father.

As we do so, let us keep in mind other forms of worship which, not being officially offered in the name of the universal Church, cannot be called *liturgical* in the strict sense of the word, but which nonetheless, on account of their biblical content and their acceptance by the Church, can be classified as *semi* or *para-liturgical* (*para* = beside, past, beyond) such as Bible Services, the Angelus, the Rosary, the Via Crucis, etc. These devotional practices should somehow flow from and lead to the Liturgy, always relating to it, not just in a general manner, but as far as possible within the liturgical framework and spirit. Properly understood, and practised in the right doctrinal, liturgical and spiritual context, they can help us find



the Liturgy (and therefore, the Paschal Mystery of Christ) more meaningful, live it more vividly and derive from it greater benefits.

## EXPECTANT FAITH

### (Advent)

Advent is the first period or season of the liturgical year. It is a four-week preparation for Christmas.

In the history of salvation, the Old Testament can be called a historical advent that goes from the call of Abraham to the birth of Christ, covering a total of some two thousand years. During this long period of time the promise of salvation, initially made to man in an obscure and veiled manner, becomes more manifest and explicit. Through the prophets the old promise is repeated again and again. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant and of his kingdom as a kingdom of peace, in words so clear and with imagery so vivid, that he sounds more like an eye-witness than a prophet who lived seven centuries earlier.

The Old Testament also speaks of Mary, in mysterious and allegorical terms to be sure, but in terms that have been understood by the liturgical tradition of the Church as somehow referring to her and which undoubtedly correspond to the reality of her life. The promise of Gn 3:15 that a woman and her offspring would crush the serpent (evil) is strongly reinforced by Isaiah's prophecy: "The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel" (Is 7:14).

In the literature of the early Christian era, Christ was hailed as the new Adam, who came to start a new race, or rather, to restore mankind to its original integrity; and Mary as the new Eve, or mother of a new generation of people.

Advent is expectation, is the approaching time for the fulfillment of the promise; is, as John the Baptist said, getting ready to welcome the Saviour. The Liturgy of Advent takes up all this and makes us long for Christ and for the salvation he brings.

We do so with the people of Israel; we do so with the prophets, especially with Isaiah and John the Baptizer; and we do so with Mary.

Mary in Advent is the expectant mother. An expectant mother is always full of wonder, full of hope and faith. Mary lives in expectation for two reasons and in two ways. First, because she carries her son in her womb and the time for delivery approaches; and second, because the son that is to be born of her has been announced as the fulfillment of the promise upon which the whole history of Israel was based. As the chosen mother of the Messiah, Mary personifies the expectation and dreams of countless generations of fellow Israelites; indeed, of the whole of mankind, for the son comes as Saviour to all. She also represents the hopes and aspirations of all those who long for deliverance from the bondage of sin and its consequences, of the poor and the oppressed, of the weak and the abandoned. And, of course, she embodies the dreams and hopes and expectations of the Christian who wants to know Christ better and follow him more faithfully. Mary's *Magnificat*, a song of praise, liberation and thanksgiving, expresses all this beautifully.

In Advent, Mary, the expectant mother, is a symbol of all that is beautiful in life, in the world, in creation; a profession of faith in the Saviour Christ and a powerful inspiration to go in his search and to prepare for his coming.

However, not only in Advent.

In a sense, the whole year is Christmas, because every day of the year Christ comes to us through the sacraments and through God's grace. For the same reason, every day of the year should be lived in a spirit of advent, of expectation for the manifestation of the Lord.

When the angel came to Mary and announced the birth of Jesus, Mary asked a question and the angel gave an answer. But neither the question expressed nor the answer explained all the things that could have been asked and which needed clarification. Mary did not understand everything from the beginning; but she understood one thing: that the Lord wanted her cooperation on a project of the utmost importance for the welfare of her people; and placing herself in his hands, she said *fiat*. And she started walking in faith, a walk that lasted all her life. Day after day she lived in 'expectant' faith, discovering new meanings and dimensions in the mystery of her son, learning more details about the implications of her surrender to the will of God, renewing her commitment to God's project of salvation, saying *fiat*. This 'whole' and total sur-

render to God is perhaps the best and clearest message implied in the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

When we were baptized we received the faith; when we discover our vocation in life we feel the power of the Spirit at work in us; when we choose a state in life we pray for guidance. But, like Mary, we do not understand everything from the beginning, and we do not know the outcome beforehand. Like her, then, we have to walk in *faith*, believing in Christ and trusting him; and in *expectation*, firmly convinced that the Lord lives in us, guides us and accomplishes his redemptive work in and through us. In other words, we too have to walk in expectant faith.

At the start of a new day we march in expectant faith, feeling that the day is a gift from the Lord and that he will manifest himself to us throughout it. When we go to Mass we go in expectant faith, thinking about our encounter with the Lord. When we pray, we pray in expectant faith, knowing that the Lord listens to us and speaks to us in prayer. When we embark on an apostolic enterprise, we do so in expectant faith, conscious that it is God's work, and confident that he will show us the way and take care of the results.

Mary, the humble woman of Nazareth, is the teacher of expectant faith in the liturgical season of Advent.

Aside from Advent, there are other occasions and feasts in the liturgical calendar and in Christian devotion that carry an advent spirit of expectation, and that, therefore, can help us think of Christ's coming and prepare for the realization of the Paschal Mystery in us; the Immaculate Conception, December 8th (Mary's preparation by the Holy Spirit for her role in the history of salvation); the Nativity of Mary, September 8th (Mary's birth, a gift that prepares the way for another and more important gift to the world, namely, the birth of Christ); the Annunciation, March 25th (the birth of Christ announced: Christ being born in Mary before he was born of her and in us); and to a lesser, but still valid degree, the feasts of the Birth of St John the Baptist (the Precursor of Jesus) on June 24th, Sts Joachim and Anna (Mary's parents, according to an ancient tradition) on July 26th, and St Gabriel (the announcer of the Good News) on September 29th.

As for devotional practices, we have to mention first of all the *Angelus*. This brief prayer recalls the solemn moment

when the world stood still and the voice of the angel was heard and Mary's answer reverberated throughout the length and breadth of creation, the greatest moment in history, the moment when the Word took flesh in the womb of a virgin, the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise. Whenever we say this prayer, we imagine Mary — her eyes raised up to heaven in adoration and surrender, and saying *fiat* — we give thanks to God for her, and to Mary for having accepted the mission entrusted to her by the Father, and we are glad that through Mary Jesus was born to us. The Angelus is an everyday Advent.

Other devotional practices with an advent spirit are the *Aguinaldo Masses* (originally a novena of Masses in honour of Mary, the expectant mother); the *Dawn Rosary* and *Novenas* in honour of Our Lady, which are expected to lead to the Eucharist and to prepare us for the encounter with Christ in communion; and of course, the first joyful mystery of the Rosary, the Incarnation.

### GOD AMONG US (Christmas)

Advent (expectation) is followed by Christmas (God among us).

During the Christmas season, several salient events are recorded in the Gospels and commemorated in the Liturgy.

The first one is, of course, the birth of Jesus. Jesus' birth is followed by his presentation to the Jewish nation, which is done on two different occasions and to two different groups of people: first, to the shepherds who, encouraged by an angel, go to Bethlehem in search of the new-born babe; and secondly, on the day (the 8th after birth) of the Circumcision, the ceremony through which the infant Jesus is officially incorporated into the Jewish people and at which the name Jesus is given to him.

Since Jesus was born of the Jewish race and came to fulfill the promise made to that race, it was only proper that he should be introduced to the Jewish people. However, Jesus came as Saviour, not only of the Jewish nation, but of the whole of mankind; he was therefore also presented to the 'Gentile' (non-Jewish) Magi, and through them to the world (Feast of the Epiphany).

There is still another presentation which is commemorated forty days after Christmas: the presentation in the Temple (February 2nd). This presentation, compulsory for all first-born males, acquired in the case of Jesus a special significance: Jesus who came to the world from God is presented and offered by the world to God.

Another important event connected with Christmas is the Flight into Egypt. So early in life Jesus starts 'visiting' the world. In biblical terminology 'Egypt' stands for slavery and oppression. The Israelites were liberated from the slavery of Egypt. Here, however, it is the other way around: Jesus flees from persecution at home and finds shelter in Egypt. Later, he will be liberated from exile and brought back home.

Throughout all these events, Mary is ever present, always taking an active part in them.

After giving birth to Jesus, we imagine her smiling at the shepherds who burst into the place, wide-eyed and astonished. As for the Magi, we have already seen how Mary presented Jesus to them and worshipped him with them. At the Circumcision, Joseph gives the baby the name Jesus, but it was to Mary that the name was first revealed.

The presentation of Jesus to the Lord in the Temple of Jerusalem moves Mary once more to the forefront. She is there, not only as the mother who brings her son to the Temple and as a woman who, after child-birth, needs the legal purification ordered by the Law of Moses. Simeon sees her in another light. He sees her as the *socia passionis* (as Jesus' partner in suffering) and makes a strikingly direct reference to it: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:35). Mary does not understand the meaning of Simeon's words, but we can be sure that in total trust and submission to God's will, she once more says *fiat*. The 'sword' (fear, doubt, separation, suffering...) was destined to be a long and important chapter in the life of Mary.

And, of course, Joseph and Mary are the protectors of the child Jesus on the trip to Egypt (when Herod wants to kill him) and from Egypt (when, for fear of Archelaus who rules in Judaea, they settle in Nazareth).

The marian feasts during the year emphasize Mary's participation in the early days of the life of Jesus, carrying with them a spirit of Christmas and being somehow related to the

story of the nativity of the Lord. The first one is the feast of Mary Mother of God, on January 1st. After centering all the attention on Jesus as God among us on Christmas, we remember the humble woman chosen to be the instrument through whom God made his appearance on earth, and we venerate her. Then, on November 21st, the Liturgy celebrates the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. That Mary as a child was brought by her parents to the Temple and that she lived there for several years, is not supported by Gospel evidence. It is rather a pious tradition from the Eastern Church, based on *apocryphal* (not officially accepted) early Christian narratives. However, more than the historical fact, what counts here, as Paul VI points out in *Marialis Cultus*, 8, is the feast's "lofty and exemplary values." Independently of whether or not Mary actually lived in the Temple of Jerusalem, she certainly lived, especially after the Annunciation, in the temple of the presence of God. And this indeed is a great lesson we can learn from her.

The feasts of Santo Niño (second Sunday in Ordinary Time) and of St Joseph (March 19th) are also intimately related to the story of Christmas.

Jesus was born physically of Mary once. In her heart, however, he was born all the time. As she grew in the understanding of the mystery of her son and in identification with him, the spiritual presence of the son and of the Spirit also increased in her life. Christian worship consists in offering Christ to the Father for the salvation of the world. The Church — and together with her, Mary and all of us — offers him. At the same time the Church offers Mary and all of us, together with Christ, to the Father. Mary is acceptable in God's presence because she was always with Christ. The offering of ourselves will be acceptable to the degree that we are with Christ.

Baptism is our spiritual birth (the 'circumcision' of the heart). On the day of our Baptism we were brought to the temple and presented to God. As on the presentation of Jesus, a prophecy was made over us, uttered not in Simeon's words, but in the form of a wish and a prayer that we would be faithful to the Christ whose disciples we became. A 'sword' was also promised us in the sense that Baptism is death and burial in Christ (Rm 6:3-4) and that the baptismal vows imply renunciation of anything that is contrary to the teachings of the Jesus we accept as master. In other words, that we might al-

(Continued on page 698)

# HOMILETICAL NOTES

by

Fr. Jesus Ma. Merino Antolinez, O.P.

## SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

(November 1, 1985)

## COMMEMORATION OF ALL FAITHFUL DEPARTED

(November 2, 1985)

### THROUGH DEATH, LIFE

#### I. *John XI, 11-27.*

Jesus looked squarely into death. He sensed and lived the whole human impact of vanishing life. He approached a little town at the moment a procession was carrying the only son of a widowed mother to be buried; He also felt the pang of the loneliness and distress of the bereaved and was moved to restore the dead son to the mother (Lk. VII, 11-17). In another incident, He entered a rich house in mourning, quieted down the funeral noise and commotion, and went on to awake the "sleeping" little girl and restore her to the caresses of her parents (Mk. V, 21-43). When laying Himself down upon the rock at Gethsemane on the eve of His passion and death, and while sweating blood, He prayed, "Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass by Me!" He meant what He was saying, because His most exquisite and keen sense of life was experiencing how bitter it was to leave all loves behind.

God first created man immortal. Other beings which have a body, be they plants or animals, and which react to the surrounding world, are subject to corruption; but man is higher than the plants or animals, he is endowed with a mind through the right exercise of which he should master his world and find in it the means of survival. And if his world fails him, he is able to communicate with God who will provide the needed assistance. But man betrayed God; he spoiled his reason and the good use of it and became hopelessly subject to suffering,

weakness, aging, wasting away and dissolution. Then God punished him with Death (Gen. III, 17-19, 21-24). Humanity at large has always kept alive both the belief in man's immortality through the veneration of the ancestors, and the reminiscence of rebellion against the plans of God in expiatory rites. Death is the product of a blunder and its consequent punishment. Death is sad and painful.

At Bethany, Martha plunged the heart of Jesus into the bitterness of funeral sadness with her greeting: "Lord, had you been here, my brother Lazarus would not have died." She felt sure that the sight of grief in the family He loved would have moved Jesus to arrest death from taking its toll. Jesus understood the tragedy and replied while aiming at the heart: "Your brother shall rise!", and then, overlooking the diverting mention of the resurrection in the last day, reached the bottom of both the whole mystery of christian death and of Martha's love with the statement: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he dies, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die. Do you believe this?" Martha, in this interplay of deep mutual understanding, got the insight into the truth welling from Jesus' Heart: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world." The Messiah, the Son of God, and the Emmanuel, "God with us" and abiding within us (Jn. XV, 4), the source of life that He is, makes us live. We shall never die while our living faith binds us to Him. The temporal death might come as a bordering line for our time on earth, but our life is with God and it has no end.

Our existence, and its continuation, is just the support of our real life. This one Jesus explained to His disciples: "If any one loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him; We will come to him and make our abode with him" (Jn. XIV, 23). And He also explained what awaits us beyond the darkness of the tomb or the lights of the sky. "In my Father's house are many mansions. Were it not so, I should have told you, because I go to prepare a place for you; I am coming again, and I will take you to myself, that wherever I am, there may you be also" (Jn. XIV, 2-3). More clearly, He prays: "Father, I will that where I am, they also whom You have given Me may be with Me in order that they may behold my glory, which you have given Me, because You have loved Me before the creation of the world" (Jn. XVII, 24). We have to



expect "the life everlasting" of being at home with God one day and seeing the glory of Jesus and the wonders of love that bind God and His creation together.

St. Paul presents the whole panorama when he writes: "The Spirit Himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God. But if we are sons, we are heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided, however, we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present times are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (Rom. VIII, 16-18).

Yes, death is a mystery of human sorrow. Jesus was pained and wept over it as we mortals do. He came to our rescue with the miracles of resurrection, with the glorious demonstration of His own rising from the dead, and with the promise of a universal resurrection as the restoration of the integrity of our being that we have lost. Yet, death seen under the light of faith, which was the insight of our supreme Judge who said that He would thus judge: "Come blessed of my Father to take possession of the kingdom prepared for you..." (Mt. XXVI, 34) is not a boundary but a gate through which our life of merit proceeds into being the everlasting life of glory with God.

Today, as we recall the numberless crowd of the Saints brought into the splendor of God's glory by the Blood of the Lamb, we visit the tombs of our dead to pray for them and to hear again the message of life as told by the cemetery Cross, that shows as it keeps watch over their dust, it also points heavenward.

### THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(November 3, 1985)

#### THE COMMANDMENTS LEAD TO GOD

##### I. *Mark* XII, 28-34.

Law-minded people tend to scale commands and regulations. It seems that they seek a way of staying firm in complying with the important regulations while safely setting aside prescriptions more or less irrelevant. Speaking in modern

christian terms, it is most common to categorize forbidden actions into mortal and venial sins, and to take the latter lightly, while seriously caring to avoid the former. In His answer to the question put by the inquiring lawyer, Jesus redresses the wrong approach to the divine commandments.

The lawyer asks for the "first" commandment, that is the most important and fundamental, and surprisingly Jesus answers by mentioning two commandments, "greater than which there is none". And they are qualified as "equal", that is, integrating them into a single unit that puts them both in the same level.

To accept God as the only God and consequently to love Him, that is, to be attached to Him, with devotion and dedication from the innermost core of our heart; and with totality of our soul so that every movement of our living would be directed to Him alone; with all our mind so that all our points of view coincide with His, and with all our strength so that we would set no conditions in our serving Him. This was the standard of the union between God and His children as formulated by Moses under divine inspiration (Deut. VI, 4) confirmed now by Jesus. It is as natural as the fact that our life comes from God, goes on under God and is meant to end in God.

The standard of treasuring and caring for our "neighbours", our fellow human beings who are also creatures of God, children of His household, object of His love and endowed with His graces and heirs to everlasting life like we are, is imprinted in human nature and simply formulated by the truth of divine inspiration (Lev. XIX, 18).

Jesus puts both sides, the love of God and the love of our brothers, in the same level, making of them a single foundation of the whole body of the divine Law. He goes to the very bottom of our existence and our life with God: Out of love we were created, to live immersed in the gifts of love, to develop the capacity of exchanging love, and meant to experience immortal love in His glory. The Law that God gives to us is, in His divine intention, nothing else than a reminder of the plans of love He has conceived for us and meant to bring about with our conscious and wholehearted collaboration with Him.

And in that divine understanding of the Law as the program of love, the distinction between the great and the small vanishes. The faintest the loving can be, the most pres-

cious and exquisite is the love manifested. And Jesus will attest in further teachings that as Judge of the living and the dead He will look at the commandments and the injunctions of the divine Law from this angle: "Whatever you did to any one of my brethren you did it to Me" (Mt. XXV, 40).

Perhaps we should wonder at the reflection with which Jesus rounds up the dialogue. He said: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Apparently both were in perfect accord, and yet the good scribe is shown to be well in the way, rather close, but not exactly within the Kingdom of God. Yes, within the kingdom, the standard regulating the love of God and the love of man is far more exacting. "Abide in Me and I in You" (Jn. XV, 4) and then, "This is my commandment that You love one another as I did love you" (Jn. XV, 12); the functional, intimate union with Jesus Christ, God incarnated, so that it is no longer we who live but Christ who is living in us (Gal. II, 20); the total self-denying service for our brothers until expending our life for them as did Jesus "who put His life for the redemption of many" (Mt. XX, 28) is the standard of the love at work in the Kingdom of God that is with us.

It was not dry compliance with regulations, which will make things straight; it was love, which will transform our earth into a starting heaven, the everything Jesus was longing for, when He stated: "I came to bring fire into the earth" (Lk. XII, 49).

## II. *Hebrew VII, 23-28.*

Saint Paul calls our attention to the intimate connection that exists between the sanctity of life, that the fulfillment of the Law is meant to bring about, and the sanctity that is at work in the performance of the sacrifice, when the priest joins God in the realization of the sacred action.

He puts forth Jesus Christ, our Pontiff, perfect, immaculate, everlasting, and ever-living in the bosom of the Father and interceding for us. He is always accepted, because His divine dignity and His sanctity deserve it.

The love of Jesus, practical in the obedience to the divine commandments and liturgical in the services of the Church, as well as in our piety, binds us to God in the priesthood of our divine Mediator.

III. *Deuteronomy* VI, 2-6.

The strange prescriptions of tying the written commandment to the wrist, of hanging them on the forehead, painting them by the doors, are popularly understandable symbols of the complete adaptation that a good Israelite is required to do in ordinary life.

We Christians, who are supposed to see better the commandments as reminders of God's love for us, must always live them whole-heartedly.

**THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

(November 10, 1985)

**WHOLEHEARTEDNESS IN GOD'S SERVICE**

I. *Mark* XII, 38-44.

God, the all knowing Father of ours, is continually looking at us. We too should have Him in mind; after all, our life begins in Him, is led by Him and ends in Him.

Jesus, God incarnated and our teacher, watching the donors as they deposited their contributions in the collection boxes of the Temple of Jerusalem evaluated in divine terms the truth and the extent of their generosity. Adjudged good were those who passed on for the service of God in His sacred liturgy what they could spare after the needs of their lives were provided; well approved also were those who took up some trouble and inconvenience to themselves in order to afford a better service for Him; but definitely proclaimed as extraordinary was the widow who deposited "two mites", that is, two little peices of copper, so tiny that they almost disappear when held on the palm of the hand, and with which she should have been able to buy a morsel of bread for a shadow of a meal. She deprived herself of her scanty food and Jesus treasured her humble offering as the greatest gift ever possible.

That insight of the total faith in God, which senses that only God matters and that He is all-knowing, and loving, and powerful, and mindful of us His beloved children, constitutes

the living dialogue His heart and ours are carrying on when we, He and our own selves, master our universe, directing it to His glory. We are directed by our Redeemer to look into the flowers of the fields or into the birds of the sky and see the splendid beauty and perfection poured on them, mute performers of divine cosmic dispositions, to see how they just realize what they are supposed to be or do. Then He reflects: "How much more of worth are you, men of little faith!", precisely because we have a mind and a heart that they do not have, and we are in possession of doctrine and grace from Him.

The impressive forms of showing the dedication to God might be good and at times necessary, and so commendable. They could be just a show of self-proclaimed sanctity, meant for personal gain and fame. Jesus warns His audience against accepting men claiming to serve God on the ground of their display of personal piety and of the honors conferred upon them. That kind of faith, perhaps is sincere at the bottom; but it is blurred and stained by personal interest.

With a simple, truthful, wholeheartedness, we must give to God everything we have or do, our wisdom or our simplicity, our enthusiasm or our inability, our bounty or our want, even our cleverness, initiative, resources, joy or our miseries, disappointments, deficiencies, and even our sins to be pardoned and mended and transformed in the way He knows best.

In life we count on money resources, on friends and relatives, on efforts and opportunities, on powerful men and chances for success. Can we wholeheartedly trust and count on Him?

## II. *Hebrew IX, 14-28.*

St. Paul brings to the consideration of the Hebrews the honest-to-goodness truth of the immolation of Jesus Christ, our Supreme Priest, in the sacrifice of His life.

Once and for all, total and forever was His oblation.

The Christian life is a sacrifice of our existence offered to God, and we must live it in the understanding of our sharing the truthfulness of our Father in heaven, and the truthfulness of feelings, thoughts and dealings.

And we must wholeheartedly join Jesus Christ in His sacrificial intentions, mainly during the Mass.

III. *I Kings* XVII, 10-16.

Plain people, like the widow of our gospel reading and that of the town of Sarepta in the days of Elijah, might be lacking technical knowledge of nature or Theology, but they do have wisdom of the values of life, undoubtedly given to them by the Father of all truths.

The man of God is requesting; the widow closes her eyes to the pressing urgency of want, trusts the divine power, and jumps into the trust in the God of the prophet.

God does not fail the trust placed on Him, and the miracle follows.

Miracle or ordinary providence, the answer of God to our sincere request will come.

**THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

(November 17, 1985)

**OUR LORD IS COMING, MARANATHA!**

I. *Mark* XIII, 24-32.

The Christians during the time of the Apostles adopted a form of greeting peculiar to themselves, undoubtedly under the guidance of them. The liturgical greeting retains it: "The Lord with you!", which our modern translations try to complete by introducing a deprecatory, optative or factual form of the verb "be", or "is". The early strong statement is better, because it conveys the whole firmness of faith in the presence of Jesus Christ with us.

In the concise description of His future coming to round up His work as Redeemer of the world by judging the living and the dead, and admitting the just into the everlasting kingdom or discarding into hell the wicked, Jesus indicated the commotions of sun, moon, stars and celestial forces that will acknowledge His divine majesty. That glory, similar or even greater than the one brought about by God coming to proclaim His Law on the mount of Sinai (Ex. XIX), has been twisted

by some too imaginative Christians into some sort of theatrical flash, marking the entrance of Jesus back into the stage of the world's life. Such is the "adventism", or "eschatological view" so much talked about in our days as it had been all along the centuries of the history of the Church since the time of the Apostles. Our Lord is not a comedian, and His purpose was centered unto revealing to us that "... they will see the Son of Man coming with great power and majesty..." and so that we may believe in a "Last Judgment".

The purpose of the revelation is clearly manifested in the fact that He proceeds to fix directives for the conduct of the present "generation". They are summarized in the observation of the living process of a fig tree getting gradually ready to offer the sweetness of its fruit in due time. The "present generation" is envisioned by Jesus as growing into fruition. It is a warning directive to His disciples to spend their lives in the expectation of His coming as Judge of the living and of the dead, in such a manner that they hear from Him the invitation of the blessed ones to enter into the glory of their Father's Kingdom.

The technical name for the fact of Jesus' second coming is in Greek "Parousia" and perhaps because it sounds mysterious and queer, it is being used by quite a number of emotional believers of today to hint a mess of theatrical and monstrous events threatening humanity. All this is non-sense. The Greek word *parousia* simply means "presence" in itself and in all the occasions it is mentioned by Jesus and by His apostles, the main of which are: Mt. XXIV 3, XXVII 37, 39; I Cor. XV 23, XVI, 17; II Cor. VII 6-7, X 10; Phil. I 26, II 12; I Thes. II 19, III 13, IV 15; II Thes. II 1, 8, 9; Ja. V 7-8; II Pet. I 16, III 4, 12; I Jn. II 28. We have blended the references so that the double meaning of "presence" and "last coming" be evident.

The "presence" that Jesus minds is His own permanence in our christian life, the one He stressed in His last address to His disciples (Jn. XIII, 31-38), the one He promised to verify within the heart of His faithful (Jn. XIV, 15-21), the one He assured to last till the end of times (Mt. XXVIII, 20).

This presence that the Church is realizing along the ages in her liturgy and in the piety of her faithful is the one that responds to the end of the Apocalypse: "I, Jesus, sent my angel to impart to you all those things on the Churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the brilliant Star of the

morning. — And the Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come'; and the one who hears let him say: 'Come'. And the one in thirst let him come and receive water of life free. ... The One who gives testimony of this says: 'Sure, I come soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' (Apoc. XXII 16-17, 20).

The faith, the life, the task and the expectation of every true Christian is this MARAN ATHA: Our Lord Comes.

## II. *Hebrew X, 11-14, 18.*

Saint Paul calls our attention to the continually officiating Priest of ours always present in every mass that is celebrated by His ministers, at every sacrament that is administered by his deputies, within every liturgical or private prayer that is uttered in His name; in the life and at the bottom of every Christian's heart, who shares the sonship of God inasmuch as he abides in Jesus' love.

Jesus, our Lord, is continually present with us to make us and His Church alive.

## III. *Daniel XII, 1-3.*

The supernatural divine intervention at work in the progress of life of the chosen people of God, who in the Old Testament was Israel and said to be protected by St. Michael the Archangel, is stressed. The repression of the inimical forces is just a previous step to the irradiation of truth and goodness by the wise-men and to the teaching of justice, the complete realization of which is found in the following of Christ.

## LAST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(November 24, 1985)

## SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE

### I. *John XVIII, 33-37.*

Jesus, the man who was standing in front of Pontius Pilate, the one who was born of the Virgin Mary, the one who was going to be crucified and die for our redemption, the one who



would resurrect from the tomb, would ascend into heaven and would sit at the right of the Father through eternity, is the King of the Universe, because He is "God with us", the incarnated Second Person of the Divine Trinity and therefore the greatest dignity possible among all the creatures in the Universe that God has created, being true God and true man living in one person.

Pilate was well informed. He knew that the Jesus brought to him was the real scion of the royal house of David, the "Son of David", the one sequence of the expectations of the Israelites; "Your own people and the High priests had delivered you to me", he says now; then, when Jesus professes "But my kingdom is not of this world" he sentences a verdict of "not guilty"; and at last, while yielding to the pressure of the Jews, he orders the wording of the sentence to be attached to the Cross "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

Jesus himself has not rejected the homage said by the blind man of Jericho (Mt. XX, 29-34), or by the crowds of Palm Sunday (Mt. XXI, 1-17), and before Pilate, He states, "If my kingdom were of this world, my officers would have fought so that I do not fall into the hands of the Jews". In the providential sequence of families and their rights and social standing, Jesus was the king of Israel awaited for all along the Old Testament.

The kingship narrowed to the historical chosen people is not the one we are celebrating. God created man both the individual and the man-humanity, that is, the living unity into which the individual comes to live at full his human life. When in the first sin man-humanity fell into disgrace and enmity, God promised a man-Redeemer; then providentially arranged his coming until finally he gave his life in redemption and built up the kingdom of God on the humanity that should become God's own again in truth and love. The "truth" referred to here is the truth of God's life with man.

The prerogatives of kingship in the life of man, and in consequence in the living "Kingdom of God", are that the king be the center and root of all power and authority; that the king be the man of vision whose wisdom see the real purpose and ways to direct his subjects into their happy welfare; that the king be the sovereign owner of the communal resources so as to be the provisor of his kingdom's needs; and the guide living and enlivening with his examples and inspiration the subjects under him to stand adversities, to work on hardships, to profit from

opportunities and to attain the glory of peace and success. Our King and Lord Jesus Christ has, and in a divine way, all this prerogatives in both spiritual and temporal manner. Son of God incarnated, He has all power in His hand (Mt. XXVIII, 18); Word of God in the bosom of the Father and living within Him, the wisdom of the Eternal is in Him (Mt. XI, 27); everlasting intercessor sitting at the right of the Father (Heb. VII, 25), He will grant everything that we pray for (Jn. XVI, 24); and the Lamb of God who came to this world to give His life in redemption (Mt. XX, 28), His everlasting call is for the truth of "taking up our cross and follow in His steps" (Mt. XVI, 24).

The majesty of the kings is not in the splendor of crowns, thrones, mantles and entourages; it is rather in their being the center and object of the love, ideal, honorable and true of their subjects. When they be good kings, their sight while living and their memory in history would be an appeal to love. Our King is simply in this regard the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and that for every man.

Our homage must be an intimate, true as our own heart is true, response to His royal request and command: "Come to me... and learn from me..." (Mt. XI, 28); "Abide in my love (Jn. XV, 9).

## II. *Apocalypse* I, 5-8.

The profession of faith in Jesus Christ, with which St. John, the visionary to whom it was given to pass on the revelation of the destinies of the Church, greets the presence in glory of the Master and Friend, with whom once upon a time he was living, is presented before us, because in it the reality of Jesus' divine royalty is expressed.

If God is the King, God incarnated is King. As God is the origin, the providence, the ruler, and sovereign Lord of all creatures, so is our King Jesus Christ.

## III. *Daniel* VII, 13-14.

God is by nature and eternally the King; but in His mercy He wanted that the intelligent beings who are extension of His glory understand and share the life of His kingship. He disposed

that the Kingdom of God be a historical reality, and the vision given to Daniel show in a performance the "Son of Man", who will be Jesus Christ, coming to the eternal throne and receiving the divine Kingship to be realized among men.

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(December 1, 1985)

### THE REDEMPTION IS NEAR

#### I. *Luke XXI*, 25-28, 34-36.

Year after year and for many centuries the Church begins the liturgical year with the announcement of the Last Judgment. She knows far better and understands more exactly the revelation of the Lord than the "advent-minded-Christian" who appears time and again to alarm and frighten men. The Church holds that Jesus brought in the foresight of His coming as Judge of the living and of the dead as a warning for a better manner of living.

The transformation into that better manner of living is what Jesus calls "redemption". The expression "redemption" used here by the Lord is borrowed from the liturgy of the Old Testament when the priest, after having performed the rituals prescribed, declared an Israelite free from guilt and clean before the eyes of God (Lev. XIV, 20). Jesus hints that our life, surrounded as it is by so many occasions of failure and pushed forward by our weakness, yet directed towards serving God, is a long process of encounter with Him, and a continuous ritual of purification.

The Master prescribes the way we must behave in order to be found worthy of meeting Him. "Do not overburden your hearts with pleasures, and drunkenness and cares of daily life." We need to master ourselves and keep the heart ready for loving God, our fellowmen, and caring for the world put at our disposal by divine providence.

As we are to re-enact His coming into the World on Christmas, we must renew the consciousness of our "redemption" and the realization of our salvation.

Yes, the Church reminds us that the world in which we are living is meant to pass away; but when this is to happen is not exactly our concern. Our personal life is going on steadily towards an end, and has in itself the purpose of bringing us closer and deeper into God's love. Also the Church reminds us that when we meet Christ at Christmas or at any day or moment of our life, and when we finally meet Him as Judge of the living and the dead, our greeting must be one of pure, unrestrained love that would last eternally.

## II. *Thessalonians* III, 12 to IV, 2.

The continuous strengthening of the love for God and for our fellowmen, as wanted and commanded by Jesus is the real preparation for meeting Him at His coming. Such strengthening is vital; it does not consist in shouting "Love! Love!" in the manner it has been so much dramatized and commercialized in our days. It implies spending our life with its means, time, efforts in serving God and procuring the real welfare of the children of God in a manner similar to that of Jesus' own.

And it demands, too, that we keep doing things in life better.

## III. *Jeremiah* XXXIII, 14-16.

The prophetic vision and expectations for the incoming life in the Kingdom of the Grand King, the Messiah, is centered in the person of the King Himself assuring the justice and the enjoyment of the rights by everyone of His subjects. What was an envisioned happiness for the prophets and the people of old days is for us a task of living cooperation with the King, Jesus, whose presence and coming we are to re-enact while enjoying the benefit of His grace.

# THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

(December 7, 1985)

## FULL OF GRACE

### I. *Luke* I, 26-28.

The Archangel Gabriel greets Mary in a twofold manner that astonishes Her. He addresses Her first as "Full of Grace" and then as "The Blessed one amongst women". When Mary

wonders, the Archangel blends both titles into one explanatory statement, "You have found grace with God". The phrase is a common expression in the Old Testament. It constantly means to attract the good sentiments of the high personality concerned, be it God or man. It was said of Noah (Gen. VI, 8), of Abraham (Gen. XXIV), and of Esther (II, 9). God Himself points to that "grace" as the main one of his attributes in relation to men (Ex. XX, 6; XXXIV, *passim*; Num. XIV, 18; Deut. V, 10). Hence, that means that Mary is in the eyes of the Almighty the woman of great destiny, object of God's main love.

The greetings might not be clearly seen in the mystery we are celebrating today; but it certainly implies it. Nephtali is blessed as full of the "Blessing of the Lord" (Deut. XXXIII, 23), and Jerusalem is described in her glory by Isaiah as "full of judgment and holiness abiding in her" (Is. I, 21); in both cases the indication is that they are filling up the expectation of God for them. A woman of destinies was, in the sight of God the Saviour, mother of "the Seed" that was going to crush the head of "the Serpent" (Gen. III, 15), mother of the "Emmanuel" (Is. VII, 14), who shall give birth in Bethlehem (Mich. V, 3), and the female who shall bring forth the "Hero", saviour and redeemer (Jer. XXXI, 23). Now, Mary is greeted by the Messenger of God as "full of grace" and the "blessed one amongst women", the spotless, most fitted mother of the incoming Redeemer.

The tenet of faith that we are celebrating today is the first step taken by God in Mary in order to make Her fit to be the Mother of His only begotten Son. We all come to life in a humanity that was placed in a stand of enmity to God by the first sin committed by our First Parents; by hereditary sequence we are conceived wanting in supernatural gifts and in the moral crookedness. Mary, the "All Holy", is the exception that God, foreseeing both the redemption to be brought about by Jesus and the role of building up the human existence of the Word incarnated, made by bringing her up within the fullness of His love and endowed her with all the mercies He meant to give to all His beloved creatures. We, who are so sensitive to the stain and painful consequences of the original sin, call the privilege granted to Mary, the Immaculate Conception, although what we mean to venerate is the mercy of God that gave to Jesus, and in Him to us, of a Mother perfect in love and sanctity.

It is not the enthusiasm of devotion, nor the niceties of theological researches about original or actual sin, neither as the historical development of a tenet of Christian belief about Mary,

or the clear formulation of a "dogma" that we celebrate, but the sanctity and beauty of Mary, the future Mother of Jesus and of ours.

Her motherly love, is all over the realm of life, an infinite symphony of touching events that bring about happiness in every conceivable manner. The heart of a Mother is the most marvelous image of the heart of God. A motherly Heart, "full of Grace", filling up to totality the ideal He had of what a mother should be, is what the Eternal Father prepared for His Son in Mary.

And because we are the brothers of Jesus, she is our Mother, too.

## II. *Ephesians* I, 3-6, 11-12.

All the graces of God to humanity are gifts to His Incarnate Son. And all these graces pass to us through His Son.

Mary was chosen and made full of grace for Jesus.

In Jesus, and with Jesus, we share the gift of a worthy Immaculate Mother.

## III. *Genesis* I, 9-15, 20.

The story of the origin of man narrated in the Holy Scriptures is read to recall that God had created man out of love and man enjoyed the happiness of His friendship. It was well until man put God aside and betrayed Him.

But God, although offended and compelled to punish, never abandoned man. He promised a redeemer to be brought about, like all his fellow children of men, from a mother.

Oh! And our faith has it, that the future mother who will bring forth our Redeemer will be a woman according to His divine Heart!

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

(December 8, 1985)

**BAPTISM FOR CONVERSION****I. Luke III, 1-6.**

St. Luke starts very solemnly his presentation of the beginning of the preaching of John the Baptist with reference to the rulers of the world at that time because he wanted his readers to become aware of the importance of the event. He was right, because in the plans of God for salvation, the preaching of John the Baptist was the starting point.

St. John received his mission in the desert, where he was like some other pious men of his times, living a life of intimate communion with God. He was a son of a priest of the Old Testament, St. Zachary, and as such, having reached the required legal age, he was himself a priest officiating for some seven years. The mission St. John received was to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom and, under the divine inspiration, he understood it in a priestly manner. He and all the priests have to wash themselves ritually before approaching the altar for the services; all the victims killed, skinned and sectioned had to be thoroughly washed before being offered and brought to the altar; he understood that all men of Israel before entering the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Holiness under the rule of the Messiah, had to be clean before the divine eyes. Hence, a ritual of washing was meant to indicate, on the part of the administering minister, to introduce the candidate to the service of God. On the part of the candidate, it meant the leaving behind a manner of life unbecoming to a subject of the Holy One. John preached the Baptism of Penance and brought the crowds to Jordan to be baptized.

The word "penance" could be more appropriately translated as "conversion", or as the Greek expression *metanoia* conveys, change of mind and heart. The dirt in man is not offensive material filth: it is the crookedness, the perversity, and sin in all ways and forms; above all, it is the attachment to pleasures. The sinful forgets sanctity.

Our baptism, the one performed under the power of Jesus Christ who is the victim immolated for the expiation of all

sins, is not only conveying it but also realizing sanctification that we need to approach, initiating us into the total service of God that is Christian life.

The Church reminds us of our Baptism that cleansed us from the state of original enmity with God, or from Original Sin. The Church wants us to offer to our Saviour a clean heart, i.e., living in the sense of justice, rectitude, truth and love.

## II. *Philippians* I, 4-6, 8-11.

St. Paul presents the program for a real Christian life, inspired by the conviction that Jesus Christ is coming and has to be received in perfect purity, as his prayer for the Philippians.

The Christian life is, according to him, a constant growing in the right evaluation of the events of our life so as to see in them the justice of God, and an equally constant exercise of virtues in order to be found spotless in the eyes of Jesus Christ when He comes.

The Christian from Baptism till death, and even till everlasting life, has to look at life as a constant advent.

## III. *Baruch* V, 1-9.

The people of the Old Testament, because of their having been unfaithful to God, were led into captivity. There they experienced the oppression of men who did not pay any consideration to divine laws and ideals. They were experiencing the oppression by sinners. Besides, they were forced to live in surroundings that were a constant occasion for sin. The Prophet announces to them "redemption", that is, a liberation from their misery, through their union and by the peaceful ways of constant meeting with the merciful Lord.

The Prophet points to the divine intervention in straightening out the path towards the encounter.

In our modern times we might think that we are living in exile within a world that is becoming more and more paganized. We are reminded that our Saviour is coming to brighten our hearts and wipe away our sorrows with His Presence.



### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (December 15, 1985)

#### BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT AND IN FIRE

##### I. *Luke* III, 10-18.

This third sunday of advent the Church makes a little change in the colour of the vestments, a liturgical detail that probably will pass unnoticed by quite a number of churchgoers. The change has a nice meaning. The liturgical colour of vestment for Advent is purple, colour of penance and sadness, befitting well the anxiety of expectation and the effort of preparedness; today it is changed to a rosy tint, the colour of dawn coming to start the glory of a new day.

And the gospel read to us is still on John the Baptist and his baptism; although the message of the Baptist changes from penance and avoidance of sin to positive directions for a life of righteousness. So the baptized person is told to share his good things with others; the government officials like the publicans are told to abide by their dues and duties; the soldiers are told not to take advantage of their power but to be satisfied with their pay; and everyone who has entered the expectation of the Kingdom of God through John's baptism is reminded of the obligation to live up his own ordinary life to the sanctity befitting the Messianic Kingdom.

The Church wants us to consider this message: "I am baptizing you with water; but there shall come one mightier than I... He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire". To be drenched by the Holy Spirit, that is by God as source and fountain of life both temporal and divine, is to become alive with the divinity itself; to be engulfed by the heavenly fire, always in movement and action, is to become intensely activated in works that realize godly wisdom and mercy; and this is the inner transformation that the baptism of John the Baptist only symbolized, but perfected in the baptism of the Christ.

The baptism we receive upon entering into the Church of God is the baptism of Christ. In it we receive — besides the pardon of the sins and besides the remission of the scars and remnants of Original Sin — the fullness of the divine grace or indwelling of the Holy Trinity in us by which we share the godly life and become children of the Almighty and heirs of

heaven. We also receive the gifts and graces of the Spirit which enable us to live in the splendour of heavenly light. Through them we are reborn as new creatures.

The joyful approach of this Sunday's liturgy is a call from the Church to pay attention to our infinite dignity as Christians, and an exhortation to join our coming King and Saviour in His work of transforming this world.

The work of transforming the world must be done with joy.

## II. *Philippians* IV, 4-7.

The consciousness of the presence of God within our hearts makes us certain about his divine wisdom. It disposes us to accept everything that happens around us. All are part of His plan and loving care.

The christian who lives, struggles, suffers, works, rests, prays, asks and gives thanks — believing that his Master and Father is near — is at peace.

Ours is the peace of Jesus Christ.

## III. *Isaiah* LXI, 1-2, 10-11.

The prophet was to comfort the people of God of olden times, who were misled by wild rulers, exploited by enemies, and scattered in the lands amidst inimical conditions of life. He, in the name of God, pointed to the presence of the Messiah King among them as the source of their peace and security.

What was for them a comforting promise is for us a happy reality.

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(December 22, 1985)

## THE MOTHER OF THE LORD

### I. *Luke* I, 39-45.

The Church, through its liturgy, leads the faithful towards a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this last Sunday of Advent, when the splendor of the incoming King

is already bursting in, it brings to prominence the figure of Mary, the Mother Queen.

The freshness and beauty of the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, so familiar even amidst the sparkling occurrence of supernatural inspiration has blurred the understanding of the event itself in many. Elizabeth, "the daughter of Aaron" or member of the family of the High Priest, was confronting her cousin, the "daughter of David" married to Joseph "the Son of David" or the titular to the throne of Israel, which, though occupied then by the intruder Herod, belonged to him. She was conscious that Mary's incoming baby was the "Lord" (and besides, the intimate shock told her that the moment of the messianic promise to be fulfilled arrived through the davidic Mother that was her cousin). That faith was the mental background of the mutual greetings between the two princesses, the Daughter of Aaron and the Daughter of David.

Elizabeth proclaimed Mary "blessed" because She believed all that the Lord said about Her. Yet Elizabeth did not yet know the message announced by the Archangel; but she knew the promised Redeemer was to have a Mother. She would come from the family of Abraham and Jacob, in the royal house of David. The "Virgin" would bring forth the "Emmanuel". The virgin, as mother of the "Great King", will have from God the mission of bringing Him up. Mary was the titular of all those promises.

Mary expressed Her faith in the song with which She responded to Elizabeth. A humble servant of the Lord, She accepted the mission of being the great dispenser of the one blessing for all human generations; as restorer, by miraculous intervention of the sovereign destinies of the messianic Kingdom; as carrier of the infinite bounties announced as glories of the future Israel; and as the person in whose Child the Promise of Abraham will become a living truth. Mary showed her heart as filled with the fullness of the faith of the Old Testament, welcoming the child she was bearing.

The Church, in the liturgy of these days preceding Christmas, leads us to join Mary in opening our hearts in a welcome of faith. She sings her longing for the Word of God and His Salvation, for the Lord of Sinai and His liberation, for the

Flower of Jesse's stem and His aid, for the Key of David and His freedom, for the Dawn of eternal life in His enlightening, for the King of all nations and His new life, and for the Emmanuel or "God with us". This tells us that our welcome cannot be a blind and dumb one, but alive with a conscious love for the Son of God who comes to dwell with us and be our Brother.

Jesus, by the will of God was brought into the world by a human Mother — Mary. As such, none understands Jesus better than Her heart does. She is our Mother, too, and none could lead us towards Him better than She does. Some aberrant Christians of today had tried to correct the ways of God and greet and welcome a "motherless Jesus Christ", Who might be offended because we, His brethren, love Mary as wholeheartedly as He does. Such ignorance of the Holy Scripture must be corrected.

We must welcome and receive our King enthroned on the most beautiful image of our loving God, the heart of His Mother, Mary.

## II. *Hebrew X, 5-10.*

Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, assuming our human nature to offer the perfect love of a total conformation to the divine will, that surpasses all possible offerings or sacrifices, is the mystery that St. Paul stresses as the great plan of God in the Birth of the Emmanuel.

Sure, He is endowed with a human body and life to abide among us, to deal with us, teach us, and to care for us; but in due time He will surrender that very human life on the Cross for our Redemption, and will extend to us the benefit of His grace and salvation.

## III. *Micah. V, 2-5a.*

The picture of Bethlehem depicted as the Mother holding out Her Child to gather back the brothers by attracting them in the enjoyment of peace, is the most touching visualization of the delicate and exquisite plan of the Almighty in bringing about the Birth of our Saviour.

**CHRISTMAS**

(December 25, 1985)

**JESUS CHRIST THE GLORY****I. *John* I, 1-18.**

The Church leads us in greeting our Saviour. Jesus, Mary's baby, is a tiny, tender and graced little human being but His dignity is divine.

John, the Evangelist, who wrote his Gospel — a presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus — had listened to Him constantly for years. He verified through His miracles and works that He was the Messiah. He witnessed for many years after the death and resurrection of his Friend and Master the miraculous transformation of the world. By the overpowering revelation from the Holy Spirit, he understood the real nature of Jesus' human personality. And he started the Gospel with a glimpse of the divine glory of Jesus.

God, the supreme Being, our Creator and the Provident Father is the Source of life in the world and of that perfect and infinite life. In the innermost part of His Being, this infinite thinking and loving are going on to the fullness, and brings about the eternal realization of the Divine Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. John centers the attention of our faith on God the Son, and states: "In the beginning was the Word", that is, a total expression of whatever was the Father. Then he says that the Word was not only within God, but He was and is Himself God. Jesus is God, the creator and providence coming to us, and living as a real man although His real nature is divine.

The "Word of God" acted and projected life over all the creatures that come into existence, upon men especially who share not only being but also the consciousness and understanding of it. But now, when the Eternal decided to come down to serve us, and to converse with us, and be one like us, the Word is then in our world, appealing to us to recognize Him and to receive Him for what He is. In this consists our Salvation — in the sharing of our life with the Divinity through Jesus who was born to us in Bethlehem.

Around us, we see the sun with its rays be-speaking splendour and glory that helps us understand the vivifying influence of the Word Incarnated among us. Those rays full of energy and life fall upon the flowers and grass of the meadows and flood them with light that penetrates them and makes them throb and shine with life and beauty. In a similar manner the Word of God who possesses divine life and is the glory and splendour of the Godhead comes to enliven every man with His divine life.

The coming of the Word into the world is more than a mechanical device; it is a work of love and has to be accepted by love as an answer to an invitation, because God who has created us free and loving counts on our freedom and love. Then the tragedy of the refusal of many to accept life and of their preference for darkness happens. Yet the mercy of God goes on and many accept Him, and by doing so, they receive the inner divine power of grace that makes them real "children of God", alive with the very life coming from the Divine Trinity. This is the new birth brought about not by "flesh and blood" of human reproduction but by the sanctifying grace of God.

Moses, and like him all the prophets, was just a minister telling us things from God; the Christ who is born for us is the Son in the divine Trinity, God with us, who starts by being a little baby and realizing the divinization of our human nature. Jesus, God and man, senses, smiles, walks, works, rests, enjoys, suffers, lives and dies and resurrects and ascends into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, the Second Person of the Trinity and the personality who is the sovereign head of all creation. "Philip, the one who sees me sees the Father", He would explain one day (Jn. XIV, 9). Such is the fundamental tenet of our faith. We must live it wholeheartedly during this Christmas.

## II. *Hebrew I, 1-6.*

The wonders of creation, both material in the harmony of the universe and spiritual in the spiritual powers and their life, are glorious manifestations of what the Almighty continually does. However, Jesus, the Child born to us, is the manifestation of what God is in Himself, penetrating our human nature and life, like the sun penetrates a cloud and reveals the infinite beauty of God.

Men and angels should acknowledge this great mystery with deep sentiment of adoration.

### III. *Isaiah* LII, 7-10.

The resplendent panorama of the sun rising over the distant mountains, levelling heights and depths into a sea of white brilliant clouds, and flooding the towns of Judah with golden rays and calling them to live and enjoy God, a gift of life is the vision of the Prophet.

It is the reason of our celebrating Christmas, a call to enjoy the glory of a full Christian life in the intimacy of Jesus, true God and true Man.

## FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH (December 29, 1985)

### AT HOME WITH JESUS

#### I. *Luke* II 41-52.

The gospel offers us a short but good insight into the way Joseph was ruling his household within which was the Mother of God-Incarnated. The parents of Jesus used to go up to Jerusalem for the yearly feast. When Jesus was twelve years old, they brought Him along at the moment He should, according to custom, be taking part in the worship. That indicates that within that house the perfect observance of the divine Law in the spirit of the most exquisite devotion was the rule. In the previous occasions the same observance was indicated in Jesus' circumcision on the eighth day of His life, in the purification of Mary when Her days were accomplished, in the proper presentation of Jesus as "the first born" in the temple, in the offering of the prescribed "pair" of birds normal for paupers who have to share in a holocaust (Lev. I, 14-17) and the only one possible to the destitute Royal House of David under Joseph. That household was a loyal observer of the divine Law.

Joseph and Mary with the Child had joined the Pilgrim age from Nazareth who attended the festivities at the Temple and in the city and were going back. The noble sense of the implicit mutual confidence appeared when they returned home presupposing that Jesus joined another group of pilgrims. And when they realized that He had remained behind, they worried and returned to search for Him in sorrow, born of deep love, going from house to house for three days.

The flash of motherly and tender but firm authority of Mary meeting Jesus amidst the Doctors of the Law in the Temple, was the most exquisite revelation of how deeply confident and how true were the dealings and feelings of the members of the Holy Family. Mary and Joseph were hurt.

The explanation, let us call it "apology" if we prefer, from Jesus was more revealing. "Why did you seek for me? Did you not know that I should be about my Father's house?" It manifestly implied that conversations on "the Father" similar to those we have sampled in the Sermon and Prayer after the last Supper (Jn. XII-XVII) were going on within the walls of the little house of Nazareth. They must have been tender, innocent remarks and observations of the true child that Jesus was, but rich enough and sure to convey the true Dignity of Him, the true purpose of His presence within the world and within the family, and the mystery of the Emmanuel of the prophecies, the "Son of God" in the lips of the Archangel of the annunciation and of the "My Father" of Jesus.

Christian Art has an immense gallery of masterpieces depicting the peace, serenity and happiness at home within the Holy Family; but none equals the flashes of intimate love that transpire from the remarks; "And He went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them", or "And Jesus was growing in wisdom and age and grace with God and Men." And a plain, unassuming firm statement on Mary comes: "And Mary, the mother, was keeping all those things in her heart".

To our world of broken hearts and broken homes, of abortions, of divorces, of senseless temporary live-ins, of test-tube babies, of children conceived along the streets to drag a loveless life in which the divine beauty of motherly love or of fatherly care and of homely sweetness is fading away, the image of the Holy Family of Nazareth is a God-sent call. It tells that refreshing the sense of God and of the heavenly dignity and destiny of the human being whose origin, formation, education and success depend on the institution of marriage and home, is the way out from the miserable tragedy of the loveless world into which we seem to be sinking.

The Christian home — wherein God abides, where His Law and love reign, where prayers to Him supplement the resources of means and efforts, where each one is an image of the Son of God Incarnated who comes and lives and dies, going on heaven-wards is our way. May the intercession and protection of Jesus, Mary and Joseph strengthen every home.

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