

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

OUR LADY OF THIS YEAR

Roman Carter, O.P.,

REDEMPTORIS MATER

John Paul II

PRIESTLY OBLIGATION TO HEAR CONFESSIONS

Excelso Garcia, O.P.

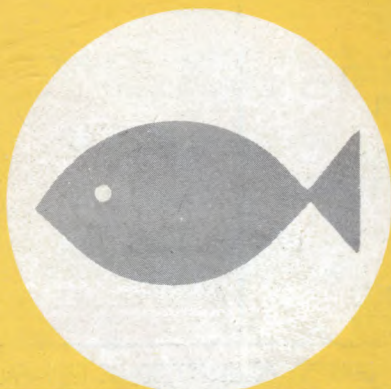
MOTHER IGNACIA DEL ESPIRITU SANTO

Pablo Fernandez, O.P.

ON CONCELEBRATIONS

Wilfredo Paguio

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Our Lady of this Year

IT is with great joy in *Jesu et Maria* that I greet the readers of *Boletin Eclesiastico* for the first time as a member of the University of Santo Tomas Community. This year seems to be a particularly "Marian" one for me.

Several weeks before coming to the Philippines, I had the blessing of spending a few days in Portugal, days particularly marked by a Pilgrimage to Fatima including the twelfth and thirteenth of May. The seventieth anniversary of Our Lady's first apparition to the three shepherd children. Over three hundred thousand pilgrims including the Auxiliary Bishop of Legazpi and his priestly travelling companion were with us there and concelebrated Masses involved the Patriarch of Lisbon, some twenty other bishops and over four hundred priests from all over the world.

Less than a month later I experienced a contrasting but no less moving event. On June 6, the Solemnity of the Pentecost, I gave a day of recollection of the Cistercian Nuns of the Monastery of Calatrava near Villalba on the outskirts of Madrid (Spain). After the Solemn Mass of the day at which the nuns

sang the traditional Gregorian 'ordinary' and 'proper,' I marched in procession with them to the cloister-garth where an image of Our Lady of Fatima was placed. We began the Marian Year there with a sung Antiphon, prayers and the crowning of the statue according to rite devised by the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid for all of the contemplative convents of his diocese. What a contrast indeed! Less than twenty cloistered nuns and myself, as compared with the myriad crowd of Fatima, could be seen as a study in insignificance. But intention and fervor, even on the part of a few, can, I am sure, make little things great.

In this number of BOLETIN our "star feature" is the Holy Father's latest Marian Encyclical, REDEMPTORIS MATER of 25 March of this year. Thanks to Pope John Paul II the Blessed Virgin Mary can be for all of us, whatever our variety of experiences, "Our Lady of this Year." He gives us the treat of reading him at his best in that typical style which is a mixture of pastoral concern, tender piety, and doctrinal depth. Reading John Paul II is like listening to a classical toccata and fugue with its subtle balances of firm notes and oft repeated but somehow always fresh strains.

For him that same Mary who is present in the mystery of Christ is likewise present in the mystery of the Church. Her presence is equally maternal in both connected mysteries. In both cases the presence is *dynamic*. Mary reflect mirrorwise the *magnalia Dei* as the Church progresses through time and extends Christ's Lordship in space. Mary has gone before the Church leading the way. The Annunciation prepares for Pentecost.

As promise is transformed into reality, Mary's initial faith is confirmed, her contemplative faith becomes something basic to the whole community as she shares it, and the Church, in turn, venerates her for the support she unceasingly gives to the new People of God. Mary's presence then, as it were, seeps through into many levels of Church life. The home, the *convento*, the diocese, the place of pilgrimage become meeting places

with our Mother. The Pope cites the Holy Land, Rome, Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima and Jasna Goa in his native Poland in a "geography of faith" for the Church in pilgrimage, led by Mary to Christ her head for the benefit of all mankind.

All this has an ecumenical dimension in that honoring Mary deepens the faith of all who do so however separated they may be from one another. She becomes the *common Mother* of us all — both Catholics and other Christians, too — inasmuch as they are coming to gradual agreement with the Church on fundamental points including her role. This is particularly true of all Eastern Orthodox especially the Russians who in this year of the Twelfth Centenary of the Second Council of Nicea (against the Iconoclast) are singled out by the Holy Father for their profound theological reflection on and constant veneration for the thaumaturgic *ikons* of their tradition.

There is so much else that is so good and to the point in this encyclical that I would urge our readers to read the document itself as I feel sure they will find it a veritable quarry of materials equally suited to doctrinal meditation and homiletic proclamation.

In this Marian Year which began on Pentecost of 1987 and will end on the Feast of the Assumption of 1988 may the prayers of the Mother of God, Blessed Mary Ever-Virgin, light us on our way on the Pilgrim Path of Christ so that under the constant interior impulse of the Holy Spirit we may come at last to where she, our Mother, is glorified body and soul midst angelic choirs forever.

FR. ROMAN CARTER, O.P.

Redemptoris Mater

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE
SUPREME PONTIFF

JOHN PAUL II

ON

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**IN THE LIFE OF THE
PILGRIM CHURCH**

*VENERABLE BROTHERS,
BELOVED SONS AND DAUGHTERS,
HEALTH AND THE
APOSTOLIC BLESSING.*

INTRODUCTION

1. The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (*Gal. 4:4-6*).

With these words of the Apostle Paul, which the Second Vatican Council takes up at the beginning of its treatment of the Blessed Virgin Mary,¹ I too wish to begin my reflection on the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and on her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church. For they are words which celebrate together the love of the Father, the mission of the Son, the gift of the Spirit, the role of the woman from whom the Redeemer was born, and our own divine filiation, in the mystery of the "fullness of time."²

This "fullness" indicates the moment fixed from all eternity when the Father sent his Son, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn.* 3:16). It denotes the blessed moment when the Word that "was with God... became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn.* 1:1, 14), and made himself our brother. It marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ. This "fullness" marks the moment when, with the entrance of the eternal into time, time itself is redeemed, and being filled with the mystery of Christ becomes definitively "salvation time." Finally, this "fullness" designates the hidden beginning of the Church's journey. In the liturgy the Church salutes Mary of Nazareth as the Church's own beginning,³ for

¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 52 and the whole of Chapter VIII, entitled "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church."

² The expression "fullness of time" (πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) is parallel with similar expressions of Judaism both Biblical (cf. *Gen.* 29:21; *1 Sam.* 7:12; *Tob.* 14:5) and extra-Biblical, and especially in the New Testament (cf. *Mk.* 1:15; *Lk.* 21:24; *Jn.* 7:8; *Eph.* 1:10). From the point of view of form, it means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and especially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfilment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension. According to *Gal.* 4:4 and its context, it is the coming of the Son of God that reveals that time has, so to speak, reached its limit. That is to say, the period marked by the promise made to Abraham and by the Law mediated by Moses has now reached its climax, in the sense that Christ fulfills the divine promise and supersedes the old law.

³ Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface of 8 December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, XV, 93-94; *PL* 16, 342; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

in the event of the Immaculate Conception the Church sees projected, and anticipated in her most noble member, the saving grace of Easter. And above all, in the Incarnation she encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined: he who is the Church's Lord and Head and she who, uttering the first FIAT of the New Covenant, prefigures the Church's condition as spouse and mother.

2. Strengthened by the presence of Christ (cf. *Mt.* 28:20), the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes. But on this journey — and I wish to make this point straight-away — she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who “*advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross.*”⁴

I take these very rich and evocative words from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which in its concluding part offers a clear summary of the Church's doctrine on the Mother of Christ, whom she venerates as her beloved Mother and as her model in faith, hope and charity.

Shortly after the Council, my great predecessor Paul VI decided to speak further of the Blessed Virgin. In the Encyclical Epistle *Christi Matri* and subsequently in the Apostolic Exhortations *Signum Magnum* and *Marialis Cultus*⁵ he expounded the foundations and criteria of the special veneration which the Mother of Christ receives in the Church, as well as the various forms of Marian devotion — liturgical, popular and private — which respond to the spirit of faith.

3. The circumstance which now moves me to take up this subject once more is *the prospect of the year 2000*, now draw-

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

⁵ Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Christi Matri* (15 September 1966): AAS 58 (1966) 745-749; Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967): AAS 59 (1967) 465-475; Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974): AAS 66 (1974) 113-168.

ing near, in which the Bimillennial Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ at the same time directs our gaze towards his Mother. In recent years, various opinions have been voiced suggesting that it would be fitting to precede that anniversary by a similar Jubilee in celebration of the birth of Mary.

In fact, even though it is not possible to establish an exact *chronological point* for identifying the date of Mary's birth, the Church has constantly been aware that *Mary appeared* on the horizon of *salvation history before Christ*.⁶ It is a fact that when "the fullness of time" was definitely drawing near — the saving advent of Emmanuel — she who was from eternity destined to be his Mother already existed on earth. The fact that she "preceded" the coming of Christ is reflected every year in the *liturgy of Advent*. Therefore, if to that ancient historical expectation of the Saviour we compare these years which are bringing us closer to the end of the second Millennium after Christ and to the beginning of the third, it becomes fully comprehensible that in this present period we wish to turn in a special way to her, the one who in the "night" of the Advent expectation began to shine like a true "Morning Star" (*Stella Matutina*). For just as this star, together with the "dawn", precedes the rising of the sun, so Mary from the time of her Immaculate Conception preceded the coming of the Saviour, the rising of the "Sun of Justice" in the history of the human race.⁷

Her presence in the midst of Israel — a presence so discreet as to pass almost unnoticed by the eyes of her contemporaries — shone very clearly before the Eternal One, who had associated this hidden "daughter of Sion" (cf. *Zeph.* 3:14; *Zech.* 2:10) with the plan of salvation embracing the whole history of humanity. With good reason then at the end of this Millennium, we Christians who know that the providential plan of the Most Holy Trinity is *the central reality of Revelation*

⁶ The Old Testament foretold in many different ways the mystery of Mary: cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Dormitionem* I, 8-9: *S. Ch.* 80, 103-107.

⁷ Cf. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI/2 (1983) 225 f.; Pope Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pii IX P. M. Acta*, pars I, 597-599.

and of faith feel the need to emphasize the unique presence of the Mother of Christ in history, especially during these last years leading up to the year 2000.

4. The Second Vatican Council prepares us for this by presenting in its teaching *the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church*. If it is true, as the Council itself proclaims,⁸ that "only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" then this principle must be applied in a very particular way to that exceptional "daughter of the human race," that extraordinary "woman" who became the Mother of Christ. Only *in the mystery of Christ is her mystery fully made clear*. Thus has the Church sought to interpret it from the very beginning: the mystery of the Incarnation has enabled her to penetrate and to make ever clearer the mystery of the Mother of the Incarnate Word. The Council of Ephesus (431) was of decisive importance in clarifying this, for during that Council, to the great joy of Christians, the truth of the divine motherhood of Mary was solemnly confirmed as a truth of the Church's faith. *Mary is the Mother of God* (= *Theotókos*), since by the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived in her virginal womb and brought into the world Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is of one being with the Father.⁹ "The Son of God... born of the Virgin Mary... has truly been made one of us,"¹⁰ has been made man. Thus, through the mystery of Christ, on the horizon of the Church's faith there shines in its fullness the mystery of his Mother. In turn, the dogma of the divine motherhood of Mary was for the Council of Ephesus and is for the Church like a seal upon the dogma of the Incarnation, in which the Word truly assumes human nature into the unity of his person, without cancelling out that nature.

⁸ Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁹ Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 41-44; 59-61: *DS* 250-264; cf. Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, o.c. 84-87: *DS* 300-303.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

5. The Second Vatican Council, by presenting Mary in the mystery of Christ, also finds the path to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church. Mary, as the Mother of Christ, *is in a particular way united with the Church*, "which the Lord established as his own body."¹¹ It is significant that the conciliar text places this truth about the Church as the Body of Christ (according to the teaching of the Pauline Letters) in close proximity to the truth that the Son of God "through the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary." The reality of the Incarnation finds a sort of extension *in the mystery of the Church — the Body of Christ*. And one cannot think of the reality of the Incarnation without referring to Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

In these reflections, however, I wish to consider primarily that "pilgrimage of faith" in which "the Blessed Virgin advanced," faithfully preserving her union with Christ.¹² In this way the "twofold bond" which unites the Mother of God *with Christ and with the Church* takes on historical significance. Nor is it just a question of the Virgin Mother's life-story, of her personal journey of faith and "the better part" which is hers in the mystery of salvation; it is also a question of the history of the whole People of God, *of all those who take part in the same "PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH."*

The Council expresses this when it states in another passage that Mary "has gone before" becoming "a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ."¹³ This "GOING BEFORE" *as a figure or model* is in reference to the intimate mystery of the Church, as she actuates and accomplishes her own saving mission by uniting in herself — as Mary did — the qualities OF MOTHER AND VIRGIN. She is a virgin who "keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse" and "becomes herself a mother," for

¹¹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 52.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 63; cf. Saint Ambrose, *Expos Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 7: CSEL 32/4, 45; *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88-89: PL 16, 341.

"she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God."¹⁴

6. All this is accomplished in a great historical process, comparable "to a journey." *The pilgrimage of faith indicates the interior history*, that is, the story of souls. But it is also the story of all human beings, subject here on earth to transitoriness, and part of the historical dimension. In the following reflection we wish to concentrate first of all on the present, which in itself is not yet history, but which nevertheless is constantly forming it, also in the sense of the history of salvation. Here there opens up a broad prospect, within which the *Blessed Virgin Mary continues to go before the People of God*. Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations, and in a sense, for all humanity. It is indeed difficult to encompass and measure its range.

The Council emphasizes that *the Mother of God is already the eschatological fulfillment of the Church*: "In most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. *Eph.* 5:27) ;" and at the same time the Council says that "the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin, and so *they raise their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues*."¹⁵ The pilgrimage of faith no longer belongs to the Mother of the Son of God: glorified at the side of her Son in heaven, Mary has already crossed the threshold between faith and that vision which is "face to face" (*1 Cor.* 13:12). At the same time, however, in this eschatological fulfillment, Mary does not cease to be the "Star of the Sea" (*Maris Stella*)¹⁶ for all those who are still

¹⁴ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶ "Take away this star of the sun which illuminates the world: where does the day go? Take away Mary, this star of the sea, of the great and boundless sea: what is left but a vast obscurity and the shadow of death and deepest darkness?": Saint Bernard, *In Nativitate B. Mariae Sermo — De aqueductu*, 6: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 279; cf. *In laudibus Virginis Matris Homilia II*, 17: ed. cit., IV, 1966, 34f.

on the journey of faith. If they lift their eyes to her from their earthly existence, they do so because "the Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren (*Rom. 8:29*),"¹⁷ and also because "in the birth and development" of these brothers and sisters "she cooperates with a maternal love."¹⁸

PART I

Mary in the Mystery of Christ

1. Full of Grace

7. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (*Eph. 1:3*). These words of the *Letter to the Ephesians* reveal the eternal design of God the Father, his plan of man's salvation in Christ. It is a universal plan, which concerns all men and women created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen. 1:26*). Just as all are included in the creative work of God "in the beginning," so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed, in the "fullness of time," with the final coming of Christ. In fact, the God who is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" — these are the next words of the same Letter — "*chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the*

¹⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 63.

purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in *the Beloved*. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (*Eph.* 1:4-7).

The divine plan of salvation — which was fully revealed to us with the coming of Christ — is eternal. And according to the teaching contained in the *Letter* just quoted and in other Pauline Letters (cf. *Col.* 1:12-14; *Rom.* 3:24; *Gal.* 3:13; 2 *Cor.* 5:18-29), it is also *eternally linked to Christ*. It includes everyone, but it reserves a special place for the "WOMAN" who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation.¹⁹ As the Second Vatican Council says, "she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents after their fall into sin" — according to the Book of Genesis (cf. 3:15). "Likewise she is the Virgin who is to conceive and bear a son, whose name will be called Emmanuel" — according to the words of Isaiah (cf. 7:14).²⁰ In this way the Old Testament prepares that "fullness of time" when God "sent forth his Son, born of woman... so that we might receive adoption as sons. The coming into the world of the Son of God is an event recorded in the first chapters of the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew.

8. Mary is definitively *introduced into the mystery of Christ through* this event: THE ANNUNCIATION by the angel. This takes place at Nazareth, within the concrete circumstances of the history of Israel, the people which first received God's promises. The divine messenger says to the Virgin: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (*Lk.* 1:28). Mary "was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort

¹⁹ Concerning the predestination of Mary, cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Nativitatem*, 7; 10: *S. Ch.* 80, 65; 73; *Hom. in Dormitionem* I, 3: *S. Ch.* 80, 85: "For it is she, who, chosen from the ancient generations, by virtue of the predestination and benevolence of the God and Father who generated you (the Word of God) outside time without coming out of himself or suffering change, it is she who gave you birth, nourished of her flesh, in the last time..."

²⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

of greeting this might be" (*Lk.* 1:29): what could those extraordinary words mean, and in particular the expression "full of grace" (*kecharitoméne*).²¹

If we wish to meditate together with Mary on these words, and especially on the expression "full of grace," we can find a significant echo in the very passage from the *Letter to the Ephesians* quoted above. And if after the announcement of the heavenly messenger the Virgin of Nazareth is also called "blessed among women" (cf. *Lk.* 1:42), it is because of that blessing with which "God the Father" has filled us "in the heavenly places, in Christ." It is a *spiritual blessing* which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality ("every blessing"). It flows from that love which, in the Holy Spirit, unites the consubstantial Son to the Father. At the same time, it is a blessing poured out through Jesus Christ upon human history until the end: upon all people. This blessing however refers to *Mary in a special and exceptional degree*: for she was greeted by Elizabeth as "blessed among women."

The double greeting is due to the fact that in the soul of this "daughter of Sion" there is manifested, in a sense, all the "glory of grace," that grace which "the Father... has given us in his beloved Son." For the messenger greets Mary as "full of grace;" he calls her thus as if it were her real name. He does not call her by her proper earthly name: Miryam

²¹ In Patristic tradition there is a wide and varied interpretation of this expression: cf. Origen, *In Lucam homiliae*, VI, 7: *S. Ch.* 87, 148; Severianus of Gabala, *In mundi creationem*, *Oratio VI*, 10: *PG* 56, 497 f.; Saint John Chrysostom (Pseudo), *In Annuntiationem, Deiparae et contra Arium impium*, *PG* 62, 765 f.; Basil of Seleucia, *Oratio* 39, *In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 5: *PG* 85, 441-446; Antipater of Bosra, *Hom. II, In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 3-11: *PG* 85, 1777-1783; Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Oratio II, In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 17-19: *PG* 87/3, 3235-3240; Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Dormitionem*, I, 70: *S. Ch.* 80, 96-101; Saint Jerome, *Epistola* 65, 9: *PL* 22, 628; Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 9: *CSEL* 32/4, 45 f.; Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 291, 4-6: *PL* 38, 1318 f.; *Enchiridion*, 36, 11: *PL* 40, 250; Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 142: *PL* 52, 579 f.; *Sermo* 143: *PL* 52, 583; Saint Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Epistola* 17, VI, 12: *PL* 65, 458; Saint Bernard, *In laudibus Virginis Matris, Homilia III*, 2-3: *S. Bernardi Opera*, IV, 1966, 36-38.

(= Mary), but *by this new name: "full of grace."* What does this name mean? Why does the archangel address the Virgin of Nazareth in this way?

In the language of the Bible "grace" means a special gift, which according to the New Testament has its source precisely in the Trinitarian life of God himself, God who is love (cf. 1 *Jm.* 4:8). The fruit of this love is "*the election*" of which the *Letter to the Ephesians* speaks. On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save man through a sharing in his own life (cf. 2 *Pt.* 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life. The effect of this eternal gift, of this grace of man's election by God, is like a seed of holiness, or a spring which rises in the soul as a gift from God himself, who through grace gives life and holiness to those who are chosen. In this way there is fulfilled, that is to say there comes about, that "blessing" of man "with every spiritual blessing," that "being his adopted sons and daughters... in Christ," in him who is eternally the "beloved Son" of the Father.

When we read that the messenger addresses Mary as "full of grace," the Gospel context, which mingles revelation and ancient promises, enables us to understand that among all the "spiritual blessings in Christ" this is a special "blessing." In the mystery of Christ she is *present* even "before the creation of the world," as the one whom the Father "has chosen" as MOTHER of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is *eternally loved* in this "*beloved Son*," this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the "glory of grace." At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this "gift from above" (cf. *Jas.* 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him."²²

²² Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

9. If the greeting and the name "full of grace" say all this, in the context of the angel's announcement they refer first of all to the election of Mary as Mother of the Son of God. But at the same time, the "fullness of grace" indicates all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.

The divine messenger says to her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (*Lk.* 1:30-32). And when the Virgin, disturbed by that extraordinary greeting asks: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?", she receives from the angel the confirmation and explanation of the preceding words. Gabriel says to her: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God*" (*Lk.* 1:35).

The Annunciation, therefore, is the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation at the very beginning of its fulfillment on earth. God's salvific giving of himself and his life, in some way to all creation but directly to man, reaches one of its high points in the mystery of the Incarnation. This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of man and of the universe: Mary is "full of grace," because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled. As the Council says, Mary is "the Mother of the Son of God. As a result she is also the favourite daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all other creatures, both in heaven and on earth."²³

²³ Ibid., 53.

10. The *Letter to the Ephesians*, speaking of the "glory of grace" that "God, the Father... has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," adds: "In him we have redemption through his blood" (*Eph.* 1:7). According to the belief formulated in solemn documents of the Church, this "glory of grace" is manifested in the Mother of God through the fact that she has been "redeemed in a more sublime manner."²⁴ By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was preserved from the inheritance of original sin.²⁵ In this way, from the first moment of her conception — which is to say of her existence — she belonged to Christ, sharing in salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the "Beloved," the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son. Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, *Mary receives life from him to whom* she herself, in the order of earthly generation, *gave life* as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her "mother of her Creator"²⁶ and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of Saint Bernard: "daughter of your Son."²⁷ And since Mary receives this "new life" with a fullness corresponding to the Son's love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her "full of grace."

11. In the salvific design of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation constitutes a superabundant *fulfillment of the promise* made by God to man *after original sin*,

²⁴ Cf. Pope Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854): *Pii IX P. M. Acta*, pars I, 616; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

²⁵ Cf. Saint Germanus of Constantinople, *In Annuntiationem SS. Dei parae Hom.*: PG 98, 327 f.; Saint Andrew of Crete, *Canon in B. Mariae Natalem*, 4: PG 97, 1321f.; *In Nativitatem B. Mariae*, I: PG 97, 811 f.; *Hom. in Dormitionem S. Mariae* 1: PG 97, 1067 f.

²⁶ *Liturgy of the Hours* of 15 August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Hymn at First and Second Vespers; Saint Peter Damian, *Carmena et preces*, XLVII: PL 145, 934.

²⁷ *Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 1; cf. *Liturgy of the Hours*, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Hymn II in the Office of Readings.

after the first sin whose effects oppress the whole earthly history of man (cf. *Gen.* 3:15). And so, there comes into the world a Son, "the seed of the woman" who will crush the evil of sin in its very origins: "he will crush the head of the serpent." As we see from the words of the Protogospel, the victory of the woman's Son will not take place without a hard struggle, a struggle that is to extend through the whole of human history. The "enmity" foretold at the beginning is confirmed in the Apocalypse (the book of the final events of the Church and the world), in which there recurs the sign of the "woman," this time "clothed with the sun" (*Rev.* 12:1).

Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, is placed *at the very center of that enmity*, that struggle which accomplishes the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. In this central place, she who belongs to the "weak and poor of the Lord" bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that "glory of grace" which the Father "has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," and this *grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty*, of her whole being. Mary thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in Paul's Letter: "in Christ... he chose us... before the foundation of the world, ... He destined us .. to be his sons" (*Eph.* 1:4,5). This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and of sin, than all that "enmity" which marks the history of man. In this history Mary remains a sign of sure hope.

2. Blessed is she who believed

12. Immediately after the narration of the Annunciation, the Evangelist Luke guides us in the footsteps of the Virgin of Nazareth towards "a city of Judah" (*Lk.* 1:39). According to scholars this city would be the modern Ain Karim, situated in the mountains, not far from Jerusalem. Mary arrived there "in haste," to *visit Elizabeth* her kinswoman. The reason for

her visit is also to be found in the fact that at the Annunciation Gabriel had made special mention of Elizabeth, who in her old age had conceived a son by her husband Zechariah, through the power of God: "your kinswoman Eilazebeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. *For with God nothing will be impossible*" (Lk. 1:36-37). The divine messenger had spoken of what had been accomplished in Elizabeth in order to answer Mary's question: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk. 1:34). It is to come to pass precisely through the "power of the Most High," just as it happened in the case of Elizabeth, and even more so.

Moved by charity, therefore, Mary goes to the house of her kinswoman. When Mary enters, Elizabeth replies to her greeting and feels the child leap in her womb, and being "filled with the Holy Spirit" she *greet*s Mary with a loud cry: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (cf. Lk. 1:40-42). Elizabeth's exclamation or acclamation was subsequently to become part of the HAIL MARY, as a continuation of the angel's greeting, thus becoming one of the Church's most frequently used prayers. But still more significant are the words of Elizabeth in the question which follows: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). Elizabeth bears witness to Mary: she recognizes and proclaims that before her stands the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of the Messiah. The son whom Elizabeth is carrying in her womb also shares in this witness: "The babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk. 1:44). This child is the future John the Baptist, who at the Jordan will point out Jesus as the Messiah.

While every word of Elizabeth's greeting is filled with meaning, her final words would seem to have *fundamental importance*: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45).²⁸ These words can be linked with the title "full of grace"

²⁸ Cf. Saint Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, III, 3: PL 40, 398; *Sermo* 25, 7; PL 46, 937 f.

of the angel's greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely the truth about Mary who has become really present in the mystery of Christ precisely because she "has believed." The *fullness of grace* announced by the angel means the gift of God himself. *Mary's faith*, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the Visitation, indicates *how* the Virgin of Nazareth responded to this gift.

13. As the Council teaches, "The obedience of faith" (*Rom.* 16:26; cf. *Rom.* 1:5; *2 Cor.* 10:5-6) must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God."²⁹ This description of faith found perfect realization in Mary. The "decisive" moment was the Annunciation, and the very words of Elizabeth: "And blessed is she who believed" refer primarily to that very moment.³⁰

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger.³¹ She responded, therefore, *with all her human and feminine "I,"* and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of God that precedes and assists" and perfects openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts."³²

The word of the living God, announced to Mary by the angel, referred to her: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (*Lk.* 1:31). By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the "Mother of the Lord," and the

²⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5.

³⁰ This is a classic theme, already expounded by Saint Irenaeus: "And, as by the action of the disobedient virgin, man was afflicted and, being cast down, died, so also by the action of the Virgin who obeyed the word of God, man being regenerated received, through life, life... For it was meet and just... that Eve should be 'recapitulated' in Mary, so that the Virgin, becoming the advocate of the virgin, should dissolve and destroy the virginal obedience": *Expositio doctrinae apostolicae*, 33: *S. Ch.* 62, 83-86; cf. also *Adversus Haereses*, V, 19, 1: *S. Ch.* 248-250.

³¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 5; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

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divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her: "The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation."³³ And Mary gives this consent, after she has heard everything the messenger has to say. She says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk.* 1: 38). This fiat of Mary — "let it be to me" — was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the *Letter to the Hebrews*, says to the Father as he comes into the world: "Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (*Heb.* 10:5-7). The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her fiat: "Let it be to me according to your word," which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire.

Mary uttered this fiat in faith. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son."³⁴ And this Son — as the Fathers of the Church teach — she conceived in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith!³⁵ Rightly therefore does Elizabeth praise Mary: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." These words have already been fulfilled: Mary of Nazareth presents herself at the threshold of Elizabeth and Zechariah's house as the Mother of the Son of God. This is Elizabeth's joyful discovery: "The mother of my Lord comes to me!"

14. Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham, whom Saint Paul calls "our father in faith" (cf. *Rom.* 4:12).

³³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 53; Saint Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, III, 3: *PL* 40, 398; *Sermo* 215, 4: *PL* 38, 1074; *Sermo* 196, 1: *PL* 38, 1019; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, I, 29, 57: *PL* 44, 142; *Sermo* 25, 7: *PL* 46, 937-938; Saint Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 21, *de natale Domini*, 1: *CCL* 133, 86.

In the salvific economy of God's revelation, Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham "*in hope believed against hope*, that he should become the father of many nations" (cf. *Rom.* 4:18), so Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?"), *believed* that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son in accordance with the angel's revelation.: "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (*Lk.* 1:35).

However, Elizabeth's words "And blessed is she who believed" do not apply only to that particular moment of the Annunciation. Certainly the Annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary's faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole "journey towards God" begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner — indeed with an ever greater heroism of faith — the "obedience" which she professes to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary's "obedience of faith" during the whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. Just like the Patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal *fiat*, "*in hope believed against hope.*" Especially during certain stages of this journey the blessing granted to her "who believed" will be revealed with particular vividness. To believe means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how *inscrutable his ways*" (*Rom.* 11:33). Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, one may say, at the very centre of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God, conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.

15. When at the Annunciation Mary hears of the Son whose Mother she is to become and to whom "she will give the

name Jesus" (= Saviour), she also learns that "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David," and that "he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there will be no end" (*Lk.* 1:32-33). The hope of the whole of Israel was directed towards this. The promised Messiah is to be "great," and the heavenly messenger also announces that "*he will be great*" — great both by bearing the name of *Son of the Most High* and by the fact that he is to assume the *inheritance of David*. He is therefore to be a king, he is to reign "over the house of Jacob." Mary had grown up in the midst of these expectations of her people: could she guess, at the moment of the Annunciation, the vital significance of the angel's words? And how is one to understand that "kingdom" which "will have no end"?

Although through faith she may have perceived in that instant that she was the mother of the "Messiah-King," nevertheless she replied: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*" (*Lk.* 1:38). From the first moment Mary professed above all the "obedience of faith," abandoning herself to the meaning which was given to the words of the Annunciation by him from whom they proceeded: God himself.

16. Later, a little further along this way of the "obedience of faith" Mary hears *other words*: those uttered by *Simeon* in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was now forty days after the birth of Jesus when, in accordance with the precepts of the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph "brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (*Lk.* 2:22). The birth had taken place in conditions of extreme poverty. We know from Luke that when, on the occasion of the census ordered by the Roman authorities, Mary went with Joseph to Bethlehem, having found "no place in the inn," *she gave birth to her Son in a stable* and "laid him in a manger" (cf. *Lk.* 2:7).

A just and God-fearing man, called Simeon, appears at this beginning of Mary's "journey" of faith. His words, suggested

by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk.* 2:25-27), confirm the truth of the Annunciation. For we read that he took up in his arms the child to whom — in accordance with the angel's command — the name Jesus was given (cf. *Lk.* 2:21). Simeon's words match the meaning of this name, which is Saviour: "God is salvation." Turning to the Lord, he says: "For my eyes have seen your *salvation* which you have prepared *in the presence of all peoples* a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (*Lk.* 2:30-32). At the same time, however, Simeon addresses Mary with the following words: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a *sign that is spoken against*, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed;" and he adds with direct reference to her: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (cf. *Lk.* 2:34-35). Simeon's words cast new light on the announcement which Mary had heard from the angel: Jesus is the Saviour, he is "a *light* for revelation" to mankind. Is not this what was manifested, in a way on Christmas night, when the shepherds came to the stable (cf. *Lk.* 2:8-20)? Is not this what was to be manifested even more clearly in the coming of the *Magi from the East* (cf. *Mt.* 2:1-12)? But at the same time, at the very beginning of his life, the Son of Mary, and his Mother with him, will experience in themselves the truth of those other words of Simeon: "a sign that is spoken against" (*Lk.* 2:34). Simeon's words seem like a *second Annunciation* to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely in misunderstanding and sorrow. While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Saviour, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful. Thus, after the visit of the Magi who came from the East, after their homage ("they fell down and worshipped him") and after they had offered gifts (cf. *Mt.* 2:11), Mary together with the child *has to flee into Egypt* in the protective care of Joseph, for "Herod is about to

search for the child, to destroy him" (cf. *Mt.* 2:13). And until the death of Herod they will have to remain in Egypt (cf. *Mt.* 2:15).

17. When the Holy Family returns to Nazareth after Herod's death, there begins the long *period of the hidden life*. She "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (*Lk.* 1:45) lives the reality of these words day by day. And daily at her side is the Son to whom SHE GAVE THE NAME JESUS; therefore in contact with him she certainly uses this name, a fact which would have surprised no one, since the name had long been in use in Israel. Nevertheless, Mary knows that he who bears the name *Jesus* has been called by the angel THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH (cf. *Lk.* 1:32). Mary knows she has conceived and given birth to him "without having a husband," by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Most High who overshadowed her (cf. *Lk.* 1:35), just as at the time of Moses and the Patriarchs the cloud covered the presence of God (cf. *Ex.* 24:16; 40:34-35; *1 Kings* 8: 10-12). Therefore Mary knows that the Son to whom she gave birth in a virginal manner is precisely that "Holy One," the Son of God, of whom the angel spoke to her.

During the years of Jesus' hidden life in the house at Nazareth, *Mary's life* too, is HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD (cf. *Col.* 3:3) *through faith*. For faith is contact with the mystery of God. Every day Mary is in constant contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man, a mystery that surpasses everything revealed in the Old Covenant. From the moment of the Annunciation, the mind of the Virgin-Mother has been initiated into the radical "newness" of God's self-revelation and has been made aware of the mystery. She is the first of those "little ones" of whom Jesus will say one day: "Father, . . . you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (*Mt.* 11:25). For "no one knows the Son except the Father" (*Mt.* 11:27). If this is the case, how can Mary "know the Son"? Of course she does not know him as the Father does; and yet she is *the first of those to whom*

the Father HAS CHOSEN TO REVEAL HIM (cf. *Mt.* 11:26-27; 1 *Cor.* 2:11). If though, from the moment of the Annunciation, the Son — whom only the Father knows completely, as the one who begets him in the eternal “today” (cf. *Ps.* 2:7) — was revealed to Mary, she, his Mother, is in contact with the truth about her Son only in faith and through faith! She is therefore blessed, because “she has believed” and continues to *believe day after day* amidst all the trials and the adversities of Jesus’ infancy and then during the years of the hidden life at Nazareth, where he “was obedient to them” (*Lk.* 2:51). He was obedient both to Mary and also to Joseph, since Joseph took the place of his father in people’s eyes; for this reason, the son of Mary was regarded by the people as “the carpenter’s son” (*Mt.* 13:55).

The Mother of *that Son*, therefore, mindful of what has been told her at the Annunciation and in subsequent events, bears within herself the radical “newness” of faith: *the beginning of the New Covenant*. This is the beginning of the Gospel, the joyful Good News. However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning *a particular heaviness of heart*, linked with a sort of “night of faith” — to use the words of Saint John of the Cross — a kind of “veil” through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery.³⁶ And this is the way that Mary, for many years, *lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son*, and went forward in her “pilgrimage of faith,” while Jesus “increased in wisdom... and in favour with God and man” (*Lk.* 2:52). God’s predilection for him was manifested ever more clearly to people’s eyes. The first human creature thus permitted to discover Christ was Mary, who lived with Joseph in the same house at Nazareth.

However, when he had been found in the Temple, and his Mother asked him “Son, why have you treated us so?” *the twelve-year-old Jesus* answered: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And the Evangelist adds: “*And they* (Joseph and Mary) *did not understand* the saying which

³⁶ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1, II, Ch. 3, 4-6.

he spoke to them" (*Lk.* 2:48-50). Jesus was aware that "no one knows the Son except the Father" (cf. *Mt.* 11:27); thus even his Mother, to whom had been revealed most completely the mystery of his divine sonship, lived in intimacy with this mystery only through faith! Living side by side with her Son under the same roof, and faithfully persevering "in her union with her Son," she "*advanced in her pilgrimage of faith*," as the Council emphasizes.³⁷ And so it was during Christ's public life too (cf. *Mk.* 3:21-35) that day by day there was fulfilled in her the blessing uttered by Elizabeth at the Visitation: "Blessed is she who believed."

18. This blessing reaches its full meaning *when Mary stands beneath the Cross* of her Son (cf. *Jn.* 19:25). The Council says that this happened "not without a divine plan": by "suffering deeply with her only-begotten Son and joining herself with her maternal spirit to his sacrifice, lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim to whom she had given birth," in this way Mary "faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the Cross."³⁸ It is a union through faith — the same faith with which she had received the angel's revelation at the Annunciation. At that moment she had also heard the words: "He will be great... and *the Lord God* will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (*Lk.* 1:32-33).

And now, standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete *negation of these words*. On that wood of the Cross her Son hangs in agony as one condemned. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows... he was despised, and we esteemed him not": as one destroyed (cf. *Is.* 53:3-5). "How great, how heroic then is the *obedience of faith* shown by Mary in the face of God's "unsearchable judgments"! How completely she "abandons herself to God" without reserve, "offering the full assent

³⁷ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

of the intellect and the will"³⁹ to him whose "ways are inscrutable"! (cf. *Rom.* 11:33). And how powerful too is the action of grace in her soul, how all pervading is the influence of the Holy Spirit and of his light and power!

Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying. For "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men": precisely on Golgotha "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (cf. *Phil.* 2:5-8). At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self-emptying. This is perhaps the deepest *kenosis of faith* in human history. Through faith the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death; but in contrast with the faith of the disciples who fled, hers was far more enlightened. On Golgotha, Jesus through the Cross definitively confirmed that he was the "sign of contradiction" foretold by Simeon. At the same time, there were also fulfilled on Golgotha the words which Simeon had addressed to Mary: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also."⁴⁰

19. Yes, truly "blessed is she who believed"! These words, spoken by Elizabeth after the Annunciation, here at the foot of the Cross seem to re-echo with supreme eloquence, and the power contained within them becomes something penetrating. From the Cross, that is to say from the very heart of the mystery of Redemption, there radiates and spreads out the prospect of that blessing of faith. It goes right back to "the beginning," and as a sharing in the sacrifice of Christ — the new Adam — it becomes in a certain sense *the counterpoise to the disobedience and disbelief* embodied in the sin of our first parents. Thus teach the Fathers of the Church and especially

³⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5.

⁴⁰ Concerning Mary's participation or "compassion" in the death of Christ, cf. Saint Bernard, *In Dominica infra octavam Assumptionis Sermo*, 14: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 273.

Saint Irenaeus, quoted by the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was united by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."⁴¹ In the light of this comparison with Eve, the Fathers of the Church — as the Council also says — call Mary the "mother of the living" and often speak of "death through Eve, life through Mary."⁴²

In the expression "Blessed is she who believed," we can therefore rightly find a *kind of "key"* which unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary, whom the angel hailed as "full of grace." If as "full of grace" she has been eternally present in the mystery of Christ, through faith she became a sharer in that mystery in every extension of her earthly journey. She "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith" and at the same time, in a discreet yet direct and effective way, she made present to humanity *the mystery of Christ*. And she still continues to do so. Through the mystery of Christ, she too is present within mankind. Thus through the mystery of the Son the mystery of the Mother is also made clear.

3. Behold your mother

20. The Gospel of Luke records the moment when "a woman in the crowd raised her voice" and said to Jesus: "BLESSED IS THE WOMB THAT BORE YOU, AND THE BREASTS THAT YOU SUCKED!" (*Lk.* 11:27). These words were an expression of praise of Mary as Jesus' mother according to the flesh. Probably the Mother of Jesus was not personally known to this woman; in fact, when Jesus began his messianic activity Mary did not accompany him but continued to remain at Nazareth. One could say that the words of that unknown woman in a way brought Mary out of her hiddenness.

⁴¹ Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 22, 4: *S. Ch.* 211, 438-444; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 56, Note 6.

⁴² Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 56, and the Fathers quoted there in Notes 8 and 9.

Through these words, there flashed out in the midst of the crowd, at least for an instant, the gospel of Jesus' infancy. This is the gospel in which Mary is present as the mother who conceives Jesus in her womb, gives him birth and nurses him: the nursing mother referred to by the woman in the crowd. *Thanks to this motherhood, Jesus, the Son of the Most High (cf. Lk. 1:32), is a true son of man.* He is "flesh" like every other man: he is "the Word (who) became flesh" (cf. *Jn.* 1:14). He is of the flesh and blood of Mary!⁴³

But to the blessing uttered by that woman upon her who was his mother according to the flesh, Jesus replies in a significant way: "Blessed rather are *those who hear the word of God and keep it*" (*Lk.* 11:28). He wishes to divert attention from motherhood understood only as a fleshly bond, in order to direct it towards those mysterious bonds of the spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word.

This same shift into the sphere of spiritual values is seen even more clearly in another response of Jesus reported by all the Synoptics. When Jesus is told that "his mother and brothers are standing outside and wish to see him," he replies: "*My mother and my brothers are those who bear the word of God and do it*" (cf. *Lk.* 8:20-21). This he said "looking around on those who sat about him," as we read in Mark (3:34) or, according to Matthew (12:49), "stretching out his hand towards his disciples."

These statements seem to fit in with the reply which the twelve-year-old Jesus gave to Mary and Joseph when he was found after three days in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Now, when Jesus left Nazareth and began his public life throughout Palestine, he was completely and exclusively "concerned with his Father's business" (cf. *Lk.* 2:49). He announced the Kingdom: the "Kingdom of God" and "his Father's

⁴³ Christ is truth, Christ is flesh: Christ truth in the mind of Mary, Christ flesh in the womb of Mary": Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 25 (*Sermones inediti*), 7: PL 46, 938.

business," which add a new dimension and meaning to everything human, and therefore to every human bond, insofar as these things relate to the goals and tasks assigned to every human being. Within this new dimension, also a bond such as that of "brotherhood" means something different from "brotherhood according to the flesh" deriving from a common origin from the same set of parents. MOTHERHOOD too, *in the dimension of the Kingdom of God and in the radius of the fatherhood of God himself, takes on another meaning.* In the words reported by Luke, Jesus teaches precisely this new meaning of motherhood.

Is Jesus thereby distancing himself from his mother according to the flesh? Does he perhaps wish to leave her in the hidden obscurity which she herself has chosen? If this seems to be the case from the tone of those words, one must nevertheless note that the new and different motherhood which Jesus speaks of to his disciples refers precisely to Mary in a very special way. Is not Mary *the first of "those who hear the word of God and do it"*? And therefore does not the blessing uttered by Jesus in response to the woman in the crowd refer primarily to her? Without any doubt, Mary is worthy of blessing by the very fact that she became the mother of Jesus according to the flesh ("Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked"), but also and especially because already at the Annunciation she accepted the word of God, because she believed it, *because she was obedient to God*, and because she "kept" the word and "pondered it in her heart" (cf. *Lk.* 1:38, 45; 2:19, 51) and by means of her whole life accomplished it. Thus we can say that the blessing proclaimed by Jesus is not in opposition, despite appearances, to the blessing uttered by the unknown woman, but rather coincides with that blessing in the person of this Virgin Mother, who called herself only "the handmaid of the Lord (*Lk.* 1:38). If it is true that "all generations will call her blessed" (cf. *Lk.* 1:48); then it can be said that the unnamed woman was the first to confirm unwittingly that prophetic phrase of Mary's *Magnificat* and to begin the *Magnificat* of the ages.

If *through faith* Mary became the bearer of the Son given to her by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, while preserving her virginity intact, in that same faith she *discovered and accepted the other dimension of motherhood* revealed by Jesus during his messianic mission. One can say that this dimension of motherhood belonged to Mary from the beginning, that is to say from the moment of the conception and birth of her Son. From that time she was "the one who believed." But as the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, she herself as a mother became ever more open to *that new dimension of motherhood* which was to constitute her "part" beside her Son. Had she not said from the very beginning: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"? (*Lk.* 1:38). Through faith Mary continued to hear and to ponder that word, in which there became ever clearer, in a way "which surpasses knowledge" (*Eph.* 3:19), the self-revelation of the living God. Thus *in a sense* Mary as Mother became *the first DISCIPLE of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say: "Follow me," even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else (*cf. Jn.* 1:43).

21. From this point of view, particularly eloquent is the passage in the *Gospel of John* which presents Mary at the wedding feast of Cana. She appears there as the Mother of Jesus at the beginning of his public life: "There was a *marriage at Cana in Galilee*, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples" (*Jn.* 2:1-2). From the text it appears that Jesus and his disciples were invited together with Mary, as if by reason of her presence at the celebration: the Son seems to have been invited because of his mother. We are familiar with the sequence of events which resulted from that invitation, that "beginning of the signs" wrought by Jesus — the water changed into wine — which prompts the Evangelist to say that Jesus "manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (*Jn.* 2:11).

Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the *Mother of Jesus*, and in a significant way she *contributes* to that "beginning of the signs" which reveal the messianic power of her Son. We read: "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come'" (*Jn.* 2:3-4). In John's Gospel that "hour" means the time appointed by the Father when the Son accomplishes his task and is to be glorified (cf. *Jn.* 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). Even though Jesus' reply to his mother sounds like a refusal (especially if we consider the blunt statement "My hour has not yet come" rather than the question), Mary nevertheless turns to the servants and says to them: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn.* 2:5). Then Jesus orders the servants to fill the stone jars with water, and the water becomes wine, better than the wine which has previously been served to the wedding guests.

What deep understanding existed between Jesus and his mother? How can we probe the mystery of their intimate spiritual union? But the fact speaks for itself. It is certain that event already quite clearly outlines *the new dimension*, the new meaning of *Mary's motherhood*. Her motherhood has a significance which is not exclusively contained in the words of Jesus and in the various episodes reported by the Synoptics (*Lk.* 11:27-28 and *Lk.* 8:19-21; *Mt.* 12:46-50; *Mk.* 3:31-35). In these texts Jesus means above all to contrast the motherhood resulting from the fact of birth with what this "motherhood" (and also "brotherhood") is to be in the dimension of the Kingdom of God, in the salvific radius of God's fatherhood. In John's text on the other hand, the description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say *Mary's solicitude for human beings*, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one and of little importance ("They have no wine"). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those

needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission and salvific power. Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. *She puts herself "in the middle,"* that is to say *she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.* She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also *wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested,* that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life. Precisely as the Prophet Isaiah had foretold about the Messiah in the famous passage which Jesus quoted before his fellow townsfolk in Nazareth: "To preach good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind..." (cf. Lk. 4:18).

Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." *The Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will,* pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins "his hour." At Cana Mary appears as *believing in Jesus.* Her faith evokes his first "sign" and helps to kindle the faith of the disciples.

22. We can therefore say that in this passage of John's Gospel we find as it were a first manifestation of the truth concerning Mary's maternal care. This truth has also found expression *in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.* It is important to note how the Council illustrates Mary's maternal role as it relates to the mediation of Christ. Thus we read: "Mary's maternal function towards mankind in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its efficacy," because "there is one mediator between

God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). This maternal role of Mary flows, according to God's good pleasure, "from the superabundance of the merits of Christ; it is founded on his mediation, absolutely depends on it, and draws all its efficacy from it."⁴⁴ It is precisely in this sense that the episode at Cana in Galilee offers us *a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation*, wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power.

From the *text of John* it is evident that it is a mediation which is maternal. As the Council proclaims: Mary became "a mother to us in the order of grace." This motherhood in the order of grace flows from her divine motherhood. Because she was, by the design of divine Providence the mother who nourished the divine Redeemer, Mary became "an associate of unique nobility, and the Lord's humble handmaid," who "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls."⁴⁵ And "*this maternity of Mary in the order of grace . . . will last without interruption until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect.*"⁴⁶

23. If John's description of the event at Cana presents Mary's caring motherhood at the beginning of Christ's messianic activity, another passage from the same Gospel confirms this motherhood in the salvific economy of grace at its crowning moment, namely when Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, his Paschal Mystery, is accomplished. John's description is concise: "*Standing by the cross of Jesus* were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother: 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (Jn. 19:25-27).

Undoubtedly, we find here an expression of the Son's particular solicitude for his Mother, whom he is leaving in such great

⁴⁴ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

sorrow. And yet the "testament of Christ's Cross" says more Jesus highlights a new relationship between Mother and Son, the whole truth and reality of which he solemnly confirms. One can say that if Mary's motherhood of the human race had already been outlined, now it is clearly stated and established. It emerges from the definitive accomplishment of *the Redeemer's Paschal Mystery*. The Mother of Christ, who stands at the very centre of this mystery — a mystery which embraces each individual and all humanity — is given as mother to every single individual and all mankind. The man at the foot of the Cross is John, "the disciple whom he loved."⁴⁷ But it is not he alone. Following tradition, the Council does not hesitate to call Mary **THE MOTHER OF CHRIST AND MOTHER OF MANKIND**: since she "belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all human beings... Indeed she is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she cooperated out of love so that there might be born in the Church the faithful.'"⁴⁸

And so this "new motherhood of Mary," generated by faith, is *the fruit of the NEW love* which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her Son.

24. Thus we find ourselves at the very centre of the fulfilment of the promise contained in the Proto-gospel: the "seed of the woman... will crush the head of the serpent" (cf. *Gen.* 3:15). By his redemptive death Jesus Christ conquers the evil of sin and death at its very roots. It is significant that, as he speaks to his mother from the Cross, he calls her "woman" and says to her: "Woman, behold your son!" Moreover, he had

⁴⁷ There is a well-known passage of Origen on the presence of Mary and John on Calvary: "The Gospels are the first fruits of all Scripture and the Gospel of John is the first of the Gospels: no one can grasp its meaning without having leaned his head on Jesus' breast and having received from Jesus Mary as Mother": *Comm. in Ioan.*, I, 6: PG 14, 31; cf. Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, X, 129-131: CSEL 32/4, 504 f.

⁴⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 54 and 53; the latter text quotes Saint Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, VI, 6; PL 40, 399.

addressed her by the same term at Cana too (cf. *Jn.* 2:4). How can one doubt that especially now, on Golgotha, this expression goes to the very heart of the mystery of Mary, and indicates the unique *place* which she occupies in the whole economy of salvation? As the Council teaches, in Mary "the exalted Daughter of Sion, and after a long expectation of the promise, the times were at length fulfilled and the new dispensation established. All this occurred when the Son of God took a human nature from her, that he might in the mysteries of his flesh free man from sin."⁴⁹

The words uttered by Jesus from the Cross signify that the motherhood of her who bore Christ finds a "new" continuation in the Church and through the Church, symbolized and represented by John. In this way, she who as the one "full of grace" was brought into the mystery of Christ in order to be his Mother and thus the Holy Mother of God, through the Church remains in that mystery as THE WOMAN spoken of by the Book of *Genesis* (3:15) at the beginning and by the *Apocalypse* (12:1) at the end of the history of salvation. In accordance with the eternal plan of Providence, Mary's divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church, as indicated by statements of Tradition, according to which Mary's "motherhood" of the Church is the reflection and extension of her motherhood of the Son of God.⁵⁰

According to the Council, the very moment of the Church's birth and full manifestation to the world enables us to glimpse this continuity of Mary's motherhood: "Since it pleased God not to manifest solemnly the mystery of the salvation of the human race until he poured forth the Spirit promised by Christ, we see the Apostles before the day of Pentecost 'continuing with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren' (*Acts* 1:14). We see Mary prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

⁵⁰ Cf. Saint Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 26, *de natale Domini*, 2: CCL 138, 126.

⁵¹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 59.

And so, in the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: *Mary at Nazareth* and *Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem*. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of "birth from the Holy Spirit." Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes — by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit — present in the mystery of the Church. In the Church too she continues to be a *maternal presence*, as is shown by the words spoken from the Cross: "Woman, behold your son!"; "Behold, your mother."

PART II

The Mother of God at the Centre of the Pilgrim Church

1. The Church, the People of God present in all the nations of the earth

25. "The Church 'like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God,'⁵² announcing the Cross and Death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26)."⁵³ "Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the

⁵² Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51: CCL 48, 650.

⁵³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

Church of God (cf. *2 Esd.* 13:1; *Num.* 20:4; *Dt.* 23:1ff.). Likewise the new Israel... is also called the Church of Christ (cf. *Mt.* 16:18). For he has bought it for himself with his blood (*Acts* 20:28), has filled it with his Spirit, and provided it with those means which befit it as a visible and social unity. *God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saying unity.*"⁵⁴

The Second Vatican Council speaks of the pilgrim Church, establishing an analogy with the Israel of the Old Covenant journeying through the desert. The journey also has an *external character*, visible in the time and space in which it historically takes place. For the Church "is destined to extend to all regions of the earth and so to enter into the history of mankind," but at the same time "she transcends all limits of time and of space."⁵⁵ And yet the essential *character* of her pilgrimage is *interior*: it is a question of a *pilgrimage through faith*, by "the power of the Risen Lord,"⁵⁶ a pilgrimage in the Holy Spirit, given to the Church as the invisible Comforter (*parákletos*) (cf. *Jn.* 14:26; 15:26; 16:7): "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to her by the Lord, so that... moved by the Holy Spirit she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting."⁵⁷

It is precisely *in this ecclesial journey or pilgrimage* through space and time, and even more through the history of souls, that *Mary is present*, as the one who is "blessed because she believed," as the one who advanced on the pilgrimage of faith, sharing unlike any other creature in the mystery of Christ. The Council further says that "Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation and in a certain way unites and mirrors

⁵⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

within herself the central truths of the faith.”⁵⁸ Among all believers she is *like a mirror* in which are reflected in the most profound and limpid way “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11).

26. Built by Christ upon the Apostles, the Church became fully aware of these mighty works of God *on the day of Pentecost*, when those gathered together in the Upper Room “were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). From that moment there also *begins* that journey of faith, *the Church’s pilgrimage* through the history of individuals and peoples. We know that at the beginning of this journey Mary is present. We see her in the midst of the Apostles in the Upper Room, “prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit.”⁵⁹

In a sense her journey of faith is longer. The Holy Spirit had already come down upon her, and she became his faithful spouse *at the Annunciation*, welcoming the Word of the true God, offering “the full submission of intellect and will... and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him,” indeed abandoning herself totally to God through “the obedience of faith,”⁶⁰ whereby she replied to the angel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” The journey of faith made by Mary, whom we see praying in the Upper Room, is thus longer than that of the others gathered there: Mary “goes before them,” “leads the way” for them.⁶¹ *The moment of Pentecost* in Jerusalem had been prepared for by the *moment of the Annunciation* in Nazareth, as well as by the Cross. In the Upper Room Mary’s journey meets the Church’s journey of faith. In what way?

Among those who devoted themselves to prayer in the Upper Room, preparing to go “into the whole world” after receiv-

⁵⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 5.

⁶¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

ing the Spirit, some *had been called by Jesus* gradually from the beginning of his mission in Israel. Eleven of them *had been made Apostles*, and to them Jesus had passed on the mission which he himself had received from the Father. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn. 20:21), he had said to the Apostles after the Resurrection. And forty days later, before returning to the Father, he had added: "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you... *you shall be my witnesses...* to the end of the earth" (cf. Acts 1:8). This mission of the Apostles began the moment they left the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The Church is born and then grows through the testimony that Peter and the Apostles bear to the Crucified and Risen Christ (cf. Acts 2:31-34; 3:15-18; 4:10-12; 5:30-32).

Mary did not directly receive this apostolic mission. She was not among those whom Jesus sent "to the whole world to teach all nations" (cf. Mt. 28:19) when he conferred this mission on them. But she was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them. In their midst Mary was "devoted to prayer" as the "mother of Jesus" (cf. Acts 1:13-14), of the Crucified and Risen Christ. And that first group of those who in faith looked "upon Jesus as the author of salvation,"⁶² knew that Jesus was the Son of Mary, and that she was his Mother, and that as such she was from the moment of his conception and birth a unique witness to *the mystery of Jesus*, that mystery which before their eyes had been disclosed and confirmed in the Cross and Resurrection. Thus from the very first moment the Church "looked at" Mary through Jesus, just as she "looked at" Jesus through Mary. For the Church of that time and of every time Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus' infancy and hidden life at Nazareth, when she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19; cf. Lk. 2:51).

But above all, in the Church of that time and of every time Mary was and is the one who is "blessed because she believed";

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 9.

she was the first to believe. From the moment of the Annunciation and conception, from the moment of his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, Mary followed Jesus step by step in her maternal pilgrimage of faith. She followed him during the years of his hidden life at Nazareth; she followed him also during the time after he left home, when he began "to do and to teach" (cf. Acts 1:1) in the midst of Israel. Above all she followed him in the tragic experience of Golgotha. Now, while Mary was with the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem at the dawn of the Church, *her faith, born from the words of the Annunciation, found confirmation.* The angel had said to her then: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great... and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." The recent events on Calvary had shrouded that promise in darkness, yet not even beneath the Cross did Mary's faith fail. She had still remained the one who, like Abraham, "in hope believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). But it is only after the Resurrection that hope had shown its true face and *the promise had begun to be transformed into reality.* For Jesus, before returning to the Father, had said to the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (cf. Mt. 28:19-20). Thus had spoken the one who by his Resurrection had revealed himself as the conqueror of death, as the one who possessed the kingdom of which, as the angel said, "there will be no end."

27. Now, at the first dawn of the Church, at the beginning of the long journey through faith which began at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Mary was with all those who were the seed of the "new Israel." She was present among them as an exceptional witness to the mystery of Christ. And the Church was assiduous in prayer together with her, and at the same time "*contemplated her in the light of the Word made man.*" It was always to be so. For when the Church "enters more intimately into the supreme mystery of the Incarnation," she thinks of the

Mother of Christ with profound reverence and devotion.⁶³ Mary belongs indissolubly to the mystery of Christ, and she belongs also to the mystery of the Church from the beginning, from the day of the Church's birth. At the basis of what the Church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, in the midst of all the nations of the earth, we find the one "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). It is precisely Mary's faith which marks the beginning of the new and eternal Covenant of God with man in Jesus Christ; this heroic faith of hers "*precedes*" the apostolic witness of the Church, and ever remains in the Church's heart, hidden like a special heritage of God's revelation. All those who from generation to generation accept the apostolic witness of the Church share in that mysterious inheritance, and *in a sense share in Mary's faith.*

Elizabeth's words "Blessed is she who believed" continue to accompany the Virgin also at Pentecost; they accompany her from age to age, wherever knowledge of Christ's salvific mystery spreads, through the Church's apostolic witness and service. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of the *Magnificat*: "*All generations will call me blessed*; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk. 1:48-49). For knowledge of the mystery of Christ leads us to bless his Mother, in the form of special veneration for the *Theotókos*. But this veneration always includes a blessing of her faith, for the Virgin of Nazareth became blessed above all through this faith, in accordance with Elizabeth's words. Those who from generation to generation among the different peoples and nations of the earth accept with faith the mystery of Christ, the Incarnate Word and Redeemer of the world, not only turn with veneration to Mary and confidently have recourse to her as his Mother, but they also *seek in her faith support for their own*. And it is precisely this lively sharing in Mary's faith that determines her special place in the Church's pilgrimage as the new People of God throughout the earth.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

28. As the Council says, "Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation... Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice, and to love for the Father."⁶⁴ For this reason, Mary's faith, according to the Church's apostolic witness, in some way continues to become the faith of the pilgrim People of God: the faith of individuals and communities, of places and gatherings, and of the various groups existing in the Church. It is a faith that is passed on simultaneously through both the mind and the heart. It is gained or regained continually through prayer. Therefore, "*the Church in her apostolic work also rightly looks to her who brought forth Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, so that through the Church Christ may be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful also.*"⁶⁵

Today, as on this pilgrimage of faith we draw near to the end of the second Christian Millennium, the Church, through the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, calls out attention to her vision of herself, as the "one People of God... among all the nations of the earth." And she reminds us of that truth according to which all the faithful, though "scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit."⁶⁶ We can therefore say that in this union the mystery of Pentecost is continually being accomplished. At the same time, the Lord's apostles and disciples, in all the nations of the earth, "devote themselves to prayer *together with Mary, the mother of Jesus*" (Acts 1:14). As they constitute from generation to generation the "sign of the Kingdom," which is not of this world,⁶⁷ they are also aware that in the midst of this world they must *gather around that King* to whom the nations have been given in heritage (cf. Ps. 2:8), whom the Father has given "the throne of David his father," so that he "will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 13.

During this time of vigil, Mary, through the same faith which made her blessed, especially from the moment of the Annunciation, is *present* in the Church's mission, *present* in the Church's work of introducing into the world *the Kingdom of her Son*.⁶⁸

This presence of Mary finds many different expressions in our day just as it did throughout the Church's history. It also has a wide field of action: through the faith and piety of individual believers; through the traditions of Christian families or "domestic churches," of parish and missionary communities, religious institutes and dioceses; through the radiance and attraction of the great shrines where not only individuals or local groups, but sometimes whole nations and societies, even whole continents, seek to meet the Mother of the Lord, the one who is blessed because she believed, is the first among believers and therefore became the Mother of Emmanuel. This is the message of the Land of Palestine, the spiritual homeland of all Christians because it was the homeland of the Saviour of the world and of his Mother. This is the message of the many churches in Rome and throughout the world which have been raised up in the course of the centuries by the faith of Christians. This is the message of centres like Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima and the others situated in the various countries. Among them how could I fail to mention the one in my own native land, Jasna Gora? One could perhaps speak of a specific "geography" of faith and Marian devotion, which includes all these special places of pilgrimage where the People of God seek to meet the Mother of God in order to find, within the radius of the maternal presence of her "who believed," a strengthening of their own faith. For *in Mary's faith*, first at the Annunciation and then fully at the foot of the Cross, an *interior space* was reopened within humanity which the eternal Father can fill "with every spiritual blessing." It is the space "of the new and eternal Covenant,"⁶⁹ and it continues to exist

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Roman Missal*, formula of the Consecration of the Chalice in the Eucharistic Prayers.

in the Church, which in Christ is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind."⁷⁰

In the faith which Mary professed at the Annunciation as the "handmaid of the Lord" and in which she constantly "precedes" the pilgrim People of God throughout the earth, the Church "*strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity... back to Christ its Head in the unity of his Spirit.*"⁷¹

2. The Church's journey and the unity of all Christians

29. "In all of Christ's disciples the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully *united*, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock *under one shepherd.*"⁷² The journey of the Church, especially in our own time, is marked by the sign of ecumenism: Christians are seeking ways to restore that unity which Christ implored from the Father for his disciples on the day before his Passion: "*That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (Jn. 17:21). The unity of Christ's disciples, therefore, is a great sign given in order to kindle faith in the world, while their division constitutes a scandal.⁷³

The ecumenical movement, on the basis of a clearer and more widespread awareness of the urgent need to achieve the unity of all Christians, has found on the part of the Catholic Church its culminating expression in the work of the Second Vatican Council: Christians must deepen in themselves and each of their communities that "obedience of faith" of which Mary is the first and brightest example. And since she "shines forth on earth, ... as a sign of sure hope and solace for the

⁷⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

⁷² Ibid., 15.

⁷³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

pilgrim People of God," "it gives great joy and comfort to this most holy Synod that *among the divided brethren*, too, there are those who give due honour to the Mother of our Lord and Saviour. This is especially so among the Easterners."⁷⁴

30. Christians know that their unity will be truly rediscovered only if it is based on the unity of their faith. They must resolve considerable discrepancies of doctrine concerning the mystery and ministry of the Church, and sometimes also concerning the role of Mary in the work of salvation.⁷⁵ The dialogues begun by the Catholic Church with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West⁷⁶ are steadily converging upon these *two inseparable aspects* of the same mystery of salvation. If the mystery of the Word made flesh enables us to glimpse the mystery of the divine motherhood and if, in turn, contemplation of the Mother of God brings us to a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation, then the same must be said for the mystery of the Church and Mary's role in the work of salvation. By a more profound study of both Mary and the Church, clarifying each by the light of the other, Christians who are eager to do what Jesus tells them — as their Mother recommends (cf. Jn. 2:5) — will be able to go forward together on this "pilgrimage of faith." Mary, who is still the model of this pilgrimage, is to lead them to the unity which is willed by their one Lord and so much desired by those who are attentively listening to what "the Spirit is saying to the Churches" today (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17).

Meanwhile, it is a hopeful sign that these Churches and Ecclesial Communities are finding agreement with the Catholic Church on fundamental points of Christian belief, including

⁷⁴ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 68, 69. On Mary Most Holy, promoter of Christian unity, and on the cult of Mary in the East, cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Adiutricem Populi* (5 September 1895): *Acta Leonis*, XV, 300-312.

⁷⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 20.

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

matters relating to the Virgin Mary. For they recognize her as the Mother of the Lord and hold that this forms part of our faith in Christ, true God and true man. They look to her who at the foot of the Cross accepts as her son the beloved disciple, the one who in his turn accepts her as his mother.

Therefore, why should we not all together look to her as *our common Mother*, who prays for the unity of God's family and who "precedes" us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?

31. On the other hand, I wish to emphasize how profoundly the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the ancient Churches of the East feel united by love and praise of the *Theotókos*. Not only "basic dogmas of the Christian faith concerning the Trinity and God's Word made flesh of the Virgin Mary were defined in Ecumenical Councils held in the East,"⁷⁷ but also in their liturgical worship "the Orientals pay high tribute, in very beautiful hymns, to Mary ever Virgin... God's Most Holy Mother."⁷⁸

The brethren of these Churches have experienced a complex history, but it is one that has always been marked by an intense desire for Christian commitment and apostolic activity, despite frequent persecution, even to the point of bloodshed. It is a history of fidelity to the Lord, an authentic "pilgrimage of faith" in space and time, during which Eastern Christians have always looked with boundless trust to the Mother of the Lord, celebrated her with praise and invoked her with unceasing prayer. In the difficult moments of their troubled Christian existence "they have taken refuge under her protection,"⁷⁹ conscious of having in her a powerful aid. The Churches which profess the doctrine of Ephesus proclaim the Virgin as "true Mother of God" since "our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Father before time began

⁷⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66.

according to his divinity, in the last days he himself, for our sake and for our salvation, was begotten of Mary the Virgin Mother of God according to his humanity."⁸⁰ The Greek Fathers and the Byzantine tradition, contemplating the Virgin in the light of the Word made flesh, have sought to penetrate the depth of that bond which unites Mary, as the Mother of God, to Christ and the Church: the Virgin is a permanent presence in the whole reality of the salvific mystery.

The Coptic and Ethiopian traditions were introduced to this contemplation of the mystery of Mary by Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and in their turn they have celebrated it with a profuse poetic blossoming.⁸¹ The poetic genius of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, called "the lyre of the Holy Spirit," tirelessly sang of Mary, leaving a still living mark on the whole tradition of the Syriac Church.⁸²

In his panegyric of the *Theotókos*, Saint Gregory of Narek, one of the outstanding glories of Armenia, with powerful poetic inspiration ponders the different aspects of the mystery of the Incarnation, and each of them is for him an occasion to sing and extol the extraordinary dignity and magnificent beauty of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word made flesh.⁸³

It does not surprise us therefore that Mary occupies a privileged place in the worship of the ancient Oriental Churches with an incomparable abundance of feasts and hymns.

32. In the Byzantine liturgy, in all the hours of the Divine Office, praise of the Mother is linked with praise of her Son and with the praise which, through the Son, is offered up to the

⁸⁰ Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, *Definitio fidei: Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 86 (DS 301).

⁸¹ Cf. the *Weddâsé Mâryâm* (*Praises of Mary*), which follows the Ethiopian Psalter and contains hymns and prayers to Mary for each day of the week. Cf. also the *Matshafa Kidâna Mehrat* (*Book of the Pact of Mercy*); the importance given to Mary in the Ethiopian hymnology and liturgy deserves to be emphasized.

⁸² Cf. Saint Ephrem, *Hymn de Nativitates Scriptores: Syri*, 82, CSCO, 186.

⁸³ Cf. Saint Gregory of Narek, *Le livre de prières: S. Ch.* 78, 160-163; 428-432.

Father in the Holy Spirit. In the Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer of Saint John Chrysostom, immediately after the epiclesis the assembled community sings in honour of the Mother of God: "It is truly just to proclaim you blessed, O Mother of God, who are most blessed, all pure and Mother of our God. We magnify you who are more honourable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim. You who, without losing your virginity, gave birth to the Word of God. You who are truly the Mother of God."

These praises, which in every celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy are offered to Mary, have moulded the faith, piety and prayer of the faithful. In the course of the centuries they have permeated their whole spiritual outlook, fostering in them a profound devotion to the "All Holy Mother of God."

33. This year there occurs the twelfth centenary of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787). Putting an end to the well-known controversy about the cult of sacred images, this Council defined that, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers and the universal tradition of the Church, there could be exposed for the veneration of the faithful, together with the Cross, also images of the Mother of God, of the angels and of the saints, in churches and houses and at the roadside.⁸⁴ This custom has been maintained in the whole of the East and also in the West. Images of the Virgin have a place of honour in churches and houses. In them Mary is represented in a number of ways: as the throne of God carrying the Lord and giving him to humanity (*Theotókos*); as the way that leads to Christ and manifests him (*Hodegetria*); as a praying figure in an attitude of intercession and as a sign of the divine presence on the journey of the faithful until the day of the Lord (*Deësis*); as the protectress who stretches out her mantle over the peoples (*Pokrov*), or as the merciful Virgin of tenderness (*Eleousa*). She is usually represented with her Son, the child Jesus, in her arms: it is the relationship with the Son which glorifies the Mother.

⁸⁴ Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, 135-138 (DS 600-609).

Sometimes she embraces him with tenderness (*Glykophilousa*); at other times she is a hieratic figure, apparently rapt in contemplation of him who is the Lord of history (cf. *Rev.* 5:9-14).⁸⁵

It is also appropriate to mention the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir, which continually accompanied the pilgrimage of faith of the peoples of ancient Rus'. The first Millennium of the conversion of those noble lands to Christianity is approaching: lands of humble folk, of thinkers and of saints. The Icons are still venerated in the Ukraine, in Byelorussia and in Russia under various titles. They are images which witness to the faith and spirit of prayer of that people, who sense the presence and protection of the Mother of God. In these Icons the Virgin shines as the image of divine beauty, the abode of Eternal Wisdom, the figure of the one who prays, the prototype of contemplation, the image of glory: she who even in her earthly life possessed the spiritual knowledge inaccessible to human reasoning and who attained through faith the most sublime knowledge. I also recall the Icon of the Virgin of the Cenacle, praying with the Apostles as they awaited the Holy Spirit: could she not become the sign of hope for all those who, in fraternal dialogue, wish to deepen their obedience of faith?

34. Such a wealth of praise, built up by the different forms of the Church's great tradition, could help us to hasten the day when the Church can begin once more to breathe fully with her "two lungs," the East and the West. As I have often said, this is more than ever necessary today. It would be an effective aid in furthering the progress of the dialogue already taking place between the Catholic Church and the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West.⁸⁶ It would also be the way for the pilgrim Church to sing and to live more perfectly her MAGNIFICAT.

⁸⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 59.

⁸⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 19.

3. The "Magnificat" of the pilgrim Church

35. At the present stage of her journey, therefore, the Church seeks to rediscover the unity of all who profess their faith in Christ, in order to show obedience to her Lord, who prayed for this unity before his Passion. "Like a pilgrim in a foreign land, the Church presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, announcing the Cross and Death of the Lord until he come."⁸⁷ "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, *the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to her by the Lord*, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord; that moved by the Holy Spirit she may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting."⁸⁸

The Virgin Mother is constantly present on this journey of faith of the People of God towards the light. This is shown in a special way by *the canticle of the MAGNIFICAT, which having welled up from the depths of Mary's faith at the Visitation, ceaselessly re-echoes in the heart of the Church down the centuries*. This is proved by its daily recitation in the liturgy of Vespers and at many other moments of both personal and communal devotion.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked on his servant in her lowliness.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is from age to age
on those who fear him.
He has shown strength with his arm,

⁸⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

he has scattered the proud-hearted,
 he has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 sent the rich away empty.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering his mercy,
 as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

(Lk. 1:46-55)

36. When Elizabeth greeted her young kinswoman coming from Nazareth, *Mary replied with the Magnificat*. In her greeting, Elizabeth first called Mary "blessed" because of "the fruit of her womb," and then she called her "blessed" because of her faith (cf. Lk. 1:42, 45). These two blessings referred directly to the Annunciation. Now, at the Visitation, when Elizabeth's greeting bears witness to that culminating moment, Mary's faith acquires a new consciousness and a new expression. That which remained hidden in the depths of the "obedience of faith" at the Annunciation can now be said to spring forth like a clear and life-giving flame of the spirit. The words used by Mary on the threshold of Elizabeth's house are *an inspired profession of her faith*, in which *her response to the revealed word* is expressed with the religious and poetical exultation of her whole being towards God. In these sublime words, which are simultaneously very simple and wholly inspired by the sacred texts of the people of Israel,⁸⁹ Mary's personal experience, the ecstasy of her heart, shines forth. In them shines a ray of the mystery of God, the glory of his ineffable holiness, the eternal love which, as an irrevocable gift, enters into human history.

Mary is the first to share in this new revelation of God and, within the same, in this new "self-giving" of God. There-

⁸⁹ As is well known, the words of the *Magnificat* contain or echo numerous passages of the Old Testament.

fore she proclaims: "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Her words reflect a joy of spirit which is difficult to express: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." Indeed, "the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."⁹⁰ In her exultation Mary confesses that she finds herself *in the very heart of this fullness* of Christ. She is conscious that the promise made to the fathers, first of all "to Abraham and to his posterity for ever," is being fulfilled in herself. She is thus aware that concentrated within herself as the Mother of Christ is *the whole salvific economy*, in which "from age to age" is manifested he who, as the God of the Covenant, "remembers his mercy."

37. The Church, which from the beginning has modelled her earthly journey on that of the Mother of God, constantly repeats after her the words of the *Magnificat*. From the depths of the Virgin's faith at the Annunciation and the Visitation, the Church derives the truth about the God of the Covenant: the God who is Almighty and does "great things" for man: "holy is his name." In the *Magnificat* the Church sees up-rooted that sin which is found at the outset of the earthly history of man and woman, the sin of disbelief and of "little faith" in God. In contrast with the "suspicion" which the "father of lies" sowed in the heart of Eve the first woman, Mary, whom tradition is wont to call the "new Eve"⁹¹ and the true "Mother of the living,"⁹² boldly proclaims the *undimmed* truth about God: the holy and almighty God, who from the beginning is *the source of all gifts*, he who "has done great things" in her, as well as in the whole universe. In the act of creation God gives existence to all that is. In creating man, God gives

⁹⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2.

⁹¹ Cf. for example Saint Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*, 100: Otto II, 358; Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 22, 4: S. Ch. 211, 439-445; Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 17, 4-6: CCL 2, 904 f.

⁹² Cf. Saint Epiphanius, *Panarion*, III, 2: *Haer.* 78, 18: PG 42, 727-730.

him the dignity of the image and likeness of himself in a special way as compared with all earthly creatures. Moreover, in his desire to give, *God gives himself in the Son*, notwithstanding man's sin: "He so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn.* 3:16). Mary is the first witness of this marvellous truth, which will be fully accomplished through "the works and words" (cf. *Acts* 1:1) of her Son and definitively through his Cross and Resurrection.

The Church, which even "amid trials and tribulations" does not cease repeating with Mary the words of the *Magnificat*, is sustained by the power of God's truth, proclaimed on that occasion with such extraordinary simplicity. At the same time, *by means of this truth about God the Church desires to shed light upon* the difficult and sometimes tangled paths of man's earthly existence. The Church's journey, therefore, near the end of the second Christian Millennium, involves a renewed commitment to her mission. Following him who said of himself: "(God) has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. *Lk.* 4:18), the Church has sought from generation to generation and still seeks today to accomplish that same mission.

The Church's *love of preference for the poor* is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's *Magnificat*. The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who "has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, . . . filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, . . . scattered the proud-hearted . . . and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him." Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the "poor of Yahweh," who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in him (cf. *Ps.* 25; 31; 35; 55). Mary truly proclaims the coming of the "Messiah of the poor" (cf. *Is.* 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that *the truth about God who saves*, the truth about God who is the

source of every gift, *cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble*, that love which, celebrated in the *Magnificat*, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus.

The Church is thus aware — and at the present time this awareness is particularly vivid — not only that these two elements of the message contained in the *Magnificat* cannot be separated, but also that there is a duty to safeguard carefully the importance of “the poor” and of “the option in favour of the poor” in the word of the living God. These are matters and questions intimately connected with the *Christian meaning of freedom and liberation*. “Mary is totally dependent upon God and completely directed towards him, and, at the side of her Son, she is *the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe*. It is to her as Mother and Model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission.”⁹³

PART III

Maternal Mediation

1. Mary, the Handmaid of the Lord

38. The Church knows and teaches with Saint Paul that *there is only one mediator*: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). “The

⁹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (22 March 1986), 97.

maternal role of Mary towards people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power:"⁹⁴ it is mediation in Christ.

The Church knows and teaches that "all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on mankind originate... from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on his mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union."⁹⁵ This saving influence is sustained by the Holy Spirit, who, just as he overshadowed the Virgin Mary when he began in her the divine motherhood, in a similar way constantly sustains her solicitude for the brothers and sisters of her Son.

In effect, Mary's mediation is intimately linked with her motherhood. It possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from the mediation of the other creatures who in various and always subordinate ways share in the one mediation of Christ, although her own mediation is also a shared mediation.⁹⁶ In fact, while it is true that "no creature could ever be classed with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer," at the same time "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise among creatures to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this unique source." And thus "the one goodness of God is in reality communicated diversely to his creatures."⁹⁷

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council presents the truth of Mary's mediation as "a sharing in the one unique source

⁹⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 60.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹⁶ Cf. the formula of mediatrix "ad Mediatorem" of Saint Bernard, *In Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*. 2: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 263. Mary as a pure mirror sends back to her Son all the glory and honour which she receives: *Id.*, *In Nativitate B. Mariae Sermo — De Aqueductu*, 12: ed. cit., 283.

⁹⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

that is the mediation of Christ himself." Thus we read: "The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. She experiences it continuously and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer."⁹⁸ This role is at the same time *special and extraordinary*. It flows from her divine motherhood and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since by virtue of divine election Mary is the earthly Mother of the Father's consubstantial Son and his "generous companion" in the work of redemption, "she is a mother to us in the order of grace."⁹⁹ This role constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the saving mystery of Christ and the Church.

39. From this point of view we must consider once more the fundamental event in the economy of salvation, namely the Incarnation of the Word at the moment of the Annunciation. It is significant that Mary, recognizing in the words of the divine messenger the will of the Most High and submitting to his power, says: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*" (Lk. 1:38). The first moment of submission to the one mediation "between God and men" — the mediation of Jesus Christ — is the Virgin of Nazareth's acceptance of motherhood. Mary consents to God's choice, in order to become through the power of the Holy Spirit the Mother of the Son of God. It can be said that this *consent to motherhood* is above all a *result of her total self-giving to God in virginity*. Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the love which totally "consecrates" a human being to God. By virtue of this love, Mary wished to be always and in all things "given to God," living in virginity. The words "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord*" express that fact that from the outset she accepted and understood her own motherhood as a *total gift of self*, a gift of her person to the service of the saving plans of the Most High. And to the very end she lived her entire maternal sharing in the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 61.

life of Jesus Christ, her Son, in a way that matched her vocation to virginity.

Mary's motherhood, completely pervaded by her spousal attitude as the "handmaid of the Lord," constitutes the first and fundamental dimension of that mediation which the Church confesses and proclaims in her regard¹⁰⁰ and continually "commends to the hearts of the faithful," since the Church has great trust in her. For it must be recognized that before anyone else it was God himself, the Eternal Father, who *entrusted himself to the Virgin of Nazareth*, giving her his own Son in the mystery of the Incarnation. Her election to the supreme office and dignity of Mother of the Son of God refers, on the ontological level to the very reality of the union of the two natures in the person of the Word (*hypostatic union*). This basic fact of being the Mother of the Son of God is from the very beginning a complete openness to the person of Christ, to his whole work, to his whole mission. The words "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" testify to Mary's openness of spirit: she perfectly unites in herself the love proper to virginity and the love characteristic of motherhood, which are joined and as it were fused together.

For this reason Mary became not only the "nursing mother" of the Son of Man but also the "associate of unique nobility"¹⁰¹ of the Messiah and Redeemer. As I have already said, she advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and in this *pilgrimage* to the foot of the Cross there was simultaneously accomplished her maternal *cooperation* with the Saviour's whole mission through her actions and sufferings. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming ever more imbued with "burning charity" towards all those to whom Christ's mission was directed. Through this "burning charity," which sought to achieve, in union with Christ, the restoration of "supernatural life to souls,"¹⁰² Mary

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰² Ibid., 61.

entered; in a way all her own, into the one mediation "between God and men" which is the mediation of the man Christ Jesus. If she was the first to experience within herself the supernatural consequences of this one mediation—in the Annunciation she had been greeted as "full of grace"—then we must say that through this fullness of grace and supernatural life she was especially predisposed to cooperation with Christ, the one Mediator of human salvation. And such cooperation is precisely this mediation subordinated to the mediation of Christ.

In Mary's case we have a special and exceptional mediation, based upon her "fullness of grace," which was expressed in the complete willingness of the "handmaid of the Lord." In response to this interior willingness of his Mother, *Jesus Christ prepared her* ever more completely to become for all people their "mother in the order of grace." This is indicated, at least indirectly, by certain details noted by the Synoptics (cf. *Lk.* 11:28; 8:20-21; *Mk.* 3:32-35; *Mt.* 12:47-50) and still more so by the Gospel of John (cf. 2:1-12; 19:25-27), which I have already mentioned. Particularly eloquent in this regard are the words spoken by Jesus on the Cross to Mary and John.

40. After the events of the Resurrection and Ascension, Mary entered the Upper Room together with the Apostles to await Pentecost, and was present there as the Mother of the glorified Lord. She was not only the one who "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith" and loyally persevered in her union with her Son "unto the Cross" but she was also the HANDMAID OF THE LORD, *left by her Son as Mother in the midst of the infant Church*: "Behold your mother." Thus there began to develop a special bond between this Mother and the Church. For the infant Church was the fruit of the Cross and Resurrection of her Son. Mary, who from the beginning had given herself without reserve to the person and work of her Son, could not but pour out upon the Church, from the very beginning, her maternal self-giving. After her Son's departure, her motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding

for all her children, the Mother cooperates in the saving work of her Son, the Redeemer of the world. In fact the Council teaches that the "motherhood of Mary in the order of grace... *will last without interruption* until the eternal fulfilment of of all the elect."¹⁰³ With the redeeming death of her Son, the maternal mediation of the handmaid of the Lord took on a universal dimension, for the work of redemption embraces the whole of humanity. Thus there is manifested in a singular way the efficacy of the one and universal mediation of Christ "between God and men." Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, *in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer*, the one Mediator. This is clearly indicated by the Council in the words quoted above.

"For," the text goes on, "taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation."¹⁰⁴ With this character of "intercession," first manifested at Cana in Galilee, Mary's mediation continues in the history of the Church and the world. We read that Mary "by her maternal charity, cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to their happy homeland."¹⁰⁵ In this way Mary's motherhood continues unceasingly in the Church as the mediation which intercedes, and the Church expresses her faith in this truth by invoking Mary "under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix and Mediatrix."¹⁰⁶

41. Through her mediation, subordinate to that of the Redeemer, Mary contributes *in a special way to the union of the pilgrim Church* on earth with the eschatological and heavenly reality of the Communion of Saints, since she has already been

¹⁰³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 62; in her prayer too the Church recognizes and celebrates Mary's "maternal role": it is a role "of intercession and forgiveness, petition and grace, reconciliation and peace" (cf. Preface of the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Mediatrix of Grace, in *Collectio Missarum de beata Maria Virgine*, ed. typ. 1987, I, 120).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 62.

"assumed into heaven."¹⁰⁷ The truth of the Assumption, defined by Pius XII, is reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which thus expresses the Church's faith: "Preserved free from all guilt of original sin, the Immaculate Virgin *was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory* upon the completion of her earthly sojourn. She was *exalted by the Lord as Queen of the Universe*, in order that she might be the more thoroughly conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords (cf. *Rev. 19:16*) and the conqueror of sin and death."¹⁰⁸ In this teaching Pius XII was in continuity with Tradition, which has found many different expressions in the history of the Church, both in the East and in the West.

By the mystery of the Assumption into heaven there were definitively accomplished in Mary all the effects of the one mediation of *Christ the Redeemer of the world* and *Risen Lord*: "In Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (*1 Cor. 15:22-23*). In the mystery of the Assumption is expressed the faith of the Church, according to which Mary is "united by a close and indissoluble bond" to Christ, for, if as Virgin and Mother she was singularly united with him *in his first coming*, so through her continued collaboration with him she will also be united with him in expectation of the second; "redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son,"¹⁰⁹ she also has that specifically maternal role of mediatrix of mercy *at his final coming*, when all those who belong to Christ "shall be made alive,"

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 62; cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Dormitionem*, I, 11: II, 2, 14; III, 2: *S. Ch.* 80, 111 f.; 127-131; 157-161; 181-185; Saint Bernard, *In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Sermo*, 1-2: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 228-238.

¹⁰⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 59; cf. Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (1 November 1950): *AAS* 42 (1950) 769-771; Saint Bernard presents Mary immersed in the splendour of the Son's glory: *In Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*, 3; *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 263 f.

¹⁰⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

when "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).¹¹⁰

Connected with this exaltation of the noble "Daughter of Sion"¹¹¹ through her Assumption into heaven is the mystery of her eternal glory. For the Mother of Christ is glorified as "Queen of the Universe."¹¹² She who at the Annunciation called herself the "handmaid of the Lord" remained throughout her earthly life faithful to what this name expresses. In this she confirmed that she was a true "disciple" of Christ, who strongly emphasized that his mission was one of service: the Son of Man "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). In this way Mary became the first of those who "serving Christ also in others with humility and patience lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign,"¹¹³ and she fully obtained that "state of royal freedom" proper to Christ's disciples: to serve means to reign!

"Christ obeyed even at the cost of death, and was therefore raised up by the Father (cf. *Phil.* 2:8-9). Thus he entered into the glory of his kingdom. To him all things are made subject until subjects himself and all created things to the Father, that God may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor. 15:27-28)."¹¹⁴ Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, has a share in this Kingdom of the Son.¹¹⁵ The *glory of serving* does not cease to be her royal exaltation: assumed into heaven, she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal mediation "until

¹¹⁰ On this particular aspect of Mary's mediation as *implorer of clemency* from the "Son as Judge," cf. Saint Bernard, *In Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*, 1-2: *S. Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 262 f.; Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Epistle *Octobri Mense* (22 September 1891): *Acta Leonis*, XI, 299-315.

¹¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁵ With regard to Mary as Queen, cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom in Nativitatem*, 6; 12: *Hom. in Dormitionem*, I, 2, 12, 14; II, 11; III, 4: *S. Ch.* 80, 59 f.; 77 f.; 83 f.; 113 f.; 117; 151 f.; 189-193.

the eternal fulfillment of all the elect."¹¹⁶ Thus, she who here on earth "loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross," continues to remain united with him, while now "*all things are subjected to him, until he subjects to the Father himself and all things.*" Thus in her Assumption into heaven, Mary is as it were clothed by the whole reality of the Communion of Saints, and her very union with the Son in glory is wholly oriented towards the definitive fullness of the Kingdom, when "*God will be all in all.*"

In this phase too Mary's maternal mediation does not cease to be subordinate to him who is the one Mediator, *until the final realization of "the fullness of time,"* that is to say until "all things are united in Christ" (cf. *Eph.* 1:10).

2. Mary in the life of the Church and of every Christian

42. Linking itself with Tradition, the Second Vatican Council brought new light to bear on the role of the Mother of Christ in the life of the Church. "Through the gift... of divine motherhood, Mary is united with her Son, the Redeemer, and with his singular graces and offices. By these, the Blessed Virgin is also intimately united with the Church: *the Mother of God is a figure of the Church* in the matter of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ."¹¹⁷ We have already noted how, from the beginning, Mary remains with the Apostles in expectation of Pentecost and how, as "the blessed one who believed," she is present in the midst of the pilgrim Church from generation to generation through faith and as the model of the hope which does not disappoint (cf. *Rom.* 5:5).

Mary believed in the fulfilment of what had been said to her by the Lord. As Virgin, she believed that she would conceive and bear a son: the "Holy One," who bears the name of "Son of God," the name "Jesus" (= God who saves). As handmaid of the Lord,

¹¹⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

she remained in perfect fidelity to the person and mission of this Son. As Mother, "*believing and obeying . . . she brought forth on earth the Father's Son. This she did, knowing not man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.*"¹¹⁸

For these reasons Mary is honored in the Church "with special reverence. Indeed, from most ancient times the Blessed Virgin Mary has been venerated under the title of 'God-bearer'. In all perils and needs, the faithful have fled prayerfully to her protection."¹¹⁹ This cult is altogether special: it bears in itself and *expresses* the profound *link* which exists *between the Mother of Christ and the Church*.¹²⁰ As Virgin and Mother, Mary remains for the Church a "permanent model." It can therefore be said that especially under this aspect, namely as a model, or rather as a "figure," Mary, present in the mystery of Christ, remains constantly present also in the mystery of the Church. For the Church too is "called mother and virgin," and these names have a profound biblical and theological justification.¹²¹

43. The Church "*becomes herself a mother by accepting God's word with fidelity.*"¹²² Like Mary who first believed by the word of God revealed to her at the Annunciation and by remaining faithful to that word in all her trials even unto the Cross, so too the Church becomes a mother when, *accepting with fidelity the word of God*, "by her preaching and by baptism *she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God.*"¹²³ This "maternal" characteristic of the Church was expressed in a particular vivid way by the Apostle to the Gentiles when he

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹²⁰ Cf. Saint Ambrose, *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88-89: PL 16, 341; Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 215, 4: PL 38, 1074; *De Sancta Virginitate*, II, 2; V, 5; VI, 6: PL 40, 397; 398 f.; 399; *Sermo* 191, II, 3: PL 38 1010 f.

¹²¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

¹²² Ibid., 64.

¹²³ Ibid., 64.

wrote: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (*Gal.* 4:19). These words of Saint Paul contain an interesting sign of the early Church's awareness of her own motherhood, linked to her apostolic service to mankind. This awareness enabled and still enables the Church to see the mystery of her life and mission modelled upon the example of the Mother of the Son, who is "the first-born among many brethren" (*Rom.* 8:29).

It can be said that from Mary the Church also learns her own motherhood: she recognizes the maternal dimension of her vocation, which is essentially bound to her sacramental nature, in "contemplating Mary's mysterious sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will."¹²⁴ If the Church is the sign and instrument of intimate union with God, she is so by reason of her motherhood, because, receiving life from the Spirit, she "generates" sons and daughters of the human race to a new life in Christ. For, just as *Mary is at the service of the mystery of the Incarnation*, so *the Church is always at the service of the mystery of adoption to sonship through grace*.

Likewise, following the example of Mary, the Church remains the virgin faithful to her spouse: "The Church herself is a virgin, who keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse."¹²⁵ For the Church is the spouse of Christ, as is clear from the Pauline Letters (cf. *Eph.* 21-33; *2 Cor.* 11:2), and from the title found in John: "bride of the Lamb" (*Rev.* 21:9). If *the Church* as spouse "keeps the fidelity she has pledged to Christ," this fidelity, even though in the Apostle's teaching it has become an image of marriage (cf. *Eph.* 5:23-33), also has value as a model of total self-giving to God in celibacy "for the kingdom of heaven," in *virginity consecrated to God* (cf. *Mt.* 19:11-12; *2 Cor.* 11:2). Precisely such virginity, after the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, is the source of a special

¹²⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 64..

spiritual fruitfulness: *it is the source of motherhood in the Holy Spirit.*

But *the Church* also preserves the faith *received from Christ*. Following the example of Mary, who kept and pondered in her heart everything relating to her divine Son (cf. *Lk.* 2:19, 51) the Church is committed to preserving the word of God and investigating its riches with discernment and prudence, in order to bear faithful witness to it before all mankind in every age.¹²⁶

44. Given Mary's relationship to the Church as an exemplar, the Church is close to her and seeks to become like her: "Imitating the Mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope, and a sincere charity."¹²⁷ Mary is thus present in the mystery of the Church as a *model*. But the Church's mystery also consists in generating people to a new and immortal life: this is her motherhood in the Holy Spirit. And here Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more. For, "*with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development*" of the sons and daughters of Mother Church. The Church's motherhood is accomplished not only according to the model and figure of the Mother of God but also with her "cooperation." The Church *draws* abundantly from this cooperation, that is to say from the maternal mediation which is characteristic of Mary, in so far as already on earth she cooperated in the rebirth and development of the Church's sons and daughters, as the Mother of that Son whom the Father "placed as the first-born among many brethren."¹²⁸

She cooperated, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, with a maternal love.¹²⁹ Here we perceive the real value of the words

¹²⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8; Saint Bonaventure, *Comment. in Evang. Lucae*, Ad Claras Aquas, VII, 53, No. 40; 68, No. 109.

¹²⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 64.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 63.

spoken by Jesus to his Mother at the hour of the Cross: "Woman, behold your son" and to the disciple: "Behold your mother" (*Jn.* 19:26-27). They are words which determine *Mary's place in the life of Christ's disciples* and they express—as I have already said—the new motherhood of Mother of the Redeemer: a spiritual motherhood, born from the heart of the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer of the world. It is a motherhood in the order of grace, for it implores the gift of the Spirit who raises up the new children of God, redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ: that Spirit whom together with the Church Mary too received on the day of Pentecost.

Her motherhood is particularly noted and experienced by the Christian people at the *Sacred Banquet*—the liturgical celebration of the mystery of the Redemption—at which Christ, his *true body born of the Virgin Mary*, becomes present.

The piety of the Christian people has always very rightly sensed a *profound link* between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and worship of the Eucharist: this is a fact that can be seen in the liturgy of both the West and the East, in the traditions of the Religious Families, in the modern movements of spirituality, including those for youth, and in the pastoral practice of the Marian Shrines. *Mary guides the faithful to the Eucharist.*

45. Of the essence of motherhood is the fact that it concerns the person. Motherhood always establishes a *unique and unrepeatable relationship* between two people: *between mother and child and between child and Mother*. Even when the same woman is the mother of many children, her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood. For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way, and this is true both for the mother and for the child. Each child is surrounded in the same way by that maternal love on which are based the child's development and coming to maturity as a human being.

It can be said that motherhood "in the order of grace" preserves the analogy with what "in the order of nature" characterizes the union between mother and child. In the light of this fact it becomes easier to understand why in Christ's testament on Golgotha his Mother's new motherhood is expressed in the singular, in reference to one man: "Behold your son."

It can also be said that these same words fully show the reason for the *Marian dimension of the life of Christ's disciples*. This is true not only of John, who at that hour stood at the foot of the Cross together with his Master's Mother, but it is also true of every disciple of Christ, of every Christian. The Redeemer entrusts his mother to the disciple, and at the same time he gives her to him as his mother. Mary's motherhood which becomes man's inheritance is *a gift which Christ himself makes* personally to every individual. The Redeemer entrusts Mary to John because he entrusts John to Mary. At the foot of the Cross there begins that special *entrusting of humanity to the Mother of Christ*, which in the history of the Church has been practised and expressed in different ways. The same Apostle and Evangelist, after reporting the words addressed by Jesus on the Cross to his Mother and to himself, adds: "And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (*Jn. 19:27*). This statement certainly means that the role of son was attributed to the disciple and that he assumed responsibility for the Mother of his beloved Master. And since Mary was given as a mother to him personally, the statement indicates, even though indirectly, everything expressed by the intimate relationship of a child with its mother. And all of this can be included in the word "entrusting." Such entrusting is *the response to a person's love*, and in particular *to the love of a mother*.

The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of Christ, which began with the testa-

ment of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, "welcomes" the Mother of Christ "into his own home"¹³⁰ and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say into his human and Christian "I": he "*took her to his own home.*" Thus the Christian seeks to be taken into that "maternal charity" with which the Redeemer's Mother "cares for the brethren of her Son,"¹³¹ "in whose birth and development she cooperates"¹³² in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ's Spirit. Thus also is exercised that motherhood in the Spirit which became Mary's role at the foot of the Cross and in the Upper Room.

46. This filial relationship, this self-entrusting of a child to its mother, not only has its *beginning in Christ* but can also be said to be *definitively directed towards him*. Mary can be said to continue to say to each individual the words which she spoke at Cana in Galilee: "Do whatever he tells you." For he, Christ, is the one Mediator between God and mankind; he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn.* 14:6); it is he whom the Father has given to the world, so that man "should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn.* 3:16). The Virgin of Nazareth became the first "witness" of this saving love of the Father and she also wishes *to remain its humble handmaid always and everywhere*. For every Christian, for every human being, Mary is the one who first "believed," and precisely with her faith as Spouse and Mother she wishes to act upon all those who entrust themselves to her as her children. And it is well known that the more her children persevere and progress in this attitude, the nearer Mary leads them to the "unsearch-

¹³⁰ Clearly, in the Greek text the expression "*εἰς τὰ ἴδια*" goes beyond the mere acceptance of Mary by the disciple in the sense of material lodging and hospitality in his house; it indicates rather a *communion of life* established between the two as a result of the words of the dying Christ: cf. *Saint Augustine, In Ioan. Evang. tract.* 119, 3; *CCL* 36, 659: "He took her to himself, not into his own property, for he possessed nothing of his own, but among his own duties, which he attended to with dedication."

¹³¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 63.

able riches of Christ" (*Eph.* 3:8). And to the same degree they recognize more and more clearly the dignity of man in all its fullness and the definitive meaning of his vocation, for "Christ... fully reveals man to man himself."¹³³

This Marian dimension of Christian life takes on special importance in relation to women and their status. In fact, femininity has a *unique relationship* with the Mother of the Redeemer, a subject which can be studied in greater depth elsewhere. Here I simply wish to note that the figure of Mary of Nazareth sheds light on *womanhood as such* by the very fact that God, in the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son, entrusted himself to the ministry, the free and active ministry of a woman. It can thus be said that women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement. In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of bearing the greatest sorrow; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement.

47. At the Council Paul VI solemnly proclaimed that *Mary is the Mother of the Church*, "that is, Mother of the entire Christian people, both faithful and pastors."¹³⁴ Later, in 1968, in the Profession of Faith known as the "Credo of the People of God," he restated this truth in an even more forceful way in these words: "We believe that the Most Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, the Mother of the Church, carries on in heaven her maternal role with regard to the members of Christ, co-operating in the birth and development of divine life in the souls of the redeemed."¹³⁵

¹³³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹³⁴ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Discourse of 21 November 1964*: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.

¹³⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Solemn Profession of Faith* (30 June 1968), 15: AAS 60 (1963) 438 f.

The Council's teaching emphasized that the truth concerning the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ, is an effective aid in exploring more deeply the truth concerning the Church. When speaking of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* which had just been approved by the Council, Paul VI said: "Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church."¹³⁶ Mary is present in the Church as the Mother of Christ, and at the same time as that Mother whom Christ, in the mystery of the Redemption, gave to humanity in the person of the Apostle John. Thus, in her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one through the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church's model. Indeed, as Paul VI hopes and asks, the Church must draw "from the Virgin Mother of God the most authentic form of perfect imitation of Christ."¹³⁷

Thanks to this special bond linking the Mother of Christ with the Church, there is further clarified the mystery of that WOMAN who, from the first chapters of the Book of *Genesis* until the Book of *Revelation*, accompanies the revelation of God's salvific plan for humanity. For Mary, present in the Church as the Mother of the Redeemer, takes part, as a mother, in that "monumental struggle against the powers of darkness"¹³⁸ which continues throughout human history. And by her ecclesial identification as the "woman clothed with the sun" (*Rev.* 12:1),¹³⁹ it can be said that "in the Most Holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle." Hence, as Christians raise their eyes with faith to Mary in the course of their earthly pilgrimage, they strive to increase in holiness."¹⁴⁰ Mary, the

¹³⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Discourse of 21 November 1964*: AAS 56 (1964) 1015.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1016.

¹³⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 37.

¹³⁹ Cf. Saint Bernard, *In Dominica infra oct. Assumptionis Sermo*: S. *Bernardi Opera*, V, 1968, 262-274.

¹⁴⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 65.

exalted Daughter of Sion, helps all her children, wherever they may be and whatever their condition, *to find in Christ the path to the Father's house.*

Thus the Church, throughout her life, maintains with the Mother of God a link which embraces, in the saving mystery, the past, the present and the future, and venerates her as the spiritual mother of humanity and the advocate of grace.

3. The meaning of the Marian Year

48. It is precisely the special bond between humanity and this Mother which has led me to proclaim a Marian Year in the Church, in this period before the end of the Second Millennium since Christ's birth. A similar initiative was taken in the past, when Pius XII proclaimed 1954 as a Marian Year, in order to highlight the exceptional holiness of the Mother of Christ as expressed in the mysteries of her Immaculate Conception (defined exactly a century before) and of her Assumption into heaven.¹⁴¹

Now, following the line of the Second Vatican Council, I wish to emphasize the *special presence* of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church. For this is a fundamental dimension emerging from the Mariology of the Council, the end of which is now more than twenty years behind us. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985 exhorted everyone to follow faithfully the teaching and guidelines of the Council. We can say that these two events—the Council and the Synod—embody what the Holy Spirit himself wishes “to say to the Church” in the present phase of history.

In this context, the Marian Year is meant to promote a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about

¹⁴¹ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Fulgens Corona* (8 September 1953): AAS 45 (1953) 577-592. Pius X with his Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum* (2 February 1904), on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary had proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of a few months; *Pii X P.M. Acta* I, 147-166.

the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, the topic to which the contents of this Encyclical are devoted. Here we speak not only of *the doctrine of faith* but also of *the life of faith*, and thus of authentic "Marian spirituality," seen in the light of Tradition, and especially the spirituality to which the Council exhorts us.¹⁴² Furthermore, Marian spirituality, like its corresponding devotion, finds a very rich source in the historical experience of individuals and of the various Christian communities present among the different peoples and nations of the world. In this regard, I would like to recall, among the many witnesses and teachers of this spirituality, the figure of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort,¹⁴³ who proposes consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary, as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments. I am pleased to note that in our own time too new manifestations of this spirituality and devotion are not lacking.

There thus exist solid points to reference to look to and follow in the context of this Marian Year.

49. This Marian Year *will begin on the Solemnity of Pentecost, on 7 June next.* For it is a question not only of recalling that Mary "preceded" the entry of Christ the Lord into the history of the human family, but also of emphasizing, in the light of Mary, that from the moment when the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished human history entered "the fullness of time," and that the Church is the sign of this fullness. As the People of God, the Church makes her pilgrim way towards eternity through faith, in the midst of all the peoples and nations, beginning from the day of Pentecost. *Christ's Mother*, who was present at the beginning of "the time of the Church," when in expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit

¹⁴² Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66-67.

¹⁴³ Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la sainte Vierge*. This saint can rightly be linked with the figure of Saint Alfonso de Liguori, the second centenary of whose death occurs this year; cf. among his works *Le glorie di Maria*.

she devoted herself to prayer in the midst of the Apostles and her Son's disciples, constantly "precedes" *the Church* in her *journey* through human history. She is also the one who, precisely as the "handmaid of the Lord," cooperates unceasingly with the work of salvation accomplished by Christ, her Son.

Thus by means of this Marian Year *the Church is called* not only to remember everything in her past that testifies to the special maternal cooperation of the Mother of God in the work of salvation in Christ the Lord, but also, on her own part, *to prepare* for the future the paths of this cooperation. For the end of the Second Christian Millennium opens up as a new prospect.

50. As has already been mentioned, also among our divided brethren many honour and celebrate the Mother of the Lord, especially among the Orientals. It is a Marian light cast upon ecumenism. In particular, I wish to mention once more that during the Marian Year there will occur the *Millennium of the Baptism* of Saint Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev (A.D. 988). This marked the beginning of Christianity in the territories of what was then called Rus', and subsequently in other territories of Eastern Europe. In this way, through the work of evangelization, Christianity spread beyond Europe, as far as the northern territories of the Asian continent. We would therefore like, especially during this Year, to join in prayer with all those who are celebrating the Millennium of this Baptism, both Orthodox and Catholics, repeating and confirming with the Council those sentiments of joy and comfort that "the Easterners... with ardent emotion and devout mind concur in reverencing the Mother of God, ever Virgin."¹⁴⁴ Even though we are still experiencing the painful effects of the separation which took place some decades later (1054), we can say that *in the presence of the Mother of Christ we feel that we are true brothers and sisters* within that messianic People, which is called to be the one family of God on earth. As I announced at the begin-

¹⁴⁴ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 69.

ning of the New Year: "We desire to reconfirm this universal inheritance of all the sons and daughters of this earth."¹⁴⁵

In announcing the Year of Mary, I also indicated that it will end next year on *the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven*, in order to emphasize the "great sign in heaven" spoken of by the *Apocalypse*. In this way we also wish to respond to the exhortation of the Council, which looks to Mary as "a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God." And the Council expresses this exhortation in the following words: "Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and Mother of mankind. Let them implore that she who aided the beginning of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, intercede with her Son in the fellowship of all the saints. May she do so until all the peoples of the human family, whether they are honoured with the name of Christian or whether they still do not know their Saviour, are happily gathered together in peace and harmony into the one People of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity."¹⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

51. At the end of the daily Liturgy of the Hours, among the invocations addressed to Mary by the Church is the following:

"Loving Mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive
to rise again.

To the wonderment of nature you bore your
Creator!"

¹⁴⁵ Homily on 1 January 1987.

¹⁴⁶ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 69.

"To the wonderment of nature!" These words of the antiphon express that *wonderment of faith* which accompanies the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood. In a sense, it does so in the heart of the whole of creation, and, directly, in the heart of the whole People of God, in the heart of the Church. How wonderfully far God has gone, the Creator and Lord of all things, in the "revelation of himself" to man!¹⁴⁷ How clearly he has bridged all the spaces of that infinite "distance" which separates the Creator from the creature! If in himself he remains *ineffable and unsearchable*, still more *ineffable and unsearchable is he in the reality of the Incarnation* of the Word, who became man through the Virgin of Nazareth.

If he has eternally willed to call man to share in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4), it can be said that he has matched the "divinization" of man to humanity's historical conditions, so that even after sin he is ready to restore at a great price the eternal plan of his love through the "humanization" of his Son, who is of the same being as himself. The whole of creation, and more directly man himself, cannot fail to be amazed at this gift in which he has become a sharer, in the Holy Spirit: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16).

At the centre of this mystery, in the midst of this wonderment of faith, stands Mary. As the loving Mother of the Redeemer, she was the first to experience it: "To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator!"

52. The words of this liturgical antiphon also express *the truth of the GREAT TRANSFORMATION* which the mystery of the Incarnation establishes for man. It is a transformation which belongs to his entire history, from that beginning which is revealed to us in the first chapters of *Genesis* until the final end, in the perspective of the end of the world, of which Jesus has

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 2: "Through this revelation... the invisible God... out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends... and lives among them... so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself."

revealed to us "neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13). It is an unending and continuous transformation between falling and raising again, between the man of sin and the man of grace and justice. The Advent liturgy in particular is at the very heart of this transformation and captures its unceasing "here and now" when it exclaims: "Assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again!"

These words apply to every individual, every community, to nations and peoples, and to the generations and epochs of human history, to our own epoch, to these years of the Millennium which is drawing to a close: "Assist, yes assist, your people who have fallen!"

This is the invocation addressed to Mary, the "loving Mother of the Redeemer," the invocation addressed to Christ, who through Mary entered human history. Year after year the antiphon rises to Mary, evoking that moment which saw the accomplishment of this essential historical transformation, which irreversibly continues: the transformation from "falling" to "rising."

Mankind has made wonderful discoveries and achieved extraordinary results in the fields of science and technology. It has made great advances along the path of progress and civilization, and in recent times one could say that it has succeeded in speeding up the pace of history. But the fundamental transformation, the one which can be called "original," constantly accompanies man's journey, and through all the events of history accompanies each and every individual. It is the transformation from "falling" to "rising," from death to life. It is also a *constant challenge* to people's consciences, a challenge to man's whole historical awareness: the challenge to follow the path of "not falling" in ways that are ever old and ever new, and of "rising again" if a fall has occurred.

As she goes forward with the whole of humanity towards the frontier between the two Millennia, the Church, for her part, with the whole community of believers and in union with

all men and women of good will, takes up the great challenge contained in these words of the Marian antiphon: "the people who have fallen yet strive to rise again," and she addresses both the Redeemer and his Mother with the plea: "Assist us." For, as this prayer attests, the Church sees the Blessed Mother of God in the saving mystery of Christ and in her own mystery. She sees Mary deeply rooted in humanity's history, in man's eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for him from eternity. She sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which *today* beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; she sees her helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that it "does not fall," or, if it has fallen, that it "rises again."

I hope with all my heart that the reflections contained in the present Encyclical will also serve to renew this vision in the hearts of all believers.

As Bishop of Rome, I send to all those to whom these thoughts are addressed the kiss of peace, my greeting and my blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, in the year 1987, the ninth of my Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS II

The Marian Year is a Great "Magnificat"*

1. "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22).

It was the evening of the "first day after the Sabbath" (cf. Jn. 20:19), the day of the Resurrection. On that evening Christ entered the Upper Room where the Apostles were gathered: he breathed upon them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

Three days before, Christ had been *crucified* and placed in the tomb. Now he *is present* once more, alive among his disciples. In his hands, his feet and his side he bears the wounds of the crucifixion. It is precisely through these wounds, *the sacrifice* of which they are the living expression — the sacrifice that obtains the forgiveness through which the world was admitted to reconciliation with the Father — that *the Son* gives the Holy Spirit to the Church. Thus through the Spirit the

* Homily delivered by the Holy Father during the evening Vigil celebration of the Feast of Pentecost with the faithful of the Diocese of Rome and the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square on June 6, 1987. Published in *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly Edition in English), N. 24 (992), June 15, 1987.

"fulness of time" (*Gal. 4:4*) is revealed: the final stage of the history of salvation, God's contact with humanity.

2. "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This *Gift that is the Spirit is linked with mission*. For Christ immediately adds: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (*Jn. 20:23*). Redemption is reconciliation with God through the blood of the Son. *Redemption bears fruit through the grace of absolution*. The person whose sins are forgiven is born in that same moment to a new life in God. *The Holy Spirit is the creator of this life in each one of us*. He is the hidden *dispenser of the holiness of man*, of his union with God: with the Father, in the Son. The Apostles receive this divine mystery *for the Church as sacramental power*. This power is intimately connected with the sacrifice of the Cross, and it also depends directly upon the power of the Spirit of truth: the Paraclete.

"Receive the Holy Spirit."

3. *Today, fifty days have passed since that evening*. Midnight brings the feast of Pentecost, which is structurally connected with the feast of Easter.

During those fifty days the Risen Jesus had prepared the Apostles for *their encounter with the Gift from the Father and the Son*. This he had done personally until the day of his Ascension into heaven. Then he had told them to return to the Upper Room, to be constant in prayer in expectation of the coming of "another Counsellor" (*Jn. 14:16*).

And now this day has come. It has already begun. In a few hours the fact *that the Apostles have received the Holy Spirit will be made manifest to the world*. It will be shown that they have accepted the Gift, which works with great power in them and through them. Witnesses of this fact will be, not only *the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, but also the strangers

gathered there from many different places. The Reading taken from the Acts of the Apostles lists the name of the inhabitants of those countries of the world to whom, immediately, on the first day, *the message of salvation comes. As word and as sacrament.* And it was a message which found fertile soil. The Spirit who acted through the testimony of the Apostles, especially through the words of Peter, acted also in the hearts of those listening.

4. Thus it was given to the Apostles to confess before all that "*Jesus Christ is Lord*" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). He who had been condemned to death and crucified was revealed as the Lord of heaven and earth in his Resurrection. He is not a Lord like any sovereign of this earth; *he is the Lord of eternal salvation.*

It was precisely this that Peter announced on the day of Pentecost. To precisely this the Apostles bore witness. It was precisely this that the Holy Spirit worked in them first of all, and then in all those who took part in the event in Jerusalem. Yes. The Holy Spirit. "No one can say: 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Without him no one can say or accept this saving word. Both of these effects are brought about by the Spirit of truth.

5. Thus, from the day of Pentecost onwards, *the saving word of the Gospel begins to course* through the history of the peoples and nations. From that day there begins the journey of the People of God of the New Covenant, just as on the night of the Passover there began the journey of Israel from the house of slavery towards the Promised Land. *On the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the Church is born:* the Israel of the New Covenant. And there begins the journey of faith, hope and love through all human generations, a journey which has now lasted for almost two thousand years.

At the outset of this journey of faith there is the Upper Room in Jerusalem — and the Apostles, gathered there *with Mary*, Christ's Mother.

Already, more than thirty years before, she had received the Holy Spirit. This came about when she accepted the angel's message: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you... the child to be born will be called... the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).

"No one can say: 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." *Mary was the first* to experience in herself this assistance. She was the first to accept Jesus, as the child of her virginity. She was also the first to accept in faith the truth about his kingdom, destined to last for all time: "And of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:33).

And in this faith Mary journeyed unceasingly at Jesus' side, through all the years of his earthly life, to the foot of the Cross on Golgotha.

6. Now, she who is "blessed because she believed" (cf. Lk. 1:45), *is with the Apostles in the Upper Room* on the day of Pentecost, when the Church is born and the great pilgrimage of the People of the New Covenant through history begins.

At the beginning of this pilgrimage, on the very day of the descent of the Spirit of truth and power upon the Apostles, she is present with them. *And she will remain present* — even after her departure from this earth — *in the mystery of Christ and the Church*.

She will be "*the first*" to go forward in the great pilgrimage of faith, hope and charity at the head of all the generations of God's People on this earth.

For this reason the Church, which on her pilgrim journey is approaching the end of the second millennium after Christ, begins her "*Marian Year*" precisely on today's solemn feast of Pentecost. This is a coincidence and a kind of convergence of

events which has great significance and which deserves to be emphasized: on *that* historic day, when the Spirit was poured out on the Church, we find Mary; on *this* day, which is today, when the Spirit is still being poured out, *we must find Mary*.

On this solemn feast the Bishop of Rome joins all his brothers in the episcopate, the successors of the Apostles, in order to deepen, throughout the Church, *in the prospect of the new millennium*, awareness of the maternal presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council has taught (cf. LUMEN GENTIUM, Ch. 8). Once more she extends to all the sons and daughters of the Church the invitation to *contemplate, to trust, and to rely on* this presence in order to overcome difficulties, in order to walk enthusiastically, in the powerful breath of the Spirit in the footsteps of her divine Son.

7. The Church *that is in Rome* has gathered this night to give a special sign of its sharing in the work of renewal begun by the Second Vatican Council. For a year now this sharing has been taking the form of a "Synod" which the Church in Rome, in all its component parts, has begun to prepare under the guidance of its Bishop, assisted by the Cardinal Vicar.

Today, in the context of this "holy vigil" which marks both the beginning of Pentecost 1987 and the inauguration of the Marian Year, I wish to thank God *for the fruits* of the initial work of study and publicity that has made it possible to define the aim and theme of the Synod: "Communion and Mission of the Church of God that is in Rome at the threshold of the Third Millennium." I now declare open the preparatory phase of the Roman Pastoral Synod. In order to continue the course of the Synod there have been set up the study commissions charged with drafting the working documents on pastoral issues which, together with the contributions made by all the various sectors of the diocesan community, will subsequently be submitted to the Synod Assembly for study. At this time I formulate the hope

that all who "by the Spirit have been baptized, and all who have been made to drink of one Spirit" (cf. *I Cor.* 12:13) will contribute, through the work of the Synod, *to the building up of the one body*, which is the Body of Christ. I fervently trust that, though many different gifts and various ministries, "the Spirit will be manifested in each one — and through all — for the common good (cf. *I Cor.* 12:7).

Dear brothers and sisters! Dear faithful people of Rome! This is our *special part* in this pilgrimage of the whole People of God, our special part in which we hope to experience, throughout the coming year, the living and active guidance of the Mother of God: her maternal presence and intercession.

8. "Receive the Holy Spirit."

May he *fill the hearts of his faithful*. May he *enkindle in them the fire of his love*.

He — the Paraclete, the Counsellor.

He — the Father of the poor.

He — the Light of all hearts.

He — the Giver of Gifts.

He — the sweet Guest of the soul.

O blessed light, penetrate the inmost hearts of your faithful!

Amen.

THE HOLY FATHER'S PRAYER

FOR THE MARIAN YEAR

1. Mother of the Redeemer,
in this year dedicated to you,
with great joy we call you blessed.
In order to carry out his providential

plan of salvation,

God the Father chose you
before the creation of the world.

You believed in his love
and obeyed his word.

The Son of God desired you for his Mother
when he became man to save
the human race.

You received him
with ready obedience and undivided heart.

The Holy Spirit
loved you as his mystical spouse
and he filled you with singular gift.

You allowed yourself to be led
by his hidden and powerful action.

2. On the eve
of the third Christian millennium,

we entrust to you the Church which acknowledges
you and invokes you as Mother.

On earth you preceded the Church
in the pilgrimage of faith:
comfort her in her difficulties and trials,
and make her always the sign and instrument
of intimate union with God
and of the unity
of the whole human race.

3. To you, Mother of Christian,
we trust in a special way
the people who are celebrating,
during this Marian Year,
the sixth Centenary or the Millennium
of their acceptance of the Gospel.
Their long history
is profoundly marked by devotion to you.
Turn towards them your loving glance;
give strength to those
who are suffering for the faith.

4. To you, Mother of the human family
and of the nations,
we confidently entrust the whole of humanity,
with its hopes and fears.
Do not let it lack the light of true wisdom.
Guide its steps in the ways of peace.
Enable all to meet Christ,
the way, the truth and the life.
Sustain us, O Virgin Mary,
on our journey of faith
and obtain for us the grace
of eternal salvation.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Mother of God
and our Mother, Mary!

Act of Entrustment to Mary

**May the Marian Year be
a Prolonged Pentecost**

1. To crown this solemn Eucharist, prior to the recitation of the Regina Caeli, united in mind and heart with my brothers in the episcopate, I wish to entrust to her whom Christ has left us as our Mother the entire population of the dear and faithful land that has welcomed me as a pilgrim of the Gospel and that is tied to the Virgin Mary with a bond of loving devotion inscribed in its history for centuries.

2. Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother,
full of trust we appeal to your maternal love
and invoke your help.
In the present stage of civilization
which profoundly marks the life of the Region of Apulia,
deign that all the sons and daughters of the Church
of the Capitanata,
rediscovering the riches of their great traditions,
may have the courage to live deeply
the message of your Divine Son,
"the way, the truth and the life" (cf. *Jn.* 14:6);
that they may translate it into action,
so that it may be a fruitful leaven of spirituality
and of humanity,

at every level of the social fabric:
in the family, the school, the world of work and of culture,
in the areas in which the fate of the community is decided.

3. Queen of heaven and our hope,
invoked in Foggia under the magnificent title of the
"Incoronata",
I place in your maternal heart
the problems and anxieties, the yearnings and the hopes
of this beloved people
which trusts in you.
I entrust to your Immaculate Heart the entire People of God
priests, religious, laity, men and women:
may they be ever more keenly aware
that they should be bold witnesses
to the values proclaimed in the Gospel
in the face of the scourges that afflict modern life.
With a most special ardour,
to which your heart is even more tenderly open,
I entrust to you the young and their high ideals,
It will be they, in the year two thousand,
who will witness to today's vitality
and reap its fruits, God willing!
May they now be among the architects of those goods,
above all of peace and of hope,
that the modern world has in great part lost,
and for which it so anxiously seeks.
Gracious Mother of the Redeemer,
obtain that this journey of the Successor of Peter
through these generous lands
may be the source of a fervent
spiritual and pastoral reawakening;
may the imminent Marian Year be for the individual souls,
and for the entire community,
a prolonged, ardent Pentecost.
Amen.

(Following the Mass in Foggia on May 24, 1987, the Holy Father entrusted the people of Capitanata region to Our Lady under the title of "Incoronata".)

Priestly Obligation to Hear Confessions

I suppose you have read in the local papers quotations of the Holy Father and other Bishops at the opening of the Synod of Bishops concerning the sacrament of Penance. Many of the faithful don't go to confession because there are no confessors to hear their confessions. Moreover, some priests do not go to confession either. This is indeed a very sad picture of some local Churches nowadays. To my mind, this is a great scandal for our faithful. The attached caricature published by Inquirer (October 4, 1987) speaks for itself. If is really a shame. Nakakahiya. It is really sad enough that a number of priests do not make their confessions as desired by the Church and demanded by their priesthood. But I think it is more serious that our faithful are neglected by those who have received their priesthood and the power to forgive sins. They cannot make their confessions as Christian



perfection demands. Will it be too much if I request you to elaborate on our priestly obligation to hear confessions?

A Parish Priest

While reading the case proposed by the consultant, I was thinking that he would have done better if he himself wrote on the topic he asks us to write on. His pastoral experience has obviously taught him how serious this priestly obligation to hear confessions of the faithful is, and how great is the need of ordinary Christians to receive the sacrament of Penance in order to make some progress in their spiritual life. We shall try our best, however, to please him by reminding our priests of their obligation as stated in the new Code of the Church and as declared by the Magisterium of the Church.

IN ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

Canon 986, § 1 reads: "All to whom by virtue of office the care of souls is committed, are bound to provide for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them, who reasonably request confession, and they are to provide these faithful with an opportunity to make individual confession on days and times arranged to suit them."

After reading canon 986, § 1, three questions can be easily formulated, namely:

1. Who are bound to provide that the confessions of the faithful be heard?
2. What kind of obligation binds these persons?
3. When are these persons bound to hear confession?

PERSONS BOUND TO HEAR CONFESSIONS

With regards to the first question, canon 986, § 1 is clear. It says: "*All to whom by virtue of office the care of souls is committed, are bound to provide for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them.*" It can be asked again:

who *by virtue of their office* are entrusted the care of souls? The answer is as follows: a) all parish priests, local as well as personal (cc. 515, 518, 528 § 2, 524); b) quasi-parish priests (c. 516); c) the priest moderator as well as the other priests taking care *in solidum* of a parish or several parishes (c. 517, § 1); d) the priest assigned to a parish committed to a deacon or to a person who is not a priest or to a community (c. 517, § 2); e) the religious parish priest (c. 520); f) a parish administrator (cc. 539, 540); g) the parish vicar (cc. 541, 545); h) the priest penitentiary (c. 508, § 2); i) the rector of a church (c. 556); j) chaplains (c. 564); k) diocesan Bishops (cc. 381, 968); l) local Ordinaries (c. 968, § 1); m) superiors of religious institutes or of societies of apostolic life of pontifical right (c. 968, § 2); confessors of religious (c. 630, §§ 1-2).

SERIOUS OBLIGATION OF JUSTICE

Canon 213 points out a basic right of the faithful when it says: "Christ's faithful have the right to be assisted by their pastors from the spiritual riches of the Church, especially by the Word of God and the Sacraments." Thus, the faithful have a right to receive a catechetical formation (cc. 776-777), Christian instruction (c. 811), reception of the sacraments (c. 843), especially Confirmation (c. 883), Viaticum (c. 911), Penance (can. 986), Anointing of the Sick (c. 1003).

Priesthood in itself is ordained to the service of the people of God. It is not a gift for the benefit of the priest himself. It is a gift to be used for the spiritual growth of the faithful. The above-mentioned persons are further bound *by virtue of their office* to provide that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them be heard, as canon 986 says. There exists some kind of implicit contract between them and their respective subjects, by virtue of which the faithful are bound to provide them what is necessary for their sustenance and the sacred ministers are obliged by "commutative justice" to take care of their spiritual needs. Authors dealing with this matter say that this obligation is a serious one.

PERSONAL OBLIGATION

The obligation of hearing confession is *personal*; it may be complied with, however, through a substitute. It is a personal obligation because it is attached to the office held. Canon 986, § 1 says: "All to whom by *virtue of office* the care of souls is committed..." The office they hold was given to them *intuitu personae* (c. 149). With regards to parish priests, for instance, canon 524 says: "The diocesan Bishop is to confer a vacant parish *on the one whom*, after consideration of all the circumstances, *he judges suitable for the parochial care of that parish*, without any preference of persons. In order to assess suitability, he is to consult the vicar forane, conduct suitable inquiries and, if it is appropriate, seek the view of some priests and lay members of Christ's faithful." Therefore, the obligation attached to the office is *personal*. Hence, the obligation to hear confession is the *pastor's obligation*, unless he is lawfully prevented, in which case he can comply through a substitute.

REASONABLE REQUEST

Canon 968, § 1 says that this obligation exists when the faithful *reasonably* request confession. The *Ordo Paenitentiae*, no. 10-b says that the confessor is to show himself ready to hear confessions of the faithful when they *reasonably* request him to do so. The Vatican II expressed the same idea by saying: "In the performance of their duty in the sacrament of Penance, they show themselves altogether and always ready whenever the sacrament is *reasonably* sought by their faithful" (Decree on the *Ministry of Life of Priests*, n. 13).

What does the term "reasonably" mean? In other words, when is the request of the faithful to be heard in confession *reasonable*? The request is to be considered *reasonable* in the following cases: a) when the faithful need to confess in order to fulfill a precept, like the yearly obligation to confess; b) in danger of death; c) when they are supposed to receive Holy Communion, as when they are getting married; d) *when they*

wish to confess in order to grow spiritually (cc. 213, 843 § 1, 991). Their request to make their confession is undoubtedly reasonable in these cases. And notice that the Church law states emphatically that "sacred ministers *may not deny the sacraments* to those who *opportunately* ask for them, are properly, disposed and not prohibited by law from receiving them" (c. 843, § 1).

TIME FOR CONFESSIONS

On the part of the confessor it will be right if he sets apart certain hours for confessions, provided of course, that these hours are convenient for the faithful. Canon 986 expressly states that *days and times convenient for the faithful* are to be arranged for their confessions. The *Ordo Paenitentiae*, n. 13 states: "The reconciliation of penitents may be celebrated in all liturgical seasons and on any day. But it is right that the faithful be informed of the *day and hours at which the priest is available for this ministry.*"

The *Ordo Paenitentiae* adds: "They should be encouraged to approach the sacrament of Penance at times when Mass is not being celebrated and preferably *at the scheduled times.*" The reason why the faithful should be encouraged to make their confessions outside the Mass is because in this way, "the administration of the sacrament of Penance may be unhurried and the people will not be impeded from active participation in Mass."

Needless to say that a confessor will never refuse to hear confessions outside the appointed hours, if individual necessity requires it and the confessor is available. Pope John Paul II said to all priests: "The ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to you, priests. Be ministers who are *always worthy, ready, zealous, available, patient, serene*, following with faithful diligence the norms established in this matter by the ecclesiastical authority. The faithful will thus be able to find this sacrament as authentic sign and instrument of spiritual rebirth and of gladdening interior freedom" (Message to the Congress

on *Penance and Reconciliation*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 7, 1983).

UNREASONABLE REQUEST

The foregoing being borne in mind, we can deduce that the request of the faithful to be heard in confession will be *unreasonable* when they want to make their confessions several times a day, or at an inopportune time, or because of scruples. Aside from these instances, the will of the Church is that the faithful should have easy access to the confessional and not be hindered easily from the reception of the sacrament of Penance.

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION

At the end of the first paragraph of canon 986, we read the following: "And they (the pastors) are to provide the faithful with an opportunity to make *individual confessions* on days and times arranged to suit them." In this clause, the pastors of souls are reminded of the clear norm contained in canon 960 which reads: "Individual and integral confession constitutes the sole and ordinary means by which a member of the faithful who is conscious of grave sin is reconciled with God and with the Church. *Physical or moral impossibility alone excuses from such confession*, in which case reconciliation may be attained by other means also." Pope John Paul II reminded the faithful of this norm in his Bull of *Indiction of the Jubilee for the 1950 Anniversary of Redemption*, when he said: "My principal wish is that fundamental importance be given to... *individual and complete sacramental confession*, wherein takes place the encounter between man's misery and God's mercy, and the worthy reception of Eucharistic Communion." And in his Message to the Congress on *Penance and Reconciliation*, he said: "And all of you, brothers, celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation with great confidence in the mercy of God, in full adherence to the ministry of the Church, *with individual confession*, as repeatedly recommended by the new Code of Canon Law, for the pardon and peace of the disciples of the Lord, and as the efficacious announcement of the Lord's goodness to every-

one. 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." (Apostolic Exhortation on *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, December 2, 1984).

And the Pope insisted once again on *individual confession* when he said: "This form of reconciliation makes possible a highlighting of the more personal — and essential — aspects which are included in the penitential process. The dialogue between the penitent and the confessor, the sum of the elements used... make the sacramental celebration correspond more closely to the concrete situation of the penitent. The value of this element is perceived when one considers the different reasons which 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, this 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 reconciliation of individual penitents*" (Apostolic Exhortation on *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, December 2, 1984).

IN EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

Canon 986, § 2 says: "In urgent necessity, every confessor is bound to hear the confessions of Christ's faithful, and in danger of death every priest is so obliged." An *urgent necessity* can be one when there is an epidemic, in time of war, when

there is a great number of faithful, which has not been foreseen... There is also an *urgent necessity* when those bound to hear confessions are suddenly prevented and it is not possible to substitute them. On these occasions, *every confessor at hand is bound to hear the confession of the faithful.*

KIND OF OBLIGATION

The 1917 Code, canon 892 stated that the obligation of these confessors is *ex caritate*. It reads as follows: "In urgent cases *all confessors* and, in case of danger of death, *all priests* are obliged *in charity* to hear confessions." Authors hold the opinion that priests who have no care of souls, refusing to hear confessions of the faithful who reasonably request for it, are bound to hear confession *sub levi* if the petition is made *extra necessitatem*. However if the request is made in *gravi necessitate*, the confessor is bound *sub gravi*, if he can hear the confession without serious inconvenience; *sub gravi* also, if a serious inconvenience existing, there is *true necessity* on the part of the faithful.

Pope John Paul II commented on our priestly obligation to hear confessions when he said: "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*" (Pastoral Exhortation on *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, December 2, 1984).

The second paragraph of canon 986 is a reproduction of paragraph 2 of canon 892 of the 1917 Code. There is a difference, however. The 1917 Code expressly stated that the obligation binding the confessor mentioned in said paragraph is an obligation of *charity*. When a priest receives faculty to hear confessions, the Church binds him with an obligation of charity to carry on his ministry, so necessary for the souls. The obligation will not be serious when there is no urgent need

of the faithful to confess. However, the obligation will be *serious* if the faithful request confession in case of *grave necessity*, for instance when they could not otherwise fulfill their yearly obligation or receive a sacrament (confirmation, order, marriage).

IN DANGER OF DEATH

Any priest enjoys the faculty to absolve the faithful in danger of death, even if he has not been granted such faculty in the normal way (can. 976). His obligation to hear confession in such circumstances is logically *serious*.

PRIORITY OVER OTHER ACTIVITIES

Pope John Paul II commented beautifully on our readiness to hear confessions when he said in his *Letter to All Priests* in 1986: "Sacramental forgiveness will always require a personal encounter with the crucified Christ through the mediation of his minister. Unfortunately, it is often the case that penitents do not fervently hasten to the confessional, as in the time of the Curé of Ars... Christians need to be reminded of the conditions that enable the sacrament to be celebrated well, and in this regard to overcome prejudices, baseless fears and routine. Such a situation at the same time requires that *we ourselves should remain very available for this ministry of forgiveness, ready to devote to it the necessary time and care, and I would even say giving priority over other activities. The faithful will then realize the value that we attach to it, as did the Curé of Ars.*"

And we conclude with the beautiful words of Pope John Paul II: "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 the 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!" (Apostolic Exhortation on *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, December 2, 1984).

SANCTITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

FR. PABLO FERNANDEZ, O.P.

Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo

Foundress of the Religious of the Virgin Mary

Among the flowers of sanctity that in the distant past have decorated and filled with their perfume the garden of the Church in the Philippines, Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, foundress of the Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM), rightly deserves to occupy a prominent place, not only for the holiness of her life but also for her beneficial influence, through the instrumentality of her daughters, on the spiritual well-being of the Philippines especially in the educational and mission fields.

Due to this and also to the praiseworthy diligence of the RVM sisters, the process of beatification will soon be initiated and some day — it is to be hoped — we shall honor her as the second Filipino Saint.

It is for these reasons that we thought of making her better known to our readers so that they may also cooperate, at least with their prayers, in the effort to obtain her glorification.

In the midst of the meager information that history has bequeathed to us about her, we have not found a better source than the narrative of Father Pedro Murillo Velarde in his *Historia de la provincia de Filipinas de la Compañía de Jesús*, Manila, 1749, pp. 809-810, as translated by Sister Rita Ferraris, RVM. It is as follows:

"The *Casa de Recogidas* at the back of our College of Manila began in the year 1684. Because these women frequented our church to assist at Mass, receive the sacraments, perform their spiritual exercises and other devotions, they became popularly known as the *Beatas de la Compania*.

"This institution was started by Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, a *mestiza* from Binondo, who, when she was twenty-one years old, seeing that her parents wished her to get married, resolved to become a *beata* at the *Beaterio de Sto. Domingo*. Desiring to prepare herself by a general confession, she went to our College to confess to Fr. Paul Klein, who advised her to examine herself in retirement at the house designated for the *Madre de la Congregacion*. It is my personal deduction that the house referred to is the one occupied by the Japanese *beatas* in the *doctrina de San Miguel* — refer to excerpt from Colin.) There God inspired her to remain in the service of His Majesty, and although she still had parents who could decently support her, she resolved to earn her livelihood by the "sweat of her brow" with the needle and pair of scissors she brought from home.

"Much later she was visited by her niece, Christina Gonzales, who remained upon her urgings. Eventually the number of her companions grew to nine, among whom were Teodora de Jesus and Ana Margarita.

"The fame of the exemplary life led in that house spread, and numerous native girls and *mestizas* from various towns joined them until they numbered thirty-three. Since the house was small and the group did not have enough resources for the maintenance of many, Mother Ignacia suspended the admission of more members until the house could be enlarged.

"They lived in great poverty, subsisting almost only on a little rice and a little salt which they begged from Fr. Andres Serrano, Rector of the College of St. Joseph. They used to scrounge the streets for firewood. M. Ignacia exhorted her companions to bear with constancy their difficulties and poverty, and encouraged them to make penance in order to move God to have mercy on them.

"M. Ignacia used to wear a halter on her neck and the others dragged her through the house, bearing a heavy cross on her shoulders; sometimes she prostrated on the ground for the others to step on her; she extended her arms in the form of a cross under the heat of the noon-day sun. The others imitated her, every night they used the discipline, slept very little but spent most of the night in prayer. They were often in darkness for scarcity of fuel. They used to have supper while there was still daylight, or else, on moonlight nights they had supper at the *batalan*, using banana leaves, because they had no plates.

Because of these hardships and the rigorous penances practised, most of the *beatas* fell ill.

"They solicited alms as far as Pampanga where they were given so much: two bancas and the contents thereof. Such was the fragrance that permeated the city by their way of life, prayer, frequency of the sacraments and penances that not only the Spaniards but also *mestizas* and natives gave them many donations. With these donations and the income from their sewing they were able to enlarge the house and maintain more than thirty *beatas*.

"Since the membership had so increased, their confessors and spiritual fathers gave them a set of rules for a stable community life, with a variety of employments and an excellent schedule. In the morning they had their prayers, then went to church where they assisted at several Masses. On their return they worked on their sewing, pounded rice, cooked, etc. They had spiritual reading, examination of conscience, public penances and acts of mortification, and other devotional exercises. They confessed and communicated frequently, made the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* yearly in several groups. A priest gave the points of meditation in Tagalog in one of the chapels of the church where they gathered for their devotions.

"They had teachers for various things. They assisted at all sermons and other religious functions in our church. As they daily increased in number, they also grew in perfection and in the esteem of the Islands.

"At present there are, besides the *beatas*, some Spanish pupils who learn to cook and other household chores, aside from Christian behavior and frequency of the sacraments. There are fifty *beatas antiguas* (perpetual vows), thirteen novices, thirty *recogidas* (native), twenty Spanish girls and four *negras*.

"Every year Spanish women, natives and *mestizas* of the Area gather for the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* from which followed great benefit to themselves and to their towns.

"What had always elicited my admiration is that, although they are numerous, all natives or *mestizas*, and governed by themselves, in the more than sixty years since their foundation, they have not given any cause for gossip in the country. On the contrary, they edified everyone with their piety, humility, industriousness and in the retreat work. May God grant them perseverance, and prevent the introduction of laxity or disorder that can destroy in a day the work of many years.

"The main benefactors had been D. Rafael del Barco, D. Juan Ignacio Bortis, D. Jose Sarmiento, D. Antonio, Governor Marques de Torre Campo, D. Jose de Salazar, Oidor Antonio Pabon, Bishop of N. Segovia, Sr. D. Geronimo de Herrera, and others.

"Mother Ignacia, foundress of this institution died on September 10, 1748. She was the genuinely valiant woman, overcoming not only the great difficulties met from the very foundation up to its completion, but more especially for having conquered with singular persistence the three species of indolence most arduous and difficult to overcome; those innate in the country natural to her sex, and congenital in the very entrails of the nation. She was mortified, patient, devout, spiritual, zealous for the good of souls, very humble, proved by her having abdicated spontaneously the government of that house, without allowing herself to be overcome by the desire to command, which can be likened to a woodborer that destroys even such hardwoods as the cedar or the hyssop.

"Her funeral took place in our church, and she was honored by the presence of ecclesiastics and other Spaniards who bore her coffin. Thus, after many hardships borne in her lifetime, she

rests in the peace of death and hope in the mercy of God that he will receive the reward of rest of glory which is the dawn of joyous consolation in eternity, after the sad evening of tears of this life."

Thus far, Father Murillo Velarde. In order to amplify his pitifully meager information, we shall bring in some excerpts of an article written by the Jesuit scientist Father Miguel Selgas, dated in 1948. Two centuries exactly had elapsed, since the authorities in Manila solicited the Royal Protection in favor of the *Beaterio de la Compañia*. "Since the year 1684, Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, a *mestiza* of Binondo, began forming the *Casa de Recogidas*, just behind our *Colegio de Manila*. In the year 1748, this Institute was only confined within the city limits of Manila, now it extends throughout the whole Philippine Archipelago; then, it was merely a diocesan congregation, now it boasts with gratitude of a "DECRETUM LAUDIS" from the Holy See. The members of this Institute in 1748, were simply pious women who sought seclusion in the *Casa de Recogidas*, now they are properly ecclesiastical persons known as the Religious of the Virgin Mary (R.V.M.) a title given to them by the Holy See; then it was a group of devout women, united among themselves by the bond of charity; now, it is a duly constituted Religious Congregation, which follows the norms dictated by the Holy See and whose members consecrate themselves to God by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Recently, I had the good fortune of coming in the Spanish archives across some documents which contain, not only laudable testimonials of praise for the *Casa de Recogidas*, but also documents which reveal the efforts made in Manila in the middle of the eighteenth century, to obtain from the King of Spain a Royal Protection in favor of the *Beaterio*. Some of the documents came from the ecclesiastical authorities, others from the State itself.

A. Declaration of the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Manila

The first document in their chronological order was the declaration made by the *Vicar General of the Archdiocese*, Dr.

Don Juan de la Fuente Yepes of Manila. Dr. de la Fuente studied for fourteen years in the Colegio de San Jose under the tutelage of the Fathers of the *La Compañia*, where he obtained the following degrees, after successfully passing the required examinations according to the Constitution of the College; Bachelor of Arts, Licentiate in Philosophy, Doctor of Scholastic and Moral Theology, Bachelor of Canon Laws. He likewise held several positions through successive promotions; Synodal Examiner, Official Provisory Judge, Judge of the Testaments, Chaplainship and Pious Works, Dean of the Cathedral, and Vicar General of the Archbishop. Dr. de la Fuente must have been generously endowed with extraordinary gifts and qualities to merit the Royal Appointment when in 1750 the Archbishop of Manila, *Fr. Pedro de la Sma. Trinidad*, who had been complaining of various sickness and infirmities, proposed to the King the designation of Dean, Dr. de la Fuente, as Auxiliary Bishop of Manila.

What the Vicar General thinks of the *Beaterio*, was revealed in his declaration as follows: "The pious woman in the *Casa de Recogidas* known as *La Compañia de Jesus* wear black habit with mantle of the same color. They support themselves by manual labor and by alms spontaneously given them by some pious and generous persons. They teach Christian Doctrine, good manners, domestic and household arts to young girls, Spaniards, *mestizas* and *indias* (natives). They receive also girls who need to be brought up to the right path, and married women whose husbands are absent. During the months of September, October and November, the Spiritual Exercises of Eight Days of St. Ignatius are given, to which women from all walks and stations of life are admitted and from which rich spiritual blessings are derived for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty."

B. Report of the Notary Major

Undoubtedly, the Archbishop of Manila must have told his Vicar of his intention of *writing to the King to ask for Royal Protection for the Beaterio* and of his ardent desire to obtain

authentic and creditable data about the *Casa de Recogidas*. The Vicar General, desirous of gathering all pertinent data to support the Archbishop's petition, *ordered the Chief Notary on July 13, 1748 to visit the Beaterio* and to make a complete list not only of the *Beatas*, their ages and number of years in seclusion, but also, of all the residents therein, whether Spaniards, natives single or married. He was asked to inquire further how many more or less made the retreat of St. Ignatius annually. Without losing time, the Chief Notary immediately went to the *Beaterio* and after three days, on *July 15, 1748 he submitted the result of his report* which is as follows:

"In the City of Manila and in the *Casa de Recogidas* called the *Beaterio de la Compañia de Jesus*, July fifteenth, seventeen hundred forty eight, I, the undersigned, in obedience to the above mentioned order, informed the *Superior, Dominga del Rosario*, fifty-eight years old and thirty-eight of seclusion, about my mission. She furnished me all data needed. (List of names was given).

SUMMARY: 50 *Beatas*

45 Girls (Spaniards, *mestizas*, natives)

1 Married woman

Retreatants: 150 *indias*, 200 Spaniards; 80
mestizas

The retreatants came from all the districts of Manila and neighboring towns.

"This list was made during the lifetime of the Foundress herself. IGNACIA DEL ESPIRITU SANTO WAS DESIGNATED WITH THE TITLE, FOUNDRESS. She heads the list in the catalogue not as a superior but simply as a mere MEMBER of the community. The superiorship has been handed down to Dominga del Rosario.

"In the catalogue, IGNACIA is listed as eighty-four years old putting her date of birth in or around the year 1664. The same happened with Murillo when he said that IGNACIA of about twenty-one years old founded the *Beaterio* somewhere in 1684.

"Two months had barely passed after the visit of *Gallardo*, when God deigned to call IGNACIA DEL ESPIRITU SANTO to her eternal reward. She, who had witnessed the beginning and progress of the petition, was unable to see the final outcome as the definite answer was not given till *seven years after, or on June 23, 1755*. IGNACIA DEL ESPIRITU SANTO, the Foundress of the *Beaterio* died in Manila on September 10, 1748 and was buried in the Church of the *La Compañia*. Her burial was honored by the presence of both Spaniards, lay officials and ecclesiastics, who bore her remains. I saw the certificate of her death in the book of the Intramuros parish in Manila which states that the deceased is considered a *saint*. It is impossible to see those records now, as all books of the Intramuros parish were either lost or destroyed during the bombardment and fire in Manila on February 1945."

C. Letter of His Excellency, the Archbishop of Manila to the King

The Archbishop Fr. *Pedro de la Sma. Trinidad Martinez Arizala*, being a very humble man renounced his worldly positions of Judge of the Royal Audience and Chancellor of Lima, to don the coarse habit of the Sons of St. Francis, so much so, that the Pope was obliged to force him, so to say, to accept the Metropolitan See of Manila. He arrived at Cavite on August 19, 1747 on the Galleon Ntra. Sra. del Rosario. A year after, he wrote the following letter to the King.

Sir: Among the many things I think worthwhile mentioning to your Majesty in my Archdiocese, is the presence of a small group of *pious* native women near the church of the *Colegio de la Compañia de Jesus*. They formed a community of their own to the great *edification of the whole city*. They wear black cotton tunic with a mantle of the same kind and color. They go daily to the nearby church of the *Colegio de la Compañia* for Mass and for their other spiritual exercises, and are under the spiritual direction of the Fathers of the college. They do not have enclosure, as they *support themselves partly through the work of their hands*

and partly on the charity of pious people. They do not go begging from door to door and if they are forced to *go out* to look for work, they go two by two *with great edification and modesty*. They admit as boarders, girls of the vicinity and teach Christian virtues and other household arts proper to girls. Because of limited space they cannot receive more than forty or fifty girls. Giving the spiritual retreat of St. Ignatius *for eight days yearly is one of their cherished works*. About two hundred women make this retreat in the nearby church of St. Ignatius, where the points of meditation are given them by the Fathers. The *beatas* help the Fathers by instructing the retreatants in the dialect in everything necessary to make a good retreat. Since these *pious women give much edification to all by their manner of living*; since they help the republic by educating and teaching the young, and since immeasurable spiritual benefits are derived from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* which they annually give, *I beg to appeal to your Majesty's clemency and benignity to favor these women, permission and approval to continue their Holy Life, serving as example to other natives*, for the glory of his Divine Majesty and common good of the Republic.

May God keep your royal person for many more years, Manila, July 19, 1748. The Archbishop of Manila.

In virtue of these and other recommendations King Ferdinand VI extended his Royal Protection to the *Beaterio of the Beatas de la Compañía*. The Papal approval would come many years later, that is, in 1907. The Beaterio had by then expanded far beyond its walls and the Spanish Royal Patronage had given way to a more direct intervention of the Holy See in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Philippines.

ON CONCELEBRATIONS

As early as the third century, several forms of concelebration already existed in the Western and Eastern Churches. The pre-Vatican II Roman Pontifical required concelebration at the ordination of priests and the consecration of bishops. These, however, were only exceptions to the rule. Can. 903 of the 1917 Code prohibited concelebrations by several priests. However, the Vatican II Constitution on Sacred Liturgy derogated from this canon. It permitted much wider opportunity for concelebration and directed the preparation of a concelebration rite which was promulgated by 1965.

Meaning of Concelebration

Etymologically, concelebration refers to persons celebrating together at the altar. In the wide sense, it signifies a liturgical celebration participated in by several ministers, each carrying out his proper ministry. In the strict sense, it means several priests celebrating the Eucharist and together pronouncing the words of consecration making it a true eucharistic celebration. For if they do not pronounce the words of consecration together, it is merely a "ceremonial" concelebration.

The elements of concelebration are the following: (1) two or more priests offering the Eucharist together; (2) a possible plurality of intentions for the Mass; and (3) the *singleness*

(*unicit *) of the matter consecrated, i.e., the host(s) and the chalice(s) are one or at least *per modum* one. If each priest in the same concelebration were to have his own host and his own chalice, rather than a concelebration, what would be celebrated would be a "synchronized" Mass.

Purposes of Concelebration

Concelebration has two purposes: (1) to manifest the unity of the sacrifice and of the priesthood; and (2) to signify and strengthen the bonds of fraternity among priests.

These are the underlying reasons for concelebration and not the greater external solemnity that may seemingly be afforded to the liturgical service. However, utmost care must also be taken in order to ensure that the concelebration is carried out in a dignified way and with true piety fostering the greatest possible spiritual good. In view of this, internal and external participation in the Mass must be enhanced by its genuine and integral celebration according to the liturgical norms laid down in the INSTITUTIO GENERALIS MISSALIS ROMANI. All parts of the Mass must be carried out in accordance with their nature. The differences of offices and ministries must be respected. Due importance must be given to chant and to the periods when sacred silence is prescribed.

Required, Recommended and Forbidden

The GENERAL INSTRUCTION of the (Revised) Roman Missal requires concelebration at the ordinations of bishops and priests and at the Chrism Mass.

Moreover, unless the needs of the faithful require otherwise, it recommends concelebration at the evening Mass of Holy Thursday; at the Mass for councils, meetings of bishops, or synods; at the Mass for the blessing of an abbot; at the conventual Mass and the principal Mass in churches and oratories;

and at the Mass for any kind of gathering of priests, either secular or religious.

Furthermore, individual Masses are forbidden when there is a concelebration occurring in the same place, i.e. church or oratory.

Right and Obligation to Say Individual Masses

A priest may concelebrate for purposes stated above. But care must be taken to respect the complete freedom of each priest to celebrate individually except, of course on the occasions, which we have just mentioned. This freedom should even be fostered through the extension of all the required facilities for individual celebration so that the priest is enabled to nourish his personal piety with what constitutes, as it were, the heart of priestly life.

The whole purpose and foremost obligation of a priest as minister is to serve the faithful. The good of the faithful is, therefore, the criterion which must prevail over all others. While it is true that the unity of the people of God is expressed in a special way each time the faithful actively participate in a concelebration, the individual celebration of Holy Mass may nevertheless become obligatory whenever there is need to provide the faithful with the chance to attend Holy Mass in different places and at different hours, or should some other pastoral reason so dictate.

It was in view of the scarcity of priests that can. 905, 2 was promulgated by virtue of which the ordinary may authorize the same priest to celebrate twice on one day or even three times on Sundays and holydays of obligation, in the Philippines, even three on weekdays and four times on Sundays and holydays of obligation. In cases like this, it would hardly be reasonable — as a rule — to hold a concelebrated Mass in the same Church or in some nearby place.

Interdenominational and Inter-ritual Concelebration

The Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity mentions the issue of "common Eucharistic celebration jointly celebrated by ministers belonging to separated churches and ecclesial communities" as early as 1970. In 1972, it affirmed the basic principle that "of its very nature, the celebration of the Eucharist signifies the fullness of the profession of faith and ecclesial communion." Hence, the Code says that Catholic priests are forbidden to concelebrate the Eucharist with priests or ministers of churches or ecclesial communities which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church (can. 908).

It is not like the *communicatio in sacris* as regards the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing. Not even with the separated Eastern Churches. This, because *communicatio in sacris* may be done either to share grace or for unity. But concelebration is done to express the unity of the sacrament and of the priesthood as well as to signify and strengthen the fraternal bonds among priests. Therefore, if there is *communicatio in sacris* by concelebration, it must be for the expression of unity. However, this is impossible because in this concelebration, it is precisely this unity which is absent. Besides, divine law itself forbids the mutual sharing in sacred things which runs counter to the unity of the Church or which involves formal adhesion to error or the danger of aberration in the faith, of scandal or indifference.

This prohibition is reinforced by the *just penalty* prescribed in can. 1365.

Concelebration among Catholic of diverse rites, however, is not excluded by this canon. Permission for it can be obtained from the apostolic nuncio, pro-nuncio or other papal legate. In such instances, only the rite of the host Church may be used, but concelebrants may wear the vestments of their own rite.

Communion under both Kinds

Communion under both kinds is expressly permitted by the GENERAL INSTRUCTION of the Roman Missal and repeated by the Appendix of the Instruction *Sacramentali Communionem* when there is concelebration. In such occasions, all including the laity who perform a genuine liturgical ministry plus all seminarians who are present may receive communion under both species. Also, all the members of an institute professing the evangelical counsels, and other societies whose members dedicate themselves to God by religious vows or promises including all those who live in the houses of these institutes and societies may receive communion under both species provided that the the concelebrated Mass be held in their own church or chapel.

Priests who are present at important celebrations and yet are not able personally to celebrate or concelebrate may also receive the Eucharist in the same way.

Offering for a Concelebration

A priest may not take another offering, even one on behalf of his ordinary, when he concelebrates on the same day that he celebrates or concelebrates another Mass. For example, if a priest concelebrates a funeral in the morning and celebrates a Mass later in the day for the faithful, he may accept an offering for only one of these Masses. However, if the priest presides at a concelebrated Mass and must also preside at one or more additional Masses that day, he may receive offerings from each Mass, though retaining only one for himself and giving the others to the cause prescribed by the ordinary.

However, while the priest may not retain more than one offering each day, he may be compensated for celebrating additional Masses by virtue of some extrinsic title. Hence, there is no objection against the priest receiving some compensation

on the grounds of some title extrinsic to the Mass itself and which, therefore, would not have anything to do with the Mass offerings. For example, for long distance travel, singing in the Mass, preaching, etc.

Competence of the Diocesan Bishop and Major Religious Superior

It especially belongs to the bishop or to the competent authority to see to it that all the above norms that we have discussed are observed. The bishop, in accord with law, has the right to regulate concelebration in his diocese, even in churches and oratories of the exempt. He can prohibit concelebration in any other church at a time when there is a concelebration in the cathedral. He shall prevent abuses, safeguard the celebration of single Masses for the welfare of the faithful and make prescriptions regarding the observance of the ritual and the discipline or other things concerning concelebration.

In the churches of religious, it is the competence of the major religious superior to judge the opportuneness of a concelebration; to grant the permission to concelebrate and to determine, if necessary, the number of concelebrants.

HOMILIES FOR NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER - YEAR B -

Our Three Christmases

MARK 13:33-37

1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
NOVEMBER 29, 1987

Beginnings of ends are usually reflective times, occasions for pondering.

We ended the Liturgical Year A with the feast of Christ the King of the Universe. We are now on the First Sunday of Advent, at the beginning of Liturgical Year B.

Advent has something to do with waiting, of course. The word "advent" derives from the Latin *adventus*. Advent means "coming," and it implies a kind of arrival for which a welcome is due — like the arrival of an invited guest for dinner. In other words, Advent is a special season of anticipation.

Anticipation of what? Of Christmas, of course! But what we need to ponder now is: (1) that the purpose of this Advent season of the Church is primarily spiritual, not material, and, (2) that there are indeed three Christmasses that this season of Advent is all about.

Advent is an anticipation of the first Christmas, the one we know so well, that is, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world through his birth at Bethlehem. Jesus was born, "a man like us in all things but sin," in order to teach us how to live both by his word and by his example. He won for us our freedom from sin and gave us the means to fulfill the purpose of human existence. Now he has left his human home, this earth, to go to his Father's home in heaven. But he will return. There will be a second Christmas.

This second Christmas is the coming of Christ into the world at the end of time. Then he will come not as an infant, any more but as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, to judge the living and the dead.

At his Second Coming, Jesus will want to know how we have followed his teachings and what use we have made of the means he has given us to make something of our lives.

However, our expectation of the second Christmas should be a joyful and happy one, in much the same spirit as we await our celebration of Christmas Day. Although Jesus is certainly no Santa Claus, he will come as a gift-giver, and we should have our list of desired presents ready for him, a list that may need a little revising and updating. Of course, we all want the gift of happiness, but perhaps in the past our list has been a little childish in what we have been asking for in our prayer — things like financial success, health, the overcoming of fear, loneliness and frustrations. All these things are worth asking for, yes, but we must remember that they are like so many presents we get at Christmas which do not last very long. In comparison with what Jesus has to offer, they are actually scarcely better than some inexpensive toy with which a child

plays for a while but soon breaks or tires of. The gift that Jesus wants to give is eternal life — something impossible for us to imagine, for “no ear has ever heard, no eye has ever seen the wonderful gift that God has for those who wait in joyful hope for the coming of the Lord.”

Jesus in today's Gospel; tells us to wait, stay awake. He says: “Be on watch, be alert.” You have observed small children who on Christmas Eve want to stay awake for the coming of Santa Claus. But, children that they are, they cannot keep their eyes open, despite all the eagerness and impatience.

Children you and I are no longer. We cannot afford to fall asleep because of weariness in our struggle to be faithful to the teaching of Christ. Nor must we grow impatient, thinking that Jesus will never come to right the wrongs of this world and to give us the present he has promised.

Thirdly, Advent is an anticipation of Christ's being born anew in our hearts through a revived eucharistic encounter during the four weeks of Advent and, very especially on Christmas Day.

We are now approaching the closing of our National Eucharistic Year celebrations. As we come over to encounter Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, let us fervently pray that God grant us the realization of the theme of the year's celebration: “One Bread, One Body, One People.”

In Joyful Hope

MARK 1:1-8

2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 6, 1987

Being now on the second Sunday of Advent, we would expect the Gospel reading to center around the birth of Jesus. But the Gospel we just heard, which in fact is the beginning of the Gospel of St. Mark, seems to be a strange starting point. St. Mark takes up his narrative when Jesus was already a grown man, heralded by John the Baptist.

You see, St. Mark in his Gospel is not so much concerned with the fact that Jesus was born as he is with the reason why Jesus was born and came into our world. The main purpose of his Gospel was to present Jesus as the Savior, as the Man-God who came to lead man back to God.

This approach of St. Mark should make us stop and think. Very surely, we treasure the beautiful stories of Christ's birth as found in St. Matthew and especially in St. Luke. But for some people Christmas seems to mean little more than a charming narrative which serves as a setting for a myriad of carols.

No doubt this year we will again hear the plea: "Bring Christ back to Christmas." This plea really needs to be made. But this plea is not heeded merely by making sure that our Christmas cards depict a Nativity scene or even by placing a "Belen" next to or under the Christmas tree. These things we should really do, but they have meaning only if we do them

with the realization of why God the Father gave us the first Christmas gift, his own Son, and with faith in what Jesus came to accomplish.

The beginning of St. Mark's Gospel makes us think back to the past, to the beginning of our human history. In the beginning, God made man in His own image and likeness, and set him over the whole world to serve Him and to rule over all creatures. Our first parents had the ability to know God and to love Him — to be His friends.

But they lost God's friendship through sin, something that human beings have been doing ever since. As a result our world fell into turmoil, filled with confusion, hatred and greed leading to death.

And yet God did not give up on His creation or abandon the human race. "Again and again God offered a renewal of friendship, and through the prophets taught men to hope for salvation." Slowly and gradually, people began to realize that one day God would send a personal Savior to right the wrongs of the world, and firmly establish a relationship of love and friendship between Himself and the human race.

When we celebrate Christmas let us please remember that we are commemorating the birth of Jesus our Savior whose coming marked the turning point in human history.

Jesus came as a Savior because of a long history of failure on the part of human beings. No doubt, Jesus has given us the means of salvation. But you all can perceive that our world is still filled with confusion, hatred and greed leading to death.

As a matter of fact, the coming of Jesus stands between two extremes of human history, its beginning and its end. It took long centuries of waiting for God to send Jesus into the world, and it is taking long centuries of waiting before the saving work of Jesus takes full effect.

Let us celebrate Christmas in our own traditional way, in the spirit of joy, with all the decorations and carols, with the food and the gifts of the season.

In this season of Advent, when in our Advent hymns and prayers we say "Come, Jesus, come. Come, Lord Savior, come," let us really mean what we say. And we mean to say that "we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ," that coming to put in full effect the saving work of Jesus in our own personal and community life. We mean to say that we will do our best "to be pure and faultless in God's sight and to be at peace with Him."

"Joy to the world," yes: but we should not fail to realize that happiness of Christmas is only a shadow of what still awaits us in the Second Coming of Christ. Let us not forget that we are a people of hope who yearn for the saving work of Jesus to take its full effect to establish "a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will be at home."

At the Service of the Lord

LUKE 1:26-38

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
PRINCIPAL PATRONESS
OF THE PHILIPPINES,
DECEMBER 8, 1987

Today we are celebrating a feast which is significant for us not only as Catholics, but also as Filipinos. Mary, immaculately conceived, is the principal patroness of our country.

This explains why there is seldom a Filipino who cannot sing the "O Virgen Maria"... why the recitation of the Holy Rosary is a widespread devotion in the Philippines.

As far as the Blessed Mother is concerned, the message of today's Gospel is not that Mary was just "served notice" that she was to conceive and give birth to the Son of God. She was not served notice, she was "called" by God to cooperate with Him in His Saving Plan. Mary was requested by God to do Him a service that He needed. The difference between the two concepts is considerable.

In the first place, the request made by God shows that Mary is called to accept willingly and freely the request of service to God.

In the second place, an acceptance of God's request implies a personal resolve and involvement of Mary in the discharge of the service requested; it requires a personal and conscious commitment to God's work, to God's service.

In the third place, a request of God freely and willingly accepted by Mary discloses the real meaning of the self-definition of Mary as "the handmaid (servant) of the Lord."

God's calling is that Mary serve God as a mother. This is the specific service that God needs and requests. Mary accepts to do this service, and it is that the definition, "the Handmaid of the Lord," expresses. From another point of view, however, Mary is requested to be the Mother of the Messiah, the person towards whom all the aspirations and expectations of the Old Testament were directed, the purpose and goal of the entire history of salvation, the key element in God's salvation projects, and, in fact, the greatest Redeemer and Savior of all times, at the service of God.

It was this saving instrument that Mary had to provide. Far beyond that, God was choosing and requesting Mary to be the human mother of His Divine Son. St. Paul said: "In the fullness of time God sent His Son born of a woman" (Gala-

tians 4:4), and this woman was Mary of whom the Son of God was born "according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3).

Theologians will continue to debate whether such a privilege could be merited. The Sacred Liturgy teaches us, at any event, that when God rewards the merits of his beloved, he glorifies the work of his own grace, power and mercy.

From our point of view, however, it is all too obvious that a mere human creature of our large family was distinguished with such a privilege. It was Mary of Nazareth, and no one else, who was picked by the Lord to serve in such a close, familiar and intimate collaboration with God in His grandiose saving project. It is a distinction and a privilege beyond all imagination. As a daughter of our human family, Mary is one of us, she is one of our sisters in this large human family, and this is why we feel that her distinction is an honor for all of us, and her privilege is a glory for all of us.

This is the foundation of our reverence, of our veneration, of our pride and of our love for this admired sister chosen among thousands and millions to be elevated to that intimacy with God and to be entrusted, not with the household of God, but with what God Himself treasured most: his only begotten and beloved Son. The Blessed Mother Mary, principal patroness of our native land, is in all truth "the exaltation and the pride of our people, the highest boast of our human race."

During this Mass and whenever we say, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee," let us ask God to make us understand the role of Mary in our lives as Filipinos, she being our principal patroness and consequently our model and guide in the service of the Lord.

One Whom We Do not Recognize

JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 13, 1987

Let us now focus our thoughts on the statement of St. John the Baptist who said: "There is one among you whom you do not recognize."

We who read this particular Gospel today, are aware that St. John was referring to Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Son of God.

We might as well borrow the words of Bishop Teodoro Bacani who wrote in his "little book," *THE EUCHARIST AND THE FILIPINO*: "Indeed, in the Eucharist Christ who loves us, and whom we should love even more than our very selves, makes himself present, really present to us, in at least four ways: he is present when we gather together to celebrate the Eucharist, for he promised that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is also present in the person of his minister who acts with the power of Christ. He is present finally in a most excellent way, in his own body and blood under the appearance of bread and wine, after the consecration (SC, no. 7).

"We know by faith that Christ remains present in the consecrated bread that is reserved in the tabernacle after the Mass. He remains with us, not for his consolation but for ours. Our Lord, Savior, Friend and Brother awaits us as if saying, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened." (Mt. 11:28) When we have no one else to turn to, Christ is always there. If we need somebody with whom to share our joys, Jesus remains present to share our joy" (THE EUCHARIST AND THE FILIPINO, pp. 20-21).

We consider as religious and devout those who regularly attend Sunday Mass. But as you know, a survey conducted by a Catholic agency revealed that of all those regular Sunday Mass-goers only fifteen percent (15%) really know the meaning of the eucharistic sacrifice. Only fifteen percent of our "religious and devout" are consequently aware of the here and now presence of Christ in our world today.

The other eighty-five percent (85%) of our "religious and devout" attend Sunday Mass, out of habit (I was attending Mass every Sunday since I was this high), or out of fear of committing a mortal sin, or out of a childish attempt to flatter God into granting some favors ("I will take the board exams next year").

The presence of the Lord Jesus to us in the Eucharist is not a static presence, not a merely local presence, but a personal and a dynamic presence. Which means that Jesus is in our midst, aware of us, loving us in a way only he in his glorified state is capable of, and offering himself to the Father and to us for our salvation.

Let us then reflect upon and strive to live by these magnificent truths of the presence in our midst of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, so that it cannot be said to us: "There is one among you whom you do not recognize."

God's Christmas Preparations

LUKE 1:26-38

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
DECEMBER 20, 1987

Today's Gospel is the so-called Annunciation narrative. If a question were asked: Who is the "Star" or the central figure of the Gospel narrative, a good number of us will answer: "Mary, of course!"

But the truth is that the real protagonist of the entire episode is Jesus Christ himself. Whatever is said of Mary is said in regard to and in connection with Jesus. Whatever privileges and favors Mary was granted were given to her for the sake of Jesus. Mary is like the moon who gets her light from the sun, Christ.

We have been saying all along that Advent, the time before Christmas, is a time for preparation. With five days to go, we write last minute Christmas cards, we make a list of people who are expected to visit us and are expecting to be visited by us, we plan the menu: but the most important of all is the selecting of gifts for relatives and friends. We spend the most thought, time, trouble and expense on the gifts that will go to persons whom we love the most.

With or without being aware of it, we give gifts at Christmas only because God started the whole idea. The gifts that we give others are supposed to be a reminder of the great Gift God gave to us on the first Christmas.

God put a lot of time and trouble into the preparation of his Gift. In fact, the entire Old Testament is the story of his preparation, God was very patient and painstaking in his preparation. The Gift took a long time in coming, but all the waiting was worth it. God gave us a wonderful Gift. God loved us so much that he gave us his own Son.

When some people give you a Christmas gift, they go to great trouble to wrap it as elegantly as possible. Once in a while, the wrappings are so extravagant that you are disappointed when you open the gift.

God did just the opposite with his Gift. He wrapped his Gift in a plain, ordinary way, for Jesus did not come robed in the finery of regal elegance amid the splendid trappings of royal court in a leading city of the world.

Jesus, God's Gift, was born just as human as you and I except for sin, of Mary, a humble Jewish girl in an out-of-town place within the little known town of Bethlehem.

In today's Gospel St. Luke wants to tell us that Jesus is a direct gift of God himself. God intervenes now on behalf of mankind. And the child Jesus, God's gracious Gift, is not the result of human generation. Jesus is perfectly human, yes, but his "humanity" was not developed by man's generating power. He presents a new humanity, a new creation brought about by God's initiative and power, by "the power of the Most High," by the "Holy Spirit." It is God's mysterious and powerful action that from the living elements in Mary's womb develops a new human being just as at the beginning he developed the "first Adam" from the dust of the earth.

God wants to remain the only Father of his own Son. St. Luke wants to emphasize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, a human being developed by God's (not man's) power and that his only Father is God.

You and I are the ones who benefit by all the preparations God made. We are the ones who enjoy his precious Gift. Jesus has really been given to us. Though Jesus came at one point

in history, and in one definite place, his coming has value and significance for all men of all times and places. Jesus means everything to us.

It is no wonder that at Christmas we are joyful and happy. But besides being joyful and happy, we should be grateful to God for his Christmas Gift to us.

In the Preface of the Mass we say: "Father, all-powerful and living God, we do well always and everything to give you thanks..." When we reflect on the meaning of Christmas, we know that we have a special motive for thanksgiving at this time of the year. In this Mass, we should lift our minds and hearts and voices in gratitude to God who has been so generous with us.

Let us also think of Mary. In accordance with God's painstaking preparation, His Gift came wrapped in Mary's own gift, her unconditional consent to be Jesus' mother which she gave by her saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word."

And as we go about the final preparations for Christmas, we should let those preparations be a reminder to send us our great Gift, his own Son, wrapped in the virginal gift of the Blessed Mother Mary.

This wonderful Gift is the "One Bread" we all partake of in Holy Communion incorporating us into the "One Body" of Christ, hoping we would all be the "One People" of God.

An Exchange of Gifts

LUKE 2:1-14

CHRISTMAS DAY,
DECEMBER 25, 1987

In a certain family it was the custom for the youngest child who could read to distribute the gifts under the Christmas tree. Now it was little Inday's turn. When no more packages were left, Inday kept walking around the tree, looking high and low among its branches. Finally her father asked: "What are you looking for, my dear?"

To which Inday replied: "I am looking for Jesus' present. It is his birthday today. Where is His gift? I guess everybody forgot Him."

I hope none of you here now have been forgotten, that all of you will receive at least some of the gifts you wanted. Above all, I hope none of us forget Christ. You know, it is His birthday.

That is why we are having this celebration. This Mass that we are now celebrating, is truly an exchange of gifts.

We are now celebrating the greatest gift ever — our Father in heaven gives His own Son to all of us. There is no greater gift than God Himself, the Giver of good things. We relive the night (day), 1987 years ago, when the Son of God became a Man in the form of an Infant.

Christmas teaches us first of all that God is not merely a God transcendent — a God *out there*, a God who dwells only

in the heavens — but also a *God bestowed*, a God who wills to communicate himself to us so that He might draw us to Him in faith, hope and love.

Christmas also teaches us the reason why God *bestows* Himself: a reason only God could reveal, of course, since it is in His own mind.

The divine motive underlying the Incarnation — the En-fleshment of the Word of God — is love. The Father gives His supreme Gift to us, the Gift of His own Son, because He is in love with us.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God: Jesus mirrors God. The infant lying in the manger of Bethlehem is God manifested to us in human form, for love of us. God, while remaining God, became a true man because He loves us.

Now, how shall we accept God's supreme love-Gift?

First, with a profession of faith. In the readings God gives us His word, His truth. In return we give our attention and acceptance. God gives us faith in His truth. We return the gift by expressing and living our faith. God gives us eyes and brains and a voice. In turn we use our mind and voice to praise Him in song and prayer.

This Christmas, at the recitation of the "Creed" we are requested to kneel down during the words "He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man." By this we are invited to renew our affirmation of Christ as true God and true man: the way, the truth and the life.

Secondly, we are reminded today that as God comes to us in a manifestation of love, so we can approach God only through love. We must love God as Jesus loved. But since in Jesus God has joined Himself to mankind, love of God cannot be separated from love of our fellow men. In Christ God Himself has made men — all men — His brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, Christmas tells us that to be truly human, we must be Christ-like. Jesus is the perfect model of humanity; hence to fulfill ourselves as persons, we must imitate His way, follow His truth, live His life.

In few moments, we will notice two people bring wine and water up to the altar. They come from the congregation to show that all of us share in this gift to God. Bread and wine represent our work, our sacrifice, our generosity. By contributing to the *colecta* we show our part in this giving. In turn, God, through the words of His representative, the priest, changes that bread and wine into the living Body and Blood of His Son.

Jesus becomes present here on the altar just as really and truly present as He was present in that manger on the first Christmas night. More, that Infant gives Himself to each one of us in Holy Communion, again through the hands of His priest. At that moment we receive the Infant Christ into our hearts with every beat and throb of love.

May your Christmas be merry, here in God's house with the family of God, and with God's family in your home. That is my prayer and hope and wish for every one of you. Merry Christmas!

Duties of Parents

LUKE 2:22-40 or 2:22.39-40

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH
DECEMBER 27, 1987

The Gospel of today narrates that the child Jesus "grew and become strong; he was full of wisdom and God's blessings were upon him."

I was once invited to a house blessing where there was a good number of guests. The father wanted to show his three-year old child was endowed with a good memory.

Standing at the center of the room, the child fluently recited some poems which were double-meaning, crass and utterly obscene. After the recitation, I called to the child and asked him to recite the Lord's prayer. The boy could not say a word; he just looked with pleading eyes at his father. His round black pretty eyes seemed to say: "Daddy, how can I recite this when you have not taught this to me?"

Seeing the child and his father made me take pity on both.

We are now celebrating the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This *Sagrada Familia* is indeed the model of every Christian family. The family is, as you know, the basic unit of society.

One of the evils in our society today is the so-called "juvenile delinquency," root-cause of many other social evils like

truancy, drug addiction, drunkenness, sexual perversions, vandalism and other violent acts.

Whether we like it or not, "juvenile delinquency" is the inevitable product of "parental delinquency."

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, let us consider the duties of parents. Parents must provide for the spiritual and bodily welfare of their children.

As to their bodily welfare, parents must provide a minor with food and clothing, guard him from sickness and accidents, and give him suitable play and exercise. It is the duty of parents to exercise personal supervision, and not leave everything to the household help.

Those institutions called nurseries or day-care centers, however good they may be, and even if they are under the supervision of religious Sisters, should be resorted to only for grave reasons.

Parents must provide for a child's future by giving him an education that will develop his mind and character. They should also enable him to acquire some sort of training, trade or profession by which he may later become self-supporting.

Parents have no obligation to support their grown-up children. It is bad practice to continue supporting older children.

As to spiritual welfare, how should parents provide moral and religious training? Parents should begin early to give their child religious training.

As soon as the child can speak, he should be taught the ordinary prayers, and told of God and holy things. It is a very praiseworthy custom to have family prayers, in which all of the family participate.

A child should be made to say his morning and night prayers regularly. He should be taught his catechism and prepared for Confession and First Holy Communion; he should be made to attend Mass, and perform all his religious duties faithfully.

Parents must exercise continual vigilance to guard the child from moral evil.

As the child grows older, he should not be allowed excessive liberty, especially with regard to the company he keeps, and to staying out at night. Parents should always know where the child is, who his companions are, what he reads, what shows he sees.

Parents must correct the child's faults, taking care not to be either harsh or overindulgent. They must act with justice as well as mercy. They must treat all their children equally, and show no favoritism.

Parents who fly into a rage about a fault one day and laugh at the same fault another day can hardly expect their child to respect them. Parents who are too "good" to correct, chide, or punish a child who has committed grave faults are either stupid or lazy. They are bad parents, failing in their duties to God.

Parents must give good example to the child. Deeds are more powerful than words. If the parents neglect the sacraments, Mass on Sundays and Holydays, and other religious duties, they cannot well expect their child to be faithful.

Some parents think that just because they send their child to a good Catholic school, they have no further responsibility over his training. However good a school may be God did not give a child into its independent care, but into that of parents. Parents must train their children not only by precept, but chiefly by example. "By the fruit the tree is known."

During this Mass in honor of the Holy Family, let us thank God for many good parents. Let us ask the Lord that He grant us more and more good parents who in turn will give us good children.

MSGR. PASTOR YBAÑEZ

HOMILETICAL NOTES

*1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29, 1987*

FIRST READING:

ISAIAH 63:16b-17; 64:1.3b-8
(Heb. 63:16b-17.19b; 64:2b.7)

THE text in today's first reading is a part of a psalm most probably composed during the first years of the return of the exiles from Babylon by an author of the Isaian school. Jerusalem was in ruins and the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. was not yet rebuilt. Thus this psalm dates before 515 B.C. but definitely after the exile.

The expression "Yahweh, you are our Father" has a very important implication in this passage. The phrase is repeated three times in this text alone: twice in verse 16 and once in 64:7. The fatherhood of Yahweh is here given a prominent contrast with the relationship which the Israelites have towards Abraham and Israel, the patriarchs. In verse 16b the expression "our Father" is in parallelism with "our Redeemer." Hence redemption is a special action on the part of God which truly entitles the redeemed to that father-son relationship with Yahweh imparting a special kind of life and not only "being" as in Deuteronomy 32:6 and in 64:7 of this reading.

It is this invocation of Yahweh, our Father, which emboldens the psalmist to ask God to return and intervene on their behalf who were still suffering because of their ruined temple.

SECOND READING:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

THE initial formula of this passage is a favorite expression of St. Paul found in all his epistles. Grace and peace spell out the whole salvific process brought about by God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is a gratuitous favor or grace from the Father which bears the fruit of peace, to be understood according to its Hebrew sense (*shalom*) as total well-being.

Although the Greek sentence can be understood in two ways, the two meanings are not contradictory. The genitive "of the Lord Jesus Christ" may refer to "grace and peace" and thus together with the Father he is also the source of these favors. Hence the Jerusalem Bible (JB) translates: "May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace." However the phrase could also refer to the Father which may mean: "Father of ours and of the Lord Jesus Christ." The Father would indeed be the direct source of grace and peace given to us as brothers of the Lord Jesus.

After this salutary greeting St. Paul expresses his unceasing gratitude precisely for all those divine favors which the Corinthians have received from the Father through the intercession of the Lord Jesus.

GOSPEL READING:

MARK 13:37-37

THE context of this parable of the unexpected coming of the master of the household is quite different in St. Matthew (12:45-51) and in St. Luke (12:42-46) with some variant details from that of St. Mark which is the liturgical reading of today's Mass. St. Matthew is closer to Mark in relating this short parable to the great eschatological discourse or the sermon concerning the end of the world but his contents and wordings are closer to Luke. Clearly in St. Luke the parallel parable does not form part of the context of either the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem or the eschatological discourse.

Still, all the Synoptic Gospels speak in this parable of the coming of the Lord, exhorting the Christians to vigilance. St. Mark specifies more to be alert during the night watch since that is the time when vigilance becomes more relaxed. The four watches of the night divided into three hours each according to Roman reckoning are: evening, midnight, cockcrow and dawn.

The lesson, then, is clear. The faithful must always be on the watch because nobody, not even the Son, except the Father, knows the time of this second coming.

2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 6, 1987

FIRST READING:

ISAIAH 40:1-5.9-11

THIS text opens one of the most inspiring pieces of prophetic literature, coming from a prophet of the Isaian school who probably wrote during the exile and is known in biblical scho-

larship as the Deutero-Isaiah or the Second Isaiah. The foregoing verses form part of the introduction to the Book of Consolation addressed to the exiles, announcing the new exodus from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The double imperative "console" in the plural is most expressive of the urgency of God's bidding either to a collective prophetic ministry or to his heavenly court to boost the people's morale (the Septuagint specifies "O ye priests," while the Targum — in Aramaic — has "O ye prophets" as the subject of the command). In verse 9, nevertheless, the imperative is clearly in the singular and is directed to the "joyful messenger to Zion."

A heavenly voice cries in verse three to prepare a way for Lord in the wilderness. The Septuagint, the Vulgate and the parallel quotation in the Gospels (Matthew 3:3 and parallels) have a slight variation. The phrase "in the wilderness" modifies "the voice" and not "the way" as in Isaiah. This "voice in the wilderness" is applied by the Evangelists to John the Baptist. Yet the passage refers less to the geography or topography of the land as to the situation of the heart. The lofty mountains of pride must be laid low and the deep valleys of despair must be filled up.

"The way" (Heb. *derech*; Gr. *hodos*) is oftentimes figurative in the Bible for the manner of life or conduct. There is the way of the wicked and the way of the just (Ps. 1:6; Dt. 30:15-20; Jer. 21:8). Jesus calls himself simply the Way (Jn. 14:6) for no one comes to the Father except through him (14:7). In the Acts the disciples of Christ were called the "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9.23 etc.).

Yahweh is featured in the last verses of the text as king and shepherd by the "joyful messenger" (JB) or "herald of good news" (NAB). The Greek word used is *evangelizomenos* from

where the term "evangelist" is derived. The king is sometimes called the shepherd of the people (2 Sam. 5:2).

The phrase "here is your God" is reminiscent of the Immanuel (God with us). It is indeed a good news, a gospel.

SECOND READING:

2 PETER 3:8-14

THE context of this second reading is part of the answer of the second letter of Peter to those who deny the parousia or the second coming of Christ. Even among Christians there were some who thought that the Day of the Lord was imminent, which impression was already corrected by St. Paul in 2 Thesalonians. But because of the delay some anti-Christian elements scoffed at the teaching.

The author adduces God's patience and mercy to be the reason for the delay of the parousia, "wanting nobody to be lost." But for sure "the Day of the Lord will come like a thief." It is, therefore, imperative that Christians be vigilant and live holy lives to be ready when the Lord comes.

GOSPEL READING:

MARK 1:1-8

IT is on the second Sunday of Advent of the second cycle that the liturgy puts the introductory verses of St. Mark's Gospel. In fact it is only St. Mark who explicitly says that his work is the Gospel (*to evangelion*) of Jesus Christ, son of God. This can be understood both as a subjective genitive: "the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ," and an objective geni-

tive: "the Gospel about Jesus Christ" or even an epexegetic genitive: "the Gospel or the Good News, that is our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus, the Gospel is not only a story about Jesus but Jesus himself made present by the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Gospel proclamation was heralded by the preaching of John the Baptist in the desert. St. Mark appends the text of Malachi 3:1 to the text of Isaiah 40:3 with the variant phrase we have already mentioned in the first reading. It may be observed that St. Mark does not specify the location of the wilderness which St. Matthew explicitly points out as the desert of Judaea and St. Luke as the desert near the Jordan district. This is precisely the desert near the Dead Sea with Jericho as an oasis touching the southern extremities of the Jordan river about to enter the Dead Sea, where Christian tradition has placed the baptism of Jesus. About ten kilometers south of Jericho are found the ruins of a monastery which is now commonly held to have belonged to the Essenes. Speculations, still difficult to prove, have suggested a relationship between John and this Essene community.

The absence of a desert specification in Mark may have a theological significance in the sense that the inauguration of the kingdom takes place in the desert reminiscent of the desert ideal of the Old Testament where the people met Yahweh during Mosaic times and where Elijah took refuge and had a wonderful experience with God.

The voice of Isaiah 40:3 is now identified with John the Baptist and the way to be prepared is not anymore the way of the returning exiles but the way for the coming of the Lord.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
DECEMBER 8, 1987

FIRST READING:

GENESIS 3:9-15.20

LITURGY has seen this passage of Genesis from a Marian angle which can be justified by taking into account the totality of revelation, but perhaps this is not immediately discernible from the immediate historical context. The woman definitely referred to in the text was the mother of mankind (named Eve in verse 20). The "offspring" then of the woman is mankind as a collectivity. Yet the Greek translation has specified the offspring in verse 15 with a masculine pronoun and, therefore, it points to an individual offspring. The neuter would have been normal if the collectivity is meant. The Vulgate, nevertheless, has a surprising feminine: *ipsa conteret caput tuum* ("she will crush your head").

There will be enmity between the offspring of the woman and the seed of the serpent, but, although the heel of the offspring may be wounded by the serpent, he will later on crush the serpent's head.

The definitive defeat of the serpent, which here personifies evil (Wis. 2:24; Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:8), will be accomplished by Christ, the son of Mary, the new Adam (Rom. 5:14-19; 1 Cor. 15:21). This antithesis, Adam/Christ, leads to another antithesis, Eve/Mary, justifying Mary's veiled presence in this text of Genesis thus making this text indeed a *proto-evangelium*, a first proclamation of the good news of salvation.

SECOND READING:

EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 11-12

VERSES 3-14 of Ephesians chapter 1 is most probably a Christian baptismal hymn proclaiming the mystery of God's plan of salvation in and through Christ with the Holy Spirit, as pledge (v. 14) thus completing a trinitarian process. The liturgical reading is only part of this hymn. A good parallel of this hymn may be found in 1 Peter 3-12.

Verse 3 is a formula of blessing influenced by Jewish liturgy (cf. Tobit 13:1; Pss 41:13; 72:18; 106:48) which is both an act of praise and thanksgiving to God followed by his mighty deeds, in this case his plan of salvation, phrased here as "all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ." The source of these blessings is God, and the purpose is "to make us praise the glory of his grace." The "glory" of God is the manifestation of his presence which is evidenced by his "grace" or those divine favors such as election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness of sins, the seal of the Holy Spirit, peace and eternal glory in heaven.

In verses 11-12 the participation of the Jewish people in the salvific blessings meant for mankind is brought to mind by Paul who includes himself as a member of the Jewish race thus using the pronoun "we."

God's masterpiece, who enjoys fully God's favor thus conceived without any stain of sin, is the mother of our Lord Jesus who herself is of the Jewish race, a daughter of David.

GOSPEL READING:

LUKE 1:26-38

A vast body of literature and commentaries have been written about the Annunciation with proposed solutions to the problems raised by the Lucan narrative, especially of verse 34

concerning Mary's question to the angel which has a bearing on the Church's teaching on Mary's virginity. We are not going to deal with this intricate exegetical problem but hold on to what the Church has always believed: that Mary remained a virgin before, during and after the birth of Jesus.

For today's feast, the first verses of the Annunciation narrative would be more to the point. These are the words of greetings by the angel to Mary: *Chaire, kecharitomēnē*, translated by JB as "Rejoice, so highly favored." The greeting has a parallel in Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice... daughter of Zion."

It is to be observed that the angel did not mention Mary's name but substituted it with the above participle. This way is most emphatic just as someone would greet his girlfriend, "Hi, beautiful."

The other part of the greeting "the Lord is with you" mirrors the early Christian faith on the divinity of the child born of Mary. The title "Lord" in its religious context was reserved to Yahweh, read as 'Adonay, by the Jews and constantly translated as *Kyrios* by the Septuagint. This title was given by the angel to Jesus.

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 1987

FIRST READING:

ISAIAH 61:1-2a.10-11

THE text of the first reading, though short, is composed nonetheless of two independent motifs. The first is the call of the prophet (1-2a) and the second, the joy of the new Jerusalem (10-11).

The first theme is applied to the Messiah and in fact this was the passage read by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth to proclaim that the messianic era has come (Luke 4:18). The second motif is readily referred to the Church as the new Jerusalem and to Mary whose opening words of her *Magnificat* are parallel to Isaiah 61:10.

This passage has been regarded as messianic, not only because of the term *masah* in verse 1 (anointed) which here means an interior strength to fulfill his mission, but the mission itself which is total salvation of the "poor of Yahweh" the *'anawim*.

The liturgical text has omitted the second part of v. 2: "a day of vengeance for our God," an Old Testament concept which is an antithetic parallel of the previous verse, "a year of favor from Yahweh."

This "year of favor" should not be understood strictly in its quantified sense but in its qualitative sense corresponding to the jubilee year, the ending of which is not specified. It is in fact the messianic era, the jubilee of all jubilees, inaugurated when the angels sang in Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to all men who enjoy God's favor."

SECOND READING:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

THE text of the second reading is part of Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians, especially demanded by mutual community relationship. After telling them how they should conduct themselves towards the different members of the community, he counsels them to be happy at all times, to pray constantly and to give thanks to God for all things.

St. Paul has given us a program of the Christian life: Christian joy, constant prayer and thanksgiving to God. The life of

a Christian is indeed joyful since there is some hope of salvation; unceasing prayer does not necessarily mean to be continually on one's knees, but to be always in communion with God, just as life implies ceaseless breathing; and for everything we have received and are we must always thanks God.

The "spirit" in verse 17 means the charisms which the faithful received through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12) with special mention made by Paul of the charism of prophecy, which definitely does not mean here the foretelling of the future but the gift of counselling or admonition. The "avoidance of evil" is reminiscent of one of Job's virtues (Job 1:1.8; 2.3), but here a discernment of "all *forms* of evil" is added. There is a cognitive side in this admonition as denoted by the use of the word *eidos* (JB: "form"; NAB: "appearance").

As St. Paul prays for the total well being of the Christians at Thessalonika, he mentions in passing (verse 22) the trilogy of man's composition: spirit, soul and body (Greek: *pneuma*, *psyche*, *soma*). This has definitely a Jewish background corresponding to *ru'ach*, *nefesh*, and *basar* of the Old Testament.

GOSPEL READING:

JOHN 1:6-8.19-28

THE first verses of the Gospel reading (6-8) are taken from the Prologue of St. John's Gospel, citing the role of John the Baptist as "witness of the light." This is completed by the public testimony made by the Baptist to an official delegation from Jerusalem concerning his mission (19-28).

Although St. John the Evangelist starts his Gospel even from the pre-existence of Christ as the Word in the Father, he also follows the apostolic catechesis already outlined in Acts 10:37ff. of beginning the historical ministry of Jesus, or the kerygma, from the preaching of John the Baptist.

The interest in the messianic expectation can be gathered from the way the priests and levites questioned the Baptist about his mission. But he flatly denied that he was the Christ or Elijah, or the prophet.

Interpreting Deuteronomy 18:15, later Jewish thought believed that a prophet like Moses would come to play an important role in the messianic age.

Based on the text of Malachi 3:23 it was also believed that Elijah would return to usher in the establishment of the messianic kingdom. Although John the Baptist denied being Elijah as he was not so in person, Jesus affirmed that John was indeed the expected Elijah (Matthew 17:12).

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 20, 1987

FIRST READING:

2 SAMUEL 7:1-5.8b-12.14a.16

THE liturgical reading has engaged in some verse-hopping in chapter of second Samuel, but the fundamental message is that God will establish David's throne forever (v. 16). This is also expressed in Pss. 89:29-37; 132:11-12. The prophecy is unique since it entails a covenant made by God to a house or a dynasty that will last forever. Yet, despite historical vicissitudes, this prophecy was fulfilled in the person of the Messiah (Acts 2:30). This is also implicitly affirmed in the genealogy of St. Matthew (1:1-16) and Luke 3:23-38). The Annunciation text is more explicit: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end" (Luke 1:22-23).

It is remarkable to compare the lot of the northern kingdom (Israel) dynasties with that of the southern kingdom (Judah) where the Davidic dynasty has persevered as the sole family. About nine dynasties had ruled in the north until the kingdom was finally destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. The Davidic dynasty in the south almost suffered annihilation during the reign of Athaliah (831-835 B.C.) but survived when Joash was able to escape death (2 Kings 11). It passed through critical moments during the Syro-Ephraimite war when Syria and Israel invaded Judah during the time of Isaiah when Achaz was king and which was the historical occasion for the Immanuel prophecy. Even after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., which ended the monarchy the descendants of David, through Jehoiachin or Jechoniah it retained its prominence while exiled in Babylon until the end of the exile, when the first returnees were led by another Davidic descendant, Zerubbabel son of Sealthiel, (Ezra 2).

SECOND READING:

ROMANS 16:25-27

THE text of the second reading is the concluding passage of Romans, which is a doxology. This is the position of these three verses in some manuscripts, such as the Hesychian and Western texts (D). However in some manuscripts, such as p46, considered as the oldest text of Romans, it occurs after 15:33 while in some, as in G, it is totally omitted. Some commentators, therefore, deny its Paulinian authorship and consider it as a later addition. Still there is no doubt about its canonicity and inspiration.

An inspiring idea in this text is the fact that God is not only the source of the revelation of the hidden mystery, which is the plan of salvation, but He also gives us the strength to live according to the demands of the Gospel.

This mystery has already been revealed, and so it is clear for Paul to proclaim it to pagans throughout the world. The objective of this proclamation is "to bring them to the obedience of faith." This is a genitive of apposition as in Romans 1:5 and actually means "obedience, that is, faith" since faith is conceived as a process which starts from hearing, leading towards obedience or submission.

GOSPEL READING:

LUKE 1:26-38

*Same as the Gospel Reading of
the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY DECEMBER 27, 1987

FIRST READING:

SIRACH 3:3-7.14-17a
(Greek 3:2-6.12-14)

THIS passage from Sirach is a sort of commentary of Exodus 20:12, on the duties of children towards their parents. The respect of father even atones for sins. This of course does not mean the cancellation of original sin, which could only have been atoned by the blood of Christ, but evil acts which offend God and which could cause a person to turn away from God.

Blessings are promised to those who respect their parents, while those who dishonor their parents are the "accursed of the Lord."

SECOND READING:

COLOSSIANS 3:12-21

IN this exhortatory part of St. Paul's letter to the Colossians he emphasizes the important virtues a Christian must have, especially in his relations with the members of the Christian community using the image of clothing (v. 12).

First he mentions five virtues: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Then he adds mutual forgiveness, clearly reminiscent of the words of the "Our Father." Still the completion of all these virtues is love, a theme which he developed in 1 Corinthians 13.

Being in a community, the faithful must advise and admonish each other mutually, according always to the word of Christ, including the singing of songs in the form of Psalms, hymns and even inspired songs, perhaps those charismatic songs impelled by the Holy Spirit.

GOSPEL READING:

LUKE 2:22-40

IN accordance with the law of Leviticus 12:2-6, Mary had to be ritually purified after forty days, having delivered a male child. Although the pronoun is in the plural, strictly speaking it was only the mother who needed purification. Yet in Exodus 13:1ff and Numbers 18:15 there is prescription for the consecration and redemption of the first born. Thus the Holy Family fulfilled the law of Moses.

It was on this occasion of the presentation of our Lord in the temple and the ritual purification of the Blessed Mother that Simeon "prompted by the Spirit" finally saw the much awaited Messiah, took the child in his arms and pronounced the "*Nunc Dimittis*," a song of thanksgiving and of hope. To the mother he prophesied that a sword will pierce her soul.

FR. REGINO CORTES, O.P.

REVIEW OF **TWO BOOKS**

"EXPLORING THE CORE OF BIBLICAL FAITH — A Catechetical Primer," 116 pp., and "WHERE ARE WE GOING: HEAVEN, OR A NEW WORLD?" 120 pp., Carlos H. Abesamis, S.J. 1983 Manila, C.F.A. Publications, 1986 Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines.

Of these two books, the second book actually came out first from the pen of the author. Therein the author, in his claimed capacity as Professor of S. Scripture, purports to cull from the Scriptures and to explain the authentic Scriptural message regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God to be established by the Messiah. However, the concepts that the author dishes out might impress as far-fetched to the Catholic reader, who has been educated along the lines of the traditional Catechism and of the Magisterium, and so the author considered that there was a need for the first book mentioned, as a kind of Primer or Catechism for the second book.

Offhand, this reviewer was surprised to find that the two books do not carry the "Imprimatur" of any Local Ordinary, as is explicitly mandated by the old Canon Law (Can. 1385) and by the New Code (Can. 827) for the publication of catechisms and catechetical information. In particular, the New Code of Canon Law bans the publication of books concerning "S. Scriptures, religion and moral subjects" to be used as textbooks for instruction, without the previous or subsequent approval of the Ordinary.¹

¹ Conf. New Code, Can. 827, par. 2 and 4.

TWO ANALOGOUS FAITHS

The Catechism starts with the declared objective of exploring the "core" of the Bible Faith. Now, any sufficiently instructed Catholic knows that in the Bible there is not just one Bible Faith, as this Scripture Professor would like us to think, but two analogous yet distinct Bible Faiths. One is the Israelitic Faith in the Messiah to come; and the other is the Christian Faith in the Messiah that has already come in the Person of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. These related Faiths are not integrants of one and the same religious Faith, because there is contradiction involved in them when taken as one faith, to wit: the Messiah has not yet come and is to come, and the Messiah has already come. Under the designation of the "Israelitic" Faith we include the Faith of the Ancient Fathers and the Patriarchs, who also professed faith in the Messiah to come.

In the present situation, the former Israelitic Faith in the Messiah to come, is no longer true and salvific, and should be rejected for the purpose of the salvation promised by God in the Old Testament and offered by Him through Christ in the New Testament. In like manner, the contents and specific message of the Old Testament in relation with the Israelitic Faith, and those of the New Testament in relation with the Christian Faith are not components integrating one and the same religious Faith. The revelation and Faith of the Old Testament were a preparation for the revelation and Faith in the New Testament. We are now living in the New Testament, and not in the Old Testament.

MATERIAL BLESSINGS PROMISED IN THE ISRAELITIC FAITH

In the Old Testament the blessings promised by Jahveh for faithful service to Him were mainly in the order of temporal blessings, to wit, abundance in the produce of the land, peace and temporal wellbeing, numerous progeny, long years, etc. No mention was made of "eternal life" with God in Heaven, because

redemption from the bond of Original Sin had not yet been accomplished and the "Gates of Heaven" were still "closed" for mankind. Heaven and eternal life could only be promised by the Redeemer, because they were to be made available to men through the price of His Redemptive Passion and Death on the Cross.

It was also for the reason that the people of Israel were not prepared to take the covenant of grace and the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ in their spiritual realities and values, that the prophecies regarding the Messianic Kingdom of God and the blessings thereof were expressed and framed in metaphorical language, reminiscent of the descriptions regarding the lost "Golden Age" of mankind, e.g. that the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.² On the basis of these metaphorical and physical expression employed in the pronostications of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom of God, it is understandable that the expectations of the Jews in the time of Christ, and even of the Apostles and contemporary disciples, should have been tainted with appreciations of a temporal deliverance of the Jewish people from external domination,³ and complemented with the restoration of their political sovereignty.⁴

A KINGDOM BASICALLY OF THE SPIRITUAL ORDER

All these Jewish prejudices regarding a temporal and earthly nature of the Kingdom of God to be ushered in by the Messiah persisted for some time, even with the Apostles, despite the fact that Christ, time and again, made it clear that He was not offering a material and earthly kingdom,⁵ Christ further clarified that his Messianic Kingdom was not like those of the world. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not

² Isaiah 11, 6.

³ Conf. Luke 24, 21.

⁴ Conf. Acts 1, 6.

⁵ Conf. John 6, 15.

be so among you; but whoever would be the first among you must be your servant."⁶ He was a King of Israel coming mounted on the colt of an ass, unlike the victorious Emperors or Kings of the earth.⁷ To Pilate He declared in clear, unequivocal terms: "My kingship is not of this world. If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews."⁸

In connection with the new Messianic Kingdom of God, Christ explained the objective of His mission in the following terms: "The Son of Man, came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many."⁹ This is quite alien to the role of temporal rulers; it was not understandable to Pilate and to the Jews. It was a kingship that did not exclude the Passion and Death of Christ on the Cross, which was an utter defeat by temporal standards. At the time of His Passion, Christ said: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."¹⁰ It was by dying on the Cross that Christ delivered mankind from the bondage of sin and to the devil, and acquired for His Heavenly Father a new people to constitute the Messianic Kingdom. To this Kingdom those, elected for eternal life, are called to enjoy the benefits of Redemption and the grace of Divine Adoption.

FURTHER DECLARATIONS BY CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES

Along the venue of the spiritual concept and nature of His Kingdom, Christ said: "You should not be working for perishable food, but for food that remains unto eternal life, food which the Son of Man will give you."¹¹ Again, he said: "Do not lay

⁶ Mat. 20, 25-26;

⁶ Mat. 20, 25-26; 23, 11.

⁷ Conf. John 12, 13-16.

⁸ John 18, 36.

⁹ Mat. 20, 28.

¹⁰ John 12, 31-32.

¹¹ John 6, 27.

up for yourselves an earthly treasure, which moth and rust corrode, thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal."¹² "What profit does he show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process?"¹³ "Do not fear those who derive the body of life, but cannot destroy the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna."¹⁴ It was again, Christ who said: "Blest shall you be when men hate you, when they ostracize you, and insult you, and proscribe your name as evil because of the Son of Man. On the day they do so, rejoice and exult, for your reward shall be great in heaven."¹⁵

From the Apostle Paul we have the following teaching: "God is rich in mercy... Both with and in Christ Jesus He raised us up and gave us a place in the heavens."¹⁶ This is an echo of the words of Christ: "In Father's house there are many dwelling places; otherwise how could I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you may also be."¹⁷ On his part, St. Peter instructs us: "Be solicitous to make your call and election permanent, Brothers. Surely, those who do so will never be lost. On the contrary, your entering in the everlasting Kingdom of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided for."¹⁸

FALLACIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Our book writer seems to be unaware of the aforementioned Scriptural passages, or to ignore them. He presumes that the "Faith" in the Bible is only of one kind, with prejudice in favor

¹² Mat. 6, 19-20.

¹³ Mat. 16, 26; Mark 8, 36; Luke 9, 25.

¹⁴ Mat. 10, 28.

¹⁵ Luke 6, 22-23; Mat. 5, 11-12.

¹⁶ Ephes., 2, 4-6.

¹⁷ John 14, 2-3; Conf. John 17, 24; Hebr., 11, 13-16; 12, 22; 13,

14.

¹⁸ 2 Peter 1, 10-11.

of the Israelitic one. Owing to the state of pre-Redemption and the metaphorical language used to sustain the Israelitic Faith, in terms of material and temporal blessings, and owing to the vicissitudes of political subjugation that the Israelitic people experienced, time and again, their expectation and faith in a Messianic Deliverer and Leader were colored by their desire for a Messianic deliverance from external domination to be complemented with the establishment of a Messianic Kingdom, where the temporal and material wellbeing that they understood from the prophetic promises would be enjoyed by them.

In the Old Testament the Redemption of men from the bond of Original Sin and its dues, had not yet been accomplished by Christ, and the "Gates of Heaven" were still "closed" to mankind. And so, the promises of God to the Israelities and the saintly individuals for faithful service were, for the most and principal part, done in terms of temporal blessings and material wellbeing. But, after Christ had come to effect the Redemption of mankind, and the "Gates of Heaven" were soon to be "re-opened" again, the promise of divine reward for faithful service were no longer concerned with temporal blessings on earth, but with the eternal reward and life in God's Kingdom of Heaven, as distinct from the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

It is true that both the Old Testament and the New Testament Scriptures speak of new heavens and new earth in the future. But these are not spoken of as to be the doings of men, but of God, as complementary bounties for His elect.¹⁹ They are not supposed to be the doings of the elect, or for which their cooperation will be required as in a shared task, but exclusively of God. It would be preposterous to assign to creatures the bringing about of new heavens and of a new earth, because these are doings commensurate only to the Creator.

¹⁹ Conf. Isaiah 65, 17; 66, 22; 2-Peter 3, 13; Revel., 21, 1-5.

CONCLUSIONS

If, according to the book writer, the final goal of the Christian Faith, and of the Israelitic Faith, is not any supernatural destiny with God in His Heavenly Kingdom, but the bringing about of a paradisiac Messianic Kingdom on earth, then let us tip our hats to Marx and the Marxists because they were the first ones to declare such a final goal in no ambiguous terms, but clearly. On this premise, our Christian vocation would not have any supernatural relevance, or any relevance at all: because there is no need to be a Christian, in order to have that kind of final and earthly goal, as the Marxists understand too well.

We, Christians, would not have an essentially superior calling, according to our Faith, than the Pagans, whose natural calling on earth is also to bring about a better world for their fellowmen. Lastly, Christ did not have to come down to earth in order to deliver to men a new revelation regarding their final supernatural goal, and a new message of supernatural salvation from the Father.

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