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## **editorial**

*Before publishing the full text of Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter "Veritatis Splendor" in the latest issue (Nov.-Dec. 1993), Boletín introduced it with an article by F. Fausto Gómez, O.P. (Sept. - Oct. 1993). In this issue, we offer our readers a reflection on the same Encyclical by Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, O.P., D.D. It is appropriate and timely, and for that, we express to Archbishop Legaspi our deep appreciation.*

*With this issue, we resume our reflection on the Priesthood with the Holy Father. Because of the importance and relevance of the Holy Father's talks on the matter, we thought it beneficial to publish them all. We are very grateful that two of our elder Dominican priests, Fr. Excelso García, O.P. and Fr. Pedro Tejero, O.P. have also shared their thoughts on the Priesthood. It is worthwhile to note that Fr. García, who retired last year from teaching at the age of eighty, still regularly ministers to the penitents in the confessional, continues to make researches and to write. Fr. Tejero, at seventy four, teaches, writes and serves as Spiritual Director at the UST Central Seminary. They stand for Priesthood, in flesh and blood, alive and happily fulfilled.*

*Not to damper our priestly reflection but to enable us to see the realities of priestly life is a decree issued by Bishop Leo M. Drona, SDB, D.D., of the Diocese of San Jose, Nueva Ecija, on one of the priests of the Diocese. Such an accident strikes a sad note on the Priesthood and on the whole community of God's people.*

*Still in the context of priestly life, we are happy to announce that our next issue will carry the full text of the Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators, prepared by the Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Institutes of Study).*

*Fr. Honorato Castilgador, O.P.*

## Christ Is Model of Priestly Poverty

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1. One of the renunciations requested by Jesus of his disciples is that of earthly goods, particularly wealth (cf. *Mt* 19:21; *Mk* 10:21; *Lk* 12:33; 18:22). It is a request directed to all Christians in regard to the *spirit of poverty*, that is, the interior detachment from earthly goods which makes them generous in sharing these goods with others. Poverty is required of a life inspired by faith in Christ and by love for him. It is a *spirit* that also demands a *practice*, with each one's renunciation of these goods corresponding to his condition both in civil life and his state in the Church by virtue of the Christian vocation, both as an individual and as a determinate group of people. The spirit of poverty is valid for all; a certain practice of it in conformity with the Gospel is necessary for everyone.

2. The poverty Jesus requested of the Apostles is a current of spirituality that could not end with them or be reduced to particular groups: the spirit of poverty is necessary for everyone, in every time and place; its lack would be a betrayal of the Gospel. Faithfulness to the *spirit*, however, does not require of Christians in general or of priests the *practice* of a radical poverty with the renunciation of all property or even the abolition of this human right. The Church's Magisterium has frequently condemned those who claimed this was necessary (cf. *DS* 760; 930f; 1097); she has sought to lead thought and practice on a course of moderation. It is comforting to note, however, that over the course of time and under the influence of ancient and modern saints, the clergy has acquired an increasing awareness of a

At the General Audience of 21 July 1993, the Holy Father continued his catechesis on the life and ministry of priests today, discussing the presbyter's attitude toward material possessions. The Pope's talk was the 66th in the series on the mystery of the Church.

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call to Gospel poverty, both as a spirit and as a practice corresponding to the demands of priestly consecration. The social and economic situation in which the clergy of almost all the countries of the world live has helped to concretize the condition of real poverty for individuals and institutions, even when the latter by their very nature need many means to carry out their work. In many cases it is a difficult and distressing condition, which the Church strives to overcome in various ways, mainly by appealing to the charity of the faithful to receive their necessary contribution in order to provide for worship, works of charity, support for the pastors of souls and for missionary projects. However, achieving a new sense of poverty is a blessing for priestly life, as for that of all Christians, because it allows them to conform themselves better to Jesus' counsels and suggestions.

### **Priests are in the world but not of the world**

3. Gospel poverty - it should be made clear - entails no disdain for earthly goods, which God has put at man's disposal for his life and his cooperation in the plan of creation. According to the Second Vatican Council the presbyter, like every other Christian, having a mission of praise and thanksgiving, must acknowledge and glorify the generosity of the heavenly Father who is revealed in created goods (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 17).

Nevertheless, the Council goes on to say that priests, although living in the midst of the world, must always keep in mind that, as the Lord said, they do not belong to the world (cf. *Jn* 17:14-16), and therefore, they must be freed from every disordered attachment in order to obtain "that spiritual insight through which is found a right attitude to the world and to earthly goods" (ibid.; cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 30). It must be recognized that this is a delicate problem. On the one hand, "the Church's mission is carried out in the midst of the world and created goods are absolutely necessary for man's personal progress." Jesus did not forbid his Apostles from accepting the goods necessary for their earthly life. Rather he asserted their right in this matter when he said in a discourse on mission: "Eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment" (*Lk* 10:7; cf. *Mt* 10:10). St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that "the Lord ordered that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel" (*1 Co* 9:14). He himself insisted on the rule that "one who is being instructed in the word should share all good things with his instructor" (*Ga* 6:6). It

is right then that presbyters have earthly goods and use them "for those purposes to which the teaching of Christ and the direction of the Church allow them to be devoted" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 17). The Council did not fail to give practical directions in this regard.

Above all, the management of ecclesiastical property, properly so called, must be guaranteed "according to the norm of ecclesiastical laws and with the help, as far as possible, of skilled lay people." This property is always to be used for "the organization of divine worship, the provision of decent support for the clergy, and the exercise of works of the apostolate and of charity, especially for the benefit of those in need" (ibid.).

The goods acquired by the exercise of any ecclesiastical office must be used primarily "for their own decent support and the fulfillment of the duties of their state. They should be willing to devote whatever is left over to the good of the Church or to works of charity." This must be particularly stressed: neither for priests nor for bishops can ecclesiastical office be an occasion of personal enrichment or of profit for their own family. "Hence priests, far from setting their hearts on riches, must always avoid all avarice and carefully refrain from all appearance of trafficking" (ibid.). In any case, it must be kept in mind that all possessions must be used in the light of the Gospel.

4. The same must be said about the priest's involvement in secular activities or those pertaining to the management of earthly affairs outside of a religious, sacred context. The 1971 Synod of Bishops stated that "as a general rule, the priestly ministry shall be a full-time occupation. Sharing in the secular activities of men is by no means to be considered the principal end nor can such participation suffice to give expression to the priests' specific responsibility" (*Enchiridion Vaticanum*, IV, 1191). This was a stance taken in response to a tendency appearing here and there toward the secularization of the priest's activity, in the sense that he could be involved, as are lay people, in exercising a trade or secular profession.

### **Priest's attitude must be the Good Shepherd's**

In truth there are circumstances in which the only effective way for the Church to re-establish links with a work place that

ignores Christ can be the presence of priests who exercise a trade in that environment, e.g., by becoming workers with the workers. The generosity of these priests deserves to be praised. It should be noted, however, that by taking on secular, lay tasks and positions the priest runs the risk of reducing his own sacred ministry to a secondary role or even of eliminating it. Because of this risk, confirmed by experience, the Council had already stressed the need of approval by the competent authority for engaging in manual labor and sharing the living conditions of workers (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8). The 1971 Synod gave as a practical rule the appropriateness, or less; of a certain secular occupation with the purposes of the priesthood; "this is to be judged by the local bishop with his presbyterate, and if necessary in consultation with the Episcopal Conference" (*Enchiridion Vaticanum*, IV, 1192).

On the other hand, clearly there are special cases today, as in the past, in which some particularly talented and well-trained presbyters can be involved in labor and cultural activities that are not directly Church-related. However, care must be taken so that these cases remain exceptional. Even then the criterion determined by the Synod must always be applied, in order to be faithful to the Gospel and the Church.

5. We shall conclude this catechesis by turning once again to the figure of Jesus Christ, the High Priest, the Good Shepherd and supreme model for priests. He is the presbyter's example of being stripped of one's earthly goods, if he wants to be conformed to the demand of evangelical poverty. Jesus was indeed born in poverty and he lived in it. St. Paul admonished: "He made himself poor though he was rich" (2 Co 8:9). To someone who wanted to follow him, Jesus said of himself: "The foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). These words show a complete detachment from all earthly comforts. However, one should not conclude that Jesus lived in destitution. Other Gospel passages state that he received and accepted invitations to the homes of rich people (cf. Mt 9:10-11; Mk 2:15-16; Lk 5:29; 7:36; 19:5-6), he had women who helped support him in his financial needs (Lk 8:2-3; cf. Mt 27:55; Mk 15:40; Lk 23:55-56), and he was able to give alms to the poor (cf. Jn 13:29). Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the spirit and life of poverty that distinguished him.

## **Bishops and priests should be accessible to the poor**

The same spirit of poverty should inspire the priest's behavior, characterizing his attitude, life and very image as a pastor and man of God. It is expressed in disinterest and detachment towards money, in renunciation of all greed for possessing earthly goods, in a simple life style, in the choice of a modest dwelling accessible to all, in rejecting everything that is or appears to be luxurious, while striving to give himself more and more freely to the service of God and the faithful.

6. Finally, let us add that, having been called by Jesus to "preach Good News to the poor" and in accordance with his example, "priests and bishops alike are to avoid everything that might in any way antagonize the poor" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 17). Instead, by fostering in themselves the Gospel spirit of poverty, they will be in a position to show their own preferential option for the poor, translating it into sharing, into personal and community works of assistance, including material aid, to the needy. It is a witness to the Poor Christ, which is given today by so many priests, poor themselves and the friends of the poor. It is a great flame of love enkindled in the life of the clergy and the Church. If occasionally in the past the clergy could in some places appear among the ranks of the wealthy, today they feel honored, with the whole Church, in being found in the first row among the "new poor." This is great progress in following Christ on the path of the Gospel.

## Bishops and Priests Must be United

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1. In the previous catecheses we have reflected on the importance which the invitation to, or the evangelical counsels of virginity and poverty have in the priest's life and on how and to what extent they can be practiced in accordance with the spiritual tradition and Christian asceticism, and with the Church's law. Today it is good to recall that Jesus did not hesitate to tell those who wanted to follow him as he carried out his messianic ministry that they had to "deny themselves and take up their cross" (*Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23*) to be truly his disciples. This is a great maxim of perfection, valid for the Christian life as the definitive criterion for the heroic virtue of the saints. It applies especially to the priestly life, in which it takes more rigorous forms justified by the particular vocation and special charism of Christ's ministers.

A primary aspect of this "self-denial" appears in the renunciations connected with the commitment to communion that priests are called to fulfill between them and their bishop (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 28; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 74). The institution of the ministerial priesthood took place within the context of a priestly community and communion. Jesus assembled the first group, that of the Twelve, and called them to form a union in mutual love. He wanted to join co-workers to this first "priestly" community. By sending the seventy-two disciples on mission as well as the twelve

\*At the General Audience of 4 August 1993, the Holy Father continued his discussion on the life and spirituality of the priest, this time treating of his need to maintain communion with his bishop and his fellow priests. The Pope's address was the 68th in the series on the mystery of the Church.

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Apostles, he sent them out two by two (cf. *Lk* 10:1; *Mk* 6:7), so that they could help each in their life and work and develop a habit of common action in which no one would act alone, independently of the Church community and the community of the Apostles.

### **Self-denial requires renouncing individualism**

2. This fact is confirmed by reflecting on *Christ's call* which is the origin of each priest's life and ministry. All priesthood in the Church begins with a vocation. This is addressed to a particular person, but is tied to the calls given to others within the framework of one and the same plan for the evangelization and sanctification of the world. Like the Apostles, bishops and priests too are called together, although in their various personal vocations, by him who wants to commit them fully to the mystery of redemption. This community of vocation doubtless implies an openness of one to the other and of each to all, so as to live and work in communion.

This does not occur without renouncing an ever real, recurring individualism, without achieving "self-denial" (*Mt* 16:24) in the victory of charity over selfishness. The mind of the vocation community, expressed in communion, must nevertheless encourage each and everyone to work harmoniously, to acknowledge the grace given individually and collectively to the bishops and presbyters; a grace granted to each one, not due to personal merits or abilities, and not only for personal sanctification, but for "building up the Body" (*Ep* 4:12, 16).

Priestly communion is deeply rooted in the sacrament of Orders, in which self-denial becomes an even closer spiritual sharing in the sacrifice of the cross. The sacrament of Orders implies each one's free response to the call addressed to him personally. The response is likewise personal. However, in consecration, the sovereign action of Christ, at work in ordination through the Holy Spirit, creates as it were a new personality, transferring the mentality, conscience and interests of the one receiving the sacrament into the priestly community beyond the sphere of individual aims. It is a psychological fact based on acknowledging the ontological bond between each priest and every other. The priesthood conferred on each one should be exercised in the ontological, psychological and spiritual context of

this community. Then there will truly be *priestly communion*: a gift of the Holy Spirit, but also the fruit of a generous response by the priest.

In particular, the grace of Orders creates a special bond between bishops and priests, because priestly ordination is received from the bishop, the priesthood is extended by him and he introduces the newly ordained into the priestly community, of which he himself is a member.

3. Priestly communion presupposes and implies that all, bishops and presbyters, are attached to *the person of Christ*. When Jesus wanted to share his messianic mission with the Twelve, the Gospel of Mark says that he called them and appointed them "as his companions" (Mk 3:14). At the Last Supper he addressed them as those who had stood loyally by him in his trials (cf. Lk 22:28), urged them to unity and asked the Father for this on their behalf. By remaining united in Christ they would all remain united among themselves (cf. Jn 15:4-11). A vivid awareness of this unity and communion in Christ continued among the Apostles during the preaching that led them from Jerusalem to the various regions of the then known world under the compelling yet unifying action of the Spirit of Pentecost. This awareness appears in their Letters, the Gospels and the Acts.

### **Each one must work in cooperation with others**

In calling new presbyters to the priesthood, Jesus Christ also asks them to offer their lives to his own person, thus intending to unite them to each other by a special relationship of communion with him. This is the true source of the profound harmony of mind and heart that unites presbyters and bishops in priestly communion.

This communion is fostered by *collaborating in one and the same work*: spiritually building the community of salvation. Certainly every priest has his own field of activity to which he can devote all his abilities and talents, but this field belongs to the broader work by which every local Church strives to develop the kingdom of Christ. This work is essentially communitarian, so that each one must act in cooperation with the other workers of the same kingdom.

We know how much the desire to work on the same task can support and spur the common effort of each one. It creates a feeling

of solidarity and makes it possible to accept the sacrifices that cooperation requires, by respecting others and welcoming their differences. Henceforth it is important to note that this cooperation is structured around the relationship between the bishop and his presbyters; the subordination of the latter to the former is essential for the life of the Christian community. Work for the kingdom of Christ can be carried out and developed only in accordance with the structure he established.

4. Now I would like to call attention to the role of *the Eucharist* in this communion. At the Last Supper Jesus wanted to found, in the most complete way, the unity of the apostolic group, to whom he first entrusted the priestly ministry. In answer to their dispute about the first place, he gave an example of humble service by washing their feet (cf. *Jn* 13:2-15). This settled the conflicts caused by ambition and taught his first priests to seek the last place rather than the first. During the same Supper Jesus gave his commandment of mutual love (cf. *Jn* 13:34; 15:12) and opened the source that would give the strength to observe it: alone the Apostles would not, in fact, have been able to love one another as the Master had loved them; but with *Eucharistic communion* they received the ability to live *ecclesial communion* and, in it, their specific *priestly communion*. By the sacrament Jesus offered them this superior capacity for love and could make a bold supplication to the Father that he accomplish in his disciples a unity like that existing between the Father and the Son (*Jn* 17:21-23). Finally, at the Last Supper Jesus invests the Apostles jointly with their mission and with the power to celebrate the Eucharist in his memory, thus further deepening the bond uniting them. Communion in the power of celebrating the one Eucharist had to be the sign and source of unity for the Apostles — and for their successors and co-workers.

### **Priestly unity must reflect Trinitarian communion**

5. It is significant that in the priestly prayer at the Last Supper Jesus prayed not only for the consecration (of his Apostles) by means of truth (cf. *Jn* 17:17), but also for their unity, a unity reflecting the very communion of the divine Persons (cf. *Jn* 17:11). Although that prayer primarily concerned the Apostles whom Jesus wanted especially to gather around himself, it is extended also to bishops and

presbyters, in addition to believers, of every age. Jesus asks that the priestly community be a reflection and participation in Trinitarian communion: what a sublime ideal! Nevertheless, the circumstances in which Jesus offered his prayer show that sacrifices are required to achieve this ideal. Jesus asks for the unity of his Apostles and followers at the moment when he is offering his life to the Father. He established priestly communion in his Church at the price of his own sacrifice. Priests, therefore, cannot be surprised at the sacrifices that priestly communion in his Church at the price of his own sacrifice. Priests, therefore, cannot be surprised at the sacrifices that priestly communion requires of them. Taught by the word of Christ, they discover in these renunciations a concrete spiritual and ecclesial sharing in the divine Master's redeeming sacrifice.

## Priestly Fraternity Means Cooperation

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1. The “priestly community” or presbyterate that we have spoken of in the preceding catecheses establishes among those who belong to it a network of reciprocal relationships that are situated within the ecclesial communion arising from Baptism. The most specific foundation of these relationships is the common sacramental and spiritual sharing in the priesthood of Christ, from which a spontaneous *sense of belonging* to the presbyterate stems.

The Council pointed this out clearly: “All priests, who are constituted in the order of the priesthood by the sacrament of Orders, are bound together by an intimate sacramental brotherhood; but in a special way they form one priestly body in the Diocese to which they are attached under their own Bishop” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8). Because of mutual knowledge, closeness and habits of life and work, this relationship with the diocesan presbyterate further develops that *sense of belonging*, which creates and nurtures fraternal communion and opens it to pastoral cooperation.

The bonds of pastoral charity are expressed in the ministry and the liturgy, as the Council goes on to note: “Each is joined to the rest of the members of this priestly body by special ties of apostolic charity of ministry and of brotherhood. This is signified liturgically from

\*At the General Audience of 1 September 1993, the Holy Father continued his discussion of the ministry and spiritual life of priests. In this week’s talk, the 70th in the series on the mystery of the Church, the Pope spoke of the need for presbyters to cooperate with their fellow priests in a spirit of respect and trust. Here is a translation of the Holy Father’s address, which was given in Italian.

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ancient times by the fact that the priests present at an ordination are invited to impose hands, along with the ordaining bishop, on the chosen candidate, and when priests concelebrate the sacred Eucharist in a spirit of harmony" (ibid.). In these cases there is a representation of sacramental communion, but also of that spiritual communion which in the liturgy finds the *una vox* to proclaim to God unity of spirit and to give testimony of it to the brothers and sisters.

### **Various ministries serve purpose of evangelization**

2. Priestly fraternity is also expressed in the unity of pastoral ministry, in the wide variety of tasks, offices and activities to which presbyters are assigned; "for even though they may be assigned different duties, yet they fulfil the one priestly service for people" (ibid.).

The variety of duties can be considerable. Thus, for example: parish ministry and inter-parish and multi-parish ministry, diocesan, national and international activities, education, research, analysis, teaching in the various areas of religious and theological doctrine, every apostolate of giving witness, sometimes by studying and teaching various branches of human knowledge; in addition, spreading the Gospel message through the media, religious art in its many forms, the variety of charitable services, moral guidance to different categories of people involved in research or other work, and lastly, ecumenical activities, which are very timely and important today. This variety cannot create classes or inequalities, because for priests these tasks always fall within the scope of evangelization. We say with the Council: "They all contribute to the same purpose, namely, the building up of the Body of Christ, and this, especially in our times, demands many kinds of duties and fresh adaptations" (ibid.).

3. Therefore, it is important for every priest to be willing — and properly trained — to understand and value the work performed by his brothers in the priesthood. It is a question of a Christian and ecclesial spirit, as well as an openness to the signs of the times. He will have to understand, for example, that there is a variety of needs in building up the Christian community, as there are a diversity of charisms and gifts; there is also a variety of ways to plan and carry

out apostolic projects, since new work methods can be proposed and employed in the pastoral sphere, while always remaining within the Church's communion of faith and action.

Reciprocal understanding is the basis of mutual help in the various areas. Let us repeat what the Council said: "It is of great importance that all priests, whether diocesan or regular, should help each other, so that they may be fellow-helpers of the truth" (ibid.). Reciprocal help can be given in many ways: from being willing to assist a confrère in need to accepting a work plan in a spirit of pastoral cooperation, which seems ever more necessary between the different agencies and groups and in the overall coordination of the apostolate.

In this regard, it should be kept in mind that the *parish* itself (as sometimes the *Diocese* too), although having its autonomy, cannot be an island, especially at a time like our own, which abounds with means of communication, population mobility, the popularity of various attractions, a new uniformity of tendencies, attitudes, fashions, schedules. Parishes are the living organs of the one Body of Christ, the one Church, welcoming and serving both the members of the local communities and all those who for any reason come there at a given moment, which could mean that God has become visible in a conscience, in a life. Naturally, this should not become a source of disorder or confusion in regard to canon law, which is also at the service of pastoral care.

### **Priests should not forget hospitality and kindness**

4. A particular effort of mutual understanding and reciprocal help is desirable and should be fostered especially in the relationships between older and younger priests: both are so necessary for the Christian community and so dear to bishops and to the Pope. The Council itself urged older priests to have understanding and sympathy for the projects of the younger ones, and advised the latter to have respect for the experience of their elders and to trust them; it recommended that both groups treat each other with sincere affection, in accordance with the example given by so many priests, past and present (cf. ibid.).

How many things spring from the heart to the lips on these points, concretely showing the "priestly communion" that links

presbyters! Let us be content to mention some things suggested by the Council: "Under the influence of a spirit of brotherhood, priests should not forget hospitality (cf. *Heb* 13:1-2), and should cultivate kindness and the sharing of goods (cf. *Heb* 13:16). They should be particularly concerned about those who are sick, about the afflicted, the over worked, the lonely, the exiled, the persecuted (cf. *Mt* 5:10)" (ibid.).

When every pastor, every priest, looks back over his life he finds it strewn with experiences when he needed understanding, help, the cooperation of so many brothers as do other faithful, who find themselves with the various kinds of needs listed above; and with so many others! Who knows whether it would be possible to do more for all those "poor," loved by the Lord and entrusted by him to the Church's charity, and also for those who, as the Council reminds us (ibid.), could be facing moments of crisis. Indeed, conscious of having followed the voice of the Lord and the Gospel, we must strive each day to do ever more and better for everyone.

5. The Council also suggests some community projects to foster mutual help in cases of need, and in a permanent and almost institutional way on behalf of the brethren.

### **Priests' associations can foster holiness**

First of all, it mentions periodic fraternal gatherings for rest and relaxation, in order to answer the human need for restoring one's physical, mental and spiritual strength, which Jesus, the "Teacher and Lord," in his careful attention to the condition of others, already had in mind when he invited the Apostles: "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little" (*Mk* 6:31). This invitation also applies to priests in every age, in ours more than ever, given the urgent tasks and their complexity in the pastoral ministry too (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8).

The Council thus encourages projects that are meant to provide and facilitate a common life for presbyters in a permanent way, including wisely established and organized arrangements for living together, or at least for an easily accessible and practical common

table in appropriate places. The reasons for these provisions are not only economic and practical, but also spiritual and, in harmony with the institutions of the early Jerusalem community (cf. *Ac* 2:46-47), they are obvious and urgent in the modern condition of many presbyters and prelates, who must be offered attention and care to alleviate their difficulties and labors (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8).

“Associations of priests are also to be highly esteemed and diligently promoted, when by means of rules recognized by the competent authority they foster priestly holiness in the exercise of the ministry through a suitable and properly approved rule of life and through brotherly help, and so aim at serving the whole order of presbyters” (ibid.).

6. In many places and in the past as well, holy priests have had this latter experience. The Council zealously desires that it be as widespread as possible; new institutions providing great benefit for the clergy and Christian people are not wanting. Their growth and effectiveness vary in proportion to their fulfilment of the conditions laid down by the Council: the goal of priestly sanctification, — fraternal help between priests, communion with ecclesiastical authority at the level of the Diocese or the Apostolic See, according to the circumstances. This communion implies approved statutes as a rule of life and work, without which the members would almost inevitably be condemned to disorder or to the arbitrary impositions of some stronger personalities. It is an old problem for every type of association, and also occurs in the religious and ecclesiastical sphere. The Church’s authority fulfills its mission of service to priests and all the faithful also when it exercises this function of discerning authentic values, protecting people’s spiritual freedom and guaranteeing the validity of associations as well as the whole life of the community.

Here too it is a question of realizing the holy ideal of “priestly communion.”

## The Priest Must Serve Christ's flock

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1. The "Priestly community," of which we have spoken several times in previous catecheses, is not isolated from the "ecclesial community," but belongs to its very essence and is its very heart, in a constant interchange with all the other members of Christ's Body. Presbyters serve this vital communion as pastors in virtue of sacramental Orders and the mandate that the Church confers on them. At the Second Vatican Council the Church sought to re-awaken in priests this awareness of belonging and sharing, so that each of them would keep in mind that, although he is a pastor, he continues to be a Christian who must conform himself to all the demands of his Baptism and live as brother with all the baptized, in service to "the same Body of Christ which all are commanded to build up" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 9). It is significant that, on the basis of the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ, the Council stresses the fraternal nature of the priest's relations with the other faithful, as it had already underscored the fraternal nature of the bishop's relations with his presbyters. In the Christian community, relationships are essentially fraternal, as Jesus requested in "his" commandment, recalled with such insistence by the Apostle St. John in his Gospel and Letters (cf. *Jn* 13:14; 15:12, 17; *1 Jn* 4:11, 21). Jesus himself said to his disciples: "You are all brothers" (*Mt* 23:8).

At the General Audience of 22 September 1993, the Holy Father returned to his discussion of the life and ministry of priests, this time focusing on the presbyter's relationship with the laity. It is his duty to foster their charisms and to assist them in deepening their faith and spiritual life, especially since the lay apostolate is so important today. The Pope's catechesis was the 71st in the series on the Church.

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## Lay apostolate has special significance

2. According to Jesus' teaching, presiding over the community means serving it, not domineering over it. He himself gave us the example of a Shepherd who cares for and serves his flock, and he proclaimed that he came not to be served but to serve (cf. *Mk* 10:45; *Mt* 20:28). In the light of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the one Teacher and Lord (cf. *Mt* 23:8), the priest understands that he cannot seek his own honor nor his own interests, but only what Jesus Christ wanted, putting himself at the service of his kingdom in the world. Thus, he knows — as the Council reminds him — that he must act as the servant of all, with sincere and generous self-giving, accepting all the sacrifices required by this service, and always remembering that Jesus Christ, the one Teacher and Lord, came to serve and did so to the point of giving "his own life as a ransom for the many" (*Mt* 20:28).

3. The problem of the presbyter's relationship with the other faithful in the Christian community is particularly significant with regard to the so-called lay *apostolate*, which, as such, has taken on special importance in our day because of new awareness of the essential role exercised by the lay faithful in the Church.

Everyone knows that the same historical circumstances have fostered the cultural and organizational rebirth of the lay apostolate especially in the 19th century, and how a theology of the lay apostolate developed in the Church between the two world wars, leading to the special conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and even more fundamentally, to the vision of the Church as community, which find in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, and the place for the lay apostolate it recognizes.

The Council considers priests' relationship with the laity in the light of the living, active and organic community which the priest is called to form and lead. To this end, the Council recommends that presbyters recognize and sincerely promote the *dignity* of the laity: their dignity as human persons raised by Baptism to divine adoption and endowed with their own gifts of grace. For each of them, the divine gift entails a special role in the Church's mission of salvation, also in places — such as the family, civil society, professional life, culture, etc. — where presbyters ordinarily cannot exercise the laity's specific roles (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 9). Both the laity and

priests must acquire an ever greater awareness of these specific roles, one based on a more complete sense of belonging to and participating in the Church.

4. The Council also says that presbyters should respect the just *freedom* of the laity, inasmuch as they are children of God enlivened by the Holy Spirit. In this atmosphere of respect for dignity and freedom, the Council's exhortation to priests is understandable: "They should be willing to listen to lay people," taking into account their aspirations and utilizing their experience and competence in human activity, in order to recognize "the signs of the times." Presbyters will also seek to discern, with the Lord's help, the laity's charisms, "whether humble or exalted," and will want to "recognize them with joy and foster them with diligence" (*ibid.*).

What the Council notes and recommends is interesting and important: "Among the other gifts of God which are found abundantly among the faithful, special attention ought to be devoted to those graces by which a considerable number of people are attracted to greater heights of the spiritual life" (*ibid.*). Thanks be to God, we know that there are many faithful — in the Church today and often outside of her visible organizations — who are devoted or who want to devote themselves to prayer, meditation, penance (at least that of tiring, everyday work, done with diligence and patience, and that of difficult living situations), with or without the direct involvement in active apostolate. They often feel the need for a priest counselor or even a spiritual director, who welcomes them, listens to them and treats them with Christian friendship, in humility and charity.

### **Priests should involve laity in Church's apostolate**

One could say that the moral and social crisis of our time, with the problems it brings to both individuals and families, makes this need for priestly help in the life more keenly felt. A new recognition of and a new dedication to the ministry of the confessional and of spiritual direction are to be strongly recommended to priests, also because of the new requests of lay people who more greatly desire to follow the way of Christian perfection set forth by the Gospel.

5. The Council advises priests to recognize, promote and foster the cooperation of the laity in the apostolate and in the same pastoral

ministry within the Christian community, not hesitating to "give lay people charge of duties in the service of the Church" and to "give them freedom and opportunity for activity and even inviting them, when opportunity occurs, to take initiative in undertaking projects on their own" (*ibid.*). This is consistent with respect for the dignity and freedom of the children of God, but also with Gospel service: "service to the Church," the Council says. It bears repeating that all this presupposes a deep sense of belonging to the community and of actively participating in its life. Even more deeply, it presumes faith and confidence in the grace at work in the community and in its members.

What the Council says could serve as key to pastoral practice in this area namely, that presbyters "have been placed in the midst of the laity that they may lead them all to the unity of charity" (*ibid.*). Everything revolves around this central truth: in particular, openness and acceptance of everyone, the constant effort to maintain or restore harmony in order to encourage reconciliation, foster mutual understanding and create an atmosphere of peace. Yes, priests must always and everywhere be men of peace.

6. The Council entrusts this mission of community peace to priests: peace in truth and charity. "Theirs is the task, then, of bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody may feel a stranger in the Christian community. They are to be at once the defenders of the common good, for which they are responsible in the Bishop's name; and at the same time the unwavering champions of truth lest the faithful be carried about 'with every wind of doctrine' (*Ep* 4:14). Those who have abandoned the practice of the sacraments, or even perhaps the faith, are entrusted to priests as special objects of their care. They will not neglect to approach these as good shepherds" (*ibid.*).

Thus, they are concerned for everyone in and outside the flock, in accordance with the demands of the missionary dimension that pastoral work must have today. Against this background every presbyter will view the question of contacts with non-believers, the non-religious, even those who call themselves atheists. He will feel spurred by charity towards all; he will strive to open the doors of the community to everyone. On this point the Council calls priests' attention to "those fellow Christians who do not enjoy complete

ecclesiastical union with us." This is the ecumenical horizon. Finally, the Council invites them to "regard as committed to their charge all those who fail to recognize Christ as their Savior" (*ibid.*). To make Christ known, to open the doors of minds and hearts to him, to cooperate with his ever new coming into the world: this the *raison d'être* of the pastoral ministry.

### **Lay people must love and support their pastors**

7. Through the Church priests have received a difficult charge from Christ. It is quite understandable that the Council asks all the faithful to cooperate as far as they can, to help them in their work and their problems, first of all with understanding and love. The faithful are the other element in the relationship of love linking priests to the whole community. The Church, which urges priests to care for and to look after the community, calls the faithful in turn to solidarity towards their pastors: "The faithful for their part ought to realize that they have obligations to their priests. They should treat them with filial love as being their fathers and pastors. They should also share their priests' anxieties and help them as far as possible by prayer and active work" (*ibid.*).

The Pope says this again, addressing to all the lay faithful an urgent request in the name of Jesus, our one Teacher and Lord: help your pastors by prayer and active work, love and support them in the daily exercise of their ministry.

## **Priestly Identity Shines in Eucharist**

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Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

1. I am particularly pleased to welcome you today, together with the members, experts and officials of the Congregation for the Clergy, gathered in plenary session.

I am grateful to the Prefect of the dicastery, Cardinal José Sánchez, for his words of introduction to the reflections made during these days, and I also thank the Secretary, Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe, for his valuable assistance.

I would like, above all, to express my grateful satisfaction for the work you have done, work which has involved the whole Episcopate in matters of the utmost importance. At the same time I encourage you all so that, as soon as possible, the Bishops, and through them all priests, may be provided with a Directory for the life, ministry and permanent formation of priests. This, as you know well, has been requested by many prelates throughout the world, as well as by the 1990 Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and by numerous priests in the care of souls.

On Friday, 22 October 1993, the Holy Father received in audience the prelates attending the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy. He reminded them the "priesthood is a gift from heaven, which we must correspondingly welcome with gratitude, loving it and giving it to others."

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## Priests act in the person of Christ the Head

It is more than ever urgent, in this age of ours marked by a widespread, although sometimes unexpressed thirst for values, that the ministers of the altar, ever spiritually aware of their great vocation, should be formed to carry out their pastoral and missionary ministry with fidelity and competence.

2. "Before I formed you in the womb," says the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, "I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you" (*Jr* 1:5).

For an authentic priestly life it is absolutely necessary to have a clear awareness of one's own vocation! The priesthood is a gift which comes from God in the image of the vocation of Christ, the High Priest of the new covenant: "No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was" (*Heb* 5:4). Indeed, it is not a question of "function," but rather of God's free and exclusive "vocation" to which, as he calls man into being, calls him also to the priesthood, not without the mediation of the Church. With the laying on of hands by the bishop and the prayer of consecration, he is made a minister who continues the work of salvation accomplished by God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

"The priesthood of priests," the Second Vatican Council reminds, us "while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is nevertheless conferred by its own particular sacrament. Through that sacrament priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the Priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 2).

Acting "*in persona Christi Capitis*" (*ibid.*, also nn. 6, 12; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 33; *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 10, 28, 37), the priest proclaims the divine Word, celebrates the Eucharist, and dispenses the merciful love of God who forgives; in this way he becomes an instrument of life, renewal and authentic human progress.

As minister of the essential saving acts, he places at the service of all men not perishable goods, nor socio-political projects, but supernatural and eternal life, teaching how to read and interpret the events of history in a Gospel perspective.

This is the primary task of the priest, even in the area of the new evangelization, which requires priests who, as primarily responsible together with their bishop for this renewed Gospel sowing, are “deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 18).

3. The priesthood of the sacred ministers shares in the unique priesthood of Christ, made Priest and Intercessor through the offering of his own sacrifice, offered once and for all on the cross (*Heb 7:27*).

In order to have an adequate understanding of the ordained priesthood, and to deal correctly with every question concerning the identity, life, service and ongoing formation of priests, it is necessary to be always aware of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, of which they are the ministers.

Priestly identity shines forth in a very special way in the Eucharist. Assimilation to Christ hinges on it; it is the basis of an ordered life of prayer and genuine pastoral charity.

4. Configured to the Redeemer, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, the priest must be clearly aware that he is, in a new way, Christ’s minister for his people (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 21).

An “awareness of being a pastoral minister” is proper only to the one who is “sent,” in imitation of the Good Shepherd, to be the leader and shepherd of the flock, in joyful and complete self-giving to all his brothers and sisters, especially those who are in most need of love and mercy.

5. In imitation of the divine Master, the priest is called to make a gift of his own will and to become an extension as it were of *Christus oboediens* for the salvation of the world.

### **Bishops must treat priests as sons, brothers and friends**

The example of Christ is a light and strength for bishops and priests. The bishop, for his part, by his obedience to the Apostolic See and communion with the whole body of bishops, creates the most favorable conditions for establishing a similar relationship with the presbyterate and each of its members.

Modelled on the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, *the Bishop* must treat his priests as sons, brothers and friends, being concerned above all for their sanctification, but also for their physical well-being, their peace of mind, their proper rest, and assistance in all stages and conditions of life. All this not only does not diminish, but better illustrates his pastoral authority which, in a spirit of genuine service, is able to assume those responsibilities of leadership which are personal, cannot be delegated and are sometimes even arduous and complex.

Such example nurtures the trust of the priests and stimulates their desire for regular cooperation and sincere brotherhood.

What a precious gift is *priestly brotherhood*! It is a comfort in difficulties, solitude, misunderstanding and weariness, and is conducive, by the example of the first apostolic community, to concord and peace, "to proclaim to God unity of spirit and to give witness of it to the brothers and sisters" (John Paul II, Catechesis, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, n. 36, 8 September 1993, p. 11).

6. In this climate of active priestly communion, the *ongoing formation* of priests will also find the best conditions for development and for bearing abundant fruit; therefore it is necessary to train well-qualified and faithful ministers.

In the work of formation the authoritative and at the same time brotherly care of the bishop for his priests, and on their part the awareness of the constant need to deepen the great gift of their vocation and the responsibility of their ministerial commitment intertwine in a positive way.

This is a theme which has been at the heart of your considerations in this plenary assembly, and one which will find an adequate response in the "Directory" you are preparing.

7. In reality, every plan for priestly formation must have as its principal aim the *sanctification of the clergy*. Indeed, if it is true that the word and the sacraments work through the power of the Spirit they impart, it is also true that, when they transform the life of the minister, he himself becomes a kind of living Gospel. The best evangelizer is always a holy one.

In a special way, *prayer* is necessary for the priest to sanctify himself and the souls entrusted to him.

The underlying principle, the virtue which shapes and guides his spiritual life, is the *pastoral charity* flowing from the merciful heart of Jesus the Savior. The essential meaning of this pastoral charity is the radical gift of self to the Church which, as a consequence, is the primary interest of the well-formed and mature priest. Priestly life is, in effect, an aspect of the wonderful mystery of the Mystical Body, and therefore cannot be interpreted correctly by purely human criteria.

For example, the more the Church, led by the Spirit, enters into the truth of Christ's priesthood, the more she is joyfully aware of the gift of *sacred celibacy* (which is seen less and less as a matter of discipline, however noble), so as to be open to the horizon of its singular appropriateness for the sacrament of Holy Orders (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 50).

Ecclesiastical celibacy is for the Church a treasure to be carefully guarded and to be presented especially today as a sign of contradiction for a society which needs to be called back to the higher and definitive values of life.

Present difficulties cannot cause the rejection of such a precious gift, which the Church has made her own uninterruptedly from apostolic times, overcoming other difficult moments that threatened its preservation.

It is necessary today, too, to interpret concrete situations with faith and humility, without introducing anthropological, sociological or psychological factors that, while seeming to resolve problems, actually add to them beyond measure.

Gospel logic, as the facts prove, demonstrates clearly that the noblest aims are always hard to achieve. We must work hard, then, and never turn back! So it is always most important to take the road of a courageous and incisive vocations apostolate, in the sure knowledge that the Lord will not fail to provide laborers for his harvest if young people are offered high ideals and visible examples of austerity, consistency, generosity and unconditional dedication.

## **No one can change what Christ established for the Church**

Truly, the priesthood is a gift from on high, which we must correspondingly welcome with gratitude, loving it and giving it to others. It is not to be considered as a purely human reality, as if it were the expression of a community which is to be seen in the light of the *sovereign will of God who freely chooses his Pastors*. Christ wanted his Church to be sacramentally and hierarchically structured, and for this reason no one has the right to change what the divine Founder has established.

8. The Eternal High Priest, on the cross, gave John as a son to his Blessed Mother, and to John he entrusted his Mother as a precious inheritance.

From that day there has been established a unique spiritual bond between Mary most holy and every priest. Because of this bond, Mary can obtain and give to her beloved sons the strength to respond ever more generously to the demands of spiritual sacrifice that accompany the priestly ministry (cf. John Paul II, General Audience, in *L'Osservatore Romano* n. 27, 7 July 1993, p. 11).

Beloved brothers, let us entrust the priests of the whole world to her, the Queen of Apostles; let us entrust to her maternal heart those who are preparing to become priests; let us place confidently in her hands our humble but sincere intentions to commit ourselves in every way to their good.

May all priests feel moved to consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Virgin: they will certainly experience peace, joy and pastoral fruitfulness from being her sons!

This is my wish, which becomes my prayer. A special Apostolic Blessing goes with it, which I gladly impart to all of you present and to the priests working in all parts of the world.

## Message for Lent 1994

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John Paul II

***“THE FAMILY IS AT THE SERVICE OF CHARITY,  
CHARITY IS AT THE SERVICE OF THE FAMILY”***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. The Lenten Season is the acceptable time which the Lord gives us that we might *take up anew our journey of conversion*, grow in faith, hope and love, enter more fully into the Covenant willed by God and experience a season of grace and reconciliation.

*“The family is at the service of charity, charity is at the service of the family.”* In choosing the theme for this year’s Lenten Letter, I wish to invite all Christians to change their lives and their ways of acting, in order to be a leaven which *gives rise in the heart of the human family to charity and solidarity*, values which are essential to the life of society and the life of each Christian.

2. Above all, I encourage families to grow more aware of their mission in the Church and in the world. In their individual and community prayer they receive the Holy Spirit who comes to make all things new in them and through them, opening the hearts of the faithful to concern for all. Drawing from the source of love, all are enabled to transmit this love by their life and their actions. Prayer makes us one with Christ and thus makes all people brothers and sisters.

The family is the first and foremost place in which we come to appreciate and live the fraternal life, the life of charity and of

solidarity, in all its many forms. In the family, we learn attentiveness, openness and respect for others, who must always be able to find their proper place. Life in common is also an invitation to a sharing which helps us to rise above our selfishness. In learning to share and to give, we discover the tact, parents should strive by word and example to awaken a sense of solidarity in their children. From childhood, everyone is called to mortification and fasting in order to grow in character and self-discipline, overcoming the desire to possess everything for oneself alone. What we learn in the family stays with us throughout life.

3. In today's particularly troubled times, may families follow the example of Mary, who hastened to visit her cousin Elizabeth, and *draw near to their brothers and sisters in need, lifting them up in prayer!* Imitating God's own concern for all, we must be able to say, "I have seen the affliction of my people because their cry has come to me" (1 Sam 9:16); in this way we will not remain deaf to their appeals. The poverty of an ever-increasing number of our brothers and sisters destroys their human dignity and disfigures humanity as a whole: *it is a scandal which cries out for the response of solidarity and justice.*

4. Today, *we must be especially attentive to the sufferings and poverty of families.* Many families have in fact crossed the threshold of poverty, and no longer have the bare essentials to feed themselves and their children, to provide their children with a normal physical and psychological growth and the chance to attend school on a regular basis. Some families do not have the means to find decent housing. Unemployment is becoming more widespread and increasing the poverty of entire sectors of the population. Women are left to provide for the needs of their children and for their education, which often leads young people to roam in the streets, to seek refuge in drugs, alcohol abuse or violence. More and more couples are experiencing psychological and relational troubles. Social problems contribute at times to the breakup of the family. All too often, unborn children are not accepted. In certain countries very young children are forced to live in inhuman conditions or are shamefully exploited. The aged and the handicapped, because they are not financially productive, are left completely on their own and made to feel useless. Some families, because they are from other races, other cultures or other religions, encounter rejection in countries where they have settled.

5. Faced with these grave problems, which have reached global proportions, *we may not keep silent or do nothing, because they are destroying the family*, which is the basic unit of society and of the Church. We are called to take the situation in hand. Christians and all people of good will have the duty to help families in difficulty, providing them with the spiritual and material help needed to overcome the often tragic situations of which we have spoken.

In this Lenten Season, then, I especially encourage sharing with the poorest families, so that they can fulfill their responsibilities, especially with regard to children, weak or poor. On the contrary, such differences are a source of enrichment for building together. *When we give to the poor, we give to Christ*, for the poor “have put on the face of our Savior” and are “God’s favored ones” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Love for the Poor*). Faith calls for sharing with one’s brothers and sisters. *Solidarity in material things is an essential and primary expression of fraternal charity*: it provides each one with the means for surviving and for leading a decent life.

The earth and its riches are the property of everyone. “The abundance of the whole earth must bear fruit for all (St. Ambrose of Milan, *On Naboth*, VII, 33). In the difficult times in which we are living, it is certainly not enough to give from one’s surplus; what is needed is *to transform ways of acting and patterns of consumption*, giving from what one needs and keeping only what is essential, so that all people can live in dignity. This Lent, let us abstain from our often immoderate desire for material goods, so as to offer our neighbor what he desperately needs. *The fasting of the rich must become the feast of the poor* (cf. St. Leo the Great, *Homily 20 on Fasting*).

6. I encourage diocesan and parish communities to recognize the necessity to find practical means of assisting needy families. I know that numerous diocesan synods have already made progress in this regard. Agencies for the pastoral care of families should also be able to make an important contribution. By their participation in civic organizations, Christians should also make every effort to call attention to the pressing duty to help families in need. Once more I appeal to the leaders of nations to discover, on both the national and the international level, the means for putting an end to the spiral of poverty, especially the poverty of families. The Church is confident that government leaders and heads of business, in developing eco-

nomic policies, will come to appreciate the changes which need to be made, as well as their own obligations in this regard. In this way families will not depend solely on financial assistance, but will be able to meet their basic needs by the labor of their own members.

7. The Christian community joyfully welcomes the initiative of the United Nations to make 1994 an *International Year of the Family*. Wherever she is able, she will be happy to offer her, specific contribution to this celebration.

Today let us not harden our hearts! Let us heed the Lord's voice and the voice of our brothers and sisters!

May the acts of charity done throughout this Lent, by families and for families, bring profound joy to all and open our hearts to the Risen Christ, "the first-born among many brethren" (*Rm* 8:29). To all who respond to the Lord's call, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 3 September 1993.

# Today is Remembering Thursday

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*James H. Kroeger, M.M.*

## *Holy Thursday Reflections*

All of us gathered here this evening have been on our Lenten journey with Jesus. During this final week, from Palm Sunday through Easter, we celebrate with special intensity key events in the life of Jesus. We enter into the mysteries of our faith. As we move through these sacred days of the Triduum, we celebrate an experience of salvation — not as spectators, but as active participants.

Over the centuries Christian tradition has tried to capture the meaning of these special times. We know various names given to these days. Last Sunday is called Palm or Passion Sunday. Today is Holy Thursday, or Maundy Thursday in commemoration of the new love commandment that Jesus has given us. Tomorrow is Good Friday, on to Holy Saturday, and then Easter, the Day of Resurrection.

I propose we look at this day in a special way. I believe that today can appropriately be titled “Remembering Thursday.” It is a day of very significant memorials — the commandment of love and service that Jesus has given us, the gift of the Eucharist, the sacrament of priesthood — three special memorials all woven together in the liturgy of the Church.

If we look at the readings of today, we discover that the theme of remembering is emphasized again and again. The first reading from Exodus speaks of how the Hebrew people were to commemorate the Passover and remember with great detail and with ceremony the

events by which they were saved. In our second reading from First Corinthians, Jesus gives us his words establishing the Eucharist and twice repeats, "Do this in remembrance of me." The Gospel narrates the vivid story of the foot-washing and Jesus, example of service. Today is a special day for remembering.

Humanly speaking, remembering is very important. It is a special gift. Our humanness and consciousness is linked to this gift. Remembering involves our entire being, both our minds and our hearts. Yes, we can recall specific details of the past; however, if we recall with our hearts and with our affections, those events will continue to shape and transform us; they will make us new. Remembering always links past events into our lives and they become present, operative realities.

When we hear about someone who has lost their memory, we are saddened. Amnesia or dementia are life situations that are hard to bear. A forgotten birthday or anniversary is difficult to accept. This only points out how we must treasure memory; we treasure it individually and as a community. Memory allows us to tell our story, to live our lives, both as individuals and as a Christian people. Today, on "Remembering Thursday," our collective memory as a Christian people gets special emphasis.

I see that there are three central moments in the memory of the Christian people. The first moment of memory is the very "focus" of our memory, the person of Jesus, his entire life and mission. As his followers, we want to remember our Master. We want to make his story live in our lives, and we want our story and the story of Jesus to intertwine, so that the Jesus story becomes operative and formative of our daily lives.

As we look at the life of Jesus, we see that in his ministry he did some rather fantastic things. As is narrated in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, Jesus came as a humble servant. He performed a striking ministry. He did not cling to his divinity. He humbled himself, became one of us, and was even humbler still by accepting death on a cross. The Lord has been exalted.

Today's liturgy re-enacts one of these unique, fantastic events of Jesus' life as a servant. Jesus, on the last evening before he was to give his life, proceeded with a ritual. He washed the feet of his

disciples. Peter was taken aback and was astounded — “How can this be!” Jesus said, “It must be.” And, Peter said, “Yes.”

In fact, the foot-washing ceremony has been so central to Christian thought and ideals that in past centuries it was considered a quasi-sacrament. What is interesting to note is that Jesus’ new commandment of love is linked intimately with the foot-washing. “Love one another as I have loved you” means we must do as Jesus did. We must be willing to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters. Love and service is the point of Jesus’ new commandment. Love and service is the point of any foot-washing. As Christians, we continue to sacrament Christ’s presence to one another through our service. In this way, the Christian Community grows and is reconciled. As we recall and imitate what Jesus has done for us, we build up (*remember*) his body, the Church.

These are beautiful thoughts, high ideals; but, friends, we must admit we forget, and we forget so very quickly. So did Peter. Peter had asked that his entire body would be washed so that he would be totally part of Jesus; and, in a matter of a few hours, he denied the Lord. Yet, Jesus looked on Peter with love. He looks on us with the same love. Jesus helps us in various ways not to forget the focus of our Christian memory which is his own life as our Master and Teacher. Though we may fail and forget, Jesus always remembers and guides us — particularly through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The second moment on this “Remembering Thursday” is our reflection about the remembering “event.” How do we continually remember Jesus’ life and mission, his ultimate service and sacrifice? Jesus has given us a communal event of remembering — the sacrament of the Eucharist. In it we celebrate together the Lord’s dying and rising. Through the Eucharist Jesus is truly and tangibly present to us. The Eucharist retells the story of Jesus. We break the bread of Jesus and so become the people of Jesus. Eucharist is always central in our lives—the source and summit of all Christian life, as Vatican II has noted.

The Eucharist is our daily bread, and Jesus reminds us as he established the Eucharist, “Do this in remembrance of me” — not once, but twice. “Do this in remembrance of me.” We come together; we are here this very evening fulfilling the Lord’s command. We

remember; we celebrate; we believe; and as we remember, truly we grow in our own faith, and as we grow in faith we have energy, dynamism, and enthusiasm for mission, for authentic service.

When we recognize Christ in the Eucharist, broken for us, we can more readily recognize Christ in the broken bodies and lives of many people whom we encounter as missionaries and evangelizers. On this "Remembering Thursday," certainly the remembering focus is Jesus the Servant. The remembering event and ritual is the Eucharist. And yet, friends, our memory still continues to fail us; and again, Jesus remembers and assists us.

We move to a third moment: another sacrament, another dimension of memory. In the Christian community Jesus has established people responsible for the memory. They are to be "keepers of the flame"; they have the "ministry of memory." Jesus chose from among his followers some designated individuals to be "remembering persons." The Church has ministers; they are to be living reminders of Jesus' love for us. The sacrament of priesthood which we commemorate today serves the community in a particular way in that it brings us to remember Jesus. Ordained ministers have the public duty to act as "remembering persons." That's a very difficult and challenging responsibility.

"Remembering people" can function in many ways. Through evangelization, proclamation and telling the Gospel story, we are remembering people. When we read and reflect on the New Testament (our book of Jesus memories), we are a remembering people. By serving one another and by living the love commandment, we are a remembering people. By celebrating the meal of the Eucharist, we become a remembering people.

It is true that all faith communities need a variety of people to be "rememberers"; otherwise, the community dissipates and dissolves. Its central focus will vanish. The shortage of vocations in the Church could result in a crisis of memory in the Christian community. That is why it is serious and why we pray for dedicated people to serve the Church as "remembering persons."

Friends, I've spoken about three interrelated sacraments. The first is the sacrament of love, service, foot-washing, the very person of Jesus, God's sacrament of compassion for us. I've spoken of the

Eucharist, that gift from Jesus, that communal meal by which we actively remember Jesus' life-giving death and resurrection. I've spoken of ministry and priesthood, and the need for remembering persons in the Christian community. These are three forms, three moments of remembering; you can easily see how they are all mutually reinforcing. The rich Holy Thursday liturgy celebrates all three of these special moments in the life of the Christian people.

As we continue with our celebration of these beautiful liturgical rites this evening, I simply invite you to let the liturgy speak to you. Hear the voice of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you." "Do this in remembrance of me." "Do you understand what I have done?" "You likewise must wash each other's feet." Think of your life. Think of your vocation and mission. Draw near to Jesus, present for us in the Eucharist. Later on this evening, spend at least one hour with Jesus. Spend it remembering. Open your heart to God's love, to God's grace. Today is "Remembering Thursday."

*\*These homily reflections were shared during the community liturgy at the Maryknoll Mission Center in New York on Holy Thursday 1993.*

# Veritatis Splendor: Reflection of a Bishop

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## I. Introduction

Rarely has a Papal encyclical received so much, so widespread, and so disparate immediate comment as has *Veritatis Splendor* (VS), of Pope John Paul II. The sheer number of commentaries alone, from all over the world, is in itself extraordinary. But their assessment, ranging from high praise to severe criticism and thinly disguised personal hurt is even more striking. No doubt, various studies of the Encyclical will continue at a less hectic pace and at a deeper level of reflection, in the months and years to come. At present, what seems to be called for is an attempt to present a calm, positive exposition of some of VS's major points, particularly those pertaining to our specific Philippine context.

### *Different Perspectives*

Given its length and highly complex nature of its content, the Encyclical naturally attracts comment from different points of view. First, as addressed to "all Bishops of the Catholic Church," VS can be read as a message for the "Pastors of the Church," in carrying out their *munus propheticum, sacerdotale, and regale*, regarding "Moral Good for the Life of the Church and of the World."<sup>1</sup> Interest is then centered on the responsibilities of the Bishops as Pastors, and on the rightful obedience of moral theologians to the Magisterium, the

<sup>1</sup>The official title of VS is "Encyclical Letter, VERITATIS SPLENDOR, Addressed by the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, To All Bishops of the Catholic Church, Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching." Nos. 114-15 take up "Our own responsibilities as Pastors."

teaching office of the Church. Outside of the Encyclical's formal introduction by a number of bishops, little direct episcopal comment has been published to date. But certain other commentators have not hesitated to criticize what they term as VS's authoritarian tone.<sup>2</sup>

A second major perspective, based on the Encyclical's specific content "Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching," is that of the *moral theologians* themselves. A section of VS is explicitly devoted to "the service of moral theologians" (nn.109-13). The special interest of the moralists is VS's "discernment of certain tendencies in present-day moral theology" in the second chapter. As one might expect, some moralists' commentaries are among the most critical of VS.<sup>3</sup> Moral theologians are understandably concerned that their work is properly interpreted, and not rejected because of errors which they actually do not teach. Nevertheless, their over-riding concern to separate teaching from the Encyclical's alleged "misrepresentations" seems to impede their capacity to discern VS's positive value in identifying mistaken moral attitudes and judgments that have become so widespread in today's world, not excluding our own Philippines.

A third perspective, offered by various editorial commentators, social scientists, and cultural analysts, views the Encyclical in terms of major moral problems in contemporary culture such as human rights, violence, abortion, contraception, one parent families, population growth, and the like.<sup>4</sup> These commentaries range from general approval and calm appreciation of VS's moral message to strident

<sup>2</sup>One example of such charges is the published account of an Australian TV debate on the Encyclical in a program entitled "Four Corners"; another is Peter Hebblethwaite's commentaries published in the *National Catholic Reporter* for October 1st and 8th, 1993.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Haring, CSSR (*London Tablet*, 23 October 1993), Richard McCormick, S.J. (*America*, 30 October 1993), and Charles Curran (*Commonweal*, 22 October 1993), are three outstanding Catholic moral theologians whose commentaries on the Encyclical are very critical. On the other hand, Germain Grisez (*Tablet* 16 October 1993), Janet Smith (*Commonweal* 22 October 1993), Fausto Gomez, O.P. (*Manila Chronicle*, 19-20 October 1993), and Vivian Boland, O.P. (*Doctrine & Life*, 43, Nov. 1991) are very positive.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, George Weigel, "Standing Up for Moral Aspiration," *Internat. Herald Tribune* (13 October 1993); William Plaff, "Question His Prescription, Perhaps, but Respect the Pope's Diagnosis," *Internat. Herald Tribune* (13 October 1993); George Hunt, S.J., *America* (23 October 1993); Felix Corley, "Veritatis Splendor: A Message on Right and Wrong," *Asian Wall St. Journal* (28 October 1993); and Avery Dulles, S.J., "The Prophetic Humanism of John Paul II," *America* (23 October 1993).

rejection, sometimes bordering on a ridiculing caricature of the Encyclical.<sup>5</sup>

The inevitable "Letters to the Editor" that follow such critical commentaries are very instructive in revealing the sharp polarities among the educated reading class, and the wide divergence in the levels of their moral reasoning and sensibilities.

### *Perspective of this Study*

The present brief study makes no claim to offering a definitive, comprehensive critique of the Encyclical, even if such were possible at this early date. It simply aims to present some key aspects of VS that seem particularly pertinent to our pastoral Philippine, post-PCP II scene. The perspective taken here, then, is more in the line of the Church's *evangelization* or *adult catechesis*, rather than a strictly professional moral theological critique. This approach has been carefully chosen as promising the most fruitful results; for a number of reasons.

Primary among these reasons is the contention that the Encyclical is concerned most of all with the role of current Catholic moral teaching amidst contemporary moral attitudes and mind-sets. VS's primary aim is surely not to inhibit serious, creative moral study and research by condemning any particular moral theologian. Nor does VS wish to impose any one philosophical or theological position on all moralists (n.29, p.49). Rather, the crisis addressed by the Encyclical is that of a widespread loss among many Christians as well as non-Christians, of a moral sense that recognizes objective moral norms (cf. 106, p.158). Thus the Encyclical directs the attention of the bishops and moral theologians to the current confusion in moral matters and general weakening of sound moral formation.

A second reason for viewing the Encyclical from the perspective of a religious educator or practical pastoral adult catechesis is PCP II's insistence on the primacy of a renewed catechesis (PCP II, 183). If VS is to exercise its full impact on our Philippine "Church of the Poor," it must reach beyond the bishops and moral theologians to

<sup>5</sup>An example of caricature is the cover article in *Asiaweek* for 27 October 1993, which carried the sub-title: "John Paul II Listened to God and Misunderstood the Message." Subsequent issues of *Asiaweek* carried "Letters to the Editor," mostly in favor of the Pope.

ordinary adult Filipino Catholic lay men and women. Educating the lay faithful in the faith by helping them form a truly Christian conscience and a Christian moral sense, is, after all, the major concern the Pope as well as the bishops and Church moral teachers whom he is addressing.

The following commentary on VS, then, is written primarily from the perspective of a Pastor of the faithful and religious educator. It views the Encyclical as an exceptional means for fostering a sound Christian moral sense among the educated, adult Filipino Catholics in the cultural world of today. Some of the following comments will necessarily involve certain technical moral terms and contemporary moral positions, but they are related directly to commonplace moral problems, attitudes and values that are pertinent to our Filipino context.

## **II. General Aim of VS: Its "Introduction"**

The specific situation that called forth the Encyclical is clearly stated at the outset. Popes, especially over the last two centuries have developed moral teaching regarding many different spheres of human life. In contrast today it seems necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching . . . the Christian community itself has experienced the spread of numerous doubts and objections . . . with regard to the Church's moral teachings . . . no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine (n.4, p.8).

Therefore, the basic purpose of the Encyclical "limits itself to dealing with certain fundamental questions regarding the Church's moral teaching." Its specific purpose is "to set forth . . . the principles of a moral teaching based on Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition, and to shed light on the presuppositions and consequences, of the dissent which that teaching has met (n.5, p. 11).

### *Sources*

Commentators generally point out that the immediate sources of VS are clearly John Paul II's own Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992), both of which are cited a number of times. But they often miss the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern

World" (GS) which is cited and referred to no less than 28 times, four-times as any other source. Such oversights indicate the difficulty in presenting an unprejudiced picture of VS.

### **Comment**

1. The focus of the Encyclical, then is on the basic principles and realities governing Christian moral life: the place of Christ himself, the human person, human freedom, conscience, natural law, and the Church's magisterium. This corresponds roughly to what was commonly known as General or Fundamental Moral," as distinct from "Special Moral" which takes up the specific areas of moral activity. (Cf. NCDP 258-80, 281-317).

2. The Encyclical's emphasis on *Truth* as the basis for all moral living is significant. It provides the foundation for the objectivity of all morality. Moreover, when Truth is related directly to Christ, it grounds all *Christian* moral teaching and living.

## **III. Selected Significant Points**

### **A. Chapter 1**

This chapter is an extended analysis of *Mt 19:16-22*, Christ and the rich young man (nn.6-24, pp. 12-37). Completely within a Catholic reading of the biblical text, the chapter nevertheless brings out the essentials of Catholic morality.

It starts with the universal human search for the meaning of life and for salvation — as pictured in this particular rich young man standing before Jesus (nn.7-8). It then sketches the unique role of Christ and of his Church (nn.9-10), and the place of the Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount in authentic Christian loving (nn.11-15).

Next, the inner human yearning for perfection (nn.16-18) and Christ's invitation to "Come, follow me" (nn.19-21) are described.

This builds up to the response made possible by the Spirit and Christ's continuing grace-filled presence, particularly in the moral catechesis of the Church's Tradition and living Magisterium (nn.22-27). It concludes by reaffirming Vatican II's position on the task of the

Magisterium as the authentic interpreter of the word of God in whatever form (DV 8-10).

### **Comment**

1. VS from start to finish is completely a *faith approach* including its discussion of the Natural Law. This faith emphasis has special significance for Filipinos today, for two practical reasons.

*First*, regarding religious education in the Philippines, the text exemplifies, within Faith's moral dimension, just the type of biblical catechesis called for by PCP-II (art. 12-14).

*Second*, in moral theology, the question, "is there a Christian Ethics?" has been discussed at great length for the past, 20 years. The answer of a good number of Catholic moral theologians has been a carefully nuanced, shrouded "No." VS never even considers the question. Rather it asserts the role of Faith in moral living (n.26), of the Lord's grace in human freedom (n.24) — in brief, of the central role of Christ and the Church in the moral life of Christians.

2. Contemporary moralists probing the interrelation between faith and moral life has not been without profit, as the Encyclical acknowledges (n.29, p.48; 36, p.58). But in practice, the prolonged discussions on the relevance of Faith to moral conduct — "is the Christian as such bound to anything more than the non-Christian?" — often led to a certain rationalizing that tended to neglect some primary operative factors in actual Christian moral living.<sup>6</sup>

3. The relationship between Faith and reason in moral living — both theoretically and practically, in the life of the ordinary adult Catholic Filipino — is forever being reinvestigated, reflected upon, and lived out. There will never be one definitive "answer." Much current Catholic Moral Theology has stressed *three basic levels* of moral reality: the deepest level of transcendent values/goods that all seek and which form their basic vision, whether explicitated or not; a *second* level of moral precepts and norms that explicitate, guard, and foster these deeper values; and a third level of specific, individual moral acts and choices that make up our moral lives (NCDP 268-71).

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, *Readings in Moral Theology, No.2*, "The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics," ed. Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1980).

This pattern has proved very helpful in many ways, but because of pressure to solve specific moral dilemmas, it tended to lead moral theology to focus in great part on the reasoning process of discerning “what to do?” The direct influence of Faith tended to be relegated to the first level of “Christian vision.” By taking up in chapter 2 the human person, human freedom, conscience, and natural law, the Encyclical brings out the essential role of Faith on all three levels. VS thus offers a salutary re-affirmation of the primacy of Faith in moral Theology.

## B. Chapter 2

### 1. *Introduction.*

This chapter contains the essential teaching of VS. Many commentators have remarked about the difficulty of grasping its message. This is due not only to the complexity of the matter discussed, but also to its “spiral” form of argumentation which circles back and repeats former truths while developing new points.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter begins with a brief introduction (nn.28-34, pp.46-56) that summarizes the truths drawn from Scripture (n.28, p.46), then defines Moral Theology (n.29, p.47), and stresses its basis in “sound teaching” of the Magisterium (nn.29-30, pp.49-51). Its final section introduces human freedom and conscience, rejects the abuse of making them autonomous and absolutely sovereign, and instead describes genuine freedom with obligation (nn.31-34, pp.51-56) — all of which are developed in various sections of the following pages.

### 2. *Human Freedom and Law* (nn.35-53, pp. 56-65).

a. Notable is the manner in which the Encyclical reconciles God’s law with authentic human freedom. In citing the Catholic Tradition’s understanding of human reason as participating in the divine eternal law, VS grounds both the rightful moral autonomy of human persons and the moral law’s origin and source in God (36-41).

The following numbers provide an extended exposition of the Natural Law: its basis in God’s eternal law, its relation to God’s

<sup>7</sup>The spiral form of argumentation had already been noted in John Paul II’s Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), and other of his writings.

revealed Law through Moses and to the interior law of the Spirit promised in Jeremiah and explained by St. Paul (nn.42-45, pp.65-71).

b. A further dimension of freedom and nature is then taken up: a particular issue raised in the contemporary discussion on contraception. The “traditional arguments” against artificial contraception have been rejected by some moralists as “physicalism” — using mere biological laws as moral laws, thus denying human rationality, freedom, and cultural conditioning. This “naturalistic” understanding of the sexual act was, the objectors claim, the basis for condemning as morally unacceptable contraception, direct sterilization, autoeroticism, homosexual relations, etc. (n.47, p.74).

Against this view VS re-affirms the intrinsic unity of the human person, body and soul. It is the human person, an embodied spirit, who is the subject of moral acts (n.48, p.76).

c. This strong VS reaffirmation of the place of the human body in questions of the natural law leads to the rejection of the terms “merely physical” goods, called “premoral” (nn.48-50, pp.75-79). The terms “premoral,” “physical” or “ontic” are also rejected in VS’s exposition of fundamental option (n.65, p.100) and of proportionalism (n.75, p.115). All three terms are commonly used by authors favoring the moral approach of proportionate reasoning.

d. The Encyclical reaffirms the universality and immutability of the natural law in terms of universal and permanent moral norms (nn.51-53, pp.79-85).

### **Comment**

1. Of special importance for the Filipino Pastor and religious educator is VS’s caution concerning the tremendous impact on moral attitudes of modern empirical observation, methods of scientific objectification through statistically verifiable data, and patterns of behavior explained exclusively in categories of psycho-social processes (n.46, p.72). In many ways, the social scientists have become the arbiters of the new morality. Human good/evil are defined in behaviorist terms (cf. also 111-12, pp.166-68).

This is particularly relevant to our Philippine context. We have only to think of DECS “Value Education Program” and the Senate’s

"Moral Reform" project to see how influential this "social science" approach to morality can be, even among religious educators. Such an approach has no place for either the reality of original sin among us, nor of our absolute need for God's liberating grace. Within the context of Filipino religiosity, this "secularist" approach to morality seems particularly out of place.<sup>8</sup>

2. Regarding "physicalism," the Encyclical's insistence on the unity of the person, body and soul, is very timely. The controversy over the problem of contraception has so dominated Catholic moral theologizing since *Humanae Vitae* (1968), that it has led to some radical re-evaluations of many traditional Catholic moral positions. Much of this is surely necessary, but in the search for creative new approaches to morality, certain exaggerations are to be expected. One such exaggeration seems to be the tendency to overly separate our physical dimensions from our free spiritual moral activity.

3. The notion of "pre-moral" or "ontic" evil must also be put into the context of this same concerted effort of current moral theology to resolve the over-riding moral problem of artificial contraception. Unfortunately this concentrated focus has tended to turn moral theology into a study of "crisis situations." The whole discipline then becomes an investigation into how the moral agent can come to a reasonable moral choice between two or more fundamental values which in the context cannot both be fostered.

This concrete situation of much of current Catholic moral theology explains the polarizing tendencies criticized by VS. The specific aspects can be outlined as follows:

<i>Shy away from the:</i>	<i>in order to stress the:</i>
a. physical dimensions of human acts;	a'. free, intentional, historicity;
b. concrete individual acts;	b'. deeper fundamental option;
c. universal, objective permanent moral laws pre-moral.	c'. the agent's proportionate reasoning on evil and consequences.

<sup>8</sup>See "Value Education/Moral Recovery and the Catholic Educator." *Docete* 12, n. 57 (Apr.-June 1989) 24-30.

4. The general thrust of this polarization is clearly away from a certain "objectivity" toward greater stress on the subject's deepest freedom and reasoning processes. Much of this approach is needed and necessary, as the discussion, below on fundamental option and proportionalism will indicate.

### 3. *Conscience & Truth* (nn.54-64, pp.85-98).

VS critiques some modern presentations of conscience which overstress the complexity of its functions and the moral conflicts it faces. The result is that the individual conscience is, in practice, either separated from, or even opposed to, the teaching of moral precepts (nn.55-56, pp.86-88).

Positively, VS defines conscience as "a moral judgment about man and his actions," "the application of the law to a particular case" (n.59, pp.90-91; 52, pp.81-82); "the proximate norm of personal morality" (n.60, p.92).

Noteworthy is the Encyclical's insistence that "conscience thus formulates moral obligation (n.59, p.91) "The practical judgment of conscience which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, manifests the link between freedom and truth" (n.61, p.93). Conscience expresses itself in acts of "judgment" not in arbitrary "decisions" (n.55, p.87; 61, p.93).

### **Comment**

1. This is one of the Encyclical's most relevant section to moral education in the Philippines. Each of the main points on conscience picked up by VS are among the most needed clarifications in Catholic religious education today. Professional moral theologians may truthfully disclaim having taught the notions of conscience criticized by VS. But the experienced religious educator can bear irrefutable witness—oral and written evidence—that the misconceptions about conscience raised in VS are right on target. Moreover, it seems probable that the current stress on the moral agent's unintentionally supports some of these errors.

2. The main points of the Encyclical's teaching on conscience that are particularly pertinent to our moral education can be summarized as follows.

a. Simple, core *definition* that focuses on what conscience alone does: apply a universal moral norm to a concrete act/situation. No law, not even God's law, "applies itself"; and conscience never asserts that it is a "law unto itself" but always gives an objective, norm as its ground.

VS's description of conscience cuts through the confusing three-level descriptions of conscience which certain contemporary moralists have favored. Such an approach has unnecessarily obscured the essential interaction of conscience and moral law.

b. By explaining how the practical judgment of conscience imposes on the person the *obligation* to act, VS has offered the inestimable service of joining authentic personal freedom with moral obligation. Current moral education's innumerable ways of escaping any and all moral obligations is perhaps the most serious erroneous attitude faced by the religious educator today.

c. VS's exposition of "erroneous conscience," both culpable and non-culpable, brings out the "objective dimension" of our personal consciences. It also helps to ward off the simplistic, pietistic tendency of identifying conscience with the voice of God.

d. VS's insistence on the formation of conscience and continuous conversion also leads to recognition of virtues — their importance and function in Christian moral living (cf. 64, p.97).

4. *Fundamental Choice and Specific Kinds of Behavior* (nn.65-70, pp.98-108).

VS takes up the notion of "fundamental option" as proposed in various current moralists. VS's main thrust is to forcefully reject the separation of fundamental option from individual deliberate moral acts (nn.65-67, pp.100-103).

In integrating a "fundamental choice" with conscious free decisions the Encyclical also *refutes* the claims that:

i. good/evil apply only to the transcendental dimension of fundamental opinion, while particular choices can only be right/wrong.

ii. a single act cannot be a mortal sin (n.70, pp.106-8).

iii. there are two levels of morality: the order of good/evil, and specific acts qualified as morally right/wrong" by proportionate reasoning on the "pre-moral" or "physical" goods (n.65, pp.99-100).

Positively, VS relates fundamental option to what the Bible speaks of as particular fundamental decisions of faith, and to the obedience of faith (nn.66-68, pp.100-105).

### **Comment**

1. A sound source for the notion of fundamental option is the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, who is famous for the distinction between "I have freedom," meaning the capacity to choose, and "I am freedom," meaning my "self" gradually formed through my free choices. In Marcel, fundamental option is a metaphysical rather than a psychological concept. It simply means our moral self as it gradually develops through specific moral experiences (cf. *NCDP* 264-66).

2. Some moralists, however took up the notion of fundamental option/freedom precisely as distinct from individual moral acts/choices. This was part of their campaign against so-called "act accounting." They like to contrast personal 'being' (who I am), with merely 'doing' (what I do). This unfortunately led to *separating* fundamental freedom from individual free acts. Only the one-way relationship of the fundamental option determining the individual moral acts was in view. How the fundamental option itself came into being was not pursued.

3. Again VS offers our Filipino religious educators and moralists an opportunity to correct one-sided presentations. A recent commentary in a Manila paper brought out sharply the grave moral misunderstanding that resulted from inadequate presentation and/or understanding of fundamental option as used in some current moral theologies. Briefly put, the error was to think that individual moral acts such as adulterous acts were not important as long as one's fundamental option to Christ remained constant. The newspaper columnist attributed the source of this notion to a 'modern' priest who undoubtedly had been schooled in one of the current moral theologies.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>See Bernardo M. Villegas, "Beware of modern priests," editorial page, *Manila Bulletin*, Nov. 2, 1993.

Once again, the leading moral theologians do not fall into such crude errors. What is at issue here, however, is the effect of their teaching as it becomes watered-down by both seminarians and adult Catholic Filipino laymen and women.

#### 5. *The Moral Act* (nn.72-83, pp.108-27).

This section begins by reasserting the “essential connection between the moral value of an act and man’s final end” (n.72, p.110). It goes on to reassert the “essential ‘teleological’ character” of moral life (n.73, p.112). But then VS takes up current ‘teleological’ moral theories (proportionalism, consequentialism) in what is the most difficult part of the whole Encyclical (n.74ff).

The effort to find ever more consistent rational arguments for moral life is “legitimate and necessary” (n.74, p.113), but inadequate understanding of the “object of moral action” leads to false solutions, called in the text “consequentialism” and “proportionalism” (defined in text, n. 75, pp.114-15).

[*Consequentialism* is defined as drawing “the criteria of the rightness of a given way of acting solely from a calculation of foreseeable consequences deriving from a given choice.” *Proportionalism* is described as: “by weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice with a view to the “greater good” or “lesser evil” (n. 75, pp.114-15).]

Both theories are said to reject the possibility of absolute moral prohibitions, and concentrate on calculating the foreseeable consequences of premoral, physical realities. They hold that goodness is always mixed with evil, so morality becomes an activity of proportionate reasoning.

The Encyclical rejects both theories as not faithful to the Church’s teaching IF and “when they believe they can justify, as morally good, deliberate choices of kinds of behavior contrary to the commandments of divine and natural law.” (n. 76, p.117) Again, “one must reject the thesis, characteristic of teleological and proportionist theories, which holds that it is impossible to qualify as morally evil according to its species — its ‘object’ — the deliberate choice of certain

kinds of moral behavior or specific acts, apart from a consideration of the intention for which the choice is made or the totality of the foreseeable consequences of that act, for all persons concerned” (n.79, p.121: repeated n. 82, p. 125).

VS insistently stresses that “the primary and decisive element for moral judgment is the *object* of the human act (n. 79, p.121). Thus the intention and the circumstances of the act, which, while capable of lessening the gravity of an evil act, nonetheless cannot alter its moral species.” (n. 77, pp.118-19).

This critique repeats *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (French ed.) n. 1754: “*Les circonstances ne peuvent de soi modifier la qualite morale des actes eux-memes.*” The aim of both VS and the *Catechism* is clearly to insist that there are certain specific kinds of behavior that are always wrong to choose” (n. 78, p.120) — i.e. “intrinsically evil,” (n. 80. p.122) independent of intention and circumstances (CCC n. 1761, quoted n.78, p. 120).

Examples of such acts are listed in n.80, p.123, quoting Vatican II, *GS* n.27: homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide, mutilation, physical and mental torture, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution.

### **Comment**

1. This section of Encyclical is most open to criticism since it enters into the tedious distinctions of the many different current moral theologies. Frankly, it tries to do an impossible task: to accurately present and evaluate all the intricacies of the different moral theories alluded to. By such attempt, the encyclical runs the risk of being discounted as simply a “misrepresentation” by the very moralists who could profit the most from re-evaluating their theories.

2. A careful reading of the text seems to indicate that essential *circumstances* and *intention* are being included in the “*object*” of the act, without being explicitly recognized. The strongest evidence for this is the following:

In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself *in the perspective of the acting person*. (Italics in original, n.78, p.119).

Hence when the Encyclical speaks of "intention," it must refer to a second meaning. This interpretation is confirmed by a following number which states: "*Intrinsically evil acts are such always and per se, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.*" (n.80)

Such also seems to be the meaning of "deliberate choice" in the excerpt cited above (n.79, p.121). Surely "the deliberate choice of certain kinds of behavior" includes an "intention." It would also seem to include the situation where the "circumstances" were traditionally said to change the moral species of an act, namely, a soldier shooting at and killing an enemy soldier in war. These "circumstances" were said to change the moral act from murder to possible heroism. In VS, such circumstances would be part of the "*object*," namely, "the end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person." (n.79, p.120).

This is a key point in responding to much legitimate criticism of VS, and reconciling its substantial position with that of many contemporary Catholic moral theologians.

3. For the religious educator, however, this section of the Encyclical is more valuable for its questioning the basic attitude of mind behind "proportionate reasoning." The objection has often been raised — and allegedly answered — the "difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of evaluating all the good and evil consequences and effects — defined as pre-moral — of one's own acts; an exhaustive rational calculation is not possible (n.77, p.119).

The Encyclical rejection of this "calculating" process is confirmed in ordinary human experience by the universal temptation of *rationalizing*. Current 'proportionalists' give but slight acknowledgment to this most common human failing. VS seems to be on far firmer ground here.

4. What must be openly acknowledged, however, is the fact that the Encyclical does not supply any direct answer to the problematic situation that gave rise to proportionalism, namely, the use of artificial means of contraception. The challenge remains on how the Church's moral teaching on sexuality can be presented in more intelligible ways to ordinary Catholic lay men and women.

To put it bluntly, *no* current moral theology up to now seems to have succeeded in this task. For all its finely spun reasoning, proportionalism must face perhaps its most telling objection in the simple, practical judgment: "It hasn't worked!"

### C. Chapter 3

The final chapter (pp.128—74) returns to the explicit Faith view of human freedom based on truth, stressing sharing the *munus regale* of the Crucified Christ (nn.84-87, pp.128-34). It emphasizes the unity of faith and morality (nn.88-89, pp.134-37).

Once again the *universality* and *immutability* of the moral norm are stressed, but this time precisely as serving "to protect the personal dignity and inviolability of man, on whose face is reflected the splendor of God" (n.90, p.137). Once again, too, *consequentialism* and *proportionalism* are judged "unacceptable" in their rejection of negative moral norms, valid without exception, regarding specific kinds of behavior. The existence of such norms are said to be confirmed in a particularly eloquent way by Christian martyrdom and the holiness of the Church (n.92-94, pp.140-43).

Universal and unchanging moral norms are then related to the "service of the person and society" (n.95-97, pp.143-47), and applied to economic, social, and political life (nn.98-101, pp.147-52).

The great difficulty of respecting the norm of morality, and the continual temptation to break the harmony between freedom and truth, are recognized (n.102, pp.152f). But, with the grace of the Lord, "temptations can be overcome, sin can be avoided." What is unacceptable is "the attitude of one who makes his own weakness the criterion of the truth about the good, so that he can feel self-justified" (n. 104, p. 155). The Gospel parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (*Lk* 18:9-14) is immediately taken up to order further illustrate the point, and to avoid any misunderstanding that the text is proposing a new type of Pharisaism (n. 104, p.156).

The next section relates morality to the "new evangelization" (n. 106-108, pp.157-61), and then discusses the "service, of the moral theologian, including the *normative* dimension of the Church's morality as irreducible to the results of the so-called behavioral sciences (n.109-13, pp.162-69). The sensitive topic of *dissent* is touched on

briefly. Dissent "in the form of carefully orchestrated protests and polemics carried on in the media" is judged to be "opposed to ecclesial communion and correct understanding of the hierarchical constitution of the People of God" and therefore "unacceptable" (n.113, p.169).

The last sections of the chapter take up the responsibilities of bishops as heralds and authentic teachers of the Faith (n. 114-17, pp.169-74), including a final brief summary of the main contents of the Encyclical (n.115, p.171).

VS concludes with five pages on "Mary, Mother of Mercy model of all who hear, the word of God and keep it" (n.118-20, pp.175-79).

### **Comment**

1. This final chapter, seems to have caused some of the negative reactions to the Encyclical. But if read carefully together with the first two chapters, a more positive interpretation can be achieved. As a local editorial column by a well known priest-social scientist highlighted, the Encyclical is "not a call for a witchhunt." Unfortunately, some moralists seem to think it is!

2. This editorial column praised the Encyclical as: (i) a corrective to "the fuzzy thinking" of those who take the community's decision to be the sole moral norm, and (ii) a "call to a moral seriousness and respect for truth, qualities desperately needed in our time."<sup>10</sup> This editorial comment in a Manila paper is noteworthy for two reasons.

*First*, it is by a leading Philippine social scientist, which indicates the relevance of VS for our social situation.

*Second*, the commentary's major point is to reject the *relativism* of "common opinion," and to praise VS for providing an intellectual basis for *objective* morality. Three days later a comment appeared on the priest-social scientist's column on VS by another author in the same newspaper. While explicitly rejecting "morality is relative," the author opted precisely for "whatever anyone 'feels' is right," a perfect relativism.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>See Fr. John J. Carroll, S.J., "Encyclical: not a call for a witchhunt," *Philippine Inquirer*, Nov. 20, 1993.

<sup>11</sup>A.O.Flores, "Commentary," *Philippine Inquirer*, Nov.20, 1993.

3. This public, local exchange of opinion could be taken as rather typical of how even well-educated Filipino Catholics “rationalize” in their moral lives. It would tend to support VS’s position against “proportionatism.” For even when an objective moral error is presented clearly, an educated writer, while recognizing the point, can simply follow his own preferences.

4. The position of VS against “proportionate reasoning” is also supported by a growing number of ethical studies that seriously question the alleged over emphasis of reasoning processes in moral life. These studies wish to bring out something as traditional as Aristotle’s *Ethica*, namely, the role of moral virtues and character in moral living.<sup>12</sup>

5. The Pope’s own public introductory announcement of the Encyclical (Sunday Angelus, 3 October 1993) asked that “when the text is read as a whole, it will be the object of calm consideration, and will thus be able to “contribute to a better understanding of the demanding and liberating Gospel message.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Concluding Comments**

A. The key positive values proposed in VS can be summarized as follows:

1. Stressing the *Christic* approach to Christian morality, from start to finish, on all levels, and more generally, the truth that faith and morality cannot be separated (n.37, 88).

2. Defining *authentic human freedom* and our human autonomy as *not absolute*, but relative to our common human nature and condition, before God our Creator (n.32-34, 38-41).

3. Stressing the intrinsic link between ‘fundamental option’ and our individual concrete moral acts (n.65-67).

<sup>12</sup>Stanley Hauerwas has developed this ‘character’ approach, and not surprisingly has high praise for VS (cf. *Commonweal* 22 October 1993). Two recent books that relativize the place of “calculating” in moral living are Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination* (University of Chicago, 1992), and James Q. Wilson, *Moral Sense* (Free Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup>See *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly edition in English, October 6, 1993, “The Church speaks to human consciences,” p.1.

4. Rehabilitating the importance of our individual moral acts, and their good/evil character, not merely right/wrong. Therefore, a single moral act can be a mortal sin.

5. Stressing the existence of a universal objective [natural] moral law, grounding objective morality (n.51-53, 95-97).

6. Reaffirming the full integrity of the human person as *embodied spirit*, thus rehabilitating the importance of the human body as intrinsic to human moral life (n.47-50).

7. Defining *conscience* as the faculty which applies objective moral law to our concrete acts, and imposing moral obligation, thus rejecting all self-centered subjectivism (n.59-62).

8. Modifying the current moral theology's over-emphasis on "complexity" and "crisis situations" so that moral life is not reduced to the individual's calculating proficiency.

9. Clarifying the weaknesses of "proportionate reasoning" and the use of "pre-moral" or "ontic" evil as constituting an adequate approach to solving moral problems.

B. Perhaps VS is calling for a new initiative that can set aside the polemics of the last 25 years and the hardened moral positions that have resulted.

In terms of *General Moral Theology*, VS's "Faith-approach" probably speaks to the ordinary Catholic more effectively than the current moral positions criticized. It would be a serious mistake, then, to reduce the present tension to a conflict between up-to-date, forward-looking moral theologians, and a recalcitrant, out-of-date Vatican.

## Three Special Graces for Priests

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*Pedro G. Tejero, O.P.*

Whenever a priest is ordained, God grants him gratuitously three special graces which deserve our attention and consideration, namely: (1) Sanctifying grace; (2) The character of the Order; (3) The grace of the Holy Spirit [Sacramental grace].

### Sanctifying grace

All sacraments are ordained to provide gratuitously sanctifying grace. When Jesus Christ was dying on the cross, “water and blood” flowed from his wounded side to signify that the sacraments of the New Law, through the power of the Holy Spirit, confer sanctifying grace for man to be saved. As man’s sins are forgiven and his soul becomes susceptible to God’s divine actions, his soul is likewise renewed and new life is bestowed on him. The Holy Scripture calls this event “the partaking of God’s nature” (2 Pt 1:3-4). The soul is then raised above its normal existence and begins to live a new kind of life. It is a sort of an entrance within the charmed circle of the Blessed Trinity. To say this is not just a mere metaphor. God’s divine action in the soul gives evidence of the tremendous reality that takes place in the lives of the just. Empowered by the action of sanctifying grace, the soul now enters into a loving and intimate communication with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The soul becomes a real, worthy, and fitting abode of the Three Divine Persons.

As the soul is enabled to perform divine actions because of its participation in God’s life, those who have been renewed by the grace of God become sons of God and can rightly cry out “Abba, Father” (Jn 1:12-18). Partakers of the divine nature, we become co-heirs with Christ, and can speak of ourselves as heirs of God as well (Jn 17:3).

This same Grace entitles us to some sort of claim to the heritage of God and to the fortune of God. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity received at baptism are abundantly enhanced to produce appropriate fruits and develop to their fullness. Propelled with the divine instinct of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, these given virtues make us more responsive to every breath of God and make us capable of performing heroic acts.

### **The character of the Order**

At the time of the ordination, when the imposition of the hands takes place, an influx of divine nature coming from Christ the High Priest, passes through the hands of the ordaining minister and enters into the inner recesses of the soul of the one ordained. This is said to be a portentous event. At this particular moment the soul of the newly ordained priest is marked with a kind of seal, by way of an image and resemblance of Christ. This is how the minister of the Church becomes, in some respect, a copy of Christ (Cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 24). "That inward character itself is essentially and principally the sacrament of the Order" (*Suppl.* 24,2,1m).

This character imprinted indelibly in the soul is derived from the Priesthood of Christ. This is a kind of special power; a *certain power* by which priests are able to dispense divine gifts to the members of the Church. The Sacred ministers do this in twofold manners: "one, which is primary, over the Body of Christ; the other which is secondary, over the Mystical Body of Christ" (*Suppl.* 36,2,1m).

In the encyclical, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, a detailed account is given of the various functions proper of the priests: "Priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the One High Priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care...Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd, authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness, and his offer of salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and in the Person of Christ, the Head and Shepherd" (No. 15).

The character or seal by which the priest is likened to Christ remains in the soul as an *instrumental power* for the purpose of administering the sacraments, and as a manifestation of God's gifts to others and to the whole Church. Consequently, the priest is "a living instrument of Christ" (III,64,5,2m). "He is a minister and instrument, so to say, of the outpouring of the heavenly gifts from the Head to the members" (Suppl.36,4,2m). Likewise, he works instrumentally in the sacraments, and acts not by his own, but by Christ's power" (III,64,6).

Christ alone has the fullness of Priesthood. When he commissioned his disciples to continue the mission He received from the Father, He also gave a share of himself to those who would become his images and communicators of the divine graces. In doing so, Christ, the High Priest, remains always as the principal agent or primary actor in dispensing divine realities. He always takes the initiative and moves first. The priest on the other hand, acts as the living instrument of Christ. He is moved by Christ, and do not act by himself at his own will. This is the theological foundation for the validity and reasonableness of the following expressions commonly attributed to a priest: 'He acts *in persona Christi*,' 'He is *alter Christus*,' 'He is *homo Dei*,' 'He is *Imago Christi*.'

As Christ's Priesthood is eternal, the character of the Order shares also in this quality. Thus the character imprinted in the soul of his priest cannot be blotted out from the latter's soul, and it remains there in an indelible manner. The Order, therefore, is not given or received for a certain period of time only (*ad tempus*). "Christ's Priesthood is eternal, perpetual, enduring." (III,63,5) "*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum...*"

Christ's Priesthood can neither be invalidated nor nullified. The sacraments, properly administered, always achieve its purpose. This is because Christ is the principal agent while the priest is simply an instrument. The indignity and sinfulness of the instrument can never be an obstacle to the efficacy of Christ's passion. Nevertheless, the good disposition of the priest while celebrating the sacraments may enhance the fruitfulness of God's gifts. "Christ works in the sacraments, both by wicked men as lifeless instruments, and by good men as living instruments" (III,64,5,2m).

## The Grace of the Holy Spirit (Sacramental grace)

The grace of God is primarily a gift of the Holy Spirit. By means of grace men are justified and sanctified. Aside from this, there are also other gifts of the Holy Spirit granted through the action of the sacraments so that man may collaborate more effectively in the work of salvation and in the growth and perfection of the Body of Christ, the Church. These are called the sacramental graces which each sacrament possesses.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, those who have been endowed with sacramental character, the seal of Christ, God gives them a *special grace* so that they may accomplish worthily the service to which they are deputed. In the *New Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the sacramental grace of the Order is thus defined: "the grace of the Holy spirit, characteristic of the sacrament of the Holy Orders consists in that the ordained priest and minister is configured to Christ Priest, Master and Shepherd" (n. 1585). In the encyclical, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, that configuration with Christ is well explained: "he forms and strengthens them with his pastoral charity; and he gives them an authoritative role in the Church as servants for the proclamation of the Gospel to every people and of the fullness of Christian life of all the baptized" (n.15).

The sacramental grace of Holy Orders according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is ordained primarily to create excellent goodness in the priests to render them apt and worthy ministers. "The worthy exercise of Orders requires not just any kind of goodness, but excellent goodness, in order that as they who received Orders are set above the people in the degree of Order, so may they be above them by the merit of holiness. Hence, they are required to have the grace that suffices to make them worthy members of Christ's people, but when they receive Orders they are given a yet *greater gift of grace* (*amplissima gratia*), whereby they are rendered apt for greater things" (*Suppl.* 35,1,3m).

## Conclusion

At the end of these reflections on the three special graces granted by God to priests on the day of their ordination, I have quoted different passages from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas on the

Holy Orders in the hope that such thought provoking sayings will serve as themes for further reflection and meditation.

a. "The word '*sacerdos*' (priest) is employed to signify one who gives sacred things by dispensing the sacraments" (*Suppl.* 36,4,1m).

b. "Wherefore that this beauty might not be lacking to the Church, He established Order in her so that some should deliver the sacraments to others, being this made like to God in their own way, as co-operating with God; even as in the natural body, some members act on others" (*Suppl.* 34,1).

c. "Order is given as a remedy not to one person, but to the whole Church" (*Suppl.* 35,1,1m).

d. "Not only should bishops, priests, and deacons take very great care to be examples of speech and conduct to those over whom they are placed, but also to lower grades, and without exception all who serve the household of God, since it is most disastrous to the Church if the laity be better than the clergy" (*Suppl.* 36,1 on the contrary).

e. "So in all things pertaining to God a man must not dare to become a leader of others, unless in all his habits he is most deiform and godlike" (*Suppl.* 36,1).

f. "Those who are made to stand between God and people...should shine with a good conscience before God, and with a good name before men" (*Suppl.* 36,1,1m).

g. "God never so abandons His Church that apt ministers are not to be found sufficient for the needs of the people, if the worthy be promoted and the unworthy set aside" (*Suppl.* 36,1,1m).

h. "Temporal things are not to be sought but for the sake of spiritual things. Wherefore, all temporal advantages should count for nothing, and all gain be despised for the advancement of spiritual good" (*Suppl.* 36,5,2m).

i. "The holiness of righteousness is required in the minister, that he may be suitable for the ministry; for which reason he acts unbecomingly and sins, if while in a state of sin he attempts to fulfill that ministry" (*Suppl.* 64,6,1m).

j. "He who approaches a sacrament, receives it from a minister of the Church, not because he is such and such a man, but because he is a minister of the Church" (*Suppl.* 64,6,2m).

## Announcement

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*Diocese of San Jose, Nueva Ecija*

*Let It Be Known to All that:*

1. Whereas he continues to violate his duties as priest (cfr. Canon 285, 286, 287) and to disregard the admonition of his Bishop;

2. Whereas he encouraged his Parish Pastoral Council to make a rally in the public streets of San Jose City last January 2, 1993 to slander the Bishop and other priests (cfr. Canon 1373);

3. Whereas he continues to evade seeing the Bishop or his representatives for dialogue and disregarded all the letters of summons from the Bishop;

4. Whereas he expressed his will not to obey the Bishop or other ecclesiastical authority with the intention of leaving the diocese of San Jose, Nueva Ecija;

5. Whereas he showed disrespect to the church and destroyed completely the priest's rectory of the Parish of San Geronimo, Baloc, Santo Domingo, and carted away all the books of records, the sacred images, furnitures, etc. belonging to the parish (cfr. Canon 1747,1);

6. Whereas he attempted to put up his own quarters to dishonor and damage the Bishop and the diocese (cfr. Canon 1368);

Therefore, in accordance with Church laws particularly canons 1333, 1373, 1391-1392, 1740-1741 we hereby declare:

**FATHER RESTITUTO AHYONG**

REMOVED from his appointment as parish priest of San Geronimo Catholic Parish, Baloc, Santo Domingo, N.E. and SUS-

PENDED from undertaking any priestly ministry within the DIO-  
CESE of SAN JOSE, NUEVA ECIJA.

Given the 1st day of February, 1994.

(Sgd.) Most Rev. LEO M. DRONA, S.D.B., D.D.  
Bishop of San Jose, Nueva Ecija

ATTESTED BY:

(Sgd.) Fr. LUZVIMINDO SAYSON  
Vicar General

(Sgd.) Fr. BONIFACIO FLORES  
Chancellor

## Cases and Inquiries

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Excelso García, O.P.

### REFLECTIONS ON PRIESTHOOD

*In our monthly recollection the question of vocations to priesthood was raised. Apparently there is a dire shortage of vocations in some countries. Some participants warned the group that the possibility of some kind of crisis to priestly vocations might be felt in the future in the Philippines too and we should take some preventive measures in order to avoid its evils. Various suggestions were proposed on how to foster and improve the recruiting of the youth to enter the seminary, as well as to strengthen the spirituality of our priests in order to inspire young people to become priests. One participant repeatedly said that in his opinion the quality of our priests is of paramount importance to avoid a crisis of vocations to priesthood. "The number of priests," he said, "will not be lacking if we priests are living examples of what Christ, the High Priest, wants His priests to be." What do you think of this problem?*

*A young priest*

I entirely agree with what the participant priest repeatedly said about the importance of spiritual life of our priests. It is a sad fact that in some countries there is an acute shortage of vocations to priesthood. This problem has been discussed in many reunions of priests and even published in the papers and magazines. It is also a fact that never in the past the problem of recruiting vocations to priesthood had ever been faced with so great courage and determination as in our time. New ways and plans are now being used to look for more young men attracting and inviting them to enter our seminaries. Sad to say

that the response is not much encouraging in some countries. A few accept the invitation, but after some time they find themselves discouraged, not satisfied and attracted to the life they have to follow.

Reflecting seriously on this obvious shortage of vocations for priesthood, we cannot help but to ask: What kind of shortage is this? Is it a need for more priests or a need for better priests? A careful consideration for the right answer to this question leads us to make a basic distinction.

If by shortage of priestly vocations we mean that God does not actually call at present enough men to continue the priestly ministry according to the Gospel, we cannot simply admit that there exists at present any shortage of vocations to the priesthood. God does not and will never fail to call the necessary number of men to carry out the Church's mission committed to her by our Lord Jesus Christ till the end of the world.

But if by shortage of priestly vocations we mean the insufficient number of properly prepared men who positively answer to the divine call either during the period of their being trained for the priesthood or, being already ordained as priest, neglect or abandon, for one reason or another, their priestly ministry, we agree that there might be and actually there is a great shortage of vocations for priesthood.

In short, God's calling enough men for priesthood is not lacking in the Church: He cannot fail to call enough number of men to the priestly ministry. What is wanting is human cooperation in following the divine call, either when they receive the necessary and proper formation before receiving the sacred order or when carrying out their priestly ministry.

The true vocation for priesthood leads the man called by God both to his personal sanctification and to the salvation of souls. These two things are inseparable. Priesthood cannot be conceived without these two ends in mind. A person is ordained priest not for his own spiritual advancement alone, but for the salvation of others as well. No priest can truly be satisfied with only saying Mass every day, to have his meditation and recite the Liturgy of the Hours daily. Priesthood has been conferred on him that he will impart the souls with holy zeal the means for their salvation too.

Of course, personal sanctification should shine in every priest's personal life, if his apostolate and priestly ministry is to be really effective and conducive to the salvation of others. This was meant by the Lord when He said: "For them do I sanctify myself." The need of holiness in every priest is declared in the words of Fulton Sheen: "For the priests and religious there is no middle course. It is either perfection — at least desired and pursued, if not actually acquired — or progressive decline."

St. Paul gave Timothy the following instruction: "Train yourself for the life of piety, because the discipline of religion is beneficial in every way, with its promise of life here and hereafter. You can depend on this as worthy of complete acceptance. This explains why we work and struggle as we do; our hopes are fixed on the living God who is the savior of all men, but especially of those who believe. Such are the things you must urge and teach. Let no one look down on you because of your youth, but be a constant example of love, faith and purity to believers... Devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you received when... the presbyters laid their hands on you. Attend to your duties; let them absorb you, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch yourself and watch your teaching. Persevere at both tasks. By doing so you will bring to salvation yourself and all who hear you" (1 Tm, 4:7-16).

A priest must be holy and apostolic as the Christ' Church is, in that order. He cannot be satisfied with having received the sacred order of priesthood; he must seriously strive to achieve the holiness proper to a minister of the sacred things he administers to others.

He has to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the High Priest, who "came to serve, not to be served." Priesthood has been given to the priest not for his own comfort, but to alleviate the needs of the poor; not to be influential among people, but to enlighten them in solving and overcoming their difficulties in their struggle for holiness; not to be a leader in temporal or political affairs, or to practice any profane or civil profession or career, but to exercise the priestly ministry for which he was ordained; not even to say only his daily Mass, recite the Liturgy of the Hour and have mental prayer, but also to hear confessions, preach the word of God and to exercise fruitfully his priestly ministry according to the Church's desire and the need of souls.

We should recall what the Holy Father John Paul II has more than once said, that the number of faithful going to confession has considerably decreased, while those who approach the Communion rail have increased. This does not mean that the Church, whose head is the Holy Father, Vicar of Christ, is opposed to the active participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the altar. What the Church and the Holy Father really want is that this participation be worthy, that all who take Holy Communion be well prepared and disposed to receive the Lord fruitfully. A great number of faithful approach the Communion rail without confessing their mortal sins, because there are not confessors around. Thus, they confessed directly to God, they say. Here we see a vicious circle: the faithful say that they confess directly to God, because there are no available confessors, and the priests say that they don't hear confessions, because there are no penitents. Neither the faithful nor the priests are correct in reasoning that way. The former should know that the Holy Eucharist is a sacrament of the living and it cannot be received in state of mortal sin. On the other hand they are not bound to take Holy Communion in ordinary circumstances. And the priests perfectly know that they have received in their ordination the power to forgive sins and with the proper faculties they are bound to exercise their priestly ministry for the salvation of souls. Their contention that they do not hear confessions because there are no penitents is not correct. Where there are priests available to hear confessions there are always penitents. If at times they have to stay in the confessional waiting for penitents, this will not occur frequently. Where the time for confessions is clearly announced at the door of the church, the penitents will come to be reconciled with God.

We want to conclude these reflections on Priesthood by quoting the description or portrait of a true priest given to us by St. Charles Borromeo. Though a little long, it is worth being quoted in its entirety. He says:

"I admit that we are all weak, but if we want help, the Lord God has given us the means to find it easily. One priest may wish to lead a good, holy life, as he knows he should. He may wish to be chaste and to reflect heavenly virtues in the way he lives. Yet he does not resolve to use suitable means, such as penance, prayer, the avoidance of evil discussions and harmful and dangerous friendships. Another priest

complains that as soon as he comes into church to pray the office or to celebrate Mass, a thousand thoughts fill his mind and distract him from God. But what was he doing in the sacristy before he came out for the office or for Mass? How did he prepare? What means did he use to collect his thoughts and to remain recollected?

"Would you like me to teach you how to grow from virtue to virtue and how, if you are already recollected at prayer, you can be even more attentive next time, and so give God more pleasing worship? Listen, and I will tell you. If a tiny spark of God's love already burns within you, do not expose it to the wind, for it may get blown out. Keep the stove tightly shut so that it will not lose its heat and grow cold. In other words, avoid distractions as well as you can. Stay quiet with God. Do not spend your time in useless chatter.

"If teaching and preaching is your job, then study diligently and apply yourself to whatever is necessary for doing the job well. Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head.

"Are you in charge of a parish? If so, do not neglect the parish of your own soul, do not give yourself to others so completely that you have nothing left for yourself. You have to be mindful of your people without becoming forgetful of yourself.

"My brothers, you must realize that for us churchmen nothing is more necessary than meditation. We must meditate before, during and after everything we do. The prophet says: *I will pray, and then I will understand*. When you administer the sacraments, meditate on what you are doing. When you celebrate Mass, reflect on the sacrifice you are offering. When you pray the office, think about the words you are saying and the Lord to whom you are speaking. When you take care of your people, meditate on the Lord's blood that has washed them clean. In this way, *all that you do becomes a work of love*. "This is the way we can easily overcome the countless difficulties we have to face day after day, which, after all, are part in our work: in meditation we find the strength to bring Christ to birth in ourselves and in other men."

Would we priests follow the advises of St. Charles Borromeo, no crisis of vocations to priesthood would occur in the Church. God

would move the hearts of the young through our example to enter the Seminary, be ordained and carry out their priestly ministry in a holy manner.

## POSTURE OF THE FAITHFUL AFTER THE CONSECRATION

*The members of our community want to observe uniformity, as much as possible, in performing the sacred rites and liturgical acts, most especially during the Holy Mass. But we do not agree on some points. We have asked our Chaplain about them in order to reach a consensus, but he has said to us to send our question to the Boletín Eclesiástico so that we will receive an objective answer. Our main question is the following: What should be the posture of the faithful after the consecration: should they continue kneeling or should they stand up?*

*A Religious Sister*

A similar case was sent to us in 1988. Our readers can see *Boletín Eclesiástico*, May-June 1988, p. 438. To give a more complete answer to the Sister's question, I will quote what the Church says concerning uniformity of the posture to be adopted by the faithful participating in the Mass: "A common posture by all is a sign of the unity of the assembly and its sense of community" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n. 2). It is worth copying what the same Instruction prescribes about this matter: "At every Mass they should *stand* from the beginning of the entrance song or when the priest enters until the opening prayer or collect inclusive; for the singing of the *alleluia* before the gospel; while the gospel is proclaimed; during the profession of faith and the general intercessions; from the prayer over the gifts to the end of the Mass with the following exceptions: They should *sit* during the readings before the gospel and during the responsorial psalm; for the homily and the preparation of the gifts at the offertory; and after communion if there is a period of silence. They should *kneel* at the consecration, unless prevented by lack of space, large numbers and other reasonable cause."

“The Conference of Bishops, however, may adapt the actions and postures described in the order of the Roman Mass to the usage of the people but these adaptations must correspond to the character and meaning of each part of the celebration” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n. 21).

Has the CBCP established anything about this matter? Fr. Testera, O.P. says in his *Canon Law Digest* (1989), p. 84: “Some adjustments were recommended by the Episcopal Commission on the Liturgy some time in 1984 which were never acted upon by the Conference. As a matter of fact, a survey conducted by the same Commission revealed that the existing practice was still the one preferred by a majority of the local Bishops.”

“As a result of the adaptations made by the Conference, the common posture to be maintained by the Filipino faithful at Mass should be as follows:

a) “the people shall *stand* from the beginning of the entrance song till the end of the opening prayer; for the singing of the *alleluia*, before the gospel; while the gospel is proclaimed; for the prayer over the gifts; they may also stand to receive the last blessing.

b) “the people should *sit* during the readings before the gospel and during the responsorial psalm; for the homily and preparation of the gifts at the offertory; after Communion if there is a period of silence.

c) “the people should *kneel down* during the Eucharistic Prayer from after the *Sanctus* until the doxology *Through Him*; while receiving Holy Communion, unless Communion is received under both species, in which case it should be done *standing*.”

Note, however, that Fr. Testera’s quotation was valid up to 1989, since his *Canon Law Digest* was published in 1989. But the National Liturgical Commission published in *Boletín Eclesiástico* (September-October 1990, p. 542), a year later, *Some Guidelines for the Eucharist*, approved by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines on January 1990, where some additions are found. Number 3 of these *Guidelines for the Eucharist* reads as follows:

“*Postures of the People during the different parts of the Mass. For the Philippines*, the following postures are prescribed:

“The people should *stand* from the beginning of the Entrance Song or when the priest enters until the opening Prayer or Collect

inclusive; from the singing of the *Alleluia* before the gospel and during the proclamation of the gospel; during the profession of faith and General Intercessions; from the Prayer over the Gifts until the praying or singing of the *Sanctus* is finished; from the Lord's Prayer to the end of the praying or singing of *Agnus Dei*; from the invitation "Let us pray" before the Prayer after Communion till the end of the Mass.

"The people *should sit* during the reading(s) before the gospel and the Responsorial Psalm, for the Homily and the presentation of the gifts and, if it seems helpful, also during the silence after Communion.

"The people *should kneel* from after the *Sanctus* until the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, then again, as a sign of reverence before receiving Communion, from after the *Agnus Dei* until Communion. If the acclamation after the consecration *is not sung*, the people *should continue kneeling* until the doxology *Through Him*."

## Festal Homilies for March and April 1994

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**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**March 6, 1994**

Ex 20:1-17  
1 Co 1:22-25  
Jn 2:13-25

### *Renewal of Filipino Religiosity*

In the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Lent, Jesus marches into the temple which has turned into a marketplace. Making a whip out of cord, he drove the buyers and sellers all out of the temple. John narrates that Jesus' wrath was burned even by small things that he drove out the sheep and the cattle, scattered the money changer's coins and knocked their tables.

The three synoptic writers all agree in placing this episode of the cleansing of the temple towards the end of Jesus' ministry. This is to introduce us to one of the Johannine themes i.e. *on true religion or true worship*.

The temple of Jerusalem was the center and symbol of Jewish Religion. It was in the temple where the meeting of Yahweh and his people takes place, where offerings for the Most High God were made and prayers were offered. It was in the temple where Yahweh dwells to protect and sanctify his people. But while the Jews fanatically held fast to these beliefs, they never learned to live well in Yahweh's presence. Vendors and money changers occupied the very courtyard dedicated to prayer. People came with insincere hearts and were less concerned about their ceremonies and prayers (cf. Christian Community Bible notes on *Mk 11:15* and *Jn 2:13-25*). Yet, no one but Jesus dared to cleanse the temple of all these profanities.

Christianity as a religion is centered not in building but in Christ's own body the Church. But as a Church, where are we today in the face of our present realities - the Philippine realities? Have we learned to live well in the presence of Jesus our head? Very often Filipino Christianity is identified with cheap religiosity. To live well in Jesus' presence entails that we ought to reform those practices which characterize our religiosity cheap. The event of the temple cleansing is an invitation for us to reshape Filipino pietism into genuine acts of faith, acts which affect the totality of our life, practices which truly satisfy the Filipinos' deep spiritual hunger.

In the Philippines the season for Lent is an occasion that exhibits the richness of our popular religious practices. In fact, tourists are drawn by our *Pabasa* (chanting the Passion Narratives) and *Flagellant Procession* during Holy Week. In some provinces male devotees of the suffering Christ even volunteer to re-enact his suffering on the cross, by allowing themselves to be crucified in the same way. But unless these practices are animated and sustained by a deep and mature understanding of our Catholic faith, they simply manifest a fanatical devotion to a defeated victim. If they fail to lead us to a personal and total commitment to the Gospel values, they only make us unfit to celebrate the victory of the Risen Lord on Easter Sunday.

The call of PCP II for the Renewal of Popular Piety (n. 173) echoes this violent protest of Christ in the Gospel. The Council asserts, "We need to foster these popular religious practices in such a way that they do not become distortions of religion or remain at the level of superficial forms of worship, but become rather true expressions of faith." [FERDINAND L. BAUTISTA, O.P.]

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**March 13, 1994**

2 Ch 36:14-17, 19-23

Ep 2:4-10

Jn 3:14-21

*The Just God*

In our gospel reading, God is presented as a *Just God*. He loves, but he also condemns. He sends his Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill the

promised Messiah. Anyone who believes in his Son will gain eternal life and his Love. He appreciates what God has done to him. However, others who do not believe in him will be deprived of that eternal life and are already condemned. They do not recognize the work that God has made to them. They bring condemnation to themselves by this unworthy action.

In the first reading, from the Second Book of Chronicles, the same *Just God* was with the Israelites. They were so stubborn that the anger of God burst out to them. He loved them, but they themselves turned that love into punishment by their actions.

In the second reading, from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians, *The Just God* was also with the people. Salvation came to them as a free gift. It was for all. But as how it was effective to each one of them, their cooperation was demanded.

At this moment of our lives, is *The Just God* still present to us? Many would complain that they have been faithful towards God and other people and yet they still experience more sufferings and sorrows than the others who have less or have no faith at all. These people who have loose relationship with God and with other people are more fruitful and fulfilled in their everyday life. It is because *The Just God* may not act in our earthly life, but primarily it is in the eternal life that our reward will be given. Therefore, *The Just God* still lives with us. [ROBERTO LUANZON, JR., O.P.]

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**March 20, 1994**

*Jr* 31:31-34  
*Heb* 5:7-9  
*Jn* 12:20-33

### *The conquest of Death*

Death can command the strongest man to kneel. Physical strength withers on its face. Somehow, the indifferent secretly cries on its back. And because of it, emotions do flashflood even the hardest of heart. The most intelligent can never figure out its ultimate threat. Wealth and riches can't stop it. The sweetest melody can never pacify its sour effect. This is its capacity. Death has no match. Or so I thought.

And yet when I reviewed my theology, I found out the following:

That everyone born in this world has two natural goals: to live and to die. In fact the very moment one starts living, he simultaneously starts dying. It is just a matter of time. No one escapes this destiny.

But that there was one person who over fulfilled this destiny. Christ was the only one born to live, to die and *to conquer death*.

And Christ conquered the dominion of death with more to spare. This was his greatest glory. He was beyond its all-embracing command. *He was glorified because of it.*

St. John, in the gospel today, is telling us about that fateful hour of Christ. He was about to die — to succumb to the enigma of dying. Yes, Christ mentioned the inevitability of dying, decaying, of being annihilated, of him “undergoing” its process. Yet he also explained that “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Christ promises that a great creative energy will supplant death and the idea of nothingness. Something productive is being ensured to those who are to die. You will live again! No! You will live forever! You will never die again!

Somehow Christ is telling us that death should not be feared. Death can destroy, yet there is a force which Christ is offering us that does not only rebuild but renews life forever. Yes, there is a power much, much greater than the supremacy of death. If you believe that one of the most fearful powers on earth, if not the most fearful, is death, then this one that Christ is telling us will give us a life untouchable by the fingers of death. It has an authority that not even death can topple. Will it not be more than a joy to possess this force!

How do you acquire this power?

The only ticket to this power is when Jesus' Father honors you. And you will be honored only when you serve Jesus. “The Father will honor whoever serves me.” How do you serve Jesus? “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.”

Imagine... just to follow Christ!

Follow Christ. Jesus went to the sinners. Let us not turn our back on them. Jesus forgave the repentant. We should never accuse them. Jesus cured the sick. We must heal them with the power of the Holy Spirit. Imitate Christ's life. Enough of personal aggrandizement. Let us be simple. Jesus was prayerful. We should never ever forget to call on God. Continue Christ's mission. We have a mission to fulfill. Jesus preached the good news. We have to live the good news. Jesus had total confidence in his Father's will. We should have faith, hope and love in God. Yes, let us be servants of Christ!

To be a servant of Jesus is to acquire an intense virility stronger than the strongest man. We can endure anything. Even another blow of death to someone we love. Once a servant of Christ, we can let the tenderest feeling enter in the heart of the most indifferent man. Our preaching will be charismatic; it can even give life. To be a servant of Jesus is to have something more astute than the most intelligent fellow, more forceful than the force of wealth. We will never feel lacking. To be a servant of Christ is to have a clear picture of our end-road. We will never get lost in the crossroads of life. We will never be a wanderer, not even a moment. God will always guide and lead us. We will always wonder at God's creation!

We will overpower the power of death.

We, too, will be glorified! [ARTHUR B. DINGEL, O.P.]

**PALM SUNDAY**  
**March 27, 1994**

*Is* 50:4-7  
*Ph* 2:6-11  
*Mk* 14:1 - 15:47

### *The Sign of the Cross*

Upon crossing Quezon bridge, my lady friend who just arrived from the province made the sign of the cross. Surprised, I asked her why. Pointing at the Post Office main building, she whispered to me in reply: "Why? Isn't that a church?"

Indeed in the hearts of many Filipinos is a great devotion to the cross. In the Mass or at prayer, we make the sign of the cross. Upon entering the Church or simply when passing by it (as the case

insinuated above), we make the sign of the cross. Our basketball players have a bizarre way of doing it. On television, we see them cross themselves as they enter the court. Some even go to the extent of doing it every time they make a free throw shot!

Why this special fondness to the sign of the cross? What is in the cross that wins our hearts as Filipinos? As Christians?

The cross reminds us of a unique meaningful story and offers us a wholesome invitation — a radical challenge.

Jesus is in Gethsemane deeply troubled, sweating — praying. Why? His hour has come! Already the malicious voices of the self-righteous and hired scoundrels are ringing in his ears: "Blasphemy!" "We want Barabbas!" "Yes, the criminal" "No! Not Jesus! We want Barabbas! Barabbas!" "What to do with Jesus? Crucify him! CRUCIFY HIM!" Jesus knows exactly what to expect. He can almost feel the crown of thorns pressed hard upon his head and the nails tearing his flesh, crushing his bones, slowly draining him out of blood, killing him softly... surely.

True to his feelings, Jesus prays to the Father: "If it is possible, take this cup from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Death on the cross is the Father's will. True to his word, Jesus made the Father's will his, too. On the cross, though innocent and God's only begotten Son, Jesus dies a criminal's death.

Is this the whole story that the sign of the cross reminds us everytime we do it? No. Definitely not! The story of the cross does not end on Calvary nor in the tomb, but at the glorious resurrection of Jesus. With resurrection, the story is now complete. It is indeed a unique story for there is only one Jesus, the God who became man and dwelt among us.

The story of the cross bears and radiates a comforting and enlightening divine message. God the Father loves us beyond compare. His will is our command, and welfare, too. In Jesus, we have a God who knows human agony and pain. He became man like us, died hanging on the cross, brutally wounded, utterly humiliated. We can never accuse God of being unfair and unjust. Immaculately innocent, Christ died a criminal's death. We can never complain to God for asking from us the impossible. Jesus showed us the real strength

found in each one of us, if only we obey and remain faithful to the will of God the Father. We have no reason for despair. Jesus resurrected from the dead!

Here now is the wholesome invitation of the story of the cross: that we carry our own cross. As followers of Christ, we are expected to undergo similar fate in life. No Christian is without a Gethsemane to agonize in, a cross to carry, a Calvary to climb and a death to undergo. Christ is the way to salvation, the Cross is the gateway. Resurrection with Christ is only attained when we too are crucified with him. If ever we leave our cross behind or neglect our share of the pie in making this world a better place to live in, then, there can never be crucifixion for us.

But how are we to carry our Cross?

Christ showed us the way: with a prayerful soul, an obedient will and a forgiving, loving heart.

Somebody is in-charge. God is. We are not. Somebody knows what is best for us. God does. We don't. Not because God hides from us his plan, his will for everyone. No. He talks to us constantly. He communicates to us unceasingly. All we have to do is communicate to him in return. Pray to him constantly that we may discern his will for us. If we don't, chances are, we will misinterpret his cue, pick up the wrong cross and follow the wrong path to him. It is at that time that we feel overburdened, misplaced, at a loss. If not remedied at once, slowly we drift away from God until finally we lose sight of him.

To ask God to spare us from an imminent danger is not a sin. It is a normal reaction to suffering. Part of being human which Christ shared with us in full. Crucifixion is not desired for its own sake. We take it in view of resurrection. We do not invent or look for problems and difficulties. But when they come as part of God's divine plan, then, in obedience to God's will, we face them valiantly.

After all the pain and cruelties he endured, before Christ breathed his last, he asked the Father to forgive his persecutors of their sins. Such a heroic commitment! *The same is demanded of us.* We are commanded to love not only our friends but our enemies as well. This is the radical challenge of the Cross. It has to be endured and borne with a forgiving and a loving heart.

"Don't you get tired carrying your playmate on your back?" asked a stranger to a child. "I do!" "Then why don't you complain? Why go on carryin him?" Looking straight to the eyes of the stranger, the child replied: "Because he is my brother."

My lady friend has already gone back to the province. When I think of the Post Office building, I smile at the memory. When I think of her making the sign of the cross, I smile and give thanks to God.

**EASTER SUNDAY**  
**April 3, 1994**

Ac 10:34, 37-43  
Col 3:1-4  
Jn 20:1-9

### *The Empty Tomb*

On that early Easter morn: the stone blocking the tomb had been moved away, the napkin which had been wrapped around the head was not lying flat like the other linens but lay rolled up in its place; and the body of Jesus could nowhere be found. It could have been rightly judged that it was an epitome of an empty tomb as beheld by Mary of Magdala, Peter and the other disciple.

Emptiness—that was the bare fact. Failure to see what one was looking for could surely lead one to despair. But man is always called to look for meaning, not only for the fact. The fact is set for him to unravel its message, to pose the proper questions. What did the empty tomb signify? Why didn't Christ show up? The same questions may be asked in moments of our emptiness. How do we face failures? How do we bear frustrations?

It is unfortunate that we often count more our tears and grieve more on our pains. But the meaning has to be sought. Behind every tear there is a message sent forth. The tears of a child may have been expressing a deep longing for a whole loving family; the tears of a mother for a plea of miracle for her dying child; the tears of the poor for a call for justice in their midst. More than the event, the message has to be sought just as the empty tomb signified a number of revelations. It manifested Magdalene's intense love for the Lord so much so that she bothered to visit the tomb early morning, notwithstanding her boldness to stay on the Cross on Good Friday, to show

her strong sense of appreciation for the love and forgiveness Jesus had accorded her. Peter's courage to rise from his fall in denying the Lord was shown as he rushed to the tomb. The empty tomb revealed the other disciple's strong trust in the lord that he accepted what Jesus had proclaimed and believed in what he saw.

The tomb is not at all empty. It has its message to tell: it rings out that there is no reason for despair. Treasures often lie hidden in darkness; just as only those who walk in the night ever see the stars. Verily, more men discover their souls in difficulties than they do in pleasure. This is not to invite pains but it is only to remind us that pain need not go to waste when it is thrust upon us. Sometimes, Christ hides himself that man may learn how to search. Sometimes, he makes himself absent, that we may feel the need of him.

Such incident happened with actor Anthony Perkins. On September 14, 1982, Daily Globe printed an article about him who died of complications related to AIDS, as said by a family spokeswoman. Contracting such dreadful disease, he could have all the reasons to be sulky and hide himself in his own cocoon. But the family spokeswoman said that Perkins prepared a statement about his condition which said: "There are many who believe that this disease is God's vengeance, but I believe it was sent to teach people how to love and understand and have compassion for each other. I have learned more about love, selflessness and human understanding from people I have met in this great adventure in the world of AIDS than I ever did in the cut-throat competitive world in which I spent my life," Perkins wrote.

Truly, no matter how hopeless things may seem to be, there is still hope, for Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life, did not leave the tomb empty at all. [ROMULO RODRIGUEZ, O.P.]

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 10, 1994

Ac 4:32-35

1 Jn 5:1-6

Jn 20: 19-31

### *The light of Easter*

Filipinos have an elaborate way of honoring the dead. The protracted ceremonies are intended to manifest that the dead is loved,

missed and appreciated. Affinity, they said, is always put to the crucible whenever somebody died. And when the long wake is shortened, the bereaved will be considered untraditional if not utterly unsympathetic for the extended time dispensed for this nocturnal watch affords the distant relatives and friends to pay their last respect to the dead. While it serves as an occasion for an emotional reunion, the deceased's lifetime offenders see it as the ultimate opportunity to ask for pardon and forgiveness. This is to assure that the dead person will leave this earthly life at peace and contended. "*Baka ako multuhin*," our proverbial expression, signifies not only our folk belief on spirits but it conveys our basic fear for retribution. Thus those who failed to exercise this long revered tradition, the native concept of "*multo*" is transposed from a world of make-believe to a frightening reality. Fear does not only cow us to a corner but obviates our actions.

When Jesus' disciples gathered together in one room after the crucifixion, they were not only afraid of the Jews but more so of Jesus. Did they not abandon Jesus in this trial and prosecution? Did they not scatter themselves save Peter after that betrayal in the Garden? Had it been his disciples were Filipinos they might be crying in chorus "*Baka tayo multuhin! Hindi kasi tayo nakiramay!*"

It could have been a very good opportunity for a sweet revenge but Jesus as he appeared to his frightened disciples greeted them with the words "Peace be with." His words are not words of punishment and anger but of peace and forgiveness. His gesture were not of punishment and threat but signs of comfort and assurance. And this is the message of Easter. The appearance of Jesus tells us that death is no longer a frightening reality. It is no longer fear that reigns but love. When Jesus showed his wounds, he is as if saying, "Be afraid no more, I have conquered sin and your wounds I have made my own."

This is the faith that John talks about in his first letter when he asked "who can overcome the world?" and he answered "only the man who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." It is imperative to realize that we are all begotten by God to break the spinning wheel of guilt and sin. Otherwise, we will continue to nurse the wounds of the past and immersed ourselves in sorrow. The unsettled, discontented "ghost" of our past will seek us constantly depriving us to have a real

experience of forgiveness, an authentic touch of healing and comforting life of peace. To live in the past is to live in the empty tomb.

When I was a child, my cousins and I used to tell stories about ghosts and supernatural spirits before going to bed. When my mother turned off the light, the beams of light penetrating the small openings of our hipa roof seemed to create images. And the more I stared at them, the more images were formed resembling the horrific characters in our night stories. When I could no longer endure it, I would run to the side of my father and seek refuge in his masculated body. Then my father embraced me and his hand covered my eyes. Then, I could rest my eyes.

The love of God for us is like that. Jesus embraced all our iniquities and nailed in the cross. There is no room for us to be frightened. The life of new born Christian is not the empty tomb. It is not the life of failures, of emptiness and darkness. It is a life full of hope, full of love and full of faith, full of light.

There is a story of a man who one day took a small candle from a box, lit it and began to climb a long stairway. "Where are we going?" the candle asked. "We're going up higher to the top of the house to show the ships the way to the harbour," answered the man. "But I am so small and my light could hardly be seen by the ships." When they reached the top of the long steps, they came to a large lamp. Then the man took the little candle and lit the lamp. And then the great polished reflectors behind the lamp sent beams of light out across the miles of sea.

As Christians, we have the same mission of bringing the light of Easter. And our first mission land is the unconquered and uncharted areas of our inner self. We have first to imbibe the message the peace and forgiveness; the virtue of faith and obedience. A little effort and willingness to let the Father help us. And then, like the little candle, we can bring ships to the harbour and exorcise the ghosts hiding in the darkness of the night.

We make Thomas our example who after challenging God because of fear and guilt went to the ultimate limit of his faith. Thomas conversion happened because he let Jesus come to him. Jesus understands that the first reaction of a frightened man is to ask "*wala na ba?*" A frightened man always asks for proofs. That is why Jesus

acceded to Thomas' request. The words of Thomas "My Lord and my God" expresses a fundamental belief that all of us should have. A strong conviction that we are owned and thus loved by the Father and no matter how frail we are, no matter how wronged we are, we can always come to him. [JOJO DAGOHY, O.P.]

**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**April 17, 1994**

Ac 3:13-15, 17-19  
1 Jn 2:1-5  
Lk 24:35-48

### *The Emmaus Experience*

When Jesus was put to death and crucified on the cross just like one of the convicted criminals, his disciples fled and trembled with fear and frustration. The people whom he cured from various fatal diseases, the people whom he raised to life, the people whom he fed with loaves and even his apostle Peter were nowhere to be found.

The Lucan gospel narrative shows that the two disciples have abandoned the way of Jesus for he did not meet their expectation and idealism. They could not understand and accept that Jesus of Nazareth whom they believed to be the Messiah and Savior would be crucified. In this sense, the crucifixion of Jesus is a stumbling block and scandal to them. Thus the journey of the two disciples is characterized with infidelity and despair. It is a journey not by faith, but by sight.

Jesus in his endless love for his disciples once again appeared to reconcile the two wayfarers to journey back to Jerusalem. Jesus opened their hearts and minds that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus opened their eyes in order to understand the words written in the scriptures. Jesus is the Son of God, became flesh in order to save mankind from the slavery and bondage of sin. He died to destroy the sting of death and rose on the third day to give peace and eternal life.

The "Emmaus experience" event in the Gospel is not a far fetched reality in the contemporary world. Unfortunately, most often, we have abandoned the way of Jesus. We have preferred to travel the opposite road of sin and malice. Undeniably, there are

several existing indications of our stupidity and infidelity to God. The proliferation of heinous crimes, drug trafficking, graft and corruption, abuses committed against human rights and mother earth and other forms of moral decadence are visible signs of our turning back to the way of Jesus.

The message of the gospel today is an invitation to all of us to journey back to Jerusalem with Jesus in our hearts and minds. It summons all people especially Christians to be the bearers of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. It reminds us all that we are pilgrims of this world journeying to the Kingdom of the Father.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, each one of us has the Christian obligation to give sight to the blind, to proclaim the Good News to the unbelievers and to guide and reconcile the wayfarers. Thus the spirit of Easter courageously invites us all to an intimate encounter with Jesus. Let Christ be the guide, center and destination of our journey here on earth. May our journey be a journey of conversion. May it be a passage from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy and from death to everlasting peace and life. [RAULA MARTERIOR, O.P.]

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 24, 1994

Ac 4:8-12

1 Jn 3:1-2

Jn 10:11-18

#### *The Good Shepherd*

Once there was a small mixed-cocker spaniel dog who got hit by a speeding car. Limping and in pain it sought out shelter across the street. All dirtied up, smelly, and flea ridden it roamed the streets in search of food.

One night a family car stopped near where the dog was. The children in the car took the dog home against the protestations of their parents. The children insisted and added that the with a little cleaning and grooming the true beauty of the dog would show up. Reluctantly, the parents agreed on condition that the children would be the ones to take care of the dog.

Upon reaching home, the children bathed, groomed and fed the dog. They then prepared a place for the dog to sleep. Finally they gave him a name—Lemcky. From that moment on they considered the dog their own. Days passed and soon the dog gained the confidence and trust of the children. Gradually too, the injured leg of Lemcky started improving, and soon the dog was able to run with its four legs.

However, Lemcky has still one or two undesirable traits — at times he is stubborn and he breaks a lot of things around. He does not like to be handled by other people especially the maids. Whenever the maids would approach he would growl and bark. Only the children can feed him, and control him.

One day, the gate was left open. Lemcky went out of the compound. This was the first time that Lemcky went out again into the streets. The maids half-heartedly called the dog back. Upon seeing that Lemcky was not responding to their call they closed the gate. When the kids where home from school they noticed that Lerncky did not come to meet them. So they called him and looked for him in the house and in the backyard but he was nowhere to be found. They asked the maids if they have seen Lemcky. The maids said no. The kids went out on the streets looking for their missing dog. They never found him.

The story of Lemcky and the children is another way of retelling the story of The Good Shepherd and why Jesus calls himself The Good Shepherd. There is a lot of Lemcky in us. We are beautiful, talented, but selfishness, bitterness and sin prevent that beauty from ever shining forth. Lemcky would have remained a filthy dog had not the children taken pity on him. And we would have remained in same pathetic condition had not Jesus took compassion on us.

Lemcky soon became a beautiful dog. Eventually he was healed of his injury and became playful again. But this blooming of Lemcky did not happen overnight. It took a lot of time and effort on the part of the children. They have to show Lemcky that he is loved and truly considered part of the family. Only when the kids won the confidence of Lemcky did the dog begin to improve. In much the same way, our salvation did not come to us overnight. It took a lot of effort on the part of God to win us back to him. The supreme expression of that campaign to save us is when he offered himself on the cross and rose again from the dead in order that we may have life.

When Lemcky got well, the children protected him and continually cared and loved him. And when he got lost they exerted all their effort to find their dog. Why should not they? From the moment they took the injured dog home and gave him a name they considered him their very own. And it was truly a great loss when Lemcky never returned home. The maids never really cared that much for Lemcky because the dog gave them a lot of trouble and they don't own him anyway.

God's concern for us can be likened to the concern of the children to Lemcky. Now that God was able to win us back, he would do all in his power to maintain us in him. Why would God care for us very well? Why would he be so concerned of our welfare? Like the children, the moment God took us under his care, he already considered us as his very own. He would not stop caring and looking after us, even if we are stubborn most of the time, because he loves us as his own. Even if the shepherds he has delegated to watch over us fail in their work or have given us up, Jesus the Good Shepherd would not give us up. And he would not stop looking after us until we are finally safe in his kingdom. [WINSTON F. CABADING, O.P.]