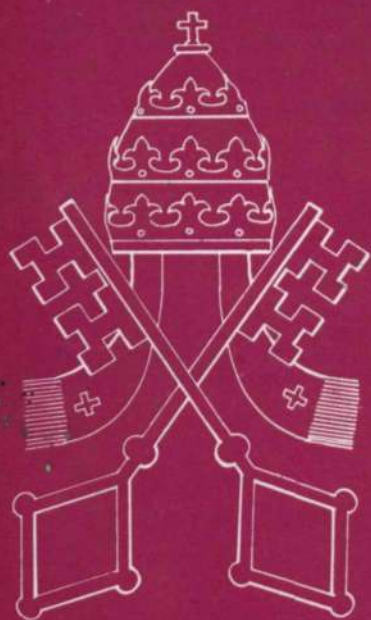


# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

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Special Issue

VITA  
CONSECRATA

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

## The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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## **Consecrated Life as Service To *Life***

VICENTE CAJILIG, O.P.

On the solemnity of the annunciation of our Lord this year (March 25, 1996), the Holy Father Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic exhortation entitled *VITA CONSECRATA*. It is addressed to the bishops and clergy, religious orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, and all the faithful. The theme is on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World.

The document is divided into three chapters: I - The Origins of the Consecrated Life in the Mystery of Christ and of the Trinity (*Confessio Trinitatis*); II - Consecrated Life as a Sign of Communion in the Church (*Signum Fraternitatis*); III - Consecrated Life: Manifestation of God's love in the world (*Servitium Caritatis*).

The apostolic exhortation is partly concluded with the idea that those who consecrate themselves to religious life show the world a sign of *unbounded generosity*.

We pray that all those who consecrate themselves to religious life will serve the protection and the interest of every form of life which is one main concern of the Church in the contemporary world.

## Cases and Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, O.P.

### LITURGICAL PERFORMANCE OF DOXOLOGY IN THE MASS

*Uniformity in observing the liturgical actions is very important. It helps the faithful to appreciate the beauty and dignity of our ritual worship. You have solved several cases in the Boletín Eclesiástico emphasizing this importance. There is, however, one instance in the concelebration of the Mass when this uniformity is needed, that is at the so called Doxology. In raising the consecrated species there is a great discrepancy or lack of uniformity.*

*Is there any law for this liturgical performance?*

*A Priest*

What our consultant says is unfortunately true. Unless the liturgical laws are faithfully followed, no uniformity can be achieved. There are always some innovators who think they can improve our liturgy by introducing a variety of changes, that are clearly reprobated by law. Canon 846 says: "The liturgical books, approved by the competent authority, are to be faithfully followed in the celebration of the sacraments. Accordingly, no one may on a personal initiative add to or omit or alter anything in these books." Pope Paul VI and John Paul II have repeatedly reminded this norm to all priests.

With regards to the matter discussed in the present case we have the GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL, which, in Chapter IV\ n. 135, says: "At the final Doxology of the Eucharistic

Prayer, the deacon stands next to the priest, holding up the chalice as the priest raises the paten with the Eucharistic Bread, until the people have said the acclamation: Amen". And the Filipino Bishops in the GUIDELINES FOR THE EUCHARIST of January 1990, n. 57 say: "At the Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, the principal celebrant alone raises the Eucharistic Bread, while the deacon or the concelebrant acting as deacon holds up the chalice, but other patens and chalices, if any, are not raised. One bread, one cup!" (Cfr. Fr. Florencio Testera, O.P., CANON LAW DIGEST OF THE PHILIPPINE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 3rd edition, Manila, 1995).

Therefore, we have an explicit and clear law on how the Doxology should be properly performed.

A SUBSISTING PREVIOUS MARRIAGE IS A  
DIRIMENT IMPEDIMENT

*I hope that the presentation of my case will be clearer if I use the following graphic way with an explanation.*

A...../ /.....B————C.....? ?.....D

*A, a catholic man who married B, a Catholic woman. After two years of married life A died.*

*B, a Catholic widow, went to Australia where she became a Mormon. She received the baptism of that sect in 1981. She then married C, an Australian Anglican, in 1984 in the Mormon sect. A few years later they separated and obtained a civil divorce in Australia.*

*C, the Anglican Australian man, who married B in 1984 and later on divorced her civilly, came recently to the Philippines and knew D, a Filipino Catholic. Both, C and D, want now to get married in the Catholic Church.*

*Question: Can C and D get married in the Catholic Church?*

*A Priest*

Our answer is in the negative. D, the Catholic girl, cannot marry C, the Australian Anglican man, not because they belong to different religious denominations, but because C is still married to B, the Mormon woman. The civil marriage of C and D, which took place in 1984, was a **valid** marriage and it has not been dissolved by the civil divorce they obtained in Australia.

In the first place, it cannot be said that such a marriage between B and C was invalid because of lack of canonical form, for B, the Mormon woman, was not bound to get marry according to the canonical form. It is true she was a Catholic before; but she defected from the Catholic Church by a formal act. Before her marriage with C, she gave her name to the Mormon sect, becoming one of its members. She even received the Mormon baptism, which is a formal act and solemn ceremony of becoming members of the Sect. Hence it cannot be said that B was still bound to observe the canonical form in getting married with C. It would be true if she would not had previously defected from the Catholic Church. Canon 1117 states: "The norm prescribed above (the canonical form) is to be observed if at least one of the parties contracting marriage was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it **and has not by a formal act defected from it...**" The mere fact that B abandoned formally the Catholic Church and gave her name to the Mormon sect shows that she was not bound any more to observe the canonical form in getting married validly with C, the Australian Anglican man, in 1984. Hence their civil marriage was perfectly valid.

On the other hand, the fact that they separated after some time and obtained a civil divorce in Australia does not show that C, the Australian Anglican man, is now free to marry D, a Catholic girl, in the Philippines. **Civil divorce does not in any way annul or dissolve a valid marriage.** From the canonical point of view, marriage, even natural marriage, is indissoluble and the State cannot dissolve it through civil divorce.

Our answer, therefore, is that C and D cannot validly marry in the Catholic Church, for there exists a diriment impediment: a previous subsisting valid marriage.

# **Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers**

## **September-October 1996**

EFREN O. RIVERA, O.P.

**SEPTEMBER 1, 1996**

**TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A**

**MATTHEW 16:21-27 <> CHRIST'S FIRST PROPHECY  
OF HIS PASSION AND DEATH**

### **A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBILIARASAL STEP 3**

*Use in the Liturgy.* Christ's first prophecy of his Passion and Death was such a shocking announcement that Peter became bold enough to tell Jesus: that's nonsense. To which Jesus replied: stay in your place behind me! I'm the Teacher here, and I'm telling you what God wants! Fortunately, Peter was humble enough to accept Christ's rebuke. Today, the liturgy invites us to examine ourselves and find out whether we are like the Peter who was shocked at the prospect of his glorious dreams being shattered by suffering and death, or like the Peter who will one day also die on a cross.

*FocusrPoints.* (1) V. 21-23. At Caesarea Philippi, in the episode of last Sunday's Gospel Reading, the disciples recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but they did not appreciate in which sense he was the Messiah. So, Jesus had to introduce them to the true nature of his messiahship,



which is the fulfillment of the biblical prophecies about the Suffering Servant. They had to learn that his life of preaching and teaching had to be sealed by his suffering, death and resurrection.

(2) V. 24-27. After accepting the fact that Jesus is the Suffering Servant who saves humankind, people who wish to be disciples of Christ are confronted with another challenge, which has a greater personal cost. Jesus makes it clear that people can become his followers only if they accept suffering as a necessary condition for following him. Following Jesus is not just a matter of accepting the teachings of a wise man but of fashioning one's whole life after his life of service. This involves not only living but also suffering and dying as he suffered and died — taking up the cross daily and accepting death as God's will.

(3) Disciples of Christ do not have to do anything extraordinary to take up their cross. All they have to do is to remain faithful to the Will of their heavenly Father in all the details of their life. On second thought, this kind of faithfulness is in itself extraordinary, and they will encounter many obstacles and difficulties. It is by persevering in pursuing God's Will in spite of obstacles and difficulties that they will accomplish the task of cross-carrying.

(4) The self-denial demanded by Jesus is not the stoic abstinence from pleasures, but the denial of SELF. It is the FORGETTING OF SELF IN THE LOVING SERVICE OF OTHERS, MOTIVATED BY THE LOVE FOR CHRIST. From being a self-centered person, a disciple of Christ must become a CHRIST-CENTERED PERSON. Far from being a formula for misery, this self-denial is the only realistic way to human fulfillment. Those who spend their possessions and themselves in the loving service of their fellow human beings, for Jesus' sake — that is, in conformity with his teaching and following his example— become truly human. Experience confirms this. We are at our happiest when we give to others, despite the hardships or inconveniences which this often requires from us.

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. Even after Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah, he was shocked when Jesus began teaching him and the other disciples about the nature of his Messiahship, which is the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Suffering Servant.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* In practice, many Christians have a wrong idea of how Jesus will save people. Most often, they believe that Jesus will show himself as Savior by granting the FAVORS people are praying for. Hasn't this been your idea too? Isn't it time for you to think of Jesus as being your Savior by CHANGING YOU INTO A PERSON WHO WANTS TO DO GOD'S WILL AT ALL TIMES?

2. Whether people want it or not, they have to cope with suffering and death. . These realities, are inevitable. People who seek to escape from them by amassing wealth and power, fail miserably in the end. Our newspapers are full of stories of how the rich and famous also have to suffer and die. Instead of escaping from suffering and death, people should learn to find MEANING in these inevitable realities.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you, in your Christian life, discovered the meaning of suffering and death?

3. By God's will, Jesus Christ suffered and died on the Cross. He set a pattern for us to follow. No matter what God's will may be for us, we must embrace it and remain faithful to it until death. It is when we make this decision that we become true followers of Jesus Christ. We need not fear God's Will. No matter what it is, we must be convinced that it is a manifestation of his great love for us. For example, when it becomes clear that He wants us to undergo great suffering, we must be convinced that we will become better human persons in the end because of this suffering.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* The "cross" should not be equated with "torture" or any evil that causes us to be miserable. It is not the

greatness of the misery it caused that gave value to the cross of Christ; it is his acceptance of God's Will. It might do a great deal of good to other people if you share with them how, in your own life, accepting or following God's Will has given you peace, joy, fulfillment.

4. A father or mother who forgets SELF to raise up a CHRISTIAN FAMILY is truly "taking up one's cross" and following Christ.

*4.1 Pointer for Sharing.* If you are a father or mother it might help others if you share about the SACRIFICES that you gladly undertake (although this means forgetting yourself) to raise a Christian family.

## **BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH**

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Christ's announcement of his coming passion and death is a good example of sharing with others a knowledge kept deep down in one's heart. Such a sharing is done for the good of others.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* True caring for the needs of others requires some measure of forgetting one's self. In this sense, every true caring is a cross-carrying.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* When Jesus challenged his disciples to carry their own crosses he also affirmed them as people who have the potential to be his true followers.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* It is our "self," particularly our pride, that prevents us from forgiving others. When we become humble, then we can forgive.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* V.25b: "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

## **C. STORY:THE DEFORMATION OF AN EMPEROR MOTH**

A man found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled, but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point.

Deciding something was wrong, the man took a pair of scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled.

Mr. Merciful expected that in a few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful snip" was, in reality, cruel. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need.

**SEPTEMBER 8, 1996**

**TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A**

**MATTHEW 18:15-20 <> RECONCILIATION WITHIN  
THE CHURCH**

**A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3**

*Use in the Liturgy.* The Liturgy turns to the "Discourse on the Church" (Mt ch. 18), which is the fourth collection of sayings of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew. Skipping the passages on "Who is the greatest (vv. 1-4), "On leading others astray" (vv.5-6), and "The Lost Sheep" (vv.12-14), it invites us to reflect on Christ's teachings about "Brotherly correction" which includes Christ's statement about the power of the Church to bind or loose (v.15-18), and "Prayer in common" (v. 19-20). If we only heed these teachings of Christ and put them into practice in our ecclesial life, then we will truly give witness to the presence of the Kingdom of God among us.

*Focus Points.* (1) V. 15. Anger is the ordinary reaction against a serious personal offense. But true followers of Christ must refrain from this kind of anger. They have to show that they have been changed by Christ. Instead of getting angry, one should have a heart to heart talk with the erring person to help him or her see the seed of discord

that has been sown by the unacceptable conduct. This is what we call "fraternal correction".

(2) V. 16-17 When fraternal correction fails, at least **two** members of the community should try to correct the seriously erring member. When this fails, the matter is brought to the leaders-representatives of the community or local Church. It is presumed that the sin of the erring member is such a serious threat to the welfare of the community, that, if the member remains unrepentant, it would be justifiable to mete out the punishment of excommunication.

(3) V.18 makes it clear that the power to bind and loose does not belong to Peter exclusively, since other church leaders can exercise it too. (This is not to be confused with the power of the keys, which was given only to Peter and his successors.)

(4) V. 19-20 Through Jesus the Divine Presence can be experienced by disciples who gather for prayer, study, or, as in the present context, for decision making. Harmony among Christ's disciples is a sign that Jesus has reconciled them with God, with whom they now enjoy harmony.

## **B. REFLECTION POINTS**

### **BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE**

1. Modern experience has shown that bloodshed can be avoided if people with serious differences agree to put their anger aside and talk with one another at a negotiating table.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you made progress in controlling your anger?

2. Social sins are a threat to the welfare of a community. For example, people who encourage others to develop the habit of gambling are destroying the moral fiber of the community. Even worse is the harm being done by traffickers in prohibited drugs.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Isn't it about time that communities take drastic action against practices that are threats to the common good?

3. Christian leaders have a great responsibility imposed by the fact that they are empowered to loose and bind on earth as in heaven.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* If you are a Christian leader, it would be good to share about your experiences in exercising the responsibilities of Christian leadership.

4. Harmony is not a static peace. It is achieved by the interaction of people who may hold conflicting ideas but possess goodwill. By preserving this goodwill at all cost, people achieve harmony.

*4.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you experienced harmony in a Christian Community?

## BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

*1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* An atmosphere of mutual trust in a community is necessary so that members will share what they feel deep down in their hearts. Whatever we do to foster this trust is a service to the community. Conversely, whatever we do to destroy this mutual trust is a sin against the community.

*2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* In a community we must care not only for the personal welfare of members but even more for the general welfare of the community.

*3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Servant-leaders of a Christian Community have a tremendous responsibility towards its members. When they do their job well, the members should affirm them so that they can do even better.

*4. FORGIVENESS.* We must hate the sin but forgive and love the sinner. This must be true even when, for a very serious offense, after complying with the three steps set forth in Mt 18:15-17a, a community has to excommunicate a recalcitrant member. The excommunication must not be done out of vindictiveness, but in the hopes of shocking the erring member to come to his senses and return to the fold.

**5. THE GOOD NEWS.** It is in verses 18-20 of this Sunday's Gospel Reading that we find a twofold good news, namely, 1) that Church leaders share in Christ's authority to bind and loose, and 2) Jesus Christ (the Risen Lord) is present with his disciples when they gather to pray or study or make community decisions.

### **C. STORY: HOW TO REHABILITATE A REPENTANT BROTHER**

A young man secretly misappropriated several hundred thousands of pesos from the business where he was employed. When the shortage was discovered, the senior partner called the young man into his office. Downcast, the young man thought he would be fired and sent to prison.

Asked by his boss whether he was guilty, the young man admitted his crime. Then the executive surprised him.

"If I keep you in your present position, can I trust you in the future?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, you surely can. I've learned my lesson," replied the astonished employee.

Being a good judge of character, the boss detected the repentant man's sincerity. "I'm not going to press charges and you can continue in your present responsibility," he said. Then he added, "I think you ought to know, however, that you are the second man in this company who succumbed to temptation but was shown mercy. I was the first. What you have done, I did. The mercy you are receiving, I received. It is only the grace of God that can keep us both."

**SEPTEMBER 15, 1996**

**TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A**

**MATTHEW 18:21-35 ◇ FORGIVE YOUR BROTHER  
FROM YOUR HEART**

### **A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3**

*Use in the Liturgy.* While last Sunday's Gospel Reading touched on the need of a sinner to listen to members of his community if he

is to hear the reconciling word of his heavenly Father, Mt 18:21-25 takes up the attitude of the offended member who must forgive.

*Focus Points.* (1) V.21-22. While Peter thinks he is sufficiently generous in being ready to forgive an offending member of a community "seven times," Jesus points out that this is not generous enough because the forgiveness he wants his disciples to practice is limitless — that's the meaning of forgiving "seventy times seven times." It is not a matter of quantity but quality. Forgiveness must come from the heart. Jesus' ethic is an ethic of the heart.

(2) The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18:23-35) illustrates Christ's teaching that our relationship with our fellows must be modelled upon our relationship with God our Father.

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. For Jesus true forgiveness is not a matter of a superficial pardon which can hide resentment and protracted bitterness. It involves a total conversion, a change of heart, by which the offended actually loves the offender. Christian forgiveness means forgetting offences, in imitation of God, who forgives our offences: "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34).

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* When someone tells you that he or she cannot forgive and forget, you will be doing that person a great favor by sharing about your own experience of finding liberation and happiness by following Christ's teaching about forgiveness.

2. The teaching in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant is not merely that the forgiveness of our sins is dependent upon our forgiveness of those who have offended us. The more important lesson here is that our awareness of God's forgiveness of our sins must overflow and show itself in our attitude of forgiveness towards others. To forgive one another is the most poignant expression of our sharing in the Spirit of Love given to us by our heavenly Father through his Son Jesus Christ



**2.1 Pointer for Sharing.** Forgiveness must become for us a "way of life" rather than an isolated occurrence. If you have been practising this "way of life," why not share it with others?

## **BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH**

1. **CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?** When people cannot forgive and forget, we can help them answer God's offer of grace by sharing with them our own experience of being delivered from a heavy burden by forgiving and forgetting the offenses of others, perhaps after a long struggle with our memories of the hurts they have inflicted on us.

2. **CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?** We should pity those who cannot forgive and forget. They carry a very heavy burden. Let us help them shake the burden off.

3. **CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?** People who cannot forgive and forget need therapy. They should avail of the services of a skilled counsellor or a psychiatrist. We can help by assuring them that there's nothing wrong in seeking professional help. This becomes more effective if we can give ourselves as examples of those who have sought assistance from professionals.

4. **FORGIVENESS.** The pillar of FORGIVENESS in the life of a community is not so much the isolated act of forgiving but the ATTITUDE that, since our brothers and sisters in the community are human beings, sooner or later they will commit mistakes, and we must not immediately ascribe malice to these mistakes; rather we must presume that they are honest mistakes.

5. **THE GOOD NEWS.** Our God is a Forgiving Father.

### **C. STORY: PARABLE OF THE TEST THAT EVERYONE PASSED**

A teacher gave a test in school and told the class that at its end they would correct one another's papers. He also stipulated that everyone would have to pass, otherwise the class could not leave the room.

Several of the test results were very poor and a heated argument ensued about its being unfair to pass people who just did not have the right answers. But after long discussions, many of the "wrong" answers were found to contain "grains of truth" that had to be taken into account. In the end, there was a sigh of relief, because everyone passed, and the class could go home at the usual time.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1996

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A

MATTHEW 20:1-16 <> THE PARABLE OF THE  
LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

*Use in the Liturgy.* This Sunday's Gospel reading reminds us that our relationship with God is not the result of our own effort. God called us, we have not chosen him. All that we can do is acknowledge his favor or grace in our regard. This we do especially in the Eucharist when we give thanks (*eucharistia*) for God's grace (*charts*) which he has revealed to us in his Son. Let us keep in mind that the Mass is the celebration of our Father's generosity to all his creatures. The Christian's role in this world is not so much to work for a reward in the future as to recognize, both in words and deeds, God's beneficence to all people.

*Focus Points.* (1) The parable was addressed originally to the Pharisees who considered themselves to be the "first" in the kingdom. It was meant to show them that God's justice is not measured by human standards (see Isaiah 55:6-9), and that a person cannot enter into the right relationship with God, known as the "kingdom," on one's own merits, since it is a pure gift completely undeserved by the human being. According to Jesus, God's justice is essentially a saving justice.

(2) Matthew, by placing the parable in its present position among the teachings directed to the Church, has referred it to Christ's disciples. The laborers are no longer the Pharisees but the disciples. Nevertheless, the message is basically the same: being right with God is a matter not

of human endeavor but of God's favor. As St. Paul puts it, 'To one who works, his wages are reckoned not as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness' (Rom 4:4-5); "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom 9:16).

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. It is but natural for people to want to be rewarded for doing good. Jesus, however, teaches that one's reward should not be looked upon as a "wage" that has been earned, but as a "gift" or "crown" that is given out of the generosity of God.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* When parents give rewards to their children, it is not because the children really earned their prize. Usually it is totally out of proportion to the "work" the children have done. The reward is given because of the generosity of the parents. Do you have experiences that illustrate this?

2. Even when the disciples have done all that they have been commissioned to do (that is, after they have accomplished their missionary work), they remain "unworthy servants." The parable as it now stands acts as an antidote to the perennial temptation to Pharisaism within the Church.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Sometimes, church-going people are perceived as "Pharisees". How fair or unfair is this perception?

### BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

*1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Do you have an experience to share that illustrates v. 16: "the last shall be first and the first shall be last"?

*2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Sometimes, in our desire to be rewarded, we overlook the needs of others to also have their

own "piece of the cake.". This can be minimized if we adopt the lesson of this Sunday's parable — we must look at our reward not as a "wage" but as a "gift" of God's generosity. God's treasure-chest will never be exhausted. We should not think that if God rewards other, there will be none left for us.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* We should be happy when God makes us his instruments in rewarding our sisters and brothers. Let us avail of every opportunity to affirm our sisters and brothers.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* A sidelight in today's parable is the patience of the owner of the vineyard in answering complaints. Let us also be patient and forgiving when people complain to us.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Because God is a loving Father, he has a reward already in store for us — a reward that we do not have to merit as a wage, but for which we should dispose ourselves. No one offends a person from whom a gift is expected.

## C. STORY: HE BROKE THE RULES TO OBEY THE LAW

In the olden days it was the custom of monks to eat only bread and water for the six days of Holy Week. On Tuesday of the week, at a certain monastery, some visitors who had walked a long distance came to have a talk with the retired founder of the monastery. When he saw how hungry they were, he went to the kitchen to prepare a modest meal for them.

While he was busy cooking, he" was noticed by some of the younger members of the community who thought he was preparing a meal for himself. They promptly complained to the Superior. After investigating the matter, the Superior called the stern young ones and said: "Our Venerable Founder has indeed broken some rules made by our community. But in showing hospitality to visitors, he has firmly kept the law of love that was laid down by God."

SEPTEMBER 29, 1996

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A

MATTHEW 21:28-32 <> THE PARABLE OF THE  
TWO SONS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

*Use In the Liturgy.* This Sunday's parable conveys the message that Jesus preached from the beginning of his ministry: people must repent, be converted, undergo a change of heart, if they want to enter the Kingdom of God. The chief priests and elders of the Jewish people thought that this message was fine. It was good that a prophet had come to tell sinners — the tax collectors, harlots, thieves — to obey God. Paradoxically, however, Jesus now clearly indicates that the invitation to repentance has been particularly directed to the leaders. In his parable of the Two Sons, the Jewish leaders are the son who said "yes" but disobeyed his father.

*Focus Points.* (1) Jesus came to correct the mistaken notion of the Pharisees, the chief priests and elders of the Jews that humanity was divided into two main camps: those who needed repentance and those who did not, that is, themselves. Jesus' message was that all men need repentance all the time. No one has the right to think that he is on the "way of righteousness" if this does not include continuous conversion.

(2) V. 31b-32. The self-righteousness of the Jewish leaders blinded them to the message of repentance preached by John the Baptist and Jesus. By contrast, the people despised by the leaders — the tax collectors, the prostitutes and criminals — responded to John and to Jesus. They had said "No" to God by their sinful lives, but by repenting they have taken back that "No" and have made it into a "Yes" not so much by word as by deed.

## **B. REFLECTION POINTS**

### **BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE**

1. Some people are inclined to divide humanity into church-going people and non-church-going people. This categorization is most often made by people who pride themselves in being church-goers. Their next step is to think of church-going people as good and the non-church-going people are pronounced as "bad." Nowhere in Christ's teachings, however, do we find an assurance that all church-goers belong to the Kingdom of God and non-church-goers are excluded from it. What counts, Jesus teaches, is **TO DO WHAT THE FATHER WANTS**.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Was there a time in your life when you were not a church-going person and yet your life already reflected the Kingdom values of love, justice, peace — at least to some extent?

2. Christians are those who have said "yes" to God in Christ. They are, therefore, in a similar situation to that of the chief priests and elders in today's Gospel reading. Thus today's parable is a warning to us not to think that our Christian commitment has been made once and for all in the past and, therefore, has no need of renewal. We are in constant need of repentance or conversion. Moreover, we have to be very careful lest we allow human tradition and structures to overgrow and obscure our commitment to the values of the Kingdom, the values of love, justice, and harmony with our fellow human beings and the cosmos.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* What is more important to you: working for the Church or working for the Kingdom — for the wider acceptance of Kingdom values?

### **BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH**

*1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* When we share with others our "insights and feelings, we learn to harmonize our speech with our heart.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* The big mistake of the Jewish leaders is that they cared only for their camp of "righteous" people and did not care for those they considered as sinners. Let us not fall into the same mistake. In fact, we should care more for sinners because they are in greater need of being cared for.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* When we affirm others, let us not be deceived by appearances. Let us look at the heart and affirm people in whose hearts we find the values of the Kingdom.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Let us not divide humanity into two camps. It is when we think of humanity as one big family that we become more disposed to treat our sisters and brothers as God himself would treat them, that is, with forgiveness and love.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* God waits for our "Yes" even after we have said, "No". A change of mind and heart is made possible by Christ's redeeming grace.

### C. STORY: LAST MINUTE CHANGE OF PLANS

Needing a new secretary, the company's president decided to have applicants judged by a psychologist. Three young ladies were interviewed together in the president's office.

"What do two and two make?" the psychologist asked the first. "Four," was the prompt answer. To the same question the second young lady replied, "It might be 22." The third girl answered, "It might be 22 and it might be four."

When the applicants had left the room, the psychologist turned to the president triumphantly. "There," he said, "that's what psychology does. The first young lady said the obvious thing. The second smelled a rat. The third was going to have it both ways. Now, which applicant will you hire?"

The president did not hesitate. On the spot he decided to disregard the psychologist's approach and follow his own judgment. "I'll take the tall one with the pretty face and slim figure," he said.

OCTOBER 6, 1996

TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,  
Cycle A

**MATTHEW 21:33-43 < PARABLE OF THE TENANTS  
WHO KILLED THE OWNER'S SON**

**A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3**

*Use in the Liturgy.* The Vineyard is a famous symbol of the people of Israel. But in his parables of the vineyard, Jesus modifies the image considerably. According to him the true Israel, the Church is no longer a vineyard but **those who work in it: the laborers (Mt 20:1-16), the sons (Mt 21:28-32) and the tenants (Mt 21:33-43).** The Greek word for "tenant" really means "gardener", a person who does not simply occupy the vineyard but works in it. Jesus emphasizes **personal responsibility.** The Church is not just a farm protected by God, **it is a community of workers who must work to produce fruit.** Thus Jesus' parable refers not simply to the leaders of the people, who would be the tenants of the vineyard, but to the whole people, the whole Church, considered as individuals who must bear fruit.

*Focus Points.* (1) The "servants" of Mt 21:34-36 are the Old Testament prophets, whose message was always an appeal for renewal. The message of John the Baptist and Jesus was no different. Evidently the "son" of Mt 22:37-39 is Jesus himself whose appeal for the interior revolution of METANOIA was rejected. As a consequence, the political, violent revolution against Rome became inevitable, resulting in the destruction of Israel as a nation and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.

(2) It was Jesus's death which made it possible for Israel to enter into its true inheritance and become not a nation but a Church: "Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance" (Mt 28:38). He was "the very stone which the builders rejected" but which "has become the head of the corner" (Mt 21:42). For, by his resurrection from the dead, he has become the new Israel.



(3) Special emphasis is placed in this parable on the need to produce fruit in its "season" (Greek KAIROS). Part of the failure of the old Israel was the inability to recognize this KAIROS: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the SIGNS OF THE TIMES (KAIROS) (Mt 16:3). The prophetic appeal for renewal, from Elijah to Jesus, was a "SIGN OF THE TIMES", the time to bear the fruit of repentance.

## **B. REFLECTION POINTS**

### **BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE**

1. The old Israel failed in its vocation to be the Lord's chosen people and therefore, the kingdom has been passed on to another people, the Christian Church. Is it possible for the Christian Church to also fail in its vocation? The answer is NO. Two main, intertwining reasons can be given: 1) The Church is the Body of Christ — the extension of Christ himself through all the ages that come after him. The failure of the Church would be the failure of Christ himself. Even now, Christ is already triumphant and certainly the Church, too will be triumphant some day. 2) Secondly, in the prayer taught by Christ, we say: "do not bring us to the test." What is meant here is the eschatological testing that would be precisely the crippling of the Church during the end-time. We pray that this will not happen and God will surely hear our prayers.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* What is of concern to each individual Christian is one's personal fidelity to the vocation to bear fruits for the Kingdom. Have you been successful or unsuccessful in bearing these fruits?

2. Let us remember that we, as Christians, are not only members of the Church but members of Christ. If we are true Christians, we share in the life of Christ, we share in his fruit-bearing.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* The important question to ask, experientially, is: am I bearing the fruit that God expects of me? If yes, then I am a true follower of Christ, a true member of his Body. If not, there must be a disconnection somewhere.

3. We, who are today the "workers in the vineyard," must learn to interpret the "SIGNS OF THE TIMES." For Jesus' contemporaries these were the preaching, teaching, miracles and personal presence of Jesus himself. In our days God speaks to us through the risen Christ in a wide variety of WORD-EVENTS (DABAR) but the basic message is always the same: continual renewal in the light of the Gospel. For us the "SIGNS OF THE TIMES" are the conditions and circumstances of our daily lives which, seen with the eyes of faith, are an ever present invitation to reach out towards God in others and leave our own fixed positions and prejudices.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you cultivated a "SIGNS OF THE TIMES" (OR "DABAR") SPIRITUALITY?

## BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* In the parable, the property owner shared his vineyard with others by leasing it out. Similarly, God shared his responsibility for the salvation of humankind by making Israel his people and forming the Church to be the New Israel. God has placed his trust in us — we must not fail him. o God's way of acting should be our model in our personal relationships with others.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* To yield a rich harvest, plants need fertilizer. Similarly, if each of us, together with our brothers and sisters, will yield a rich harvest for the Kingdom of God, we also need fertilizer. Let us make room for God's Word and his Sacraments among us, for they are our heavenly fertilizer. Let us show our caring for our sisters and brothers by sharing with them our love for God's Word and leading them to the Sacraments.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Christ affirmed his people, his Church, by calling his followers "a nation that will yield a rich harvest" (v.43).

4. *FORGIVENESS.* A parable is a story that is true to life. And in the life of Jesus' time, it was not unusual for powerful people to act vindictively when their rights were violated, hence in today's parable we have the rather heartless punishment of the criminal tenants.

However, THIS IS NOT THE POINT OF THE PARABLE and it would be a distortion of Christ's teaching to say that God's forgiveness has the same limitations as man's patience. What is at issue in this parable is the VINTAGE TIME, which represents the KAIROS. Those who, at the proper time, live up to their duty, remain in good relations with God; those who do not live up to their duty are punished. To this we add the footnote that the punishment meted out by God is always tempered by his mercy.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* We belong to the "nation that will yield a rich harvest" (v. 43).

### C. STORY: WHAT A NEW NAME CAN DO

A gentleman once caught a thief in the act of picking his pocket. Justifying his act, the thief said that he was without work and was starving. He had just finished a jail term and with that on his record, he could not find employment. He said that whenever he gave his name, its reputation was so bad that no one would hire or trust him.

"Well," said the gentleman who was a successful businessman, "take my name, which I have never soiled in my life. I give it to you. Take it and keep it clean." Then he got the man a job.

Fifteen years later the businessman was told by his secretary that there was a gentleman to see him. He looked at the visitor's calling card and noticed that both of them had exactly the very same name. When he opened his office door to invite the visitor, before him stood a well-dressed man of noble appearance, who said, "I called to tell you that today I have been made the Chief Executive Officer of the company to which you recommended me fifteen years ago. All you see me to be, I owe to your noble generosity, and above all, to the gift of your name — Which is still unsoiled."

Christ has given us his name. If we keep it unsoiled, we will be able to yield the rich harvest that the old people of God was unable to produce.

OCTOBER 13, 1996

TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Cycle A

MATTHEW 22:1-14 <> THE PARABLE OF THE KING'S  
WEDDING BANQUET

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

*Use in the Liturgy.* Like last Sunday's parable, today's story of the King's Wedding Banquet teaches that since the old Israel refused to believe the Gospel, the Kingdom has been taken away from it and given to another people, the Church. The episode about the wedding garment that guests at the wedding must have is a warning to Church members that they must prove themselves worthy of their call by being faithful to a life led according to Christ's Spirit, the Spirit of Love.

*Focus Points.* (1) The Jewish contemporaries of Jesus thought of the Messianic era as a Wedding Banquet in which they were assured of a privileged position. Jesus attacked this complacency which was predominant among the chief priests and Pharisees. He pointed out that when the invitation to the banquet came, they did not recognize it as THE INVITATION THEY WERE WAITING FOR.

(2) Mt 22:7, "the king...sent his army to destroy those murderers and burn their city," is a reference to the sack of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in AD 70. We should note that at that time, the Jewish leaders kept warning people against becoming Christians, but there was already a growing Christian community in Jerusalem. The members of this community were perceived to be heretical Jews and indeed they retained the distinctive Jewish practices of praying in the Temple, celebrating Jewish feasts and reading the Old Testament Scriptures. With the destruction of Israel as a national and political entity, the umbilical cord of the Church with the matrix of Judaism was finally cut,

(3) The episode of the "wedding garment" (vv. 11-13) does not concern the chief priests and Pharisees anymore but the the Christian readers of Matthew converted from Judaism or paganism. These are not

necessarily more worthy of the Wedding Banquet than those who refused to come. They have to prove their worthiness.

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. The chief priests and Pharisees were too busy in their own affairs and they were blinded by their own view of the Kingdom that they did not heed the prophets who were God's messengers — and especially John the Baptist as well as Jesus and his Apostles — and so they failed to get into the messianic Wedding Banquet. The way to get invited is to heed the call to repentance and conversion. One has to change one's life-orientation and one's understanding of the Kingdom to make heart and mind conform with the Christian message.

*1.1 Pointer for Sharing.* What has been your experience of repentance and conversion?

2. While Judaism continued to be practised by ethnic Jews dispersed to the four winds after AD 70, Christianity emerged as a truly universal Church, unidentifiable with any one culture or nation. It is alluded to in the parable as comprising all those rounded up from the byroads, who had previously not been invited to the banquet.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you sufficiently appreciated the UNIVERSALISM indicated by the adjective "CATHOLIC" attached to your identity as a Christian?

3. Matthew does not explain what the "wedding garment" (vv. 11-14) is, except by saying that "the invited are many, the elect are few" (v. 14). It is up to us to think of what qualifies a person to be among the "elect." The New Testament answer to this is that it is a life led according to Christ's Spirit, the Spirit of Love.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* God's part was to call us to his Church. Our part is to prove ourselves worthy of being among the elect by living according to the Spirit of Love as taught by Jesus Christ Isn't this fair enough?

## **BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH**

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* The exercise of sharing insights and feelings develops an interior life in us. We need this interior life in order to respond to God's invitation to his Wedding Banquet

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* One reason why the chief priests and Pharisees failed to get to the messianic Wedding Banquet is that they cared only for their own selves and their own interests. They did not care enough for the salvation of non-Jews, of those who did not belong to their own ethnic group.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* The Jewish cultural expression, "The invited are many, the elect are few" is not to be understood mathematically. For the Jews, if 100 are invited and only 99 are among the elect, that's "few", that is to say, the perfect number has not been reached. What Scriptures state categorically is that God wants the salvation of ALL HUMANKIND. His plan will therefore be far from successful if the greater majority will be lost. Our being members of the Church is an affirmation of our destiny to be among the elect. If we fail in fulfilling this destiny it will be our fault, not God's.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* The parable should not be construed as a lesson about the limits of God's patience with sinners. See the explanation in last Sunday's commentary.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* We are already guests at the messianic Wedding Banquet. It is easy for us to prove ourselves worthy of our calling if we let ourselves be filled with the Spirit of Love.

### **C. STORY: THE BISHOP AND THE YOUNG PRIEST**

It so happened that an elderly bishop shared a train compartment with a young priest fresh out of the seminary. The two had never met before, and just to get better acquainted, the bishop told the young priest the story of his vocation to the priesthood.

Having come to the end his story, the bishop asked the new priest how he got his calling. "Oh, that's very simply told," the young man smugly replied. "All I can say is that the Lord had need of me."

"That's a remarkable coincidence, young man," observed the bishop. "So far as I can remember, only once in the Gospels did the Lord ever say that he had need of anything. In Luke 19:34 on the occasion of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he said he had need of a donkey."

God calls us not because he needs us but because he has something good in store for us.

**OCTOBER 20, 1996**

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A**

**MATTHEW 22:15-21** ◇ **GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT  
IS CAESAR'S, TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S**

**A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3**

*Use in the Liturgy.* Jesus' famous saying, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's" (Mt 22:21) is first of all a reminder that Christianity, though concerned with earthly, socio-political questions, must rise above them and uplift them in the process. Secondly, and more importantly, it is a reminder that Christian worship is essentially eucharistic, that is, the giving back to God of what is recognized as coming from him and belonging to him.

*Focus Points.* (1) Today's Gospel reading manifestly presents a plot on the part of the Pharisees and the Herodians to entrap Jesus. The Pharisees supported the movement for national independence and thus were not in favor of taxes to be paid to the Roman Emperor. The Herodians were pro-Roman and saw no objection to taxes. If Jesus answered "yes" to the question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" the nationalists would attack him. If he answered "no," the pro-Romans will be his enemies. Furthermore, he will be in danger of being accused of rebellion, which was punishable by death.

(2) Jesus neither denies his people's right to political independence nor incites them to revolt. He escapes from the dilemma by calling on his questioners to produce the money for the tax. It bears the image and inscription of Caesar, and therefore it belongs to Caesar. After that, Jesus rises to a higher plane. He teaches his adversaries to "give (back) to God what belongs to God." Just as the tax money was stamped with Caesar's image, so is the human being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26).

(3) Jesus has been tagged as a revolutionary but this is misleading. He is neither a political nor social revolutionary except as a consequence of his basic demand that people undergo a REVOLUTION OF THE HEART and turn to God.

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. It was not just because of shrewdness that Jesus escaped from the plots against him. He escaped because his time had not yet come. He had not yet arrived to the end of his rope. Putting it another way, Jesus could have used his cleverness to escape from being condemned to death by Pilate. Instead, he kept quiet at his interrogation by the Roman governor because it was time for him to take up his cross and redeem humankind.

*LI Pointer for Sharing.* If Jesus only had his own welfare in mind, he could have used his talents to avoid being condemned to die on the cross just as he used his brilliant mind to escape from the dilemma of the Pharisees and the Herodians. In his hierarchy of values, however, obedience to his Father was higher than wisdom and in the end obedience led him to embrace the Cross. Have you followed his example in the use of your talents?

2. A human person must give the total human "self" to God. This is the "something" that already belongs to God and must be given back to God. This is the essence of true worship. It does not mean giving anything to God which would be an addition to what God possesses. True worship is acknowledging that one's self is God's very



own possession. True worship is basically not a ritual but human life led to the full in a spirit of thanksgiving to its Creator. Jesus' answer to the Pharisees and Herodians suggests that by opposing him they were not worshipping God. True worship requires accepting Jesus because he alone can give the fullness of life requiring ultimate thanksgiving to God.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Do you confuse worship with rituals? Rituals have their place in worship, but the essence of worship is giving back one's self to God. This is done by following the way to God that has been taught by the example and teachings of Jesus. Do you give this kind of worship to God?

3. As followers of Christ, the kind of revolution to which we must give priority is the conversion of human beings to their Creator in order to praise and thank him for the fullness of life one experiences when one is filled with the Spirit of Christ.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* The Charismatic Renewal in the Church is the kind of revolution we should espouse before espousing socio-political revolutions. What has been your priority?

## BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Since Jesus was not opposed to the paying of taxes to the Emperor, surely he does not object to the practice of tithing in the Church. Let us generously share at least 10 per cent of our income with our sisters and brothers in the Christian community.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Our sisters and brothers do have socio-political and economic needs and we have to show our caring for them in these areas. But before anything else, we must care for them in the matters that pertain directly to their eternal salvation.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* By creating human persons in his image and likeness, he has given them their basic affirmation. And when Christ shed his blood on the Cross for our salvation, he wanted us to realize how truly precious we are in God's sight

4. *FORGIVENESS*. The Pharisees and the Herodians, approaching Jesus, did not obtain forgiveness for their sins because they had "bad faith" (see v. 18).

5. *THE GOOD NEWS*. By being followers of Christ we share in his wisdom.

### C. STORY: GETTING A LITTLE HELP FROM BEES

There is a legend that the Queen of Sheba once sent two wreaths of roses to Solomon. One was genuine and the other was artificial. According to the legend, the queen challenged Solomon to detect from a distance which was artificial and which was genuine.

Solomon opened a window and let in a swarm of bees, which at once settled on the real roses.

Likewise, even when two people use the very same rituals in rendering homage to God, God will know who is sincere and who is not.

OCTOBER 30, 1996

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle A

MATTHEW 22:34-40 <> THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

### A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

*Use in the Liturgy.* Just as Christian doctrine can be reduced to one simple truth: all peoples are one big family cared for by one Father, namely, God, so also the Christian ethic can be reduced to one rule: take the love that was manifested in the life of Jesus as the norm of your relationship to God and your fellow human beings. If your actions are inspired and guided by Christian Love, you are on the right track. This is the message of today's Gospel reading.

*Focus Points.* (1) Today's Gospel reading presents another attempt on the part of the Pharisees to embarrass Jesus. This time a

question is posed on a point of law. The background of the question is the fact that the rabbis were experts at dividing the numerous commandments of the Torah into the greater and the lesser, and their masters debated on which was the greatest, without coming to any consensus. The lawyer, in posing the question to Jesus, doubtless wished to divide people against him. As in Mt 22:15-21 (last Sunday's Gospel Reading), Jesus' answer to the question saves him from the trap.

(2) The answer of Jesus is so simple, yet, for the rabbis it was revolutionary. For them, the love of God is the goal of the commandments. By observing all the commandments of the Torah, a person arrives at the love of God. It's like climbing the stairs. The floor you reach is not part of the stairs. In their discussions about the ranking to be given to the commandments, they did not include the commandment of love because it could not be given any ranking. It is as if one asked, "What is the best decoration in the Christmas tree?" And the answer given would be: "The best decoration is the tree itself."

(3) The answer of Jesus destroyed the whole fabric of the rabbinic legal system. His answer meant that one should not bother about giving a ranking to the commandments because if you obey the commandment of love, all the commandments that are in contention for ranking become unnecessary commandments or they are already complied with.

## B. REFLECTION POINTS

### BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. Nowadays we no longer debate on which commandment is the greatest, but some people are still engaged in debates that similarly are a waste of time. For example, some people ask whether devotion to Jesus, Lord of Pardon is better than devotion to the Sacred Heart; or whether one's salvation is better assured by devotion to the Rosary or by devotion to the Scapular; or whether it is better to go to Lourdes or to Fatima, etc.. It was a question like this that was posed to Jesus and he wisely solved it by rising above the futile debate. He took the opportunity offered by his adversaries to proclaim his ethics of Love.

Today, let us also rise above petty discussions that produce no spiritual fruit and concentrate on keeping our hearts and our lives attuned to God.

*1./ Pointer for Sharing.* People cannot grow spiritually unless they focus their attention on their basic commitments. Have you decided on what your basic commitments are?

2. Particular commandments can be helpful in concrete moral situations. If, for example, your anger has been aroused, the commandment of love takes the form of "Thou shalt not kill". Or if a married man finds himself alone in a room with a woman who is not his wife, the commandment of love takes the form of "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In all situations, however, Christian conduct becomes easier when one clearly sees the link between a particular commandment and the overriding commandment of Love.

*2.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Have you gone through the exercise of seeing the connection between the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandment of Love? If you have gone through this exercise, are there any insights you would like to share with your group?

3. When you obey the commandment of Love, it's like hitting a homerun in a baseball game. You get a score quickly. You don't have to earn it slowly, waiting at each base for an opportunity to run, not sure whether you will eventually be able to score. Aiming for the homerun is what makes baseball exciting. Similarly, aiming to fulfill the commandment of Love is what gives meaning to Christian life.

*3.1 Pointer for Sharing.* Has your life gained meaning because of your commitment to fulfill the commandment of Love?

## BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

*1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* The teaching of Christ about the Greatest Commandment is found late in his ministry, almost at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew. Surely, however, Jesus had it in his mind and heart from the very beginning. He practised it all his life. However, he was able to express it in speech — share it — only because his adversaries wanted to trap him with a tricky

question. We, too, should welcome tight situations that afford us an opportunity to share what we hold dear.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* The Greatest Commandment is a relationship. A CARING RELATIONSHIP.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* In Mk 12:32-34 the lawyer and Jesus mutually affirm each other after Jesus had given his answer.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* We cannot practice love of neighbor without forgiveness.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* When we get to know what is the Greatest Commandment, we are "not far from the reign of God," see Mk 12:34.

### C. STORY: DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH

Some city boys were living on a farm during vacation time. One day a calf got out of the barn and the three of them were trying to get it back in. So one of them pulled on its little horns and the other two pushed from behind. But the more they pulled and pushed, the more the calf just stiffened its legs and stood there.

The farmer's young daughter came along and watched them. She smiled, walked over to the calf, and put her finger into its mouth. As the calf sucked her finger, she gently led it to the barn, to which the calf willingly walked.

The boys scratched their head in wonder. They had used the wrong approach. The girl, more experienced in animal psychology, knew the right approach.

It's the same with the Jewish doctors of the Law and Jesus. The learned men used the wrong approach and the people resisted them, ending up being alienated from God. Jesus knew the right approach and taught the Commandment of Love. People now find it easier to obey God.

# *Stand, Speak for Life*

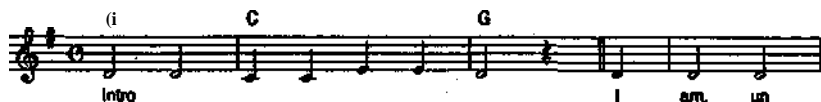
*Lyrics by Emma Q. CuCanag*

*Music By <E.<P. Jfontiveros, S.J*

# Stand, Speak for Life

Lyrics by 'Emma Q. Ctamtg

•Music by <A>. •Hontnens, S.J.







you outthere.dont fight a-mongyour -serves, And leave\_\_\_\_me here, for - got



D<sup>7</sup>

Do something now be-fore the world goes. bar - ren. Pleasespare a

it r i Muj

D<sup>7</sup>

D<sup>7</sup>

£E^^-^

life, and\_\_\_\_this is how I hope and pray you'll do:

^

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O<sup>7</sup>

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f

M

Stand, speak for me now, Next time, 111.

D<sup>7</sup>

J-

n J J

fight. for. you.