

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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YOUTH: TO BRING CHRIST INTO NEW ASIA

Vicente Cajilig, OP

AGENDA FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Angel Lagdameo, DD

PRIESTS OF TOMORROW: FIRST BICOL PRIESTS' CONFERENCE

Leonardo Legaspi, OP, DD

AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM: PHILIPPINE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

John Paul II

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The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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Youth: To Bring Christ Into New Asia

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

The launching of the celebration of the Jubilee Year at the Luneta's Quirino Grandstand on December 1, 1996 was an outstanding success. But while the opening was a successful event, will it mean that the same result would be true to all future endeavors done to welcome fittingly the third millennium? Let us watch and see.

One focus of attention in the coming years should be the youth who in the country and in Asia constitute over 60% of the population. The years 2000 and beyond belong to them.

It is heartening to note that local parishes pay attention to them. For instance, in the recent meeting of the Vicariate of St. Francis Xavier of the Diocese of Batangas, six priests were talking about their representation to the August 1977 World Youth Day in Paris, France. The priests were also talking on the problems of drugs in their respective towns. The parishes have their strategies in trying to help eradicate the drug addiction plague.

Moreover, our youth will look forward to the examples of their elders in the Church, politics and economics. Should they witness in their elders true transformation proposed by Cardinal Sin in his homily at the Luneta gathering, then, youth will be the ones to bring Christ into New Asia in the millennium to come.

Agenda for the Third Millennium

ANGEL LAGDAMEO, DD

"Facing the Concerns of Today and the Challenges of the Future"

In launching his program Tertio Millennio Adveniente (TMA) to celebrate the 2000 years of Christianity, Pope John Paul II said that this advent is the *hermeneutical key* of his Pontificate, the defining and climactic point of his papacy (TMA 23). The Pope called on everyone to do his utmost *"as it involves a special grace for the whole humanity"* (TMA 46). This advent time, he assures us, will *"illuminate the mystery of man as we find solutions to the outstanding problems of our time"* (TMA 59), and *"renew our hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God"* (TMA 46).

This proposed Philippine Program *A Filipino Vision for the Third Millennium* is our response to the call of His Holiness. Our special focus will be on the need of the Catholic Church, bishops, clergy, religious and lay leaders to realize this vision of the Third Millennium.

So that our Philippine Program will be relevant to our own national needs, we have joined the Holy Father's themes for TMA with that of the Plenary Council of the Philippines II (PCP II).

AGENDA FOR THE G

Implementing Terto Millennio Adveniente (T

	1997	
FOCUS	JESUS CHRIST (PJP II's REDEMPTORIS HOMINIS)	(PJP II's
Theological Virtues	FAITH	
Sacrament	BAPTISM	
Mary, as Model	Divine Motherhood Model of Faith	Do
Thrust of Evangelization	CATECHESIS (VATICAN II's DEI VERBUM & SACROSANTUM CONCILIUM) Worship Social Apostolate	(VAT
Vision	<u>Forming Community of Disciples</u> (PCP II #S 87 TO 121) Church of the Home Church of the Poor	Co Buildin
Mission: Renewed Integral Evangelization	Renewal of the Moral and Spiritual Order	Ren
PLAN OF ACTION		

ILEE OF REDEMPTION

cond Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCPII)

	1999	2000
T FICANTEM)	GOD the FATHER (PJP II's DIVES IN MISERICORDIA)	BLESSED TRINITY (PJP II's REDEMPTORIS MISSION)
	CHARITY	UNITY and PEACE
ON	RECONCILIATION	EUCCHARIST
Spirit ie	Obedient to the Father Model of Love	Consecrated for the Work of Redemption
NTIUM) te	Catechesis Worship SOCIAL APOSTOLATE (VATICAN II's GAUDIUM ET SPES & NOSTRA AETATE)	WITNESSING OF FAITH "strengthening of Faith and of the Witness of Christians" (VATICAN II'S AD GENTES & PAUL VI's ECCLESIAM SUAM)
iples he Home (M) por	Community of Disciples Church of the Home <u>Becoming the Church of the Poor</u> (PCP II NOS. 122 - 136)	<u>To establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.</u> (PCP II NOS. 581, 650 - 651 "May Your Kingdom Come"
cal and	Renewal of the Social and Economic Order	Renewed and Transformed Society

YEAR 1997: JESUS CHRIST
Building a Community of Disciples
in Faith to Renew the Moral
and Spiritual Order

For the year 1996/1997, we will focus on the person of Jesus Christ, who He is to us and what discipleship under His Lordship means in our personal lives.

For the year, the overriding theme of TMA-JESUS CHRIST blends perfectly with the PCP II Theme - FORMING A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It will be a year devoted to knowing, loving and following Jesus. In this regard, we will follow the Holy Father's counsel in TMA:

"Everything ought to focus on the primary objective of the Jubilee; the strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians. It is therefore necessary to inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbor, especially the most needy." (TMA 42)

In this goal to strengthen our faith and to give witness to our Christianity, Mary, is our best guide and model. We will need to stress the social teachings of the Church, renew our study of catechesis, and rediscover Jesus in the Scriptures.

"The first year therefore will be the opportune moment for a renewed appreciation of catechesis in its original meaning as the "apostles' teaching" about the person of Jesus Christ and his mystery of salvation. In this regard, a detailed study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church will prove of great benefit ... to allow for a better knowledge of the Christian mystery and for the enlivening the faith of the People of God." (TMA 42)

"How do we live as Catholic Christians today? It is to know, to live, to follow Christ in the Church which he founded. We need to contemplate the face, and the heart of Christ. We have to retell his story to ourselves, to tell it to others." (PCP II 36)

We need to organize ourselves for study and prayer, retreats and recollections with the objective of strengthening our faith by knowing more deeply Jesus Christ and knowing more about His person through a detailed study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Leaders in the Church, in religious congregations, in the private sector, government, academe, and other lay leaders can develop joint programs on the following: training on lay evangelization; massive catechetical instruction in all schools and communities; formation in the Gospel values of Truth, Freedom, Justice and Love; and forming a pool of resource persons.

Organizations may distribute printed information on the TMA and copies of Catholic Bible and the new Catechism of the Catholic Church as Christmas give-aways. Business enterprises can be agents for evangelization by organizing their staff and employees into a community of disciples in the workplace. Bible study groups/prayer meetings may be formed and masses celebrated within the work premises. Projects like *adopt-a-parish* program to fund catechists and other pastoral workers may be encouraged.

There is a need for education to teach the faith or a renewal appreciation of baptismal catechesis coupled with genuine conversion and personal renewal evidenced by hunger for the Word of God and intense prayer life. Persons and groups can link with religious congregations and other Church renewal movements and associations to support this effort.

The Holy Father indicated the need for effective witness of Christians as they tread through the path of righteousness in relating to the members of the family household, their neighbors in the community where they live, in schools, offices, in their own particular workplaces. *(e.g. Among the businessmen, there is a need to Christianize corporate business ethos and practices, to integrate the Christian faith in their corporate vision-mission, to do social outreach programs involving personal participation on their employees and other similar activities.)*

The study of the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* as well as Nos. 422-682 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *PCP-II* Nos. 87-121 can provide us with direction and guidance in knowing about Christ, the mystery of our redemption, and our calling to become disciples - a community of disciples of our Master, Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

Marian Program

The Blessed Virgin will be contemplated in this first year especially in the mystery of her Divine Motherhood. It was in her womb that the Word became flesh! The affirmation of the central place of Christ cannot therefore be separated from the recognition of the role played by His Most Holy Mother. Mary constantly points to her Divine Son and she is the model of Faith which is put into practice. (TMA 43)

YEAR 1998: HOLY SPIRIT

**Engaging in Renewed Evangelization, with hope,
and to Renew the Political
and Social Order**

Again, we find a happy blending of the TMA and PCP II themes for the second year, PCP II mandates our *ENGAGING IN A RENEWED EVANGELIZATION* while TMA's overriding theme for 1998 is the *HOLY SPIRIT* who, the Holy Father emphasizes, is the principal agent of the new evangelization.

"The primary tasks of the preparation for the Jubilee thus include a renewed appreciation of the presence and activity of the Spirit, who acts within the Church... and in the variety of charisms, roles and ministries which he inspires for the good of the Church..."

"... The spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization... who builds the Kingdom of God and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time." (TMA 45)

"He gathered them around him at supper on the night he was betrayed, handed to them his own body and blood as the seal of the new covenant, and gave them the command to love one another as he loved them. He entrusted them with a definite mission as his own representatives, to make disciples of all the nations whom they were to teach to obey his commands. He sent the Holy spirit upon the disciples on Pentecost. Invested with power from on high with supreme

courage they went to proclaim the Good News, the love of Jesus who died and rose that all might have life" (PCP II 47)

As hope is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Father said that we must prepare for the Third Millennium *"by renewing our hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God."* He then suggests an action program in which he expresses this hope:

"scientific, technological and medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples." (TMA 46)

Our activities for this year would be on the promotion of the Church of the Home and the Apostolate of the Laity. One of the four principal tasks of the Christian Family is to form a community of persons starting with the spouses and increasing as the children comes, the beginnings of a community of disciples. This task entails renewed education and catechesis on Christian Family Life. The Holy Father wrote two documents on family catechesis: *Familiaris Consortio*, and his Letter to Families. The three other tasks of families are: serving life through the procreation and education of offspring, participation in the development of society, and sharing in the life and mission of the church.

There is a need to strengthen existing family life apostolate programs in our parishes (e.g. *Marriage Encounter, Marriage Enrichment Seminars*). Business organizations and associations can link up with the parishes as well as with existing family life movements in the Church to form study groups or cells composed of 5-7 married couples to meet regularly (*twice a month or weekly*), praying together and meditating/reflecting and listening to the Word of God and obeying them as they relate to their day-to-day life as Christian families. The cell as a BEC (*Basic Ecclesial Community*) also serve as a support group of the member couples as they go through the joys and the difficulties of raising a truly Christian family.

It will be useful for families (*or married couples*) to get together as groups in the conduct of their apostolate. Activities of the family

apostolate will include: adoption of abandoned infants, assistance to abandoned spouses, unmarried mothers and mothers-to-be in difficult situations who are tempted to recourse to abortion, helpful advice and material assistance to the poor adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, support of families involved in material and moral crises, help for the elderly and the handicapped.

The laity is tasked to permeate the temporal sphere of things with the Gospel. It is the particular obligation of the laity to ensure that transactions and relationships in the field of business, government, and other temporal fields are in accordance with God's plan. The application of the four cardinal virtues (*Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance*) would be a great help in dealing effectively with the temporal things of this world. The Second Vatican Council issued a decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, while Pope John Paul II wrote his encyclical *Christifideles Laici*, to guide the laity in the task of spreading the Good News in the workplace.

Linkaging and networking with the lay organizations in the Church, academe, government, NGO's, mass media, private and business sector, joint programs for advocacy and action may be launched on the pressing issues of: poverty, environmental degradation, children and youth concerns, trafficking of women and children, plight of the informal labor/workers, landless farmers, fisherfolks, ancestral domain of indigenous peoples, electoral and political reforms, gambling, peace and order, etc.

For guidance in our activities, we need to study (*in addition to the documents mentioned above*) Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* and Nos. 683-744 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concerning the third person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We need to study also the Papal Social Encyclicals beginning with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* to *Centessimus Annus* of our present Pope. *PCP II* Nos. 574-594 provide useful guidance on the Christian Family, the Church of the Home.

Marian Program

The Marian theme for this year is Our Lady as the Woman of Hope:

"Mary who conceived the Incarnate Word by the power of the Holy Spirit... will be contemplated and imitated during this year above all as the woman who is docile to the voice of the spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope who, like Abraham accepted God's will "hoping against hope."

(She) is the radiant model for those who entrust themselves with all their hearts to the promises of God." (TMA 48)

YEAR 1999: GOD THE FATHER

Becoming the Church of the Poor, in Love, to Renew the Social and Economic Order and Care for our earth.

For 1999, the Holy Father, in TMA, again provides the linkage between the theme of God the Father and PCP II's goal of BECOMING CHURCH OF THE POOR.

"In this third year the sense of being on a "journey to the Father" should encourage everyone to undertake by holding fast to Christ the Redeemer of man, a journey of authentic conversion ... It will therefore be necessary to emphasize the theological virtue of charity, recalling the significant and lapidary words of John: "God is love." Charity, in its twofold reality as love of God and neighbor is the summing up of the moral life of the believer. It has in God its source and its goal." (PCP II 4)

"From this point of view, if we recall that Jesus came to "preach the good news to the poor", how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the Church's preferential option for the poor and the outcast? Indeed, it has to be said that a commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the jubilee. Thus, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations." (TMA 51)

"The Kingdom of God is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God." (PCP 41)

"The Kingdom is promised to those who do the will of the Father, to those who serve "the least" of Christ's brothers and sisters, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the homeless, the sick, those languishing in prison. It is promised to the meek and pure of heart, to those who hunger and thirst for justice. We must pray for this coming, strive for its coming." (PCP II 43)

The plan for the third year shall give emphasis on our calling to serve the poor and the needy, with whom our Master and Lord identified Himself. Our projects may include advocacy efforts to protect the rights of the poor, our indigenous peoples in the protection of their ancestral domain, children in especially difficult circumstances, mass housing for the urban poor, genuine implementation of agrarian reform care for our earth and efforts against massive degradation of our natural environment brought by the so-called *development aggression*.

The Church of the Poor is a call by the Church to be in solidarity with the poor, a call to a preferential love for the poor, a call for a decisive commitment on the part of those who live above the poverty line to share their treasure, time and talents with those who are poor and marginalized.

Projects and activities that would empower the poor through access to capital resources and appropriate technology would include assistance in the formation of credit cooperatives, farmers associations, etc. Businesses, in their social outreach projects may link with parishes and NGOs in the formation of cooperatives for the poor in their areas. For instance, professional associations or organizations like the Bishops-Businessmen Conference (BBC) may link with government agencies like the National Livelihood Support Fund, (NLSF), Cooperatives Development Authority (CDA), Technology & Livelihood Resource Center (TLRC), People's Credit finance Corporation (PCFC), etc. for livelihood development for the poor.

For our guidance and study, we have the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* and Nos. 199-418 of the *Catechism on God, the Father Almighty*. On the subject of the Church of the Poor, the Social Doctrine of the Church (*composed largely of Papal Encyclicals starting with Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII to Centessimus Annus of Pope John Paul II*) and PCP II Nos 122-136 would provide us guidance for study.

Marian Program

The Marian theme for the last year of preparation is slated in part as follows:

"Mary Most Holy, the highly favored daughter of the Father, will appear before the eyes of believers as the perfect model of love towards both God and neighbor ... The Father chose her for a unique mission in the history of salvation: that of being the Mother of the long-awaited Savior. The Virgin Mary responded to God's call with complete openness: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." Her motherhood, which began in Nazareth and was lived most intensely in Jerusalem at the foot of the Cross, will be felt during this year as a loving and urgent invitation addressed to all the children of God, so that they will return to the house of the Father when they hear her maternal voice: "Do whatever Christ tells you." (TMA 54)

YEAR 2000: BLESSED TRINITY

Witnessing of Faith

Strengthening of Faith and of the

Witness of Christians

The Year 2000 will be centered on the Blessed Trinity ... giving the Trinity honor, glory, praise and thanksgiving for the gift of Redemption.

"To carry out the work of Christ, to whom the future belongs, under the lead of the Spirit, the youth will be expected to do great things. The future of the world and of the Church belongs to the younger generation." (TMA 58).

This now will be linked with our PCP II accent on youth.

"Young people and children are truly the present and the future of the Church. As they grow in the maturity of Christ, they must increasingly assume responsibility in the task of evangelizing which they share with their elders by right of Baptism" (PCP II 581).

"The youth need to be evangelized." (PCP II 650)

"They must also become evangelizers." (PCP II 651)

Since the Year 2000 will be *"intensely Eucharistic,"* we will have to recall the laity's *"tri-dimensional participation in the priesthood of Christ."* They should be encouraged to live Christian life as a consecration to the Trinity, as a mediation for the transformation and redemption of the world, and as a sacrifice of life together with Christ celebrated in the Eucharist. (PCP II 13).

We need to draw ever new fervor, new energy and fire from the Lord through contact with him in prayer and in the Eucharist in a fervor that translates itself in faithful, creative, persevering and visible commitment to our vision and mission in the world and in the Church. (cf PCP II 199).

Marian Program

"I entrust this responsibility of the whole church to the maternal intercession of Mary Mother of the Redeemer. She, the Mother of fairest Love, will be for Christians on the way to the Great Jubilee of the Third Millennium the Star which safely guides their steps to the Lord. May the unassuming Young Woman of Nazareth, who two thousand years ago offered to the world the incarnate Word, lead the men and women of the new millennium towards the One who is the "the true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1:9) (TMA 59).

“Open our hearts to the redeemer!”: Homily on the Eucharistic Celebration of the First Sunday of Advent

JAIME CARDINAL SIN

*“Salubong kay Kristo!” Eucharistic Celebration
at the Luneta, First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 1996*

When Peter, at the mountain top, saw Jesus transfigured, his face shining like the sun, his garments dazzlingly bright, he cried out, “How good it is for us to be here!” We can say that together, my dear brothers and sisters, as we gather here – young and old, high and low, from near and far: “How good it is for us to be here!”

We have watched the beautiful and moving procession of the mysteries of the rosary, the beloved scenes from the lives of Jesus and Mary. We have listened to our brothers and sisters singing to the Lord, giving witness to their faith, and we have joined joyously the hymns and prayers which we have lifted up heavenwards. We have enjoyed the music of so many bands from various schools and communities. We salute with gratitude and appreciation all the labor -- all the labor of love! -- which has gone into this afternoon’s program. Let me assure all who gave so much of their time and treasure and energy to make this wonderful afternoon possible, that they must bring joy to the hearts of Jesus and Mary, and that their reward will surely come from God.

My brothers and sisters, today is the First Sunday of Advent. As I welcome you here at the Luneta, let me say that I am certain your coming here is a fitting beginning for this advent time. It is surely

a sacrifice, to give up almost an entire day of rest and relaxation, to gather here, to stand for several hours here despite fears of inclement weather ... because you wish to welcome Christ in our hearts, in your homes, in your communities. Something tells me that this Christmas will be, for many of us, a very good Christmas, maybe "the best yet". This is because when we welcome Christ, he will also welcome us into his heart and the fullness of his grace, into "the fullness of life."

Very recently our government and business community held the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) which was much acclaimed as a resounding success. Whatever the short-or-long range results, beneficial or not, of APEC, one thing is made clear beyond doubt: that a "new asian world" is emerging, and with it a constellation of development and facts we put under the umbrella of "Globalization". Thus the run-up to, and the coming of, the third millennium in Asia, is one of vast significance. It poses before us as Christians, as Church, the immensely important challenge: Will Jesus Christ be part of this new Asia? Will his person, will his Gospel, have anything to say to this dynamic and incredible "Asian Century" already coming-to-being around us?

To us, the so-called "only Christian country in Asia", the happenings in our part of the globe should present a sobering, almost frightening double-edged blade: Do we know the Gospel of Jesus well: Well, in that we truly understand it, in that we truly live it? Do we have the desire and the courage to bring it to the nearly three billion Asians around us, 97% of whom have not really -- effectively -- heard of Jesus Christ? Time Magazine writes of this new dynamic world of skyscrapers, subways, bullet trains, electronic empires, factories, financiers, firms-upon-firms earning billion of dollars each year, of universities and laboratories, condominiums and five-star hotels, thousands of cars of all makes, Jet-setters and tourists by hundreds of thousands, cellular phones and computers ... the lively streets aboil with direction and purpose. So on, and so forth.

For us, the question of questions is this: can we bring Jesus Christ into this New Asian World? Can we bring Jesus Christ into this dynamic, bursting Asian century? For if we fail to do our part, will it not be true that when our time came, when our hour at last came, we failed

Christ, we failed our Christian calling, we failed to be Christ's witnesses to those around us? Now that our hour of truth has come, will we Filipinos fail Christ?

My brothers and sisters, for me, this is the deeper challenge of *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* for us. This is the deeper meaning of our *Salubong kay Kristo* this afternoon, and what comes after it. There is not much time: these three years are a challenge God faces us with: we must truly be converted to the fuller meaning of our Christian faith. We must make that faith, that hope, that love, something very real and operative in our lives. Our individual lives as well as our communities -- all the aspects of our existence! Because we must give witness, and witness is beyond words, beyond mere appearances, beyond all mere *Habla*, beyond mere *Palabas*! Pope Paul VI said it well: The modern world is sated with words; it no longer listens to teachers. It will only listen to witnesses; only witness can speak to people in our time.

This, I believe, is the deeper meaning of this beautiful gathering we hold here, this first Sunday of Advent. We want to really welcome Christ, and open our hearts and our lives to Him. We want to hear his Gospel, as if for the first time in our lives; we want to understand it, so that it penetrates every level of our being and our life. We want to make its values the substance of our deeds. We want, in other words, to become saints, followers of Jesus, in deed and in truth.

The challenge to each one of us is discipleship; it is the "following of Jesus". Following Jesus means becoming more and more like him. It means learning his way, making his message and teaching our own, living it out in our lives. How do we do that? We "learn Jesus" the way the disciples did,, those first disciples who left all things and followed him. They spent days and nights in his company, walking beside him. Watching him, listening with all their minds and hearts to what he said, remembering his words and pondering over them in their souls.

You must have heard, some years back, the words addressed to Jesus in a song in the musical Godspell, words taken from a prayers of the middle ages:

*Day by day, three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly,
To love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly,
Day by day.*

So the new advent challenges us, each one of us and our communities, to become more and more like Christ. You must find ways to do this. We all have different lives. We live in different situations, have different opportunities, and thus have different callings.

You in the government, how do you follow Christ? Your work, above all is meant to be for the common good, above all for those "who have less in life", as Ramon Magsaysay liked to say. The policies you adopt; your honesty, your dedication; the way your office functions, the way you handle public funds; the way you deal with people.

You in business; especially those whose decisions affect the lives of so many. I am told 60% of the wealth of our country is controlled by a small number of corporations based here in Manila. If only they ... no, if only you ... who are Christians, "followers of Jesus"... if only you would really bring the Gospel of Jesus into your personal and professional lives and decisions and deeds.

To so many of you who are here this afternoon, as well as you who are listening now to me: if only you would take to heart the social teaching of the Popes -- especially of our present Holy Father -- and put it into practice: what difference it would make in our country! Pope John Paul II in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* says: The rule of thumb of the Old Testament teaching on justice was: "God's first concern is the protection of the poor and the weak. This should be the first rule for the King" and other people of wealth and power. And in the New Testament, that is the rule of thumb also. Read the Magnificat of Mary; read the Beatitudes of Jesus, read the Manifesto of Jesus in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel: "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor ..." Hear their over-riding concern for the poor, the sorrowing, the lowly ones, the victims of society. The Popes have told us in our time, again and again, that Christianity teaches this "preferential love and care for the poor." We cannot be true Christians without it. This is the challenge of the triennium of renewal. People in government,

people in business, people in the professions: Listen to the Gospel and the Church! Make a difference ... make a difference ... and the Lord will step in with you!

You who teach ... are you teaching the Gospel and the values of the Gospels? The Gospel values teach us how to be truly human, how to fulfill our true vocation as human persons. The Gospel tells us that "Pro-existence", giving our lives for others, for our brothers and sisters, for the common good, is "what it's all about." Do you teach this to the young? Parents, who by life, by word and example, are humanity's first and most important teachers: Do you really put the values and priorities of the Gospel first in your own lives, so that you can teach it to your children? This is the time to examine your lives deeply, to be honest, to try truly to be followers of Jesus day by day in the weeks and months to come!

As you listen to all this, you may be asking: "But is not this what we have been hearing all along? Is not all this what we should be doing, anyway? We have had several holy years before this! What's so different about this triennium, what's so important about the year 2000, the Year of the Great Jubilee?"

In the Old Testament, there were the Sabbatical Years and the Jubilee Years. The years of the Lord's favor. Privileged years of God's forgiveness, mercy and blessing. Remember Jesus' manifesto at Nazareth: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... he has sent me ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." His coming, his ministry, his death and resurrection; those made up the time of God's favor, "the fullness of time". The fullness of time is the time of God's coming, of God's outpouring of his "amazing grace."

It is true: all times and all places are in the hands of God, in the power of God. But God has chosen in his dealings with us, to set aside special places and special times of his coming-to-us, his special presence, his powerful grace. Places: there are Nazareth and Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Holy City ... places in our time: Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima, God's special grace dwells there, for those who come in pilgrimage. And times? we have Holy Week and Easter; we have the moments of sacramental grace. The Holy Father tells us; the Year of the Great Jubilee will be a special time of abundant and amazing grace.

The triennium before that will be abundant and amazing years of the Lord's favor: you can count on it!

But grace is gift and task. In the matters of our salvation and the world's salvation, God has chosen to "need" us. We remember Saint Augustine's famous words: *Deus, qui creavit te sine te, non te salvavit, sine te*. God created you without your help. But he won't save you without it. He won't save you, if you do not give him your yes, your efforts, your deeds." The Holy Father says, "You can be sure of it: there will be abounding grace during this new Advent. But you have to open your hearts to it. You have to open your hearts totally! No reservations, no blockages. Let the Lord come in!" This is the call I want you to hear this evening: "Open your hearts to the Redeemer!" Hear it well, my dear brothers and sisters! Open wide your hearts. And if you do ... oh, if you do ... you will be surprised at what the Lord will do! For with God all things are possible! Remember what the angel said to Mary at Nazareth, when she seemed to doubt that her cousin, in advanced years, was truly with child: "For what is impossible for man, is possible to God!" so ... open your hearts, my brothers and sisters, open wide your hearts, and see what God will do in you, what God will do through you!

As the Holy Father always does, so must we end these words with some thoughts on Mary, Mother of the Lord, and our Mother. Again and again Pope John Paul II has told us, "Mary is the woman of Advent. Mary is the new Advent." When first the Lord came, sent by the father, it was to her he came. It was to Mary, the Holy Father likes to say, that the Father first entrusted his Son. For nine months, all the time of the first Advent, God's own Son was within her, taking flesh and blood from her, becoming man in her womb. As Mary went about, and prayed or slept, ate and worked, she carried salvation within her, she carried Emmanuel, God-with-us within her body. So too Mary is for us the ark of the new advent.

With the new advent we expect a new coming-of-God into our world. *Tertio millennio adveniente* speaks of "The definitive coming of the Kingdom of God" in our time, of a new springtime for humanity, a new springtime in the history of the human family: a new "victory of Christ" in the world. In his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the Pope tells us that from the experience of the Polish people, he brought

with him to the papacy the conviction that "the victory of Christ, if it comes, will come through Mary." He utterly convinced that, for the whole world, "on this universal level, if victory comes it will be brought by Mary, Christ will conquer through her, because he wants the Church's victories now and in the future to be linked with her.

So what victory do we ask for? Some beginning of a true "fullness of life". You remember in 1985 we celebrated the bimillennium of Mary's birth as a Marian Year of Prayer, Penitence and Reparation. Our motto was C-O-R; conversion, offering of our daily duties, reparation. We offered much prayer and penance; I was moved by the earnestness and devotion I saw everywhere. We relied on God's promise: "I will hear their prayers from Heaven. I will forgive them their sins. I will restore their land to them. "The Lord did hear us. His answer was EDSA '86, his answer was the fall of the dictatorship, and the restoration of freedom and human rights: although we were a long way from "fullness of life." Even now, we beg the Lord for just the beginning of a new fullness of life!

But part of the spirit of the new advent is trust. Again and again we repeat with the Pope, our Lord's words: "Be not afraid!" Words of the crucified-and-risen Christ to his disciples, "Be not afraid!" We want to hear those words as we begin this advent. We need "the certainty that someone exists who holds in his hands the destiny of this passing world, someone who holds the keys to death and the netherworld; someone who is the Alpha and Omega of human history." I am citing from the Holy Father's book:

This someone is love -- love that became man. Love crucified and risen, love unceasingly present among men. It is eucharistic love. It is the infinite source of communion. He alone can give the ultimate assurance when he says, "Be not afraid!"

"The victory, when it comes, will come through Mary!" That is our firm and unshakeable hope. We will turn to her in the new advent. We will turn to her with utter confidence. No one better that she can lead us in the way of discipleship. No one better than she can lead us to her son.

Following her as she goes ahead of us, we will go forth from this celebration with those words ringing in our souls. Each one of us, and all of us together, must go forth on mission. You, lay people most of all. Now is your hour; now is your time for "laying your lives on the line!"

My brothers and sisters: we must go forth from this assembly with a deep and powerful spirit of mission. *Caritas Christi Urget Nos*: the love of Christ drives us on! In so doing we shall be like Mary, Mary of the mystery of the visitation, Mary on the roadways of Galilee, carrying her son to the world.

My brothers and sisters: with a full heart I cry out: "Open your hearts to Christ Jesus our redeemer!" During this advent-time, and through our 1997 "year of Christ", let Jesus live in you, let Jesus truly take over your lives. And then, bring Him with you wherever you go. Let Jesus, living in your hearts, be also the power and radiance of your words and deeds, so that people may meet Christ in you, and you -- each one of you; every man, woman and child here present -- may bring Christ Jesus to the world, and bring the world in turn to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Amen! Amen!

Statement of the Second Provincial Council of Manila (PCM-II)

PANGARAP PARA SA KINABUKASAN

Sa loob ng dalawang linggo kami, mga laiko, relihioso, mga pari, obispo't arsobispo mula sa Arkidiyosesis ng Maynila, diyosesis ng Imus (Cavite), Malolos (Bulacan at Valenzuela), Antipolo (Rizal), San Pablo (Laguna), at Vikariato Apostoliko ng Palawan ay nagtipon-tipon sa San Carlos Pastoral Formation Complex, EDSA, Makati City, upang ipagdiwang ang Ikalawang Konsilyong Panlalawigan ng Lalawigang Eklesiyastiko ng Maynila. Kami ay sama-samang nanalangin, kumain, naglibang, nagtalakayan, nagpasya, at higit sa lahat, nag-alay ng Banal na Eukaristia at tumanggap sa Katawan at Dugo ng Panginoong Jesus. Naranasan naming "kay ganda kapag namumuhay na nagkakaisa ang mga magkakapatid" (*Salmo 133:1*). Natanto namin na ang bawat isa sa amin ay tinawag ng Panginoon na lagi naming kapiling at nagbubuklod sa amin sa pagkakaisa.

Ang naranasan namin ay ang katotohanan ng Iglesia, "isang bayang bunga at hawig sa pagkakaisa ng Ama, Anak at Espiritu Santo" (*LG, no. 4*). Bunga ng aming karanasan at pagtatalakayan sa Panginoon kami ay nangangahas na mangarap para sa isang Iglesiang binago ng Panginoon at kasiya-siya sa Kanya.

Ito ang aming pangarap: isang Iglesiang binubuo ng mga taong nakaranas ng pag-ibig ng Panginoon at bilang tugon sa Kanyang panawagan ay nagbabalik-loob at sumasampalataya sa Kanya. Ang

Iglesiang ito ay binubuo ng mga tunay na alagad na nagsisikap sumunod kay Kristo sa gitna ng mundong ito. Ang Iglesiang ito ay hindi lamang isang organisasyon o kilusan kundi isang tunay na sambayanan o pamilya ng Diyos, isang kaisahan ng mga taong tinipon ng Panginoon at nakikiisa sa Panginoong Jesus sa pamamagitan ng pananampalataya pag-asa at pag-ibig. Kilala at kinikilala ng bawat isa si Jesus. Siya ang yaman ng bawat puso. Siya ang ibinabandila ng bawat buhay: "Si Kristo noon, ngayon at magpakailan man" (*Heb 13:8*).

Sa Iglesiang ito ang lahat ay kapwa Kristiano, kapwa disipulo ni Kristo, kapwa kasapi sa bayan ng Diyos. Walang nakahihigit dahil lamang sa hawak na katungkulan. Ang lahat ay pantay-pantay sa kadakilaan. Kung may mas dakila man ito ay dahil sa kabanalan na Diyos lamang ang nakaalam.

Ang Iglesia ng Panginoon ay isa. Ang mga kasapi ay nagkakaisa. Ngunit mayroong tunay na pagkakaiba. Hindi pare-pareho ang kaloob ng Espiritu Santo sa bawat isa. Hindi rin -pare-pareho ang tungkulin ng bawat isa. Dito sa Lalawigang Eklesiastiko ng Maynila, kay dami ng mga talino at karisma, kay laki ng kanilang pagkakaiba! Isinasalarawan ni San Pablo ang pagkakaisa ng Iglesia sa pamamagitan ng Katawan na bagamat iisa ay mayroong nagkakaibang mga bahagi. Sa katawang ito mahalaga ang bawat isa; kailangan ang bawat isa, at kailangang magkaisa (*1 Cor 12:12-30*). Ang pagkakaiba ay para sa ikapaglilingkod sa iba, para sa ikabubuti ng buong Iglesia. Ang bawat isa ay binigyan ng kaloob ng Espiritu Santo upang mapaglingkuran ang kapwa niya ng buong pagmamahal.

Sa Iglesia hindi maitatatwa na mayroong mga namumuno na ang Espiritu Santo rin ang naglagay (*Gawa 20:28*). Ngunit ang pinuno ay hindi dapat maghari-harian kundi dapat maglingkod (*Mt 20:24-28*). Kung kaya't lumalabas na ang Iglesia ay isang sambayanan ng mga taong hinirang upang maglingkod sa isa't-isa. Ayon na nga sa isang madalas gamiting awit "Walang sinuman ang nabubuhay para sa sarili lamang. Walang sinuman ang namamatay para sa sarili lamang. Tayong lahat ay may pananagutan sa isa't-isa. Tayong lahat ay tinipon ng Diyos na kapiling Niya."

Ngunit ang Iglesia ay hindi lamang para sa mga kasapi. Ito ay para sa ikapaglilingkod ng lahat ng tao. Ang mga kasapi na naglilingkod

sa isa't-isa ay dapat namang sama-samang maglingkod sa iba. Ang Iglesia'y tinipon upang isugo naman sa mundo bilang lingkod ng sangkatauhan.

Kay laki ng pangangailangan ng mundong ito kay Kristo! Kay laki ng pangangailangan sa Kanyang kaharian ng buhay, pag-ibig, katarungan at kapayapaan! Kay dami ng mga taong kinakapos sa buhay, mga taong inaapi, nilalamangan, ipinasaisantabi! Kay dami ng mga taong hindi pinapansin ng iba! Kay dami ng mga hidwaan at di pagkakaunawaan! Kay dami pa ng mga kaguluhan, krimen at problema! At kay dami pa rin ng mga hindi nakakikilala kay Kristo!

Ang Iglesia ng Panginnon, ang bayan ng Diyos, ay nakababad din sa mga pangangailangan at suliraning ito. At nagtitiwala kaming hindi magkukulang ang Diyos na pagkalooban ng iba't-ibang kaloob o karisma at paglilingkod ang Kanyang Iglesia upang maipamalas at maipaabot nito sa lahat ng mga tao, lalo na ang mga nangangailangan ang malasakit at paglilingkod ni Jesu-Kristo.

Nakikini-kinita na namin, bilang bunga ng konsilyong ito ang paglitaw ng lalo pang maraming mga laiko na nakatatanto na ang tawag na maging Kristiano ay tawag din sa apostolado o paghahatid ng magandang balita ni Kristo (*Dekreto sa Apostolado ng mga Laiko*, no. 2). Nakikita namin ang mga laikong bukas-palad at lakas-loob na nag-aalay ng kanilang yaman, talino at panahon para paglingkuran ang mga kasapi at maglingkod na kasama ng mga ibang kasapi ng sambayanan ng Diyos. Nakikita namin ang pagganda at pagsasaayos ng paglilingkod sa pamumuno ng mga kahaliling mga apostol, at ibang mga namumuno na hinirang ng Panginoon. At nakikita namin ang mga pinunong ito na buong lugod na kumikilala at nagpapalakas loob sa mga karisma o kaloob ng bawat Kristiano. Mga pinuno na kumikilalang hindi lamang sila ang dapat magpasan sa mga pasanin ng Iglesia kundi kumikilala at tumatanggap ng mga laiko bilang katwang nila sa paglilingkod sa kapwa tao.

Nakikita namin ang mga laiko na nanunuot sa lahat ng bahagi ng lipunan: hindi lamang sa relihiyon kundi sa pulitika, sa ekonomiya, kultura at *mass media* upang ito ay bigyan ng lasang Kristiano at iangat sa pagbabago.

At nakikita rin namin ang maraming mga kababayan nating laiko na sumasaksi kay Kristo sa pamamagitan ng marangal at banal na pamumuhay at pagsasalita tungkol sa Magandang Balita sa iba't-ibang bansa ng Asya. Nakikita namin ang Bayang Pilipinas na nagiging maningning na ilaw sa dakong ito ng mundo.

Si Kristo ang ating yaman, noon, ngayon, at magpakailan man. Ngunit hindi siya para sa atin lamang. Naririnig namin ang kanyang atas: "Humayo kayo gawin ninyong disipulo ko ang lahat ng mga bansa" (Mt 28:19). Ang atas na ito ay aming sama-samang didinggin at susundin.

PANALANGIN

Sa ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak at ng Espiritu Santo.

Panginoong Jesu-Kristo, aming kapatid, Diyos na Tagapagligtas, kaisa ng Ama at ng Espiritu Santo, binuo mo ang iyong samabayanan. Pinagkalooban mo ng lahat ng kinakailangang karisma, kaloob at paglilingkod ang iyong Iglesia upang mabuklod sa pagkakaisa at maipagpatuloy ang iyong misyon sa mundo.

Nagpapasalamat kami sa iyong paghirang sa amin, sa iyong pagbubuklod at pagsusugo sa amin.

Biniyayaan mo kami ng maraming mag laiko na tunay mong mga disipulo at mapagmalasakit para sa iyong Iglesia. Pukawin mo ang diwa ng marami pang iba upang ang lahat ay makiisa Sa paghahatid ng iyong magandang balita at pagtataguyod ng iyong paghahari. Dumami sana ang iyong mga saksi at manggagawa sa iyong bukirin.

Gisingin mo ang mga nagwawalang bahala, palakasin mo ang loob ng mga nanghihina, at pag-alabin mo ang puso ng mga masigasig nang naglilingkod sa iyo.

Kami nawa na hinirang mo ay maging dangal mo rin sa bahaging ito ng mundo at dumakila sa iyong pangalan sa lahat ng mga bansa.

Sama-sama naming dalangin ito sa iyo kasama ni Mariang Ina mo at Ina namin, uliran mong disipulo at huwaran ng lahat ng lingkod ng Diyos at tao. Hinihiling namin sa tapat mong saksi, si San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila na ipanalangin kami sa iyo. Sa inyo, Diyos Ama, Anak At Espiritu Santo ang lahat ng papuri magpakailanman! Amen.

Lay Ministries

JAVIER GONZALES, OP

The *laity*, the vast majority of the People of God, have awakened from centuries of lethargy and have started taking active part in the mission and in the ministry of the Church. What was unthinkable not so many years ago is now a reality. In fact, nobody is surprised today to hear, for instance, the expressions "lay ministers" or "lay ministries." Moreover, we find 'normal' seeing lay persons performing various liturgical functions, such as reading at Mass, leading prayers and prayer-meetings, distributing Communion ... We indeed cherish the presence of lay people involved directly in Church affairs: sitting in the various governing bodies and councils at all levels; carrying Communion to the sick; serving at marriage tribunals; presiding, in special cases, at weddings and funerals ...

Understandably, we hear different reactions from the Church's various sectors:

"This is an invasion!" conservative members protest at seeing lay people 'stepping' on traditional clergy grounds. *"This is a repression!"* some extremist voices from the feminist headquarters complain in anger at not seeing *yet* ordained women-priests around. *"This is a blessing, a sign of the times!"* most people cry out.

Be that as it may, the fact is that we are witnessing the emergence in the Church of a mature, well-prepared, responsible lay people,

committed and directly involved in carrying out the mission entrusted by the Lord to his followers.

Lay Ministry: What is it about?...

For centuries the terms "minister" and "ministry" in Church language have been reserved for priests and bishops. Nowadays, however, we speak of "lay ministries" and of "lay ministers," finding the expressions quite fashionable.

Every member of the Church, whether cleric or lay, is a minister, understanding the term "minister" in its broad sense. The statement may seem a bit unorthodox, yet there is nothing wrong with it. In fact, what is the Church? *The People of God*. And who are the people of God? Those who have been baptized in Christ. By virtue precisely of such incorporation into Christ through baptism, every Christian is entitled to take an active role in the mission of the Church: "For this reason *they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ*. They are called, *each according to his or her particular condition*, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world" (c. 204).

As Christians then, we share not only the dignity of Christ but also his mission: humble service to others. The whole life of Christ was such a ministering to others.

Everyone, man or woman, has a mission to accomplish, a service to fulfill, within the Church; obviously, in accordance with their own condition and diverse charism. While some people are born organizers, others excel in the execution of plans already laid down. Still others, from the experience of their Christian life, have a remarkable wisdom for the preparation of the sacraments and are capable of helping animate liturgical services. Some people work wonders in the religious awakening of children, while others have a special capacity for responding to the spiritual needs of adolescents and leading them forward. A number have received the grace of being able to lead prayer groups, and others show an aptitude for initiating leisure activities of a Christian flavor. While some contribute the leaven of the Gospel in their particular area, others are actively involved in mass media: as Christian publishers, editors, writers or broadcasters...

They all put their charisms at the service of others. This is precisely what being "ministers" is all about: being servants, being "at the service" of the rest!

Of course, we know that the term *minister* in the ecclesial context has a proper meaning and that "a person is not a *minister* simply by performing a task." As defined by the Second Provincial Council of Manila, a minister must render "a specific service done on a sufficiently stable basis, in the name of the Church and in pursuit of its mission." Today, fortunately, many of the tasks exercised by the laity in the Christian community fulfill these conditions. Consider, for instance, the liturgical ones of Lectors, Acolytes, Prayer Leaders, Commentators, Cantors ... and the apostolic in nature, of the Catechists, Preachers of the Word, Missionaries ... These are truly ministries, and their executors real ministers. With a distinction, though: they are "*lay ministers*."

... *Why only now?*

Theologically, there is nothing new or revolutionary about lay ministries. As Pope Paul VI reminded us, "the admission of lay persons to the exercise of certain instituted ministries or functions should not be seen as a novel experiment, but rather as a restoration of the old practice. For certain liturgical and charitable functions were entrusted to the faithful from earliest times, whose conferring was frequently accompanied by a special rite, in which God's blessing was invoked, and which established the person designated in a special rank or class for the performance of some ecclesiastical ministry" (*Ministeria quaedam*, 1972).

Why is it then that only in recent times have we started hearing about lay ministers and lay ministries? Well, this has an explanation. The image of the Church as composed not only of clergy but also of laity is not new at all. What has happened is that for centuries, the laity had been considered as a sort of second-class citizens, paternally admitted, with specific obligations but hardly any right in the governance of the Church. This was one of the factors that accelerated the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, which issued an urgent call for the restoration and the old practice (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14).

The developments that have so far taken place in this field are mainly the response to that urgent call issued by the Council. That is why the whole matter appears to be a "recent creation". Certainly, the awakening and restoration of the functions of the laity within the Church are something new.

Lay Ministers: Substitutes for Priests?

The presence and the work of lay ministers in the Church are seen today by many not as a legitimate 'empowerment' of the laity based on their baptismal consecration, but rather as an emergency solution due mainly to the scarcity of priests. This looks particularly true when their "cooperation" implies the exercise of certain offices and functions considered for centuries "exclusive" to the clergy. Thus the question: Why are lay members now accepted to carry them out?

Several advanced hypothetical explanations make us wonder: Do lay ministers exist simply because of the scarcity of priests? Couldn't it be simply because we have to be open to the new democratic spirit of our times? May it be due to some psychological or pedagogical rule of group dynamics in order to have more effective celebrations or group insertion? All these reasons are right and legitimate to a certain extent, but they are definitely insufficient.

Why then, these *lay ministries*? The answer has already been basically given in reference to the right understanding of the Church by the new Vatican II ecclesiology. All ministries are the answer to a personal call, a particular vocation for which each member is uniquely empowered, and oriented towards the same aim of carrying out the mission entrusted to the Church.

As will be stated later, some ministries are exclusive of the ordained ministers, like for instance, the Eucharistic consecration and the sacramental absolution, for which the sacrament of Holy Orders is absolutely necessary, and no delegation is possible to those who have not been ordained.

There are also other functions whose competence in principle belongs to the clergy since they imply the exercise of the power of

governance, but that in certain circumstances could be delegated to lay people: "Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions..." (c.230). There is more than mere "substitution" here!

Finally, there is a tremendous variety of ministries which are valid options for lay people since they are perfectly compatible with the very laical condition. The range starts with the instituted ministries of *lectorate* and *acolytate*, and extends to the unlimited functions that cover the different spiritual and material needs of the people of God. Here, the ministers are not merely "delegated" or "substituting" but are acting on their own baptismal consecration. To officially recognize some of them, the Church normally blesses their undertakings.

Scarcity of priests? New democratic spirit? Psychological or pedagogical reasons? There is certainly some truth in these and other reasons invoked as direct causes of the present lay ministerial boom. And though they have the merit of having created the present awareness with the consequent proliferation of such ministries, the heart of the matter remains deeper than those mere external circumstances.

Liturgical Ministries: Open to Women?

Women have a privileged role in so many fields of Church life: catechesis, pastoral means of evangelization, care of the destitute and the sick, social welfare ... It is but logical that, in these past years, women have normally entered the liturgical world to exercise their ministry as readers, commentators, leaders for prayers and music, distributors of Communion, ushers, etc.

Understandably, this started with many hesitations, some of which are still held today. In some places, due to religious-socio-cultural factors, we can expect that the implementation of already approved norms will take time.

Two examples illustrate these hesitations: female readers in the Church, and female altar servers.

In 1969, the Roman Missal prescribed that if the readings at Mass were proclaimed by a woman, she could not go up to the sanctuary (hence to the lectern). Soon afterwards, in 1970, this matter was left to the decision of Episcopal Conferences. Acting on it, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) officially prescribed that women could proclaim the Word of God in the liturgical assembly *from the place where the readings are normally proclaimed* (LIB, 1971, 28-54).

The case of female altar servers is of more recent development. Church law has traditionally prohibited women from serving at Mass. The prohibition, expressly stated in the old Code of Canon Law, was reiterated in 1972 by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship (*Inaestimabile donum*, 18). The revised Code (1983) required the presence of a server at Mass, but mentioned nothing about the server's gender; the presumption was then in favor of the old practice. However, some people argued that female altar servers (altar girls) were implicitly permitted in it by virtue of canon 230, which states that "lay persons, male or female, may fulfill the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions..." Since that of the *altar servers* was not mentioned, might not this be one of the "other functions" that laity of both sexes could perform? The question was raised to the Council for Interpretation of Legislative Texts for an *authentic* interpretation of the text. Their *affirmative* answer to the question came in 1992, although its implementation was subject to some norms from the Sacred Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Sacraments. The norms issued leave the matter to the discretion of diocesan bishops (AAS, 1994, 541-542).

Up to now, only men are accepted for the instituted ministries of *lectorate* and *acolytate*. We know, however, that there have been requests formulated by experts asking for the revision of this norm, since *de facto* these same ministries are being performed already by women (readings, distribution of communion, etc). Obviously, such a reservation was necessary when the "minor orders" of *lectorate* and *acolytate* were seen exclusively as steps towards priestly ordination. However, now that the two are restored as lay ministries, any reservation does not make much sense anymore.

The exercise of liturgical ministries, with the exception of *ordained ministries*, is open to both men and women. The degree of openness,

however, will vary greatly from times and places, since it involves many religious-socio-cultural factors.

Types of Ministries...

There is a three-fold diversity of ministries in the Church: the ministry of the *Word*, which basically consists in the proclamation of the Good News; the *Sacramental* ministry, which embraces mainly the administration of the sacraments — Eucharist, Baptism, Marriage; and the *Administrative* ministry, which relates to administration and “bureaucratic” work.

A hierarchy of these ministries is established by their condition and conferral:

- **Ordained ministries** in the Christian community - *diaconate*, *priesthood* and *episcopacy*. The exercise of these ministries requires a special ordination or consecration through the sacrament of Holy Orders.
- **Instituted ministries**, which until 1972 were called “minor orders”: *lectorate* and *acolytate*. Although their reception and exercise are a must for the candidates for Holy Orders, such ministries are no longer reserved to clerics. Lay persons may now also be *installed* as *lectors* and *acolytes* in a stable manner, more or less permanent.
- **Recognized ministries**: those which, without being formally instituted, have somehow an official character and for which some people are temporarily commissioned or assigned - *readers* at liturgical celebrations, *commentators* at Mass, *leaders of prayers*, *cantors*, *altar servers*, *distributors of Holy Communion*, *ushers* *collectors...*; or commissioned for some pastoral service like the *catechists*, *preachers of the Word*, *leaders of public prayer*, *assistants at marriages*, *theology teachers*, *missionaries*, *leaders of apostolic movements*, etc.
- **General ministries**: those of charity and service to mankind, from which no follower of Christ can be excused, since all are deputed for them by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

Clearly, with the exception of the *ordained* ministries, which are specific of those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, the

rest can be and are actually called "lay ministries." Why? Simply because they can be exercised by lay persons.

Technically speaking, although the expression "lay ministries" in a broad sense includes also the general ministries of charity and service to mankind, it refers primarily to those particular ones for which, in addition to baptism, some sort of *delegation, installation or commission* is needed.

The Second Provincial Council of Manila, held in August 1996, mentioned a long list of lay ministries grouped as follows:

- Worship (liturgical)
- Education (catechesis, religious education)
- Social Services
- Temporalities
- Youth
- Family
- Public Affairs

This list, although arbitrary in composition, reminds us of the fundamental "secular" spirituality of the laity, which is by no means limited to liturgy. Actually, apart from the liturgical ministries, the fields of evangelization and apostolate offer an immense variety of services which are specific to the laity. This had been said beautifully by Pope Paul VI: "Evangelization, specially in the wide and complex arena of politics, sociology and economics, as well as other fields such as human love, the family, the education of children, the practice of the various professions and the relief of human suffering... are areas *where the laity are called to build up the kingdom of God* and to bring salvation in Jesus Christ" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 70).

... and of Ministers

The variety of ministers runs parallel to the variety of ministries. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand the diversity of ministers in the Christian community, which basically can be catalogued into two different types: "sacred ministers" (those ordained), and the "lay ministers" (those non-ordained).

- **Ordained ministers:** They are selected members who, through the special sacrament of Holy Orders, are marked with an indelible character

and deputed to fulfill the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling the People of God *in the person of Christ the Head*. They are the *bishops, priests and deacons*. They constitute the *clergy*.

- **Non-ordained ministers:** They are those who are not in "Sacred Orders." They can be categorized as:

- **Installed ministers:** Lectors and acolytes are solemnly installed for the office.

- **Assigned or commissioned ministers:** *Readers, commentators, cantors, distributors of Communion, catechists, theology teachers, lay missionaries* ... Those officially appointed to carry out the wide variety of *recognized* ministries in the Church. Very often functioning also as *extraordinary* ministers, that is, exercising functions proper of the instituted ministries and even at times some of the ordained ministries "where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available."

- ***De facto* ministers:** They are those who, without having been formally installed instituted or *commissioned*, exercise *de facto* a variety of ministries as needed: from those officially recognized to those general ministries of charity and service to mankind, having been deputed for them through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

LECTORS — Readers

Among the liturgical ministers, *Lectors* have a place of prominence, as their main task is the proclamation of the Word of God to the community. Note, however, that most of those who actually perform this function are not installed lectors, but simply lay persons - men and women - ordinarily assigned to the task.

INSTITUTED LECTORS

The *lectorate* has been for centuries a "minor order" reserved for the clerics as a preparatory stage for priestly ordination. In 1972, Pope

Paul VI converted it into an *instituted* ministry accessible also to lay persons. Attached to the conferral of this ministry is a well-defined set of requirements, functions and spirituality.

Requirements

- A petition freely signed by the aspirant and made out to the Ordinary who has the right to accept it;
- Suitable age and special qualities to be determined by the Conference of bishops;
- A firm will to render faithful service to God and the Christian people.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has set the following norms for the country:

- The candidate must be an exemplary Catholic.
- He has to be at least twenty-one years old.
- He must be adequately literate.
- He must complete the seminar established for his proper training and formation.

The permanent assignment to the ministry of lectorate is so far reserved for men. Even as the conferral of this ministry "does not carry with it the right to sustenance or salary from the Church", (MQ, 12) they are entitled to a worthy remuneration to adequately provide for their own needs and those of their families (c.231, 2). The ministry is given in a stable manner, more or less permanent, although the exercise of office is subject to periodical renewal (normally three or five years).

Rite of Conferral

The simple *rite of installation* basically consists of a prayer, and the handing over of the Bible or the Lectionary. It may be done within the Mass or at a celebration of the Word of God. The installation is carried out by the bishop or the major superior of a clerical religious institute, for their respective subjects.

Functions

The Ritual summarizes the lectors' "job description" into three major tasks: the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgical

assembly; the instruction of children and adults in the faith (catechesis); and the preaching of the message of salvation to those who have not yet received it. The *Sacramentary* (1970) mentions other functions.

Spirituality

The spirituality of lectors is configured by the three functions and, therefore, it has to be founded on a true love for the community they serve and for the Word they proclaim. Besides, they must have a correct understanding of God's Word and a deep faith in it, as well as a personal appreciation of their ministry.

ASSIGNED READERS

Normally, the *readers* at our Eucharistic celebrations are not installed lectors, but rather good-willed volunteer persons inducted and commissioned to the task at the parish level. They are men and women, religious brothers and sisters, old and young; and act as "substitutes" of the installed lectors. It is then but normal that the former should share in the same spirituality as the latter.

Since this ministry is not a mere privilege granted to the laity, but a proper lay ministry, even if there are deacons and priests present, it is fitting that lay people proclaim the readings before the Gospel (IGRM, 55). For the service to be done well, readers must be properly prepared. "Those who exercise the ministry of reader ... must be truly qualified and carefully prepared, in order that the faithful will develop a warm and lively love for Scripture from listening to the reading of the sacred texts" (*Ib.* 66). Readers must also possess the conviction that the Word being proclaimed is not their own, but God's, they being only the instruments for it to reach the people.

Practical Points for Lectors/Readers

To be a "good reader" is not easy. In addition to what has been said, the reader must also observe the following:

- Timely approach to the lectern, which is the proper place for the proclamation of the Word;

- Dignified bodily posture: the person himself is a sign “seen” by the assembly;
- Proper “ordinary dress” or special liturgical vestment;
- The format of the book has to show to the assembly to what extent its content is appreciated;
- The proper use of the microphone: adjusted distance, direction, volume; acoustics are important;
- The reading should not be started until silence in the assembly is established;
- The reader does not need to start by saying “first reading” or summarizing it, but by mentioning the book from where the reading is taken;
- Good reading is essential: slowly, with the right tone of voice and expression, clear enunciation, correct punctuation, adequate pauses or silence;
- Right attitude: that of a listener before a reader, with joy and respect at the same time, with an attitude of faith, proclaiming the Word “after having meditated on it in his heart,” as the Ritual says.

ACOLYTES

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion; Altar Servers

Acolytes are those who “accompany” the priest or the deacon in order to help them during Eucharistic celebrations. They are also “extraordinary ministers of Communion,” helping among other things to distribute communion and take it to the sick. Altar boys have traditionally been important but rather symbolic substitutes of the installed acolytes.

INSTALLED ACOLYTES

The former “minor order” of Acolytate went hand in hand with the Lectorate in being restored to a true lay ministry by Pope Paul VI in 1972. Actually, the conditions and requirements to be met by the candidates are the same as for the Lectorate.

Rite of Conferral

The installation is carried out also by the bishop or the major superior, *always* within the Mass. The candidates are called after the Gospel reading and briefly instructed about their duties. A prayer over them follows: "Grant, Lord, that they may be faithful in the service of your altar and in giving to others the bread of life." Then the bishop hands over a vessel with the bread or wine to be consecrated to each one. The Mass continues with the acolytes exercising their ministry for the first time.

Functions

The functions of acolytes are as follows:

- To assist priests and deacons during the Eucharistic celebrations;
- To distribute communion to those present at the Eucharistic celebration;
- To bring communion to those absent, especially the sick;
- To receive for themselves and distribute to others the Eucharist in the absence of priests;
- To expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration and replace it (without giving the blessing);
- To instruct other ministers who, by temporary assignment, are helpers in the Eucharist.

Spirituality

Two factors determine the spirituality of acolytes: the local Church where they serve and the sacrament of the Eucharist of which they are special ministers. As the Eucharist is the "re-presentation" of the sacrifice of Christ, so the acolytes themselves must become a sacrifice to the Lord: exhibiting dedication and concern for their fellowmen, specially the sick and the weak, and genuine love and deep appreciation for the Eucharist. For acolytes to rightly perform their ministry, they should have a correct understanding of the Eucharist.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

In the last years, lay persons, including women, have been taking care of distributing communion and of performing other functions

virtually identical with those of the *installed* acolytes; acting, in a word, as “extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.” It was a big surprise at the beginning because for centuries, touching the Eucharist had been a taboo! Today, however, this lay ministry is progressively being accepted with normality.

Motivation? Pastoral utility; that is, to abbreviate the time of communion, to facilitate for the sick the possibility of receiving the Eucharist, specially on Sundays. But there is something else here: with this ministry another image of the Church is emerging and the dignity of the laity is highlighted anew.

This ministry cannot be entrusted indiscriminately to anyone: certainly not to children or adolescents, but to mature people (in the Philippines, the minimum age of 21 has been established). And besides, a good reputation and dedication are required. These elements are demanded by the ministry itself which must be exercised in coordination with the parish priest (the acolytes are helpers, not substitutes), and that requires from the ministers a responsible spiritual attitude: awareness of continuing the same mission of Christ who cared for the sick and weak, spirit of sacrifice: time, dedication, love ... (it is not easy to care for others!); and also a great appreciation for the Eucharist.

What Lay Eucharistic Ministers should know

- *A correct understanding of the Holy Eucharist:* a basic comprehension of the Mass and of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice and memorial. Also the various forms of reverence and their meaning (genuflections, incense, monstrance, etc).
- *The manner of distributing Communion:* The lay Eucharistic ministers go to the altar at the fraction of the Bread, having fetched the ciboria. After giving the Bread to the ministers, the priest hands over a ciborium to each of them, and all together distribute communion to the faithful. Communion must be given - people should not just be invited to take it (the “self-service” here is not expressive: Can you imagine an athlete taking the medal from a table himself?); purification of vessels.

- *The manner of giving Communion outside the Mass:* In times and places where there is no priest, people should not be deprived of the Eucharist. A rite is to be followed: greeting; penitential act; prayer; Liturgy of the Word; Our Father; peace; communion; silence; prayer; blessing.
- *The manner of giving Communion to the sick:* Instruct the family beforehand to prepare a little table, with a clean white mantle, flowers and candles ... The rite includes the Our Father and some other prayers... The persons around may receive communion (if, for instance, the caregiver was unable to go to Mass). In hospitals, if they can follow by loudspeaker the celebration of the Mass, the communion is an extension.
- *What to do in special situations: Examples:* When a sick person cannot receive communion in solid form - communion under the species of wine alone is recommended; another possibility of giving communion to the sick - a particle only, giving water afterwards; when a host falls to the ground - pick it up and put it on the communion plate or altar, afterwards, leave it in a water container until it dissolves then pour it on the ground.

Distributing communion to the brethren in the community and to the sick is a beautiful service that should fill with joy those called to do it. Still, this is not a "privilege" but a "service" for the welfare of the rest. Pastoral motivations of this ministry: "I was sick and you visited me."

ALTAR SERVERS

By *altar servers* we understand those children or adolescents who help the priest or deacon at the service of the altar. They carry the cross, candles, books, incense, wine and water, and give the celebrant anything needed.

"De Facto" Acolytes

The altar servers are not *installed* acolytes, but *de facto*, "act" as such in most ways. The *Directory for Acolytes* states that "every parish or Christian community should have a group of stable and well-formed altar servers. Parish priests must be aware of the positive contribution

acolytes and servers render to the liturgy, especially to divine worship." The *Book of Blessings* contains a special blessing for them. This blessing is given by the parish priest or by another delegated priest or deacon, normally during Mass or in a celebration of the Word of God.

The presence of children round the altar is very significant: not only for their help, which is indeed invaluable, but mainly because they "represent" the whole community, being actually ministers not only of the priest, but also of the whole community. Besides, they make the celebration more festive. How nice to see them on Sundays and holidays, wearing liturgical attire, moving around and helping in the different functions!

The function of altar servers needs to be kept. In some countries today, it is almost a merit to find Christian families whose parents want their children to be acolytes. All the more to keep this ministry and to consider it as an educative factor in the faith for them and for the community. Many priestly vocations have been nurtured here.

Performance and Attitude of Altar Servers

The altar servers' ministry is something more than moving around and being helpful. The following are some other aspects that configure their formation, spirituality and behavior:

- They should have some spiritual/liturgical formation: initiation to the Eucharist, Liturgical Year ...
- They should have an adequate sense of the sacred to help them carry a dignified, respectful actuation before the community.
- They should have a "celebrating" attitude. Their gestures, postures, active attention, etc., must show that they are part of a community that celebrates, listens, prays, sings and shares.
- They should be able to discover the different presence of Christ in the celebration: in the Word proclaimed, in the person of the priest, in the community, and specially in the Eucharist. Hence love and respect should be shown in their service (Pope John Paul II speaking to altar boys).
- They should have a spirit of camaraderie. They must appreciate and attend meetings, formation programs, activities, even those recreational and cultural.

Altar Girls?

In some places they are serving already, with a more or less explicit consent of the bishops. The legislation of the Church has, since 1994, permitted it in principle. More or less valid reasons, however, explain in the reluctance with which its implementation has taken place:

- Traditional opposition to women approaching the altar;
- Psychological effect of women visibly near the priest during the celebration;
- The fear that such closeness to the altar and to the priest could lead automatically to the aspiration of women to the ordained ministries.

But today there is a 'new way of thinking', and present circumstances have led to a revision of the matter whose implementation has been left to the diocesan bishop.

Liturgical Attire

Customarily, altar boys wear more or less liturgical attire. Some think that this "clericalizes" too much the ministry. But the reasons for a liturgical attire are also valid: esthetic, festive, sacred. These reasons seem to favor the use of a special uniform, perhaps a simple white tunic. Pope John Paul II reminded them that white tunic was symbol of their baptism. The symbolic language of dress helps them understand that they are rendering service.

COMMENTATORS

The presence of *commentators* in our celebrations is quite common. According to the Lectionary, "commentators exercise a true liturgical ministry when they give to the assembly of the faithful relevant explanations and introductions..." (IGLM, 57). The Missal describes them as follows: "This minister provides explanations and commentaries with the purpose of introducing the faithful to the celebration and prepare them to understand it better" (IGMR, 68).

The service of commentators is very old (not so its name and emphasis, though). Deacons had been given the task of guiding the people through simple explanations during the celebration.

Guides and Coordinators

Commentators are extensions of the celebrant or deacon, who are the real guides and coordinators. Some of their interventions are "indicative" (corporal postures), others "explicative" (introduction of a reading), and still others are "exhortative" (spiritual attitude to sing the responsorial psalm). These ministers are expected to coordinate the songs, introductions, intentions of prayers, announcements... acting like conductors of orchestras or "masters of ceremonies." The right rhythm, proportion and balance of the celebration depend on the commentators. This task is quite challenging.

The Explanations before the Readings

The explanations, which "will be of great help for the reunited assembly to listen better to the Word of God" (OLM, 42), put the passages to be read in an accessible context. Such explanations are not anticipated homilies, or summaries of the reading, but preparation for listening. At times, it is helpful to introduce briefly the historical context of a reading: a poem, a prophecy, a letter written by St. Paul from the prison ... The commentator may say: "Today we start, for the next three weeks, the reading from the book of Genesis," and suggest the importance of taking the example of Abraham. Other times, the explanation attempts to call the attention of the community: "Would our assemblies deserve the praises that we are about to hear from St. Paul?" A sort of appetizer! (The explanations are not supposed to be taken as dogmas, but simply as suggestions). Something similar should be done with the responsorial psalm, explaining why we sing the psalm and in what inner attitude we should do it.

Qualities of a Good Commentary

The Vatican II Council recommends that the commentator's remarks be "short" and only in the most opportune moments (SC, 35). The Missal says that they "must be meticulously prepared and marked by a simple brevity" (IGMR, 68). The new Lectionary of 1981 lists the qualities of a good commentary: "brief and appropriate ... simple, faithful to the text, short (second time!), prepared beforehand ..." (OLM, 15). Therefore, the interventions of commentators should be brief, simple, appropriate, discreet, pedagogical, well-prepared (normally in writing and

in coordination with the main celebrant, who should approve them). They are ordered to help the community to listen, sing and celebrate better.

What about the announcements? They should also be brief and discreet. It is good to keep the parishioners informed (schedules, festivities, events), and to involve them in parish activities (catechesis of children, lectures on formation, excursions, etc). But these announcements are not done during the homily or after it. It is better to make announcements at the end, before the recession. And this can be done by the priest himself or by the commentator.

Reminders to Commentators

- The commentator should not at the same time be the lector (to distinguish the personal word from God's Word).
- The place of the commentator should not be at the lectern: "In performing this function the commentator stands in a convenient place visible to the faithful, but it is preferable that this not be at the lectern where the Scriptures are read" (IGMR, 68). The lectern is reserved for the proclaimed Word.
- Explanations should be "said" even if they are written; they require communication.
- Commentators have to keep themselves at all times serene and cool, to give the assembly the assurance that "everything is under control." This will make people feel at ease during the celebration.
- It is the task of the commentator to keep the right rhythm of the celebration: neither fast nor slow, tranquil with pauses and silences, proper of well-prepared things.
- Good commentators avoid being the protagonists (voice, attitude...). They do not overshadow the celebrant, who is more important than the commentator since he is Christ's representative. The commentators only "serve" the community.
- Commentators give example of attention to the celebration. When someone else is reading or praying, they do not appear

distracted, giving orders, looking for papers, going from one place to another ...

- Commentators have to be discreet and courteous. If a look is enough, they avoid speeches; if people know what posture to take, they do not remind them everytime. In short, they avoid the temptation of being domineering by the fact of having a microphone and being in front of all.
- Commentators should be aware that they need special formation: How could they "conduct" a celebration without mastering first its structure, rhythm, and liturgical meaning?
- Commentators should not feel discouraged by the criticisms of the people; furthermore, they should humbly listen to and receive them with humility, for they usually contain good suggestions. The assembly has something to say, too!

The most important work of this ministry is done before the celebration: preparing, coordinating ...

MUSIC DIRECTORS

Music directors are important ministers for a praying assembly. They are directly involved with Church music, a substantial and integral part of the Christian celebration.

Music Directors' Mission

Proper of their mission is to select and rehearse the songs, to lead the choir and encourage the assembly to sing.

• *To select the songs.* In coordination with the main celebrant and the commentator, music directors prepare the celebration, in particular the musical interventions. They select songs based on these criteria:

- Musical quality (consider the dignity of a song);
- Appropriate lyrics, text (avoid sentimentalism or pure poetry; attuned to theological values);
- Liturgical sense (songs appropriate for a moment of the celebration offertory, communion...);

- Pastoral discretion (songs appropriate for this community, for this choir)

- *To seek due proportion.* Music directors contribute to the proportion of all the elements of the celebration: silence, word, songs, prayer. For this, they select just the right number and length of songs.

- *To rehearse the songs.* A community has to rehearse its interventions. It is worthwhile to practise the songs a few minutes before the celebration. To accomplish this difficult task, music directors should hold only brief rehearsals and practise only the new songs. To familiarize the faithful with the songs, taped music may also be played over the microphone or they may be played on the organ.

- *To educate the community.* Besides helping others participate actively in liturgical celebrations, this ministry likewise works for the development of the people's understanding of liturgy. Music directors can also catechize choir members by helping them purify, for instance, their motivation in joining the music ministry: gratitude to God and service to the brethren.

Qualities of Good Music Directors

- *Musical knowledge:* They know how to sing and give the right intonation.
- *Human and pedagogical sobriety:* They know that to stand in front of an assembly is an art, like conducting an assembly and moving it to sing. They are friendly; they display humility especially when some unforeseen events happen.
- *Liturgical sensibility:* Besides knowing and loving music, music directors must grasp the dynamism of the celebration, as well as the spirit of the liturgical season, in order to select the appropriate songs and sing them properly. For instance, a good music director will neither change the Our Father nor readily substitute the responsorial psalm for other hymns.
- *Capacity to coordinate:* Music directors easily coordinate with the celebrant (who also sings at times), the choir and the cantor or psalmist, the organist, and the assembly.

CHOIRS

The *choir* is that group of Christians, young or old members of the community, who, having specialized in music, exercise a truly liturgical ministry. The Missal says: "The *schola cantorum* or choir exercises its own liturgical function within the assembly. Its task is to ensure that the parts proper to it, in keeping with the different types of songs, are carried out becomingly and to encourage active participation of the people in the singing."

Choir members support and help the singing of the community when the musical intervention belongs to the entire community: the brief responses of the psalm and the acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer (*Sanctus, Christ has died, Amen*). In these cases, they sing together with the whole assembly. At times, they sing strophes alternately with the assembly, like in a psalm, in the *Gloria, Agnus Dei, Communion*. Sometimes they simply assume the singing of a song, during those moments when the liturgy allows it (Entrance, Offertory, Communion), which may help create the right liturgical atmosphere. The choir's place should neither be far from the assembly nor from the altar/lectern. Since "the place of the *schola cantorum* has to show that they are part of the assembly" (*Inter Oecumenici*, 97), it should be a visible place near the sanctuary.

The choir is an excellent ministry. Choir members, besides participating in the celebration as a part of the community, have taken upon themselves the burden of forming a musical group, with regular practice, with obvious sacrifices and participate in the celebration not just as "hobby," but with the spirit of service, to uplift the quality of community prayer. They are aware that, with their voice and art, they are helping their brethren feel and sing expressively the joy of their faith. These choirs deserve all praise and their disappearance would be a great loss.

CANTORS OF THE PSALM

The *cantor of the psalm* is one of the special ministries listed in the Missal: "The cantor of the psalm is to sing the psalm or other biblical song that comes between the readings. To fulfill their function correctly,

these cantors should possess singing talent and an aptitude for correct pronunciation and diction" (IGRM, 67).

The Beautiful Ministry of the Psalmist

The psalmist is a guide and a master of sung prayer, making the Word of God resound in the community and in the hearts. A good psalmist sings from within. After hearing and understanding the psalm, the psalmist proclaims it, meditates on it, prays in supplication, or praises the Lord.

A psalm is not "read" but it is either "declaimed" or sung. The psalmist must unite musical technic with liturgical sense; he/she must assimilate its contents before converting it into the sound of his/her voice. That is why the cantor of the psalm, to offer a better service, needs a good biblical, liturgical and technical formation.

Every community should have someone with this art. The psalmist's spirituality follows the kind of person he/she is - a person fascinated by the psalms; gifted with voice and musical art; a person who expresses his/her own faith in accordance with the suggestion of the psalm and puts everything at the service of the community, thus contributing to the well-being of his/her brethren and to the quality of the celebration of the Word of God.

Importance of the Responsorial Psalm

The *psalm* is one of the oldest songs inherited by our liturgy. It was sung during the first centuries, as appears in texts from Saints Augustine, Ambrose, John Chrysostom and Leo the Great. Now, it has been recovered as a *psalm* (not any song) and *responsorial* (sung by the psalmist and the people).

The psalm helps the assembly interiorize the Word, and prolong the message of the first reading. The psalm itself is Word of God and guide in our echoing the reading. The best place to read it is at the lectern, something that cannot be said of other songs. This is an important moment of the celebration of the Word, a dialogue between God and the community.

Points for a Good Responsorial Psalm

- The music must respect the text. Unlike in other songs, the text of the psalm is more important than the music; the melody simply serves as support of the words.
- The psalm is intended to be sung or recited alternately by the psalmist who sings or recites the strophes and the community that listens and answers by singing.
- Temporal solutions: Use the same psalm or answer, eg, during Christmas, Easter time, or even substitute it with another song (for instance, in Masses with children).
- If the psalm is read without answer, background music of the organ or guitar could help.
- The psalmist should be different from the person who reads the first reading.
- While the psalmist sings along, he/she should not appear nervous even if mistakes are committed; a good psalmist always knows how to go on, making the necessary adaptations.

ORGANISTS

The ministry of good *organists* is priceless for a Christian community and the quality of its celebrations. The organists offer God the homage of their art, which at the same time creates a climate of prayer and celebration for the community. Precisely, when musical art becomes liturgical ministry, it acquires nobility and dignity.

But the value of this ministry comes also from the quality of its instrument. "There is no other instrument that reaches so deeply the human sensitivity, that creates a climate so adequate for prayer, that transports the person to the sphere of the sacred as the pipe organ." No wonder it continues to be the instrument par excellence of sacred music. When Vatican II admitted some other instruments to be used in liturgy, it reminded us of the high esteem in which the pipe organ should be held "... for it is the traditional musical instrument, the sound of which

can add a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up men's mind to God and higher things" (SC, 120).

The Organists' Function

One mission of the organists is to accompany the chanting/singing. In this case, the organ accompaniment "must not cover the voices, nor make difficult the comprehension of the text" (MS, 64); it must also follow the exact rhythm, not faster, not slower.

Sometimes a climate of prayer calls for "solos." There are four moments "allowed" for the solos: before the start of the celebration; during the offertory and preparation of the altar; during communion; at the end of the celebration.

When people enter a church filled with the sound of the organ, according to the spirit of the liturgical season; when those who have received communion go back to their places wrapped by the same sound; when a song is echoed in the spirit of all - all these contribute to a community celebration filled with peace and tranquility, in a climate of contemplation and interiority...

Expectations from Organists

- *Musical art:* Organists are first expected to have a good knowledge of music; that they be experts in the musical art. This also means that they are expected to use the right registers and volume in accompanying the soloist or the community so as not to cover them; to use the appropriate music when playing solo for the entrance, offertory, communion and dismissal.

- *Liturgical sensibility:* To their musical knowledge Christian organists must add a special sensibility. It includes the capacity to improvise and accentuate the different liturgical moments.

- *"He must know and be filled with a liturgical spirit"* (MS, 67). Organists should give, for instance, each song its right tone or intensity, and know the moments of silence: "All instruments must be silent when the priest or minister pronounces loudly a text that is proper of him by his specific function" (MS, 64). The same or with great moderation

is observed during certain liturgical Seasons (Advent, Lent) when silence and sobriety must prevail.

- *Attitude of a servant:* The organists in a Christian celebration must not act as if they were concert artists, but as servants and ministers of the praying community. In fact, organists who have everything ready beforehand - musical scores, organ registered, etc.; who listen carefully to the readings; who pray ...are giving testimony that they are not "hired" persons who come only to make the Mass pleasant. The spirituality of organists is that of Christians who offer God the homage of their art and surrender it also to the community, helping the community pray better.

It is commendable that organists take their ministry seriously. The community in turn should manifest their appreciation and understanding for them in terms of provision for the organists' musical formation and financial remuneration. In addition, organists should always be considered part of the liturgical team in charge of preparing the celebration.

USHERS

Very little is written of these ministers who are also known as "Ministers of Hospitality." The Missal simply says: "There are also those who, in some places, meet the people at the church entrance, seat them, and direct processions." (IGMR, 68). The Ritual, however, mentions that of the *ushers* or "ministers of hospitality" among the liturgical ministries exercised by lay persons, adding that "they provide welcome and dignified order to the celebration." There is a special blessing for them. The blessing is normally given by the parish priest or any other delegated priest/deacon. This ministry is becoming important for it maintains a climate of order and fraternity.

More than a Welcoming Service

On Sundays, our churches are filled with throngs of people from all walks of life. In most cases, these assemblies are pervaded by indifference, anonymity or lack of rapport. To start with, perhaps not all are there with the right disposition. Thus, they need to be helped specially at the beginning to make them "feel at home" and to create the right atmosphere of celebration. One way is by providing a "welcome

service" by the community, for which some special ministers are assigned.

At times, the parish priest himself greets the people at the entrance of the church. If there are deacons or installed acolytes, this ministry (the old office of the "porter") would be also proper of them. But there should always be a team of ushers around, lay people, men and women, specially at the beginning of the celebration to provide people with the proper services. Their functions also include the following:

- Answering questions about schedules, celebrations, etc;
- Distributing leaflets, songs, missalettes, bulletins, and the like;
- Accompany or guide the people to their places, encouraging them to occupy the front seats;
- Organizing the processions (entrance, offertory) and keep the flow orderly during communion;
- Providing other special services required by circumstances.

Spiritual Attitude of Ushers

A hospitable community, or someone in its name, that welcomes everyone, making them feel members of the assembly, may be for many the first sign of the presence of Christ Jesus. Those assigned to the task are more than mere functionaries: ushers, porters, etc. They are brethren welcoming other brethren. Everyone is a person equally important, a Christian, a baptized believer in Christ Jesus. The letter of St. James reminds us to avoid discrimination against persons young or old, known or unknown, rich or poor;

all are part of the celebration, a sign of Christ. To welcome others is in the end to welcome Christ himself: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Of course, this is a delicate task for which some special qualities are required.

COLLECTORS

The last of the "special ministries" mentioned in the Missal is that of "those who take up the collection." Nothing else is said about it. We can just add that this is also a valuable service rendered to the

community; a service that has not always been fully appreciated. It demands much sacrifice and honesty. Also some kind of human and liturgical sensitivity in carrying out the task. People expect from them professionalism and decorum. I personally have been very well impressed at seeing on some occasions the team of collectors attentively participating in the celebration, moving around during the offertory in synchronized movements, wearing proper uniform and showing great respect for the people and for the celebration that is going on.

All these things are important. People who generously contribute their money for the needs of the Church "demand" certain guarantees that the persons act in the name of the parish and that the money will be properly used. Both things can be seen at times in the mere appearance of the men or women collectors! That is why parishes should be cautious in selecting persons assigned to this ministry, whose dignity has to be preserved.

Accordingly, here are some practical advises/reminders to collectors:

- The proper timing for the collection is at the offertory, when the assembly is already seated. (I have seen collectors start moving around while the Creed is being recited and during the Prayers of the faithful!)
- The collectors should be part of the celebrating assembly, not outsiders "raiding" the church at a certain moment of the celebration and vanishing hastily afterwards with the spoils...
- Collectors should proceed smoothly and with dignified movements, as fitting the place and the celebration that is going on. The sudden action of collectors at the offertory time is not meant to be a disruption of the celebration.
- The wearing of proper uniform, apart from adding propriety and showing the people that they are ministers acting in the name of the parish, will help the collectors themselves realize that they are rendering a service.
- Great respect for the people and the celebration has to be shown at all times by the collectors. One example would be by pausing during the consecration whenever it takes place before they have finished collecting.
- It is beautiful to see the team of collectors proceeding all together from the end of the church and orderly leaving their collection

at the foot of the altar. Thus people can see that their money is part of the gifts (flowers, bread and wine ...) presented during the Eucharistic celebration, a symbol of their own self-offering.

Collectors should be endowed with the right attitude of a servant who is serving the parish and at the same time the people of God, helping them to exercise one of the rights/duties every Christian has: to contribute to the maintenance of the Church. Normally collectors discharge also other functions in the Parish. Needless to say their work should be fully appreciated and adequately remunerated.

SACRISTANS

Among the liturgical lay ministries, that of the *sacristan* is one of the most characteristic and "visible." The sacristan, from the background, has a great influence in the physical support and immediate preparation of the celebrations. Here, the term "ministry" is used in an analogical sense, having in common with the other ministries the help extended to the whole community to celebrate well.

We cannot include here the details of the sacristan's many functions, some of them related to esthetics and good taste. Certainly, not everyone can be a sacristan. There is no need for academic titles, but, exposed to the danger of the excessive familiarization with the sacred, he/she needs a good preparation and the possession of a great human, liturgical and Christian sensitivity. Being a sacristan as such is a vocation: to help his/her brethren to pray and celebrate their faith.

EDUCATION IN THE FAITH MINISTERS

CATECHISTS

Every Christian, by virtue of baptism and confirmation, is called to transmit the Gospel. That is why, in an analogical sense, everyone in the Church is a *catechist*. But by "catechists" here we mean those who dedicate all or part of their time to the education in the faith of the children or adult Christians.

An Eminent Form of Lay Apostolate

The term "catechist" belongs, above all, to the catechists in mission lands: those born of Christian families or converted at some time to Christianity who consecrate their lives to catechizing children and adults in their own country. Ordinarily, however, "catechists" refer to the numerous lay teachers of catechesis in our parishes and schools. Catechesis, so understood, is an eminent form of lay apostolate.

The Church has words of praise and appreciation for catechists, not only because Christian communities that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them, but also because they continue to exercise a task of vital importance for the life of the Church. Pope John Paul II says: "I am anxious to give thanks in the Church's name to all of you, lay teachers of catechesis in the parishes and schools, the men and the still more numerous women throughout the world, who are devoting yourselves to the religious education of many generations. Your work is often lowly and hidden but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal, and it is an eminent form of the lay apostolate, a form that is particularly important where for various reasons children and young people do not receive suitable religious training in the home" (CT, 66).

Commissioned Catechists

Catechists for centuries have been spreading the teachings of the Church without any official or vow-commitment, but motivated simply by a personal dedication. Today, the Church has envisioned the possibility of having them granted official approval and of commissioning them for this ministry. In some dioceses this program is already implemented.

To be properly called "ministers," catechists need to act "in the name of the Church." But how can catechists act in the name of the Church unless they are "sent" or *com-mission-ed* by the Church itself? This is the sense of the "Apostolic Mission" or *Missio Canonica*, conferred on those accepted as catechists by their Ordinary or, as currently practised in Manila, by the bishops of the ecclesiastical province.

The core of the written document issued to each catechist reads as follows: *"After you have signified in word and deed your intent to commit yourself to the fundamental ecclesial task of evangelization and catechesis, we hereby confer on you the Apostolic Mission to be a Catechist. We are confident that you will communicate the Christian Faith in doctrine, worship and life according to the directives of the Magisterium of the Church, and that to the best of your knowledge and ability, you will lead those entrusted to you to the maturity of Christian life."*

This written appointment attests also to the seriousness of the commitment and to the support of the Church that sends them. Such support should not be only moral or spiritual, but also financial, specially with full-time catechists.

Qualities and Functions of Catechists

The qualities and functions of catechists can be deduced from a basic understanding of catechesis, whose purpose, according to Vatican II, is "to develop in believers a living, explicit and active faith enlightened by instruction" (CD, 14). Catechesis is to be based on Scriptures, tradition, liturgy and the teaching authority and life of the Church. It is to be imparted not only to children and young people but also to adults. Catechesis must always be adapted to the age, ability and circumstances of life of the listener. These elements demand from catechists a good knowledge of the message and the testimony of their lives.

If one would seek the ideal catechist, Jesus would always be the paragon. Jesus, the ideal Teacher who knows the content, knows the audience and lives the message. As a matter of fact, the spirit of catechetics requires faith in the Lord, inner enthusiasm, good training and witnessing.

Catechists are oriented towards the education in the faith of those being instructed: to teach the revealed truths (leading to the profession of faith); to relate the message with liturgy (leading to the celebration of the Christian mystery); to witness what is proclaimed (leading to an authentic life in Christ); to promote a life of prayer in the listeners.

Catechetical Training

On-going training for catechists is very important. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines urged the training centers in the country forming professional catechists to extend their services, giving shorter courses for part-time volunteers. Religious associations, basic Christian communities, seminarians and Catholic schools should also give special attention to the training of catechists (PCP-II, a.55).

"There is a need for a catechetical fund in every parish to cover the training of catechists, the salaries of professional catechists and the allowance for volunteers" (*Pastoral Letter*, 15 July 1987).

Given the importance of electronic media today, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has decreed that a "Ministry for Evangelization and Catechesis through Electronic Media (MECEM) shall be created at national and diocesan levels."

PREACHERS IN A CHURCH OR ORATORY

The laity's right and duty to participate in evangelization is often affirmed in the Vatican II decrees. The new Church law states that "Lay persons may be admitted to preach in a church or oratory if in certain circumstances it is necessary, or in particular cases it would be advantageous" (c. 766). No limitation is set as to age or sex. But limitations to lay preaching are otherwise provided for either by law or by the local authorities.

In the Philippines, the Conference of Bishops has empowered the diocesan bishops to depute duly qualified lay persons to preach outside the Mass, in accordance with the following norms (cf CB, Prot. N. 35/84):

- Whenever there is a need because of scarcity or physical inability of sacred ministers, in cases such as those in large parishes, in remote barrios and islets, and in other places where there is difficulty in the means of transportation and during inclement weather.

- They must be Catholics of good moral character.
- They must be well prepared through formation in Christian doctrine and in sacred scriptures.
- They must be distinguished by their loyalty to the hierarchy and fidelity to the Church's magisterium.
- They are deputized for one year; renewable.

Henceforth, lay persons may be admitted to the preaching ministry in church and oratories in circumstances when their preaching is necessary or useful. It would include:

- Liturgy of the Hours or Liturgy of the Word with or without Communion at daily services as well as Sunday services in the absence of a priest or deacon;
- Marriages and funerals presided over by a duly authorized lay person: then he/she preaches a sermon or instruction in place of the homily.

What about lay persons preaching the homily at regular Masses? The Church has made it clear in strong terms that the homily is a special case and must be preached by an ordained minister. Hence ordained preaching is required at Sunday and holy day Masses and can only be omitted for serious reasons. However, occasionally, instruction could be given by a lay person in place of the homily.

Faculties from the diocesan bishop are required for lay preachers who preach on a regular basis, being their exercise of the office periodically renewed.

LEADERS OF PUBLIC PRAYER

Not all communities can have a Sunday Eucharist presided over by a bishop or priest. For some Catholics, this is an altogether new experience. Many years of daily and Sunday Masses have suddenly given way to less frequent or even infrequent celebrations led by a priest. The local community must continue to gather nonetheless.

The present law of the Church not only permits but encourages such gatherings of the assembly: "*If it is impossible to assist at a Eucharistic celebration, either because no sacred minister is available or for some other grave reason, the faithful are strongly recommended to take part in a liturgy of the Word ... which is celebrated in accordance with the provisions laid down by the diocesan Bishop*" (c. 1248).

Some communities that gather for public prayer choose a liturgy not patterned on the Eucharistic celebration, such as the Liturgy of the Hours or the Liturgy of the Word. In others the weekly liturgy is patterned after the Mass, that is, the Liturgy of the Word followed by the Rite of Communion using hosts consecrated at a previous Mass. The option depends on the community involved. In some dioceses, the bishop has provided specific instruction on how he lay-led worship services be conducted. In the Philippines, a *Rite for Sunday Worship Without a Priest* has been approved by the bishops. In such cases, suitable lay people can be temporarily assigned to preside over those liturgical prayers and distribute Holy Communion. What was said before for lay Preachers is applicable here.

THEOLOGY TEACHERS

Those who teach theological subjects in any institute of higher studies must have a 'mandate' from the competent ecclesiastical authority (c.812).

The Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* spoke of a 'canonical mission' or *venia legendi* to teach theological or academic subjects that deal with matters of faith and morals. Furthermore, it required that those professors made the *profession of faith* (art. 27, s. 1). However in view of certain practical and theoretical difficulties, the present law requires a *mandate* rather than a *mission* (cf *Comm* 15 (1983), 105). This 'mandate' (commission or appointment) is required because those who teach these subjects do so, *not on their own authority, but in the name of the Church* (SP, 27). This means that their work becomes a ministry, and that they themselves are constituted as "ministers." Hence this 'mandate' is something more than mere permission to teach (although it seems to be less weighty than 'canonical mission').

Is this applicable also to lay people? Yes, it is indeed. In fact the present law of the Church expressly states that "*Lay people ... are capable of receiving from the lawful ecclesiastical authority a mandate to teach the sacred sciences*" (c. 229, 3).

This is not surprising at all. The logical conclusion of the admission of lay people to the study of the sacred sciences is that they may also teach them in theological schools and faculties. Two conditions though are prescribed:

- The 'requisite suitability', ie, those concerned must have obtained the required academic qualifications.
- They must be given a 'mandate to teach' by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Who is 'the competent ecclesiastical authority' to give such a *mandate*? Originally, the Apostolic See, the episcopal conference within its territory, and in the normal course of events the diocesan bishop in his own diocese. By delegation, the Major Religious Superior of clerical institutes which own and operate Catholic learning institutions.

In which institutes is a *mandate* needed to teach? The norm mentioned before indicated that a *mandate* is needed to teach only in "any institute of higher studies," that is, in post-secondary educational institutions. However, other norms remind the diocesan bishop (indeed the local ordinary) also of his duty to regulate and watch over the education in the Catholic religion provided in *any* school: "In his own diocese, the local Ordinary has the right to appoint or to approve teachers of religion and, if religious or moral considerations require it, the right to remove them or to demand that they be removed" (c. 805).

In this regard, we have to acknowledge that nowadays, the presence of labor unions in Catholic schools and universities have made things difficult, to the point that it may not always be possible for the Ordinary to control the appointment or dismissal of teachers of religion. This is particularly true in state-run or state-aided schools where much will depend on the terms of their contracts of employment. In some countries, the civil courts have recognized that the character of a Catholic school demands that a teacher's lifestyle be in harmony with Christian living; in some indeed there has been upheld the dismissal, for instance, of a teacher living in an irregular marital union. This is clearly a very delicate

area, in which all competent authorities must tread with great sensitivity and prudence, while always bearing in mind the Church's teaching mission to the world. If there is question of dismissing a teacher, for whatever reason, natural justice will certainly demand that the Ordinary allow him or her a total right of defense.

But the point here, beyond legal complications, is the excellence of this ministry of educating in the faith the youth. As the patron saint of Catholic educators (St. Joseph of Calasanz) put it, "this ministry is directed to the well-being of body and soul. In doing this the teacher performs for the students the very same service as their guardian angels."

What should then be the right attitude or 'spirituality' of a theology teacher? Allow me to borrow an inspiring answer from the same Saint:

"All who undertake to teach must be endowed with deep love, the greatest patience, and most of all, profound humility. They must perform their work with earnest zeal. Then, through their humble prayers, the Lord will find them worthy to become fellow workers with him in the cause of truth. He will console them in the fulfillment of this most noble duty, and, finally, will enrich them with the gift of heaven. As Scripture says: 'Those who instruct many in justice will shine as stars for all eternity' because, in Christ's words: 'What you did to one of the least of my brethren, you did to me' " (The Liturgy of the Hours, 25 August, 2nd reading).

LAY MISSIONARIES

It is not uncommon to see lay persons committed to some missionary activity and works of apostolate: professionals (doctors, teachers ...) who volunteer to go to mission lands offering the services of their witnessing and expertise; young people who generously offer themselves for a period of time to help in parishes (catechetical and social work) and schools (campus ministry). These ministries, fully appreciated and encouraged by the Church, become properly such - and their members called "missionaries" - when the candidates have been "sent" or commissioned by the competent ecclesiastical authority (cf c. 784).

In the Ritual, there is an "Order for the blessing of those who exercise pastoral service." It is a blessing that may be given by a priest/

deacon or superiors in religious congregations. The order may be celebrated during the Mass or during a celebration of the Word of God. Normally, a little cross is imposed on each one after the public commitment. In the prayer/blessing, the community ask God "to strengthen and bless our brothers and sisters as they begin their new pastoral service."

OTHER PASTORAL MINISTERS

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF BAPTISM

Baptism, being the gate to and foundation of the other sacraments, must be accessible to all people. Hence, when the ordinary or other ordained ministers are not available for the administration of the sacrament, non-ordained people, like catechists, nurses, doctors and other lay persons, may be deputed by the local ordinary as ministers of baptism. A simple rite is used for the purpose. But in case of necessity, no express deputation is needed: right intention is the only requirement.

This theological principle has succinctly been translated into canonical terms: "If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or *some other person* deputed to this office by the local Ordinary, may lawfully confer baptism; indeed, in a case of necessity, any person who has the requisite intention may do so" (c. 861, 2).

PRESIDERS AT FUNERAL SERVICES

The Philippine bishops decided to allow lay persons to conduct funeral services at the home and at the cemetery, as the new ritual allowed them. They also applied to Rome for allowing lay persons to preside over non-Eucharistic funeral services in church when necessary. Rome confirmed this decision on 1 April 1971.

ASSISTANTS AT MARRIAGES

"Where there are no priests and deacons, the diocesan bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages with prior approval of the Episcopal Conference and permission of the Apostolic See." In such cases, "a suitable lay person is to be selected, capable of giving

instruction to those who are getting married, and fitted to conduct the marriage liturgy properly" (c. 1112).

Apart from possessing a specific delegation and using a Rite approved for the occasion, the lay person delegated to assist at a marriage will have to carefully fill up a formal document of the act performed, that is, of the celebration of marriage, with the signatures of the spouses, of the witnesses and of the assistant himself/herself. Likewise, he or she will see to it personally that all the necessary civil formalities are observed, as when the marriage is celebrated in the presence of the ordinary, the parish priest or any other priest or deacon.

In the Philippines, very little use of this prerogative has been made so far, due mainly to the reluctance of the local Bishops' Conference to act on this issue. The reason was the unfavorable results of the opinion survey conducted among the clergy and bishops of the country. Sixty-five percent of the respondents were not in favor of allowing lay persons to solemnize marriage for various reasons, to wit: "It would not be different from the civil marriages or those solemnized by other religious sects; it will lower very much the esteem of the people for matrimony as a sacrament; our people are not yet ready to accept them..."

In the present law of the Church, when the one competent to assist at a marriage cannot be present or be approached, those who intend to enter a true marriage can validly and lawfully contract in the presence of witnesses only ... "provided it is prudently foreseen that this state of affairs will continue for a month" (c. 1116).

PARISH MINISTERS

In exceptional circumstances, due mainly to scarcity of priests, the pastoral care of a parish could be entrusted to one or several persons who are not priests - whether clerics, religious, or lay person. "If, because of a shortage of priests, the diocesan bishop has judged that a deacon, or some other person who is not a priest, or a community of persons, should be entrusted with a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, ..." (c. 517, 2).

The possibility of such participation arises from the basic fact of the sacrament of the baptism. Those who are not priests cannot be

entrusted with the full care of souls, but they may be given various liturgical and pastoral responsibilities within the parish. It is not uncommon to refer to such people as "pastoral administrators" or "parish ministers." The Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest is an occasion when those entrusted with their pastoral care may exercise their ministry.

... AND OTHER FUNCTIONS

In addition to those mentioned, there are other ministries and functions the laity may exercise, all of them in connection with the life and mission of the Church:

- Heads of apostolic movements and of charitable institutions;
- Councils members;
- Diocesan/parochial administrators;
- Judges in ecclesiastical tribunals;
- Apostles in politics and media...

The following are further areas of action for the Laity:

- To take part, if invited, in particular councils, such as the provincial council of Bishops;
- To take part in the diocesan synod as member of the synod;
- To be a member of a finance committee of the diocese and of the parish;
- To be a financial administrator of the diocese;
- To be a member of the pastoral council of the diocese and of the parish;
- To be consulted, if appropriate, for the appointment of parish priests;
- To see that the civil society acknowledges the freedom of parents in their choice of schools for their children; and to see that civil laws provide a religious and moral education in the schools that is in accord with the conscience of the parents;
- To promote Catholic schools, helping in establishing and maintaining them;
- To assist the pastoral action of the Church through the facilities of social communication;
- To take part in the liturgy of the hours;

- To ensure that disputes among the people of God are as far as possible avoided and settled promptly;
- To be consulted if the papal Legate judges it expedient for the appointment of bishops;
- To assist the parish priest take pastoral care of the community entrusted to him;
- To assist a blind or sick celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice;
- To administer certain sacraments in accordance with the liturgical books, subject to the local ordinary;
- To be one of the judges in a college of judges, if the Episcopal conference permits it. Also to be assessor or an auditor in the ecclesiastical tribunal;
- To be a promoter of justice and defender of the bond;
- To hold the offices of a chancellor or a notary.

Shall we add another list of "hidden" ministries, exemplified in those engaged in contemplative prayer or "prayer apostolate" and in the countless anonymous "martyrs" whose lives are a perfect witnessing to the spirit of the beatitudes? If we do, we will have an endless list!

Such a variety would take us back to a better understanding of the splendid nature of the Christian laity: "The chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pe 2:9), with the specific mission of transforming the world, of "consecrating" the early realities; deputed to such a mission by baptism and confirmation!

Priests of Tomorrow

First Bicol Priests' Conference

LEONARDO Z. LEGAZPI, OP, DD

What is our starting point in discussing a future which is shrouded in mystery and whose conditions are hidden from our eyes?

Undoubtedly, there is one certitude about the future which we already know. This is the fact of death, our death and the death of all about us.

Death of a Cardinal

Bear with me then while I talk about the death of a priest, a brother Dominican who at 90 years of age became a Cardinal. I speak of Yves-Marie Congar, the last theological giant of this century who died on June 22nd at the age of 91.

What relevance does this French priest have for us? A victim of multiple sclerosis, he never travelled to Asia. In his lifetime, he published an impressive number of theological books but was never assigned to parish work.

Yet, I have chosen to start my talk today by dwelling briefly on his death not only to honor this great theologian but to recall how, years before Vatican II, he already described with prophetic insight what the Church of Tomorrow could be. His reflections on this point have a connection with our topic because the **Priests of Tomorrow** must find their mission and meaning within the **Church of Tomorrow**.

How did Congar envision the Church to be? Firstly, he foresaw the importance of ecumenism. In 1937, he published his book: "Divided Christians" where he called for a rediscovery of the true tradition of the undivided church. For Congar, to achieve Christian unity, it was necessary to purify the Church of a dominant juridical mode and return it to the thinking of the Gospels and of the Fathers of the Church.

Secondly, Congar whom Pope John XXIII appointed as a peritus in the preparatory commission of Vatican II and whose contributions influenced the drafts of Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes — this creative theologian foresaw the importance of the laity in building up the Community of Disciples. His classic work on the laity was originally published in France in 1953 under the title, "Lay People in the Church". In it he wrote: "Lay people are not solely the object of hierarchical ministry; they have each according to his state, an active function of bringing the world and history to God in Christ..."¹

Still on the subject of community, Congar noted that: "When the Church is no longer considered as formed by the faithful but is seen chiefly as a mediating institution, then the mission and motherhood of the Church find their locus in external legal acts, instead of being drawn from her Christian existence of love and prayer by which her members live".²

The third and final point which I wish to recall regarding the prophetic insights of Cardinal Congar is his view of the Church in Poverty. In the second volume of "Theological Burning Points" whose contributors included Cardinal Ratzinger, the French theologian wrote: "To obey the law of Christ which has its own inner binding force ... means to bring to completion the new birth directed to redemption as its final goal. This new birth consists in descending to the deepest depths in order to begin to share life with the poor".³

¹Yves M.J. Congar, O.P. *Lay People in the Church* (London: Chapman, 1959) p. 108.

²J. Ratzinger et al. *The Church Today: Theological Burning Points*, vol. II (England: The Mercier Press, 1967) p. 38.

³*Ibid.*, p. 61

In summary, we see that in the mind of Congar the Church of Tomorrow is a church that has finally attained unitas; it is also a Church where the laity are full members of the Community of Disciples. And it is a Church which imitates the special love for the poor which Jesus showed.

PCP-II Recall

It was almost as if he was foreseeing the main ecclesial insights of our Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, which are: the Church of the Poor as pilgrim striving to be transformed into a Community of the Disciples of the Lord. And one of the clear marks of that community is its unity. In the course of my sharing with you, we shall try to further study this facet of unity without which no genuine *communio* is possible. I might further state that without unity among us we imperil the realization of the Church of the Future in our midst.

In this talk, I need not once more recall the characteristics of a Church of the Poor as described by PCP-II. This, together with the concept of Community of Disciples of the Lord are well known to all of you. But should there be time, in the course of this Congress, to take up these 2 basic PCP-II concepts, then perhaps they should be studied in the light of Bicolandia's needs. These questions could be asked: How can the Church of the Poor be realized in our Bicol dioceses? What concrete steps must our Bicol priests, religious and laity take in order to become a Community of Disciples of the Lord?

If, after PCP-II we have a clearer idea of what the Church in the Philippines is striving to be, let us realize that this journey is not taking place in some isolated rural road but passes right through history's highways. This means that we cannot simply ignore the crises and challenges, the failures and achievements of the world around us. It provides the socio-economic, the political and technological context in which the Church exists.

As priests our thoughts are shaped not only by our theological studies but by the pervasive influence of secularism. Our feelings are affected not only by liturgical themes and music but by the manipulative techniques of modern media. Our judgement derives its criteria and principles not only from evangelical values but is confronted by the contradictory cultures of modern technocracy.

Dedicated Architects of a New World

When one considers the architects of secular society, its scientists and engineers, its business leaders and research experts — all of whose efforts are converging on the transformation of the past and the creation of a new future — we cannot but be impressed by the amount of serious dedication they invest in their complex activities. Everytime we ride a car and enter a plane to attend church meetings here or abroad, we are utilizing the products, not of monks but of secular technicians. Everytime we are seriously sick and in need of an operation, we entrust our bodies not to some contemplative but to a doctor whose skills were honed in years of serious study. The civil laws which regulate the transactions of our citizens, which make it possible for us to live in societies with pluralistic interests, have been designed by serious legislators (thank God we have a few of them).

My main reasons for raising our awareness of the immense human efforts which were invested in the creation of secular life is to bring to our reflections three points: firstly, the question of dedication. Can we, who by vocation are the architects tasked to prepare the way for the Kingdom's advent, as dedicated as the engineers building the modern world's technology? A scientist a doctor, a lawyer does not conclude his or her studies upon graduating; their quest for scientific progress and truth is lifelong. It is motivated by their desire to constantly advance their profession through new findings. Are we priests similarly motivated?

My second point brings us to the threshold of the future which we cannot enter without a precondition. What then is this necessary precondition?

Simply, it is conversion.

The seriousness of those who build the ephemeral City of Man can shame us whose efforts to co-build the eternal City of God could look haphazard and mediocre in comparison. This sense of shame could be the first step towards conversion. But there is still another and perhaps more cogent reason why we are in need of conversion.

The Imperative of Conversion

This brings me to the third point, namely, the pervasive presence of evil which forms the underside of history. The efforts of humanity to shape a habitable earth is invariably accompanied not only by widespread personal poverty but by structural injustice and violence. Yet it is this colossal technological world with its mesmerizing capacity through media to blur the difference between fantasy and reality and between love and violence which tempts us to subservience. The temptations it offers us are far greater than those faced by a St. Anthony in the desert or a St. Augustine in the fleshpots of Egypt.

Its wealth and power have the capacity to reduce our priesthood to the status of mere chaplains to society's elites whose main function is to legitimize the mores of the rich and to distribute the sacraments at their feasts.

It might be salutary to recall this passage from the prophet Ezechiel (34:1-6):

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds, rather, pasture sheep? You have fed off their milk, worn their wool, and slaughtered the fatlings, but the sheep you have not pastured. You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the strayed nor seek the lost, but you lorded it over them harshly and brutally."

Who then can deny our need for unceasing conversion which in the words of PCP-II "is a lifelong task" (Acts 275).

Perhaps at this point, I should apologize to you for placing so much emphasis on conversion. After all, this is the kind of topic best reserved for retreats. However, my line of argumentation is influenced by PCP-II's orientation where, as a precondition to the renewal of the Church in the Philippines, conversion is the first step to take. PCP-II's definition of conversion is simple and direct. It states:

"In order to be renewed as a Church, we must leave behind many ways of thinking, speaking and acting which no

longer effectively serve and perhaps even obstruct our evangelizing mission. This will mean an unsettling pain, a disengagement from what is cherished but is now obsolete or obstructive, a dying to what is sinful, that we may come to newness of life." (Acts 143)

In Centesimus Annus, the Pope makes an insightful remark, saying: "The first and most important cultural task is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he builds his future depends on the understanding he has of himself and his destiny" (CA, 51). We can paraphrase this statement in this manner: "The way in which the priest builds his future depends on the understanding he has of his priestly vocation and his destiny within Christ's Church."

Before we enter further into our topic, I wish to delimit the term "tomorrow". I do not mean by it an indefinite future but rather it refers to that historic moment when humanity enters the third millennium, the year 2000, which the Church will celebrate as the Great Jubilee. We are now, in the mind of the Pope, in the first phase, 1994 to 1996, which is 'ante-preparatory' in character. You will be interested to note that the main objective of this first stage "is above all a joy based upon the forgiveness of sins, the joy of conversion" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 32).

Priestly Identity

What then is the essential identity of Bicol's Clergy of Tomorrow? Let us try to depict this priest of tomorrow in human terms rather than in frozen formulae.

Tomorrow's priest will find himself at the center of a rapidly changing society whose multiple and often conflicting demands could at times throw him off balance.

He, a simple man, is made to live in a complicated society. His seminary training provided him with an environment akin to the simplicity of rural life yet he will find himself assigned to urban centers whose sophistication could unnerve him.

He strives to be a man of the people to nourish his vocation by sharing the life and sufferings of parishioners, yet at the end of the day,

he must confront that loneliness unique to those who, in Christ's startling words, chose to be "eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 19:12).

The Bicol priest is a man of ideals, for so it was at the start of his vocation. But reality eventually brings him down from the clouds. Like the Son of Man, he is tempted by power and pride, by wealth and pleasure. Unlike the Son of Man he falls into sin and his idealism is bruised by his offenses. Thus, at the very center of his being, he is a wounded man who must seek healing for himself.

We could go on trying to depict bits and pieces of the profile of our priests of tomorrow. But paradoxically, the more we try to foretell what the Bicol priest could be in the future, the more we are brought back to what he already is today. There is no magic frontier separating the present from the future. Today's priest is also tomorrow's priest — what he is making of himself today is what he will see when he faces tomorrow's mirror.

Priests "in the Diaspora"

I would like therefore to briefly dwell on one situation of today's priest, namely, those who find their vocation and ideals weakened because, for one reason or another, they have become, in the words of the Pope, "losers" who have lost their bearings (Pope John Paul II to the German Episcopal Conference, 1980). We are referring to priests who have been described as "in the diaspora". They live isolated lives, burdened by work and unresolved tensions and whose solitude is further deepened from lack of a priestly fraternity to serve as a supportive community. Perhaps many of us have gone through such a crisis with its psychological and spiritual dangers. Providentially, through God's mercy and love, we survived and came out of this dark night, with amore realistic appreciation of our vocation.

In facing this problem, which could be a far more common though publicly unvoiced problem, let our discussions not remain on the theoretical plane. Rather, let us link its resolution with our present

*Taken from a terminology used by Fr. Carlo Bertola in his book: "I Have Called You Friends"

activity, namely, this first congress of the Bicol clergy. This could be a Spirit-event to bring about a presbyteral fraternity among the Bicol priests. This could be an opportunity to articulate a spirituality of the diocesan priesthood which is inculturated in Bicolandia. The hospitality you experience here, the sharing of ideas and problems, the gathering at common meals marked by conviviality and camaraderie — all these build up community. It would be a pity if the fruits of this congress become co-terminous with the last talk given in this congress.

Bishops in Dialogue

Thus far we have been reflecting on priests helping brother priests to become holy and happy priests of tomorrow. What about the bishops? Are they not part of the solution since they too have been part of your problem? It would take a personality with the habits of an ostrich not to be aware of tensions in the relationships between bishops and priests. But it would also be the mark of an immature and insecure person to use these tensions as a naive excuse to endanger his vocation or to fall into the anti-authoritarian syndrome of modern society.

The sign that a form of tension is healthy rather than destructive, is that it can be a catalyst for dialogue among those affected. Fraternal dialogue with his priests makes a bishop realize more deeply the meaning of his authority in the Church.

A bishop in dialogue learns to listen patiently to his priests, to take time to know them, to appreciate their strengths and to heal their weaknesses. Through sincere dialogue with his priests, the bishop remembers his own early days as a priest, the travails he went through, the consolations he received - and in so remembering he will be motivated to establish a warm, supportive community with his priests. In a sermon on Pastors, St. Augustine said: "... good sheep give rise to good shepherds" (Second Reading, 25th week in ordinary time). There is an irreplaceable relationship between bishop and priests. In the Community of the Disciples of the Lord, ours should be the model community of fraternal love, peace and understanding.

To emphasize this point, permit me to quote from a biblical scholar, the Jesuit Fr. John L. McKenzie who wrote:

"The base of the power of authority is the love which those in authority exhibit; for the mission of the Church is the work of the love of Jesus Christ for men (and women). Authority is a commission to lead in love and in service of love. This, and not a grant of dominative or jurisdictional power in the juridical sense, is what enables authority to exercise its leadership and to demand the assent of the other members of the Church. This conception of authority, far from diminishing its scope, increases it; for all men (and women) know that love can demand and obtain a response far in excess of the response which can be demanded by mere dominative and jurisdictional power."⁵

I quoted this definition at length because it offers timely reminders not only to bishops but to priests as well. I would suppose that for every bishop who is authoritarian there just could be, in turn, a dozen priests with authoritarian proclivities — if the criticisms of some of the laity are to be believed.

This question on authority reminds me of a little anecdote told by an African bishop during a seminar in the Vatican. He narrates that when a tribal chieftain assumes his throne, an elder of the community is called and who presents the newly crowned king with an egg. The elder then says: "O king, great and powerful is your authority. But you must handle it as carefully as you do this egg I place in your hand. If you grasp it too strongly, it will get crushed. On the other hand, if you grasp it gingerly, it will fall and be crushed. You will need therefore to find a moderate way to preserve it."

Jesus Transcends History

My dear brother-priests, the thematic of your congress is to study the development of Bicol's clergy within the dynamic timeframe of history. We see ourselves standing at the threshold of a new millennium. In some respects, we seek to experience one vital process of the Second Vatican Council which saw the Church as undergoing "a transition from

⁵John L. McKenzie, S.J. *Authority in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) p. 61

a more static understanding of the order of reality as a whole to a more dynamic and evolutionary understanding.”⁶ Behind these abstract words lies a world of risks. For change can bring insecurities to the weary and the weak. Change can become a quest for material well-being to be planned for and implemented solely in human terms.

To free us from the necessity and impotence of history we need to ground our life in one who transcends time, who alone opens us to eternity. This is Jesus Christ, “the same today, yesterday and forever” (Hb. 13:8). It is in his Cross that Christ gives us victory over history and ushers us into the fulness of eternity. We, priests, who are God’s sign and witness in this world must, therefore, be united to Christ by entering into his way of life.

To be a faithful follower of Christ calls for fidelity to one’s spirituality, to keep one’s spiritual house in order through prayer, spiritual reading, studies, spiritual direction and regular recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation. Every aspect of priestly spirituality proceeds from the altar and goes back to the altar where his words are spoken in sacrifice, where he learns the significance of renouncing the security of goods, of family, of honors. And it is when he comes down from the altar that he takes on his other roles as witness, teacher and shepherd. The priest therefore must bring together his dual roles as sacrificing priest and pastoral priest in an interior, integral spirituality.⁷

Dear Brother-Priests, like the Church in the Philippines, the Church of Bicolandia is on a pilgrim journey. At times, this long journey will be arduous; at other times it will be joyous. It can be likened to the ancient pilgrimages of Europe with their colorful experiences. At times the pilgrimage was illumined by the morning star. At other times the path ahead was shrouded in fog making progress dangerous. And in the evenings the weary pilgrims would gather by camp fires sharing meals, exchanging stories and singing songs. What weilded these motley groups together was the ideal of fidelity — fidelity to those they left behind; fidelity to the goal they faced ahead.

⁶Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 5.

⁷Karl Rahner, S.J. *Mission and Grace*, vol. II (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964) pp. 35-52

We too are such pilgrims. We too need courage to overcome the dangers of a pilgrim journey. We too need songs to lift our hearts and new friends to expand our horizon. We too need a morning star to illumine the path before us. Our songs and dreams seek to be captivated by an inspiring person to whom we could pledge lifelong fidelity.

Priests of Bicolandia — your beloved Ina is all this and more. Let us, in the long journey we still face ahead, remain faithful to her.

Viva la Virgen! Viva, Ina!

Foster bonds of base communities with the local and universal Church

On Friday, 27 September, the Holy Father met the first group of Filipino Bishops to complete their ad limina visit to Rome. Praising the Asian Pastors for their efforts to instil in their people a greater sense of belonging to the Church, the Pope said: "With your brothers Bishops in the rest of the country, and responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council and your own Second Plenary Council, you are working to communicate a greater sense of community and mission, an awareness among the faithful of belonging to and sharing in a reality, the Body of Christ, which transcends them, and yet embraces them and depends on them and makes them responsible for the present and future of that same reality". The Holy Father went on to discuss the role that basic ecclesial communities, when properly formed and guided, can play in renewing the Church's life. Here is the text of his address, which was given in English.

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is always a great pleasure for me to meet the *Bishops of the Philippines*, especially on the occasion of your *ad limina* visits, when you bring to the Successor of Peter the joyful testimony of your people's faith and of their union with the Apostolic See. I greet you — the first group in this series of visits — and, through you, all the faithful of the Philippines: "the favour of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Gal 6:18).

Seeing you here, I think back to the marvellous experience of the World Youth Day in Manila, in January last year. It was not just the number of Filipino young people present with such fervour that was so impressive. What remains impressed on my memory is above all the vitality, conviction and enthusiasm with which the Filipino Catholic community as a whole professed its love of God and of his Church. From the moment of my arrival on Filipino soil I wished to centre my preaching on “*the Good News of God’s love and mercy — the word of truth, justice and peace which alone can inspire a life worthy of God’s sons and daughters*”, and on “*the special vocation*” of the Church in the Philippines “*to bear witness to the Gospel in the heart of Asia*” (Arrival Speech, 12 January 1995, nn. 6 and 7). By word and attitude, Filipino Catholics showed that they were ready to respond to this vocation in answer to God’s love; and that they would do so with “new light, new love, new commitment to meeting the great needs of humanity” (ibid., n. 6).

Be serenely confident in
the Lord’s guidance

2. Yes, there is no doubt that *the Church in your land, throughout your islands, is vibrant, strong and full of life*. Like the young bride of the Book of Revelation, she has full confidence confidence in the steadfast fidelity of her Lord and Savior; she holds forth the promise of love and life: “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready” (Rv 19:7). What are the signs of this youthful spiritual vitality? In the first place, the faithful ministry of your beloved co-workers, *the priests*, committed to realizing their priestly identity in the generous service of God’s people. They draw strength from their sacramental configuration configuration to Christ, the great High Priest (Heb 4:14), whose friendship they experience in personal prayer and liturgical celebration. Your *seminarians* too are a sure sign of hope for the future. They look to you for that solid formation that will lead them to “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). And what about the numerous *men and women religious*? Their irreplaceable contribution to the evangelization of the Philippines is an essential part of your history, and continues today in your particular Churches’ efforts to present the true face of Christ in every form of

ecclesial service. And a particular sign of vitality is the growing participation of the *laity* in the Church's mission. More and more you can count on their active and fruitful collaboration in responding to the magnitude of the challenges of the new evangelization and of integral human development, which form the framework of the Church's action as she enters the next Christian millennium.

Since you, the Bishops, have a unique and central role in meeting these challenges, I wish to invite you to be serenely confident in the Lord, the Chief Shepherd (1 Pt 5:4), who never abandons his flock. No matter what difficulties arise as times and circumstances change, he is present with his grace and the power of his word to guide and sustain your ministry and service. Indeed, the Lord "continually distributes in his body, that is in the Church, gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we serve each other unto salvation so that, carrying out the truth in love, we may through all things grow up into him who is our head" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 7). It is your responsibility as Bishops to discern and judge the gifts and charisms, but above all to encourage their growth for the benefit of all, and to harmonize them in a great chorus of praise to God. This is the truest sense of the *communion of discipleship* which the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines posited as a goal for your pastoral planning and activity.

3. With your brother Bishops in the rest of the country, and responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council and your own Second Plenary Council, you are working to communicate a *greater sense of community and mission*, an awareness among the faithful of belonging to and sharing in a reality, the Body of Christ, which transcends them, and yet embraces them and depends on them and makes them responsible for the present and future of that same reality. In this communion, Bishops are, as it were, the elder brothers. To us, the Successors of the Apostles, has been principally entrusted the task of evangelizing and teaching so that all may attain to salvation by faith, Baptism, and the fulfilment of the commandments (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 24). We are called to exercise this role and this authority, not with pride or relying on our own strength, but with love and humble obedience to the truth, as "servants of the Lord's servants" (St Augustine, *Epist.* 217: ML 33, 378). In fact, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "that duty, which the Lord committed to the shepherds of his people, is a true service,

and in sacred literature is significantly called *diakonia* or ministry" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 24). Your *ad limina* visit is an excellent occasion for you to reaffirm and strengthen that inner commitment and ready availability which daily inspire your prayer, your activity and your efforts on behalf of the Dioceses entrusted to you. You know that the way you yourselves respond to God's grace is not without effect on the progress of God's people "made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (St Cyprian, *De orat. Dom.*, 23: PL 4, 553; cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 4).

The conciliar Constitution *Lumen gentium* places the bond between Pastors and faithful on a profound theological footing, as part of the divine plan for the Church, as an expression of *their common dignity deriving from their rebirth in Christ*: "the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God entails a unifying purpose, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need ... the very diversity of graces, ministries, and works gathers the children of God into one, because 'all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit' [1 Cor 12:11]" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 32). You, the Pastors, are saying to the faithful: yes, we have received from Christ a ministry of spiritual leadership, of teaching and of guidance, but this too is a service to the whole body; ours is "a hierarchy of service, and not of Christian excellence" (cf. Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Document*, n. 96). In other words, it is as if you were telling the faithful: no one has a merely passive role; the contribution of every individual and family is essential; Christ needs every one of you. And, with the help of the priests, religious and committed lay people, you are directing your pastoral efforts to *turning the evangelical concept of communion into a reality of everyday life in each local community*.

**Basic communities are way
to teach tenets of faith**

4. In this great pastoral effort, one of your priorities is the spreading and strengthening of *basic ecclesial communities*, as well as the formation of their leaders. You are well aware of the great potential of such communities, but also of the challenge which they entail. A fundamental text of the Magisterium in this regard remains the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of my predecessor Pope Paul VI, to which I invite you to return from time to time in order to be reminded that this pastoral

approach is valid only insofar as such groups "come together within the Church in order to unite themselves to the Church and to cause the Church to grow ... having solidarity with her life, being nourished by her teaching and united with her pastors" (*L.c.*, n. 58).

By creating a deeper bond between their members, a bond sustained above all by the Church's sacramental and liturgical life, these fraternal communities become the leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor, destitute and marginalized, and of commitment to social transformation. You see these communities as a way to teach the tenets of the faith through a *catechesis that is closely related to real life situations*, and therefore as an effective means of safeguarding the community from the inroads of fundamentalism. They also serve to channel popular devotions in the right direction, by giving them a solid biblical and theological foundation. In many of your Dioceses you have seen that through the basic ecclesial communities the teachings of the Magisterium, the pastoral letters of the Bishops' Conference and the documents of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines are more easily brought to the grassroots level of the parish communities.

5. As Pope Paul VI recognized, such communities will become a hope for the universal Church to the extent that they seek their nourishment in the word of God, do not allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarizations or fashionable ideologies, and avoid giving in to the temptation of systematic protest and a hypercritical attitude, under the pretext of authenticity. It is essential that they remain firmly attached to the local Church to which they belong, and to the universal Church, thus avoiding the danger of becoming closed within themselves, to the exclusion of other ecclesial realities (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 58).

Social peace must be based on respect for rights

If the experience of basic ecclesial communities proves successful in fostering a deeper, more fraternal and more practical witness of Christian life and solidarity, then a new image of the Church will appear, the image of an active and responsible community which truly reflects the model offered by the early Christians of Jerusalem as described in the Acts of the Apostles. At the same time, pastoral activity, *especially in parishes*, cannot overlook the majority who do not participate, and those who are lax or have fallen away. The Church is also the home

of the sinner, of those who doubt or need encouragement. She must never become the exclusive domain of an elite of committed members.

6. It is the duty of the Church's Pastors to correct centrifugal tendencies leading to fragmentation or division. Indeed, within the Christian community the Bishop is the centre of unity, a fact illustrated by these striking words of the Council: "for their part, the faithful must cling to their Bishop, as the Church does to Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father, so that everything may harmonize in unity and bring forth abundant fruit unto the glory of God" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 27). In every way possible the Bishop must work for union among the priests, religious and laity, a harmony based above all on principles of faith and manifested most particularly in the unity of God's people around the Altar of Sacrifice. He needs to instruct, watch over and defend the portion of the Lord's inheritance committed to his care, knowing that peace is the result also of a thorough and far-reaching programme of catechesis which *enlightens and strengthens consciences for the responsible choices which have to be made also in civil and social matters.*

All the Church's members, as active and responsible citizens, are called to be builders of peace in society as a whole, and this task is all the more pressing where religious differences or cultural and social conditions generate tensions. Some of your Dioceses are not immune to a certain instability and violence. Everywhere the Church prays and works for *social peace founded primarily on respect for people's fundamental rights, beginning with the cardinal right to freedom of religion and conscience.* By its very nature, peace-making calls for sincere and constructive dialogue on the part of everyone involved. Peace can only be achieved if the integral good of the whole of society is everyone's overriding goal. When I visited the Southern Philippines in 1981, I had the pleasure of meeting members of the Muslim community and of encouraging the dialogue which was already taking place and which, in spite of difficulties, has continued. What was said then is just as true today: "Society cannot bring citizens the happiness that they expect from it unless society itself is built upon dialogue, Dialogue in turn is built upon trust, and *trust presupposes not only justice but mercy*" (*Speech to the Representatives of the Muslim Community, Davao, 20 February, 1981, n. 4*). As you yourselves have written: "the journey to peace is the journey of people of different faiths, people who pray

to the same almighty God, who for the sake of peace creates in our hearts the attitudes of mutual respect and trust and love for justice, truth and freedom, which are the pillars of a house of peace" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 73 *Plenary Assembly*, 8 July 1996). May God bless your efforts to build that house of peace in your own region!

7. In Manila in 1995, I urged the Bishops to bring *the liberating power of the Gospel* to bear on the pastoral challenges facing you (cf. *Meeting with the Bishops of the Philippines*, 14 January 1995, n. 5). It is in fact "the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name" (cf. Rom 1:5) which is the definitive and ultimate answer to man's problems and the fulfilment of his aspirations. In our preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, next year will be devoted to *reflection on Christ*, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 40). It is my ardent prayer that you will lead the people of God to "a renewed appreciation of Christ, Saviour and Proclaimer of the Gospel ... a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation" (ibid). As you come ever closer to Christ, you and your people will drink at the true wellspring of salvation and hope. "Straining forward to what lies ahead ... press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (cf. Phil 3:13-14). May the Lord himself guide you and sustain you. May the Mother of the Redeemer intercede for the beloved Filipino people. With my Apostolic Blessing.

CONSULTATIVE WORDS

Cases & Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, OP

Mass Application

I have read the case on GREGORIAN MASSES, published in 1994. I agree with the reasons of the religious Brother who sent you the case. Something similar can be said about the application of the Mass to the intention of the faithful. Our attention should be called from time to time in so delicate problems. Thus, I am sending you the following questions:

- 1. What to do when, having received one intention, the priest forgets about it and applies for a second intention he recently received for the same day?*
- 2. Can a priest offer a Mass for the intention of the first donor who will approach him?*
- 3. What should be advised to the faithful: to offer Masses for themselves while they are still alive or to make a will, so that the Masses will be offered for them after their death?*
- 4. Is the priest bound to say the Mass at the donor's intention when the stipend for the Mass has been lost?*

A Priest

There has always been in the Church the laudable custom of the faithful requesting the priest the application of the Holy Mass for the benefit of a particular person or for the fulfilment of a concrete plan or good desire. The application of the Mass can be defined as the intention or will of the celebrating priest to apply the *special or ministerial* fruit of the Eucharistic sacrifice in favor of a person or to attain a particular grace desired by the one who requested the Mass. Only a priest can, by virtue of his ordination, apply the Mass' ministerial fruit to the intention or wishes of the faithful who, due to the offering or stipend given to the priest to relieve his needs, is usually called *donor*. The person, living or dead, for whom the Mass is offered, is the recipient of the *satisfactory, propitiatory or impetratory* fruit of the Holy Sacrifice, if he/she has no obstacle or hindrance to the same.

Undoubtedly the Holy Mass can be offered as a reparation or compensation for sins committed, as well as thanksgiving for graces received from God. Obviously, the purpose intended by the donor who requests the Mass application should always be honest and good. It would be a serious error to request the Mass application in order to attain some evil, for instance to succeed in obtaining a favorable sentence in a judicial controversy against an innocent person.

The priest's intention is necessary

It is practical and helpful if, when requested by the faithful to apply the Mass, the priest makes an *explicit intention* to offer the Holy Sacrifice according to the donor's desire, writing down the date when the Mass is to be applied. The intention so made and recorded will undoubtedly persevere as long as it is not explicitly retracted. Hence, in case the priest forgets, the ministerial fruit of the Mass will surely be applied to the donor's intention. Otherwise such fruit will go to the Church's treasure. Naturally it would be desirable that the priest makes always an *actual* intention, at the beginning of the Mass, to celebrate for the donor's request.

A conflict of intentions can exist, when the priest, having forgotten that he had previously accepted a request for the application of the Mass on a certain day, he offers the Mass of that day for another intention he has received recently. In this case, the conflict may be solved applying the following principles:

a) If the priest decided, when he received the first request for the Mass, that he would apply the Mass for the intention of its donor, the first donor's intention prevails.

b) If the priest did not make any explicit intention when he received the first request, as for instance recording it in the Ordo or any private booklet, and he forgot entirely about that request, it seems that the second request and its intention should prevail.

c) If the two foregoing principles do not dissipate the doubt, the priest concerned can apply another Mass for the unfulfilled intention on the first day when he has no other intention.

d) The so-called *interpretative* intention should never be invoked, since it never existed.

No condition should be attached to the intention

The intention of the Mass should be applied without any condition. In case a condition has been given or added with the request for the Mass, it should be interpreted as follows: a) Conditions of the present or of the past do not affect the validity of the intention. Thus, if the condition is fulfilled, the Mass is applied for the donors intention; if it is not fulfilled, the ministerial fruit of the Mass goes to the Church's treasure. b) Conditions of the future, as for instance: "I apply the Mass for the first donor who will request for its application", can never be admitted, since the ministerial fruit of the Mass cannot be suspended until the condition is fulfilled. Such fruit is produced when the Holy Sacrifice is complete with the consecration of both species. The interpretative intention should not be considered, as mentioned before.

"Collective " Mass

The Church establishes in canon 948; "Separate Masses must be applied for the intentions of those who made an offering which has been accepted". This means that the number of Masses should correspond to the number of stipends accepted, no matter how small the stipends are. It is forbidden, therefore, to accumulate various stipends, given and accepted, applying only one "collective" Mass for all of them, without the donors' knowledge.

Even if the donors consent to do so, the following conditions should be followed:

a) It should be announced publicly where and when the "collective" Mass will be celebrated, on condition that this be done not more than twice a week;

b) The celebrant priest can keep for himself only what is determined as diocesan stipend for a Mass, in accordance with canon 950;

c) Whatever exceeds the diocesan stipend should be remitted to the Ordinary, who will use it according to the law (can. 946).

The foregoing norms were given by the S. Congregation for Clerics in the Decree of February 22, 1991 (AAS, LXXXIII, 1991, p. 443-446).

Various questions

Some authors raise various questions concerning the application of the Mass. The following are worth being considered:

1. If the priest celebrates the Holy Sacrifice without stipend and he has no particular intention, who will perceive the *special* or ministerial fruit of the Mass? A distinction should be made: a) If the priest has made before a habitual intention of being himself benefitted by this ministerial fruit; or for the benefit of somebody else, living or dead, such fruit is applied in conformity with the habitual intention he has made once for all. b) If the priest has not made such *habitual* intention, the ministerial fruit of the Mass is added to the treasure of the Church made up by the merits and satisfactions of Christ and of the Saints, which is administered by the Church. It is important, therefore, that the priest makes once for all the habitual intention of applying the Eucharistic fruit for himself or somebody else, unless expressly revoked.

2. What will happen with this ministerial fruit when the Mass is offered for a dead person, incapable of being benefitted? The authors dealing with this question have different opinions. Some think that the ministerial fruit of the Mass goes to the treasurer of the Church. Others believe that the fruit will be perceived by the donor of the Mass or the

relatives of the dead who cannot be benefitted. Others make a distinction: a) if the priest, on his initiative, offered the Mass for the dead who is not capable of being benefitted, the fruit is perceived by the priest himself; b) if the Mass, however, was offered by a donor, the donor will perceive the Mass fruit. Still there are others who hold the opinion that God will apply the ministerial fruit of the Mass to the souls forgotten or seldom remembered by the living. As we have said before, it seems to be practical if the priest makes a habitual intention to apply these Masses for himself or others, when celebrated without stipend, or for the donor when a stipend was offered.

3. Can the *satisfactory* and *impetratory* fruits for the Mass be divided. In other words: can the same Mass be offered as suffrage for the dead and for the recovery of a patient? A distinction is in order: if the celebrating priest offers the Mass on his own initiative, without stipend, he can divide the fruit that way. However, if he offers the Mass for the intention of a donor, he cannot. The donor's intention covers both fruits: he can, therefore, offer the Mass as a suffrage for a dead and as a petition for the recovery of a patient.

What is more beneficial for the donor?

This interesting question is sometimes raised by the faithful themselves: What is better, to request the application of the Mass for him/her while still alive, or to make a will that the Mass be applied for his/her soul after his/her death? The majority of the authors sustain that it is much better and helpful to request the application of the Mass while he/she is still alive. The reasons they give is that the dead person can perceive only *ex opere operato* the satisfactory and perhaps the impetratory fruit of the Holy Mass, while the living can perceive both fruits plus an increase of sanctifying grace *ex opere operantis*. On the other hand, the donor who offers a stipend for the application while he is living elicits a greater meritorious act than the one who makes a will for the application of the Mass for his soul. Besides, the living can increase *ex opere operantis* the impetratory and satisfactory fruits of the Mass by being present at its celebration with fervor and devotion, which a dead person cannot do. It can be added also, that a person who makes a will leaving an amount of money in order that the Mass will be applied for his/her soul cannot be absolutely sure that this will be fulfilled, due

to possible human negligence in executing his desire or due to the possible depreciation of the money he/she left for this purpose.

Benedict XV himself said in this respect: "The fruits of the Holy Mass perceived by the living are greater than those perceived by the dead, since the former, if well disposed, are *more directly, certainly and abundantly* benefitted than the latter" (AAS, XIII, 1921, p. 344).

What to do when the stipend is lost?

The consultant priest's last question is: What can the priest do when the stipend has been lost before celebrating the Mass? The answer is given in canon 949, which leads as follows: "One who is obliged to celebrate and apply the Mass for the intention of those who made an offering, is bound by this obligation even if the offering received is lost through no fault of his".

Whenever the stipends, having been accepted and received by the celebrant, are lost, with or without the celebrant's negligence, the Masses for those stipends must be celebrated. The implicit contract between the donor and the priest to say the Masses has already been made. By accepting the stipend, the amount involved became already property of the accepting celebrant. Whatever happens to it, is his responsibility, not of the donor. However, if the amount was still in the possession of the donor or within his responsibility when it disappeared, the celebrant has no obligation whatsoever.

We think all the questions of our consultant Priest are already answered. He can supplement what we have explained by reading any Manual dealing with this topic.

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers

March - April 1997

EFREN RIVERA, OP

March 2, 1997

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, Cycle B

JOHN 2:13-25

THE NEW TEMPLE RAISED UP IN THREE DAYS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT/BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The first Christians were converts from Judaism and found nothing wrong in doing what Jesus himself used to do, that is, go to the Jerusalem Temple for worship (see Luke 24:52-53; Acts 3:1, etc.). But in the year 70 A.D. — that is, a few years after the deaths of St. Peter (in 64 A.D.) and St. Paul (in 67 A.D.) — the Romans captured Jerusalem from Jewish rebels and they burned the Temple to the ground. From that time to around the year 312 when the first Christian emperor, Constantine, donated the Lateran basilica in Rome, the Christians did not have any public place of worship. For about 240 years, therefore, Christians did not have anything but the Risen Christ — raised three days after his death — and visibly their own Christian Community, as their New Temple.

Today, the practice of having buildings where the Christian Community can gather for public worship continues to be valid. But it should not distract us from the gospel teaching — literally followed by the Gospel writers themselves and by all Christians for about 240 years — that the enduring Christian Temple is not a visible structure but the invisible Risen Christ himself.

Focus Points. (1) Prophetic texts like Jer 7:11, Isa 56:7; Zech 14:21; Mal 3:1 announced that the coming of the Kingdom of God will be marked by a “purification” of the Temple. In this light, what Jesus did according to today’s Gospel narrative was a symbolic action or “sign” that the Kingdom of God had already arrived in the person of Jesus. The Jewish authorities, however, in their blindness, did not recognize this prophetic sign and instead asked for a display of miraculous powers, which Jesus refused to do.

(2) The key quotation in the story comes from Ps 69:9: “Zeal for your house consumes me.” The word “consumes” gets a double meaning in this context: a) the zeal of Jesus consumes him because it impels him to act in a shocking manner; b) this zeal, mistaken by the Jewish authorities as blasphemy, will be the reason of his being condemned to a “consuming” death.

(3) The plot of the Jewish authorities to destroy “the Holy One” (see Mk 1:24) that is Jesus, eventually succeeds and so they unwittingly make possible the resurrection by which Jesus becomes the NEW TEMPLE RAISED IN THREE DAYS.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The purification of the Temple by Jesus is narrated by all the evangelists as an EXORCISM (inasmuch as they all use the Greek word ‘*ekballein*’). Wittingly or unwittingly, the businessmen in the Temple were being used by Satan.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing: Has Satan ever used you to do something evil in God’s eyes, which you thought was something good and in fact even a service to the community?

2. The disciples knew Jesus as a man of peace and were doubtless frightened by his instant transformation into a zealot violently lashing at people with a whip of cords and creating havoc. In due time, however, they understood what the enemies of Jesus never did, namely, that he was one prefigured by the prophet Jeremiah, who suffered because he criticized the kind of worship being practised in the Temple (see Jer 7:1-34; 26:1-24), and that he is the Messiah who fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Has reflection on the words of Scripture helped you understand happenings which were a puzzle to you when they occurred?

3. After the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 A.D., and before Christians were allowed to worship in public buildings ca. 312 A.D., the followers of Jesus had no choice but to accept the Risen Christ as the New Temple and the Christian Community as its visible presence on earth. In later history, however, and up to our own days, these insights have been obscured or forgotten. It is time for us to reappraise them. This has been the message of the liturgical reforms called for by the Second Vatican Council.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. When you worship in church during Mass, do you act as a person worshipping God *through Christ, with Christ, in Christ*?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? We can sometimes share our inmost feelings most effectively through symbolic actions, as Jesus did.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Caring becomes ZEAL when it takes heroic proportions. This is how Jesus cared for his Father and for us, his brothers and sisters.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? To affirm persons, we must first understand them and their actions. Because the disciples were shocked and did not at once understand why Jesus acted so strangely when he purified the Temple, they could not affirm him.

But eventually, in retrospect and with the help of the Holy Spirit, they understood, and then they affirmed as John tells us in Jn 2:22.

4. FORGIVENESS. The Jewish authorities could not forgive what they considered blasphemous words and behavior on the part of Jesus regarding the Temple. This led them to the crime of condemning a just man to die by crucifixion. God forbid that we ever get into the same situation with regard to our brothers and sisters.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. By providing us with a New Temple, that is, his Risen Body, Jesus has made it possible for us to worship God in spirit and in truth (see Jn 4:24; 14:17).

C. STORY: AT THE WAILING WALL

One of the highlights of a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land organized by the Archdiocese of Manila was a visit to the "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem. As a guide remarked, it is not the wall that wails but, sometimes, the people who pray facing the wall. They wail (or cry) because the wall is all that remains of the ancient Jewish Temple of Jerusalem, first built by king Solomon in 966 B.C. and then rebuilt by king Herod in 19 B.C., but razed to the ground by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Everyone is welcome to pray at the Wailing Wall, and the Catholic pilgrims availed themselves of this hospitality. Men had to have their heads covered, but this was not required of women. Men and women, however, prayed in separate areas. Most of the Jews praying there read from prayer books and performed rituals like constantly bowing one's head. A popular form of devotion was to write prayer petitions in scraps of paper and insert these in the cracks of the wall. This is what appealed most to the Catholic pilgrims.

Externally, the Catholic pilgrims prayed the same way that the devout Jews did. But internally, there was a big difference. The Jews prayed without recognizing Christ. The Catholic pilgrims prayed through Christ, with Christ, in Christ.

March 9, 1997

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, Cycle B

JOHN 3:14-21

THE GOSPEL LEARNED IN ONE NIGHT

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEPS 3

Nicodemus was a devout Jew, a Pharisee, who sought salvation by following the Law of Moses and observing the teachings of the rabbis. But one day he heard about Jesus, and like the crowds, he was struck by the fact that this man "wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority" (Mk 1:22). While the ordinary religious teachers (like Nicodemus himself) spoke thousands of words and wrote thick volumes on how people are to please God and merit salvation, Jesus went to the heart of religion. Nicodemus learned about this when he asked for an audience with Jesus under the cover of darkness — he was a prominent religious leader in Jerusalem and he did not want his colleagues to know that he admired Jesus. He went home with a new vision. He learned that the heart of religion is to reciprocate God's love with love and salvation comes from accepting the Messiah who will manifest God's immeasurable love for people by atoning for their sins, an atonement that God will accept by glorifying ("lifting up", "elevating", "resurrecting") the atoning victim.

There are still many people today, even among Catholics, who are like Nicodemus before his audience with Jesus. They too, think that religion requires people to MERIT salvation by doing good works. All such people are invited today to listen to Jesus and learn that religion means LOVE. First and foremost it means GOD'S LOVE FOR US THAT WE MUST RECIPROCATATE BY BEING GRATEFUL FOR JESUS AND TO JESUS, THE SAVIOR SENT TO ATONE FOR OUR SINS.

Focus points. (1) V. 14b "the Son of Man (must) be lifted up." The Evangelist John explains the "lifting up" of Jesus in this passage (see also Jn 12:32 and Is 2:2-5; Jn 12:38 and Is 52:13) by recalling the

bronze serpent "lifted up" by Moses on crossed poles so that the rebellious Israelites punished by being bitten by poisonous serpents, by looking up to it, would escape death. The bronze serpent lifted up by Moses for the salvation of sinful people prefigured Jesus lifted up on the cross for the salvation of all sinners.

(2) V. 15 "that all who believe may have eternal life in him." It is belief in Jesus or the acceptance of Jesus as one's Savior, and not merit earned through good works, that saves people and gives them eternal life on earth and in the after life. (Other passages of the New Testament teach that Christians are obliged to do good works — but not in order to merit salvation. They are obliged because the Holy Spirit of Jesus dwelling in them impels them to do good works.)

(3) V. 16 "God so loved the world that he gave his
Only Son
So that whoever believes in him may not
Perish but have
Eternal
Life."

This passage of John is the one line summary of the entire GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The Cross of Jesus must be understood in the light of his resurrection, otherwise it is but an executioner's cruel torture of a condemned man. Without the resurrection, it is a sign of death and defeat. But, viewed in the light of the Christian's faith in the Risen Christ, it is a sign of God's love for the world, a love which gives without reserve. God gave his eternal Son a human life — the most precious thing in the whole universe — and he allowed cruel men to take this life away. By accepting this divine plan, Jesus atoned for the sins of all humankind. He can now bestow salvation as a gift to all who will accept him as their Savior. In this way Jesus draws all people together, as the children of the one Father and as brothers and sisters of the one Son, with the Holy Spirit as the bond of love.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Was there a time in your life when you looked at the cross as a sign of cruel suffering? Did anything happen to make you change your viewpoint and started you on the way of looking at the Cross as a sign of victory and life?

2. Salvation must be accepted as a gift of God's LOVE, not as a wage for our labors or a reward for our merits.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Some people would rather EARN salvation than ACCEPT IT AS A GIFT OF LOVE. What could be the reason for this?

3. It is the experience of truly wise people that, as they grow in wisdom, they also simplify their outlook on life. The truly wise Christian knows that the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ can be simplified and reduced to one sentence (John 3: 16). The whole of religion can be simplified and reduced to one reality: LOVE.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you grown by making your life more complicated or by making it more simple?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? In sharing there is a certain intimacy, an ambiance of LOVE. That is why people learn better by sharing than by listening to lectures.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? At any time of day or night, Jesus responded to the needs of people. This is the model of caring that we should imitate.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? At the risk of being ostracized by his peers, Nicodemus affirmed Jesus by seeking an audience with him to learn what made him different from all others rabbis.

4. FORGIVENESS. God's love is a just and merciful love. On one hand he demanded reparation for sin. On the other hand, he accepted this reparation not from sinful humanity but from his own Son whom he sent to redeem the sinful human race.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. The Good News of Jesus Christ is summarized in one line: see John 3:16 above.

C. STORY: HELEN, THE JEWISH TOURIST GUIDE

When the Archdiocese of Manila's travel agency sent a group of 52 pilgrims led by seven priest to the Holy Land, it asked its Israeli agent to provide them with its best Tourist Guide. They did so in the person of Helen, an Australian Jew now residing in Jerusalem. She has been a Tourist Guide in Israel for more than 15 years and she really knows her stuff.

At first the Catholic tourists did not know that their guide was a non-Christian. The fact dawned on them after some time, and for some people in the group it was a shock. Some of these approached her and asked point blank, "Helen, why don't you become a Christian?" They thought it was such a pity that she wasn't one, since she was such a nice person, and in fact very respectful toward Jesus and the Christian religion.

Helen replied, "Well, for one thing, I don't feel the need of becoming a Christian. Your religion and my religion is the same except for one point: you believe that Jesus is God, and I don't believe in that. He is one of the prophets of the Jewish religion and I admire his miracles and teachings."

The friendship between Helen and the group grew as the tour progressed, because aside from her treasure of knowledge she was witty and caring. But every time the group would have its liturgy or devotions, Helen would keep her distance, lost in her own thoughts.

Helen is a Christian at heart, just as Nicodemus was before he believed in Jesus Christ. What keeps her from making the leap to explicit Christian faith seems to be the burden of the innumerable persecutions that have marked Jewish-Christian history from the time of Jesus unto our own days.

March 16, 1997

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, Cycle B

JOHN 12:20-33
FROM DEATH A RICH HARVEST

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Today's Gospel Reading is about the "HOUR" of Jesus. To understand this, we must think of agriculture. A farmer's "hour" starts when he begins preparing the ground for planting, but is not accomplished until he reaps the harvest and enjoys the prosperity it brings. Jesus is like a farmer faced with the prospect of several weeks of hard labor when he has to plough the field and plant the seed. But he is not daunted by the hard work because he looks forward to the end result.

For many people today, life is but a monotonous grind of working days. It is time for them to adopt the positive outlook of Jesus the "farmer" who looks not only at the back-breaking toil of ploughing and planting but at the rich harvest that will come in due time.

Focus Points. (1) V. 20-22 (Some "Greeks" would like to "see" Jesus). The "Greeks" in this passage represent the Jews of the diaspora (countries other than Palestine). The fact that they want to "see" Jesus is taken by Jesus as a sign that his "HOUR" has arrived. We must therefore see a deeper meaning of symbolism in these "Greeks." They represent, in embryo, all God's children who will be gathered together by Jesus' death (see John 11:52). That is to say that the "Greeks" in this passage symbolize the universal church which will be born from Jesus at his death.

(2) V. 23, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..." Jesus' "HOUR," in the mind of John, is the precise moment of Jesus' "end," the moment of his complete revelation of God. John identifies this moment with the last moment of Jesus' life, **THE MOMENT OF HIS DEATH, SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION.** Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection are not two successive moments but one indivisible moment which can be considered

in two ways: with or without faith. Considered without faith it is a disaster, considered with faith it is a triumph.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Whereas for Luke, the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit occurs at Pentecost, for John it occurs at Jesus' death (see John 19:30). In both Luke and John, however, the Jews of the diaspora are involved.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you ever wanted to "SEE" Jesus like the "Greeks" in today's passage (v. 20-21)? Has your wish been fulfilled?

2. All Christians are invited to imitate Jesus in having a positive view of everything that happens, including what appears to be the negation of life: death. For Jesus, as it should also be for the Christian, death is not a destruction but an accomplishment, because it liberates human beings from the limitations of earthly life and empowers them to start a new form of existence marked by perfection and eternity.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Instead of just exchanging pleasantries with the Greeks who wanted to "see" him, Jesus interprets their request as a sign that hour has come, and even his disciples were surprised when he started sharing with them, at that moment, his innermost thoughts about his mission on earth for the salvation of all humankind. We could learn from this that, it will probably do a lot of good to many people if we take the opportunity to share our thoughts about salvation even during ordinary, "social" meetings with others.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Jesus cared for the salvation of all humankind, but he was also sensitive to the proper time that this salvation is to be offered to particular persons. We, too, should cultivate this kind of sensitivity.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? The disciples of Jesus affirmed the "Greeks" when they did not take their request lightly but referred it to Jesus. We, too, should affirm people by giving some importance to their requests for help, even when these seem to be impertinent.

4. FORGIVENESS. Forgiving our fellow human beings becomes easier for us when we remember that our real enemy are not people but Satan (see Jn 12:31).

5. THE GOOD NEWS. Ever since Jesus Christ, our "Sun of Justice" has come to this world, there is a "silver lining" to all the dark clouds that come our way.

C. STORY: OLIVE GATHERING AT THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Just three months ago, pilgrims to the Holy Land from the Archdiocese of Manila, to their pleasant surprise, witnessed three or four men gathering olives from the ancient trees growing at the Garden of Gethsemane. The men had placed nylon nets on the ground under the trees and they had long, slender rods they utilized to strike the olive fruits so that they would fall to the ground. Some pilgrims remarked: "What a cruel way to harvest the olive fruits — it's cruel to the trees because they are damaged!"

Yes, it's cruel to the trees to hit them with those rods, because the pilgrims saw that many leaves and even small branches had dropped to the ground. But the tourist guide had pointed out that those trees have lived for centuries. Some of them are maybe a thousand years old! The seemingly cruel beating with rods — year after year — apparently has not caused irreparable damage. Those trees have the resilience to survive maybe a thousand years more.

March 23, 1997

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION, Cycle B

Procession of Palms: MARK 11:1-10

**Passion: Long Form MARK 14:1 - 15:47; Short Form:
MARK 15:1-39**

**AT HIS DEATH JESUS WAS PROCLAIMED
THE SON OF GOD**

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

For a commentary on the Lord's Entrance to Jerusalem, see BEF Jan. - Feb. 1996. Suggested Reading from the Passion of Christ for BIBLIARASAL: Mark 15:33-41.

Surprisingly, for Mark, the model for all believers among the people at the foot of the cross was not the mother of Jesus nor St. John the Apostle, but the Roman centurion. He was amazed at how Jesus had the mastery of everything that was happening although he seemed helplessly nailed to the cross. His amazement opened his mind and heart to God's grace of faith. He exemplifies that salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God is a pure gift of God.

Focus Points. (1) 15:37 "The Jesus, uttering a loud cry, breathed his last." As far as Mark is concerned, this loud cry is the only "sign" given to the Jewish authorities who taunted Jesus to perform a miracle. This loud cry showed to all that Jesus had the mastery even of his own death. A dying man normally does not have the strength to make a loud cry.

(2) 15:38 "At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom." The tearing of the temple curtain recalls the tearing (opening) of the heavens at Jesus' baptism, see Mk 1:10. Both occurrences indicate that a special revelation, that is, about the DIVINE SONSHIP OF JESUS, has been given. In the Jordan scene of the tearing of the heavens, it is Jesus alone, at that historical moment, who receives the revelation (although Mark wants his readers to renew

their faith in Jesus, Son of God). In the Calvary scene to which the tearing of the temple curtain is attached, the revelation was received by the Roman centurion, symbolizing all who receive faith in Jesus as a gift from God.

(3) 15:39 "The centurion who stood guard over him, on seeing the manner of his death, declared, 'Clearly, this man was the Son of God.' " In what sense the Roman centurion, historically, accepted Jesus as the "Son of God" may not be clear to critics but certainly Mark has wanted to present Jesus as Son of God in a completely unique sense, that is, in the strict sense of the term, recognizing him as equal with the Father, not just as messiah or a righteous man.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The Jewish authorities asked for a "sign" from Jesus, pretending that they will believe as soon as the sign is given. In fact, they refused to believe even after Jesus gave them two "signs" which were also great miracles: first, the loud cry he uttered even after all his human strength had been exhausted, and second, his empty tomb (sign of his resurrection).

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do you ask God for extraordinary "signs" or miracles? Is it not better to ask God for FAITH to see ordinary occurrences as signs of his love?

2. All the revelation we need for our salvation has already been given by God and they are available to us through the Bible and the Church, which continues the teaching office of Jesus Christ.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do you put yourself in touch with revelation by reading the Bible and learning the teachings of the Church?

3. During Holy Week, more than at any other time, we should try to grasp the greatness of God's love, which reached the height and depth and width of sending us his own real Son to be our Savior.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. What sentiments should dominate our observance of Holy Week: sorrow and penance for our sins or joy and celebration of the greatness of God's love?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? By exclaiming, "Clearly, this man was the Son of God," the Roman centurion shared his faith with the rest of humankind. Do we try to do something similar?

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Even at the moment when he needed most to be cared for, Jesus was still preoccupied with caring for his mother and for us, represented by the beloved disciple: see John 19:25-27. Shouldn't we imitate this kind of caring?

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? God affirmed the Roman centurion by giving him the gift of faith. We, on our part, can affirm somebody by praying that God will give him or her the gift of faith.

4. FORGIVENESS. It is Luke 23:34 that records the following famous words of Jesus: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

5. THE GOOD NEWS. The story of Jesus does not end with his crucifixion but with his resurrection and glorification.

C. STORY: NO ICON OF THE CENTURION ON CALVARY

If, as a pilgrim, you go to calvary today, you will not find a hill, but just plain stairs going up to a kind of mezzanine. This is because, at a certain point in Christian history, those in charge of the shrine decided to reduce the original hill to its bare essentials — chopping away everything else — and eventually putting it under the same roof as the Holy Sepulcher.

As soon as pilgrims get to the mezzanine they see three contrasting altars. The leftmost altar is surrounded by many oil lamps hanging from a low ceiling. This altar marks the place where the Cross of Christ was planted — if you put your hand inside the hole beneath the altar you can touch the rock of calvary. Its stewards are Greek Orthodox Christians. Next to it, to the right of the viewer, is a small altar of the "Mater Dolorosa," to the right of which is a wider altar below a mosaic of Christ being nailed to the cross. These two altars do not have hanging oil lamps but candles, and they are under the custody of the Franciscan Order.

An icon of the crucified Christ flanked by icons of his mother Mary and St. John can be seen behind the altar of Christ's crucifixion. Evidently, the scene is inspired by John 19:26-27: "Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, there is your son.' In turn he said to the disciple, 'There is your mother.'"

The centurion of Mark's narrative (15:39) is nowhere in sight. It is the pilgrims themselves who go to calvary who take the part of the centurion as they look to Jesus with faith and say, "This man was really the Son of God."

March 30, 1997

EASTER SUNDAY, Cycles A, B, C

JOHN 20:1-9

THEY RAN TO THE EMPTY TOMB

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The disciples of Jesus had to hurry in burying him because at sundown on Friday the Sabbath began. The women disciples thought the anointing of the body with spices was done in an haphazard way, and they wanted to do it properly, but they too had to observe the Sabbath and had to postpone their pious plan. The Sabbath ended on the evening of Saturday, but, because of the onset of night, the women only had time to go to market for the spices and they had to wait until early Sunday morning to visit Jesus' tomb.

Womanly piety or concern for the proper anointing of Jesus' dead body, led to the early discovery of the Empty Tomb and to the early announcement of Christ's Resurrection. These two realities belong to two different spheres. The discovery of the Empty Tomb is an earthly happening and lends itself to historical investigation. The Resurrection of Christ — **HIS BEING GRANTED A NEW BODY-AND-SOUL LIFE, BUT A TRANSCENDENTAL ONE (NOT BOUND BY EARTHLY CONDITIONS)** — is a mystery and cannot be proven historically: it is an object of faith.

Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and John, the one Jesus loved, were the three persons chosen to be key players in the proclaiming of the Good News of Christ's Resurrection. We can learn something from each of them, but it is most of all the "beloved disciple" that we Christians today — beloved disciples too — must imitate in believing the MYSTERY of the Resurrection.

Focus Points. (1) V. 1b "...Mary Magdalene came to the tomb..." Mary Magdalene was the first to proclaim the Empty Tomb and thus merited to be called "the apostle to the Apostles" because she was the one chosen to tell this Good News to the Twelve Apostles. However, upon seeing the Empty Tomb she did not at once believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This belief will be elicited from her later, when Jesus appears to her (see Jn 20:11-18).

(2) Mary Magdalene "saw the stone had been moved away" (v. 1b), but nowhere is it said that she entered to *verify* her conclusion that Christ's body was not there. The *verification* is made by two apostles, Peter and John (unnamed): V. 6-8a "... *Simon Peter ... entered the tomb ... then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in ...*" This is the evangelists' way of telling his readers that the Apostles were the official witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ.

(3) V. 8b. "He saw and believed." What is special to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is that he believed in the mystery of the Resurrection even before being favored with an appearance of Jesus. In this he is the model of believers like us who have not been favored with appearances of the Risen Christ. In Luke ch. 24 it is clear that others believed in the Resurrection of Christ not because of the say-

so of the women (v. 22) but because of the authority of Peter to whom the Lord appeared (v. 34).

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The Empty Tomb of Christ is what pilgrims can see today when they visit the basilica of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Hopefully, every pilgrim who sees the Empty Tomb will, like Mary Magdalene, be an announcer of its Good News. In fact, even those who cannot make the pilgrimage should meditate on the story of the Empty Tomb and also become bearers of its Good News.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing: Does the "Empty Tomb" of Christ mean as much or more to you than his Cross?

2. The successor of Peter in the see of Rome, the Pope, is, even today, the most important official witness to the Resurrection of Christ. It is ridiculous to settle the question of whether Jesus resurrected or not on the basis of the votes of some so-called "Theologians" — as was done by a group in the U.S.A. History, Archeology, etc. can only go as far as proving that the body of Christ has never been found — and this is really what the Empty Tomb is all about. The Mystery of the Resurrection of Christ is something beyond the realm of the inquisitiveness of man. To attain it by faith what we need are not scholars but witnesses.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing: Have you, in your whole life, given more importance to the Pope as the "*official witness of the resurrection of Christ*" than to so-called scholarly theologians who deny the truth of this great mystery?

3. The "disciple whom Jesus loved," in the Gospel according to St. John, is both a historical person and a symbol of each and every disciple of Jesus, male or female — since all of us are loved by Jesus. Like him, we must carefully look at the signs given at the Empty Tomb, and reaffirm our faith in the mystery of Christ's Resurrection.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing: The transformation of a human life through faith in the Risen Lord is one of the best signs of the truth of Christ's Resurrection. Can this sign be seen in your life? Do you see it in the life of a loved one or a friend?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? The best kind of sharing is not just the sharing of material goods nor even of ideas and insights. It is the sharing of experiences that have made an impact in our lives. This is what Mary Magdalene did. She shared with others her experience of finding Christ's Empty Tomb on Easter morn. And, in an even deeper way, this was done by the "disciple whom Jesus loved," the one who is presented as our model in our belief in the Resurrection of Christ. He believed in the Resurrection even before he was favored with an appearance of the Risen Christ, and later, in his ministry especially in Asia Minor, he shared this belief with people who had no chance of witnessing any earthly appearance of Jesus Christ.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Because the women cared ... they cared about giving Christ a decent burial, not satisfied with the hurried anointing and spicing of Christ's body by the men who buried him. This is the reason for the early discovery of the Empty Tomb and the proclamation of Christ's Resurrection within 24 hours after it occurred.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? "The disciple whom Jesus loved" affirmed Peter's position as the top ranking Apostle by not entering the tomb first — giving this honor to Peter — although he was the first to arrive there after Mary Magdalene's astonishing news.

4. FORGIVENESS. Peter ran to the tomb after Mary Magdalene's report not just out of curiosity but because he wanted to seek forgiveness and make amends for his cowardice during Jesus's capture and trial. He represented every sinner who seeks forgiveness from the Lord.

5. WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS HERE? The Good News here is a reality that is rooted in history but transcends it. It is the Good News that Christ's Tomb was found empty on Easter morn — and this

is something historical — and that he, in his entire human being of body and soul, alive as one unit, now lives beyond time and space and is the Lord who gives NEW LIFE to every human being who wants it — and this is his mystery, accepted in faith by Christians.

C. STORY: PILGRIMAGE TO EMPTY TOMBS

Pilgrims from Manila were surprised when their tour guide in Jerusalem showed them THREE “empty tombs.”

The first is the empty tomb venerated by Christian pilgrims for more than 15 centuries as that of Christ. We call this “the Holy Sepulcher.” One cannot be 100 percent sure this was indeed Christ’s tomb, because until the year 312 A.D. when Christians were allowed by Emperor Constantine to have public places of worship, they were not allowed to venerate any place connected with Christ. St. Helen, Constantine’s mother, then made it her personal mission to find Calvary and Christ’s Empty tomb — more than 300 years after the events connected with them transpired. Whether or not she identified the right spots does not really matter now, because Christian piety practised over 1,500 years and more now make these sites THE HOLY PLACES FOR VENERATING CHRIST’S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION.

The Basilica which enshrines the Holy Sepulcher, however, has not preserved the original sights and surroundings of Christ’s tomb. One doesn’t anymore see the stone that is to be rolled to open or seal the tomb (see Mt 27:60b; Mk 15:46b; Mt 28:2; Mk 16:3-4; Lk 24:2). And where is the garden implied by Jn 20:15, “... She supposed he was the gardener?”

To fill in these gaps, the tour guide brought the Manila pilgrim group to a field owned by the Armenian Christians in Jerusalem, where one can see a tomb sealed by a circular stone that can be rolled back and forth. Then the guide also took the pilgrims to the “Garden Tomb” which is under the care of a Protestant group.

The visits to the three places made the recollection of the Easter scene more vivid and, in a way, made the Risen Christ even more alive to the pilgrims.

April 6, 1997

**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, Same Gospel Reading for
Cycles A, B, C**

**JOHN 20:19-31
EIGHT DAYS LATER**

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Modern commentators point out that the main concern of the story in today's Gospel passage is not Thomas' doubt but his **NEED TO HAVE AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST TO BE AUTHENTICALLY ONE OF THE TWELVE OFFICIAL WITNESSES TO HIS RESURRECTION**. Without such an encounter, Thomas would have been reduced to the situation of those, like us, who have not "seen" the Risen Lord. Fortunately, because of what happened on the eight day after the Resurrection, he is one of those who "have seen and believed." Providentially, we believers, 20 centuries later, are reassured that our belief does not depend on the credulity of gullible people who believe anything they hear, but on the solid quest for truth of people like Thomas the Apostle, designated by God to be a witness of the Resurrection of Christ.

Focus Points. (1) V. 24 "... one of the Twelve." The New Testament term, "one of the Twelve," means one of the chosen men called Apostles who were chosen by Christ and charged with the duty of proclaiming his Good News and give a God-guaranteed witness to the Resurrection of Christ.

(2) V. 28 "Thomas said in response, 'My Lord and my God!'" People make fun of the Christian faith — and thereby insult us — when they say these words were said as part of a reaction of surprise. The text clearly says that this is Thomas' **RESPONSE** to Christ's exhortation, "Do not persist in your unbelief, but believe!" (v. 27b). Christ asks for a profession of faith and Thomas gives that profession of faith. It is a faith that accepts both the Lordship (or Messiahship) and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. John records it so that readers would profess the same faith.

(3) V. 29b "Blest are they who have not seen and have believed." Christians of all succeeding generations — including us — were meant by Jesus.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEP 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. Christian believers today must be able to trace their faith back to the personal testimony of the Twelve Apostles who were favored by a face to face encounter with the Risen Christ. Because of the Pope, the successor of Peter, and our Bishops, who are successors of the apostles add a collegial body, we in the Roman Catholic Church are assured that our faith is truly APOSTOLIC — something that some Christian sects cannot claim or prove.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing: Have I appreciated the fact that I am a Roman Catholic and that my faith in the Risen Christ can be traced to an Apostolic witness?

2. The spread of the Good News of salvation depended on the witness of the Twelve Apostles about their encounters with the Risen Lord. This original witness generated the vicarious witness of those who followed afterwards. Until now it is our Christian duty to give witness. We have to prove that the power of the Risen Lord works among us by living a life that is "different in quality" from worldly life.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing: Reflect and share with others on whether you understand that the spiritual quality of your life is better than that of people who have not yet come to an explicit belief in the Risen Christ.

3. Jesus proclaimed a blessedness reserved for future generations of followers.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing: Ask yourself: have I felt this blessedness in my life? Then share the result of your reflection.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? We are blest because the Twelve Apostles shared their faith with others and these others kept the sharing going on through the centuries. Let us be aware of our great calling to be a link in this great chain of sharing.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Jesus cared for Thomas. He knew the need of Thomas to have an encounter with him and he graciously masterminded the encounter. We should learn from him how to respond to the spiritual needs of our sisters and brothers.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? Jesus' affirmation of us was done long before we were born. We read about it in today's Gospel Reading.

4. FORGIVENESS. Thomas' "doubt" was not a sin because there was no hardness of heart in it. It was a temporary lack of communication that was soon remedied. If we resolve never to put malice where an erring brother or sister intends none, we will not find it hard to forgive people when they admit their mistakes. We will see them, after all, as honest mistakes.

5. WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS HERE? Belief brings blessedness.

C. STORY: PILGRIMAGE TO THE CENACLE

There is a long standing tradition perpetuated by pilgrims and tour guides that the "Cenacle" was not just the place where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, but also the scene of appearances of Christ to his disciples after his resurrection, and indeed the venue of the first Christian Novena (nine days of prayer) and the Pentecostal experience of the first disciples.

Manila pilgrims visited the Cenacle on their last day in Jerusalem. To stress the fact that the majority of the Filipino nation is grateful for all the great happenings that occurred in that holy place, but specially for the institution of the Eucharist, they sang two Filipino Congress held in Manila in 1937, and "Isang Bayan, Isang Lahi" from the Golden Jubilee celebration of the said event in 1987.

There wasn't much more that they could do there. They could not, for example, celebrate Mass, because the place is, today, jointly a shrine of Christians, Jews and Muslims. Still, it was a memorable place to visit because it was also there that Jesus said his "ecumenical prayer" in John 17, particularly verses 11, 21, 22, "that they may be one."

April 13, 1997

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, Cycle B

LUKE 24:35-48

**HE OPENED THEIR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND
THE SCRIPTURES**

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

If our reflection on the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection are not superficial, we realize sooner or later that they are narrated to us by John (20:19-29) and Luke in today's Gospel Reading, not so much to "prove" that Jesus is physically alive (in a non-earthly way), but to remind readers that they have an equivalent to the appearances of Jesus, namely, his "word" in the Scriptures (New Testament) that can make him present to the people of all times and places.

Focus Points. (1) V. 39 "It is really I. Touch me, and see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I do." The appearances of Christ after the resurrection are not to be confused with his resurrection itself. On one hand, the appearances (and Christ's reference to his flesh and bones) are necessary to convince the disciples that he, their Master, is still really alive. We must remember that for the disciples, a human being cannot be still truly alive if he no longer has flesh and bones. On the other hand, the resurrection is a "mystery" that cannot be fully grasped by human intelligence, and must be accepted by faith. The appearances were meant by Christ as an aid so that the disciples could make the intellectual "leap in the dark" which is their faith in their Risen Lord.

(2) V. 44-45 "Then he said to them, 'Recall those words I spoke to you when I was still with you: everything written about me in

the law of Moses and the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures." These verses show that Jesus' visit had a higher purpose than just giving peace and joy to the disciples because they are assured of Jesus' continued existence as a living human being. The higher purpose is to teach the disciples and future Christian generations that he, Jesus, becomes really present to them when they gain a true understanding of what the Scriptures say about him.

(3) V. 47 "In his name, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." In the risen Jesus, the remission of sins is available for all people who repent.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. If the first Christian disciples needed help in order to come to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we need this help even more. Surely, just as Jesus helped them, he is also helping us today in a proportionately greater way, availing himself of the holy men and women in his Church.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you been helped in your faith by "living saints" (like Mother Theresa of Calcutta) in the Church?

2. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that Christ "is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in Church" (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 7).

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you felt the presence of Christ in Church during the reading of the Scriptures or during the sermon?

3. What the Church is commissioned to preach is not simply that Jesus is risen but that, because he is risen, all men can now be reconciled with God.

3.1. Pointer for Sharing. Have you ever felt having a share in the resurrection of Christ through the reconciliation with God you experienced through the Sacrament of Penance?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? It was when the disciples were doing a "sharing" that the Risen Christ came to their midst, see Lk 24:36.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? It is by wishing the disciples the blessing of "peace" (SHALOM) that Christ showed his caring for them, see Lk 24:36b.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? Today's Gospel reading ends with an affirmation of the disciples expressed by Christ in the words, "You are witnesses of this" (Lk 24:48).

4. FORGIVENESS. By raising up Jesus from the Dead, God has shown that he is accepting his atonement for the sins of all humankind. Through the Risen Christ, God is now offering forgiveness and reconciliation to each and every human person.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. Salvation is offered to all "in the name" of Jesus, see Lk 24:47.

C. STORY: SCRIPTURES IN CONTEXT

One of the most moving spiritual experiences is that of reading Scriptures in its geographical and cultural context during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This was experienced by pilgrims from Manila during a boat ride on the sea of Galilee. As the boat moved away from the pier, the wind became stronger and stronger. When the boat was about two kilometers away from shore, some pilgrims began to feel sea-sick. Then, all of a sudden, the winds stopped. It was smooth sailing, and a rainbow appeared in the sky.

It was then that the motor of the boat was cut off, and the pilgrims listened to the reading of how Jesus walked on the water of Lake Galilee and how Peter was given the power to do the same but he began sinking when he started to be afraid and lose faith, and how, when Jesus saved Peter and the two climbed into the boat, "the wind died down" (see Mt 14:22-32).

After a few moments of silence, the group had a sharing on the passage, and some sharers and listeners were reduced to tears, not of sorrow but of joy and gratitude at the great mercies of the Lord.

April 20, 1997

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Cycle B

JOHN 10:11-18

THE GOOD SHEPHERD UNITES HIS SHEEP

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The Church is the assembly, the gathering of God's children. The trumpet call to this meeting was sounded in Jesus' life, seen or heard as a revelation of love and a call to love. In this way, the Church is being continually built as people come together in love. The one distinguishing mark of the church is the listening to Jesus' voice. And his voice is his commandment to love. The unity of the Church is not achieved through conformity of practices or even of beliefs. It is attained when people are bound together by the mutual love revealed in Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Focus Points. (1) Jesus' allegory of the "good shepherd" (John 10:11-18) must be seen against the background of Jer 23:1-6 and, especially Ezek 34:1-31. For here Jesus is depicted as the good leader of Israel, as opposed to the bad leaders castigated by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both of these prophets preached in the context of the Babylonian exile, envisaging it as the scattering of Israel, Yahweh's flock. Thus they naturally looked to the return from exile as a re-assembly, a gathering of the scattered sheep.

(2) Jesus claims that this prophetic hope has been realized in him. By laying down his life (10:11, 17, 18), he has brought about the long awaited unity of Israel. But in what sense has his death achieved this unity? By laying down his life he has exemplified in the most eminent degree the love which should rule men's lives. Moreover, he has done this out of obedience to his Father's commandment (10:18). Thus Jesus' death is the expression of God's love for the world, of the Father's love for the Son (10:17), of the Son's love of the Father (10:18), and of the Son's love for his disciples (15:13). Because Jesus' work is a work of LOVE, it effects the unity of Israel. Insofar as Israelites actively welcome this word of love they will be united. Insofar as they refuse it they will be divided.

(3) The unity which Jesus establishes is not only for Israel. It is also for ALL PEOPLE. These are the "other sheep" mentioned by Jesus (10:16). The end of Jesus' work is the unification of the whole human race. The principle of this unity is Jesus' voice (10:16). When all people hear Jesus' voice, that is, when they listen effectively to his word of love, his commandment, the unity destroyed at Babel (Gen 11:1-9) will be re-established.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. There have been good shepherds and bad shepherds of Israel and the Church before Jesus and after Jesus. The good ones before Jesus prefigured him, while the good one after him share in his goodness. The bad ones before Jesus demonstrate the need for a Savior-Shepherd. The bad ones who came after Jesus are the unfaithful one — they were bad precisely because they were unfaithful to the example of Jesus.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you experience having a good shepherd or a bad shepherd?

2. Only love unites. Hatred divides.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do you know an example, from your life experience, of how hatred divides? What about an example, from your life experience too, of how love unites?

3. History has recorded several attempts at uniting the whole human race. Alexander the Great, by promoting the culture we call "hellenism" sought to bring all people together. The Romans, through their "pax romana," and their marvelous roads also tried to unite the whole world known to them. There was the League of Nations and in our times, the United Nations. The most modern attempt has been satellite TV shows and the computer internet. All these attempt have something good to contribute, but they will all fall short of the goal. LOVE is the only force that can unite the whole human race.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you been affected, in one way or another, by attempts to unite the whole human race?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Jesus shared with his disciples his understanding of his salvific mission. It might be good, if we, too, undertake the exercise of sharing our life's vision-mission a supportive community.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? A shepherd of sheep, more than any other kind of shepherd, has to care for his flock because sheep are so defenseless and little endowed. In the human sphere, the shepherd of "little ones" has to be extraordinary in caring — the kind of sharing which, in the Tagalog language, we call "kalinga".

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? When persons lay down their life for others, or put their life at risk for others, they affirm that these other people have great value. Thus, Ninoy Aquino affirmed his countrymen when he said that "the Filipino is worth dying for."

4. FORGIVENESS. The fact that God has given us a Good Shepherd means that he wants to forgive our sins. The coming of a good shepherd to a parish is a blessing to that parish — a sign that God is forgiving the sins of the parishioners. People get the pastor they deserve.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. From the time Jesus gave the example of good shepherding, many other good shepherds have followed him, because they were enabled to do their job well by the graces merited by Jesus Christ.

C. STORY: NO MORE SHEPHERDS IN ISRAEL?

The Manila pilgrim group that toured the Holy Land for ten days did not see a single shepherd during their tour. It could be said, of course, that the tour was too brief and therefore the places visited were few. But it seems safe to point out a more obvious reason: the Israelis of today are no longer the people of ancient days whose main livelihood was agriculture and pasturing livestock. In fact, the pilgrims were surprised to find out that Israel's biggest income-generating industry today is cutting and polishing diamonds!

Not all Israelis are affluent city dwellers, and when the pilgrims were in Galilee and the Golan heights and then in the Jordan River area they saw farms and livestock — but no shepherd. Even the bedouins, Arab nomads whose traditional livelihood was pasturing sheep and goats, upon settling in Israel, engage in other means of earning a living. The pilgrims were much surprised, for example, when they learned that the taxi cabs that ferried them to the top of Mount Tabor, up a winding road too narrow for their tourist bus, were driven by Arab bedouins!

Much of the ancient way of life has disappeared in Israel. But the saving grace is that the land is being restored to its ancient greenery. Hills that have been bare for centuries are now covered with trees. Swamps that were useless and were breeding places for mosquitoes have been drained and converted into productive farms. Fields that were barren for lack of water have now been irrigated and yield a good crop of vegetables and fruits.

People have much to learn from the way their fellow human beings earn their living, as Jesus showed us in his parables and allegories, like the allegory of the Good Shepherd.

April 27, 1997

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Cycle B

JOHN 15:1-8

I AM THE VINE AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The Church is God's chosen people. But it is chosen for a purpose: in order to be the sign of God's joy to the world. We are reminded of this mission every time we drink (at least in the person of the priest) the fruit of the vine at Mass.

Focus Points. (1) In presenting himself as the "true vine" Jesus suggests that he is the fruitful Israel which has at last borne the fruit which God, his Father, expects from his people.

(2) The disciples are the branches of the true vine. In Jesus they form the new, fruitful Israel. Thus the vine has become a symbol of the church, emphasizing its unity, its community life with Jesus and its mission. It is virtually impossible to distinguish, let alone separate, a vine from its branches, as impossible as it is to separate a body from its members. Thus the vine, like the Pauline theme of the body, is a symbol of unity, of the union between Jesus and his church. There is one life flowing throughout the whole vine, thus it is a symbol of the common life of Jesus and his church. But, above all, the vine is cultivated in order that it may produce a fruit which is the symbol of joy: wine (Ps 104:15). Thus it is a symbol of the joy which the Good News of Jesus and his church produces in the world.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Had Jesus lived and preached in the Philippines, he might have compared himself to the palay plant or the coconut. Included among

the many benefits that these agricultural products give to people are the alcoholic drinks that local people call "alak."

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. If you are asked to choose a plant or tree to symbolize yourself, would you choose the palay or the coconut?

2. If, in the Philippines we think of Jesus as the promordial or original rice plant, and the disciples are the rice plants that sprung from the original, then the Church would be the sheaf of rice-bearing stalks bound together at harvest time. Of what good is such a sheaf if the palay is not processed to become rice and used for food or to produce "alak" to gladden fellowship gatherings (granting that people will drink moderately). Let us not forget that the purpose of the Church is to be a sign of God's joy to the world.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do you really think that life is more joyful because of membership in the Church?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Sharing is done best in an atmosphere of joy. Do you have this atmosphere in your community?

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? It is when people are sick, sad or discouraged and fearful that they need our caring most.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? We affirm other when we laugh WITH them (not at them).

4. FORGIVENESS. Reconciliation should be celebrated with joy. In the Philippines that translates to "food and drink".

5. THE GOOD NEWS. Our celebration of Christ's continuing presence among us is done in a sacred meal that should always be joyful: the Holy Mass.

C. STORY: STUDYING PLANTS

Helen of Jerusalem — that's how she wanted to be called — the Manila pilgrim group's tour guide, was very good in doing her job because she not only explained the historical and religious value of pilgrim and tourist sites but also gave a lot of cultural and archaeological background.

One time, when the tourist bus was travelling at the foot of Mt. Carmel, the pilgrims could see vineyards, orange and citrus orchards, and even fruit-bearing banana plants. Helen started sharing some of her agricultural information with her charges. She told them that oranges originally came from China but eventually they were improved in Spain and later in Israel. Seedless oranges, she said, were an Israeli invention, developed so that the Spaniards could not import orange fruits from Israel and plant the seeds in Spain. Bananas, she conceded, are tropical fruit. But when the banana plant is not aware that it is no longer in the tropics, it bears fruit just the same. And Israeli agriculturalists found a way of making the banana plant unaware that it is no longer, for example, in the Philippines. So, even in Israel, it bears fruit — for local consumption and export.

Knowing something about plants can help people attain wisdom. For example, knowing something about the grape bearing vine can help us better appreciate Christ's teachings in today's Gospel Reading. The vine is a most tender plant and it requires constant care and attention. It is a most precious plant and yields valuable fruit. But, failing this fruit, it is fit only as fuel.



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TO: ALL PARISH PRIESTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CACERES
RE: CIVIL MARRIAGE OF FR. REY DIZON AND ANABELLE OLBES


On November 14, 1996, the REV. FR. REY P. DIZON, a diocesan priest of this Archdiocese, contracted civil marriage with ANABELLE A. OLBES in the Office of the Municipal Mayor, Canaman, Camarines Sur.

In accordance with the Sacred Canons, I hereby declare that REV. FR. REY P. DIZON has incurred a SUSPENSION LATAE SENTENTIAE (Canon 1394, 1). In effect, he is prohibited from exercising all of the acts of the power of order and those of the power of governance (Canon 1333, 1).

I hereby also declare that ANABELLE A. OLBES has incurred an INTERDICT LATAE SENTENTIAE. As a result, the REV. FR. REY P. DIZON and same ANABELLE A. OLBES shall be deprived of the Sacraments and the Sacramentals (Canon 1332) until such time that these censures are lifted by the competent authority as determined by the Sacred Canons.

I further declare the abovementioned marriage is canonically null and void ab initio (Canon 1108, 1).

Given at our Chancery, City of Naga, Republic of the Philippines, this 20th day of November in the year of our Lord, 1996.


†LEONARDO Z. LEGASPI, O.P., D.D.
Archbishop of Caceres