

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

Vol. LXXIII, No. 800

May-June 1997

**MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH OF THE
WORLD ON THE OCCASION OF THE
XII WORLD YOUTH DAY 1997**

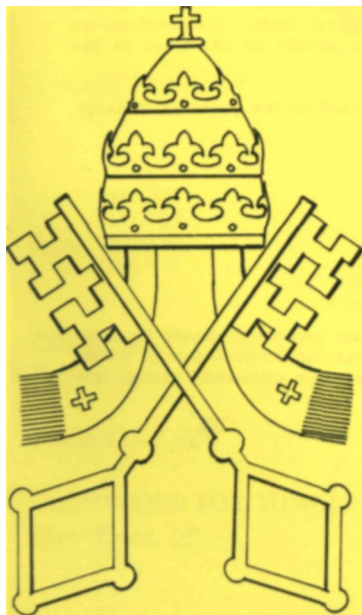
John Paul II

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
LINEAMENTA OF THE SPECIAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
OF ASIA**

Leonardo Legaspi, OP

**1997 NATIONAL
EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESS**

Jaime Card. Sin



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published bi-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at UST Press, Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 21, 1946.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned. They will, however, be given courteous and scholarly attention. Writers are reminded that the scope of this review is ecclesiastical and broadly archival. While we wish to inform the whole Church, our readership is largely clerical and this should be borne in mind by prospective contributors. Articles herein published do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editorial Staff. Communications of an editorial nature concerning articles, cases and reviews should be addressed to the Editor.

Advertising and subscription inquiries should be addressed to the Business Manager.

Subscription Rates

| | One Year | Per copy |
|-------------------------|------------|----------|
| Philippines: | P/200.00 | P38.00 |
| Foreign: (Via Sea Mail) | US\$ 30.00 | \$ 6.00 |
| (Via Air Mail) | US\$ 40.00 | \$ 8.00 |

Subscriptions are paid in advance. In the Philippines, payments should be made by postal money order, telegraphic transfer or check with regional bank *clearing* only. Orders for renewal or change of address should include both old and new addresses, and go into effect fifteen days after notification.

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The Year of Jesus: 1997

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

The pastoral letter on the Advent Season Before the Great Jubilee, signed by Archbishop Oscar Cruz, D.D., President-Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, has given pastoral indications (which maybe followed by the local communities).

- (1) "Together with the Commission on Catechesis, the ... speakers' bureau, shall offer appropriate catechesis on various topics described the TMA master plan, v.g. Baptism (1997), Confirmation (1998), Penance (1999), relating them to the yearly trinitarian focus."
- (2) "Novenas and homilies in preparation for parish fiestas must be used as occasions to develop and explain the themes and programs of the Great Jubilee. The lives of saints are a reflection of the grace redemption which originated from the Trinity."
- (3) "Diocesan/Regional/National Conventions of religious or lay associations, organizations and movements could be venues for highlighting the preparation and celebration of the Great Jubilee."

As we are in the middle of the year dedicated to JESUS, the Second Person in the Trinity, we would like to pose these questions: **What have** been done locally in the area of catechesis to explain the sacrament of

baptism which gives birth in the Spirit to every believer? Are the homilies in the parishes taking into consideration the centrality of Jesus in the life of the local church? Have the meetings of religious and lay organizations and movements looked into Jesus as savior to be the point of departure and the climax of all their individual and communal activities?

Yes, the preparation of the Great Jubilee is taken place in the local communities. All must realize that *"Christians are called to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the beginning of the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in their hearts, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context, and in world history itself."*

Message for the Celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life

JOHN PAUL II

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear consecrated persons!

1. The celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life, which will be observed for the first time on 2 February, is intended to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels and, at the same time, is intended to be a suitable occasion for consecrated persons to renew their commitment and rekindle the fervor which should inspire their offering of themselves to the Lord.

The mission of the consecrated life in the present and in the future of the Church, now at the threshold of the third millenium, concerns not merely those who have received this special charism, but the entire Christian community. In the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* issued last year, I wrote: "In effect, *the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church* as a decisive element for her mission, since it 'manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling' and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse" (VC 3). Thus, I would like to renew the invitation to consecrated persons to look to the future with confidence, relying on the fidelity of God and the power of his grace, who is always able to accomplish new wonders: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!* Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (VC 110).

The reasons for the World Day for Consecrated Life

2. The purpose of such a day is threefold: **in the first place**, it answers the intimate need to praise the Lord more solemnly and to thank him for the great gift of consecrated life, which enriches and gladdens the Christian community by the multiplicity of its charisms and by the edifying fruits of so many lives totally given to the cause of the Kingdom. We should never forget that consecrated life, before being a commitment of men and women, is a gift which comes from on high, an initiative of the Father "who draws his creatures to himself with a special love and for a special mission" (VC 17). This look of special love profoundly touches the heart of the one called, who is urged by the Holy Spirit to place himself or herself in the footsteps of Christ, in a particular way of following him, by means of assuming the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. A stupendous gift!

"What would become of the world if there were no religious?" St. Teresa rightly asked herself (*Autobiography*, ch. 32, n. 11). This is a question which brings us to give unceasing thanks to the Lord, who by this singular gift of the Spirit continues to enliven and sustain the Church in its demanding journey through this world.

3. In **the second place**, this day is intended to promote a knowledge of and esteem for the consecrated life by the entire People of God.

As the Council underlined (LG 44) and as I have had occasion to emphasize in the above-mentioned Apostolic Exhortation, consecrated life "'constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding re-enactment in the Church' of the way of life which Jesus, the supreme Consecrated One and missionary of the Father for the sake of his Kingdom, embraced and proposed to his disciples" (VC 22). It is thus a special and living memory of his being Son, who makes of his Father his only love — his virginity; who finds in him his exclusive richness — his poverty; and who has, in the will of his Father, the "food" by which he is nourished (cf. *Jn* 4:34) - his obedience.

This form of life, embraced by Christ and made present particularly by consecrated persons, is of great importance for the Church, called in every member to live the same upward striving toward God who is All, following Christ in the light and power of the Holy Spirit.

The life of special consecration, in its many forms, is thus at the service of the baptismal consecration of all the faithful. In contemplating the gift of consecrated life, the Church contemplates her own intimate vocation of belonging only to her Lord, desirous of being in his eyes "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish" (*Eph 5:27*).

The fittingness of dedicating a special World Day is evident, then, for it assures that the doctrine about consecrated life will be more widely and deeply meditated and assimilated by all members of the People of God.

4. **The third reason** regards consecrated persons directly. They are invited to celebrate together solemnly the marvels which the Lord has accomplished in them, to discover by a more illumined faith the rays of divine beauty spread by the Spirit in their way of life, and to acquire a more vivid consciousness of their irreplaceable mission in the Church and in the world.

Immersed in a world which is often agitated and distracted, taken up sometimes by the press of responsibilities, consecrated persons also will be helped by the celebration of this annual World Day to return to the sources of their vocation, to take stock of their own lives, to confirm the commitment of their own consecration. In this way, they will be able to give witness with joy to the men and women of our time, in diverse situations, that the Lord is the Love who is able to fill the heart of the human person.

Truly there is great urgency that the consecrated life show itself ever more "full of joy and of the Holy Spirit," that it forge ahead dynamically in the paths of mission, that it be backed up by the strength of lived witness, because "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41).

On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

5. The World Day for Consecrated Life will be celebrated on the feast which commemorates the presentation which Mary and Joseph made of Jesus in the temple "to present him to the Lord" (*Lk 2:22*).

This Gospel scene reveals the mystery of Jesus, the One consecrated by the Father, come into the world to carry out his will faithfully (cf. *Heb* 10:5.-7). Simeon points to Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (*Lk* 2:32) and by a prophetic word foretells the supreme offering of Jesus to the Father and his final victory (*Lk* 2:32-35).

In this way the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is an eloquent icon of the total offering of one's life for all those who are called to show forth in the Church and in the world, by means of the evangelical counsels "the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one" (VC 1).

Mary is associated with the presentation of Christ.

The Virgin Mother who carries Jesus to the temple so that he can be offered to the Father expresses very well the figure of the Church who continues to offer her sons and daughters to the heavenly Father, associating them with the one oblation of Christ, cause and model of all consecration in the Church.

For some years now, in the Church of Rome and in other dioceses, the feast of 2 February has almost spontaneously brought numerous members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life around the Pope and diocesan pastors in order to demonstrate together, in communion with the entire People of God, the gift and commitment of their call, the variety of charisms of consecrated life, and their special place within the community of believers.

It is my wish that this experience be extended to the whole Church, so that the celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life may gather consecrated persons together with other faithful in order to sing with the Virgin Mary the marvels which the Lord accomplishes in so many of his sons and daughters, and to manifest to all that being a "people consecrated to himself" (cf. *Deut* 28:9) is the condition of all those who are redeemed by Christ.

Fruits hoped for the mission of the whole Church

6. Dear brothers and sisters, as I entrust to the maternal protection of Mary the institution of this World Day, I deeply hope that it bear abundant

fruits for the holiness and the mission of the Church. May it help, in a special way, to heighten in the Christian community an esteem for vocations of special consecration, to stimulate ever more intense prayer for obtaining them from the Lord, in this way helping to mature in young people and families a generous willingness to receive them as gift. The life of the Church as a whole will draw benefit from this and so will the new evangelization.

I trust that this World Day of prayer and reflection will help the *particular Churches* to treasure ever more the gift of consecrated life and to be measured by its message, to find the proper and fruitful balance between action and contemplation, between prayer and charity, and between commitment in the present time and eschatological hope.

May the Virgin Mary, who had the sublime privilege of presenting to the Father his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a pure and holy oblation, obtain for us that we may constantly be open and welcoming in face of the great works which He does not cease to accomplish for the good of the Church and of all of humanity.

With these sentiments, and with the prayer that consecrated persons may persevere with joy in their vocation, I impart to all the Apostolic Blessing.

Vatican City, 6 January 1997.

Message to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the XII World Youth Day 1997

JOHN PAUL H

"Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see"
(cf. *Jn* 1:38-39)

Dear Young People!

1. I come to you with joy to continue the dialogue, already long, whose fabric we are weaving together on the occasion of the World Youth Day. In communion with the whole people of God on the journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I want to invite you this year to fix your eyes on Jesus, Teacher and Lord of life, with the help of the words recalled in John's Gospel: "Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see" (cf. 1:38-39).

In all the local Churches, during the coming months, you will be meeting together to reflect, with your Pastors, on these words of the Gospel. Then, in August 1997, together with many of you, we will have the experience of the XII World Youth Day, celebrated at international level in Paris, at the heart of the continent of Europe. In that metropolis, for centuries a crossroads for peoples, for art and culture, the young people of France are already preparing, enthusiastically, to welcome their young contemporaries from every corner of the planet. Following the Holy Year Cross, the people of the younger generations who believe in Christ will, once again, become a living icon of the Church in her pilgrimage along the roads of the world. Meeting in prayer and reflection, in the dialogue that unites beyond all difference

of language and race, in the sharing of ideals, problems and hopes, these young people will experience living the reality promised by Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Mt* 18:20).

2. Youth of the whole world, it is along the paths of daily life that you can meet the Lord! Do you remember how the disciples, hurrying to the banks of the Jordan to listen to the last of the great prophets, John the Baptist, saw Jesus of Nazareth pointed out to them as the Messiah, the Lamb of God? Out of curiosity they decided to follow Him at a distance. They were shy almost and embarrassed, until, turning round, He asked them: "What do you seek?" So began the dialogue that would give rise to the adventure of John, Andrew, Simon "Peter" and the other apostles (cf. *Jn* 1:29-51).

In this concrete and surprising encounter, described in a few, essential words, we find the origin of every journey in faith. It is Jesus who takes the initiative. When we have to do with Him, the question is always turned upside down: from questioners, we become questioned; "searchers", we discover that we are "sought"; He, indeed, has always loved us first (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10). This is the fundamental dimension of the encounter: we are not dealing with something, but with Someone, with the "Living One". Christians are not the disciples of a system of philosophy: they are men and women who, in faith, have experienced the encounter with Christ (cf. *1 Jn* 1:14).

We are living in an era of great changes: the rapid decline of ideologies that seemed to promise a long resistance to the wear and tear of time; the tracing out on the planet of new confines and frontiers. Humanity often finds itself uncertain, bewildered and anxious (cf. *Mt* 9:36). But the word of God knows no decline; throughout history and among changing events, it remains firm and gives light (cf. *Mt* 24:35). The faith of the Church is founded on Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday and today and for ever (cf. *Heb* 13:8). It gives Christ as reference for an answer to the questions rising up from the human heart in face of the mystery of life and death. Only from Christ, indeed, can there be answers that do not deceive nor disappoint.

When my thoughts go back to your words, spoken during the unforgettable encounters I have had the joy of experiencing with you

on my apostolic journeys to every part of the world, I seem to read in them, with vital urgency, the very question of the disciples: "Teacher, where are you staying?" See that you are able to listen again, in the silence of prayer, to Jesus' answer: "Come and see".

3. Dear young people, like the first disciples, follow Jesus! Do not be afraid to draw near to Him, to cross the threshold of his dwelling, to speak with Him, face to face, as you talk with a friend (cf. *Ex* 33:11). Do not be afraid of the "new life" He is offering. He Himself makes it possible for you to receive that life and practise it, with the help of his grace and the gift of his Spirit.

It is true: Jesus is a demanding friend. He points to lofty goals; he asks us to go out of ourselves in order to meet Him, entrusting to Him our whole life: "Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it" (*Mk* 8:35). The proposal may seem difficult, and, in some cases, frightening. But - I ask you - is it better to be resigned to a life without ideals, to a world made in our image and likeness, or rather, generously to seek truth, goodness, justice, working for a world that reflects the beauty of God, even at the cost of facing the trials it may involve?

Break down the barriers of superficiality and fear! Recognizing that you are "new" men and women, regenerated by the grace of Baptism, talk with Jesus in prayer and while listening to the Word; experience the joy of reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance; receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist; welcome and serve Him in your brothers and sisters. You will discover the truth about yourselves and your inner unity, and you will find a "Thou" who gives the cure for anxieties, for nightmares and for the unbridled subjectivism that leaves you no peace.

4. "Come and see". You will meet Jesus where men and women are suffering and hoping: in the little villages, scattered across the continents and seemingly on the fringe of history, as Nazareth was when God sent his Angel to Mary; in the huge metropolises, where millions of human beings live often as strangers. In reality, every human being is a "fellow citizen" of Christ.

Jesus is living next to you, in the brothers and sisters with whom you share your daily existence. His visage is that of the poorest, of the marginalized who, not infrequently, are victims of an unjust model of development, in which profit is given first place and the human being is made a means rather than an end. Jesus' dwelling is wherever a human person is suffering because rights are denied, hopes betrayed, anxieties ignored. There, in the midst of humankind, is the dwelling of Christ, who asks you to dry every tear in his name, and to remind whoever feels lonely that no one whose hope is placed in Him is ever alone (cf. *Mt 25:31-6*).

5. *Jesus dwells among those who call on Him without having known Him*; among those who, after beginning to know Him, have lost Him through no fault of their own; among those who seek Him in sincerity of heart, while coming from different cultural and religious contexts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16). As disciples and friends of Jesus, become agents of dialogue and collaboration with those who believe in a God who rules the universe with infinite love; be ambassadors of the Messiah you have found and known in his "dwelling", the Church, so that many more young people of your age may be able to follow in his footsteps; their way lighted by your fraternal charity and by the joy in your eyes that have contemplated Christ.

Jesus dwells among the men and women "honoured with the name of Christian" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 15). All are able to meet Him in the Scriptures, in prayer and in service of their neighbours. On the eve of the third millennium, it is becoming every day a more urgent duty to repair the scandal of the division among Christians, strengthening unity through dialogue, prayer in common and witness. It is not a matter of ignoring differences and problems in the detachment of a lukewarm relativism; that would be like covering the wound without healing it, with the risk of interrupting the journey before reaching the goal of full communion. On the contrary, it is a matter of working - under the guidance of the Holy Spirit - with a view to effective reconciliation, trusting in the efficacy of Jesus' prayer on the eve of his passion: "Father, that they may be one even as we are one" (cf. *Jn 17:22*). The more you cling to Jesus the more capable you will become of being close to one another; and insofar as you make concrete gestures of reconciliation you will enter into the intimacy of his love.

Jesus dwells especially in your parishes, in the communities in which you live, in the associations and ecclesial movements to which you belong, as well as in many contemporary forms of grouping and apostolate at the service of the new evangelization. This rich variety of charisms is a benefit for the whole Church, and an encouragement for every believer to place his or her capacities at the service of the one Lord, fount of salvation for all humankind.

6. Jesus is "the Word of the Father" (cf. *Jn* 1:1), gift to humankind, to reveal the face of God, and to give a meaning and goal to their uncertain steps. God who "spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets in many and various ways, has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (*Heb* 1:1-2). His word is not an imposition, unhinging the doors of conscience; it is a persuasive voice, a free gift that, if it is to have a saving effect in each one's concrete existence, calls for an attitude of readiness and responsibility, a pure heart and a free mind.

In your groups, dear young people, multiply the occasions for hearing and studying the Word of the Lord, especially through the *lectio divina*. You will discover the secrets of the Heart of God and will derive profit for discerning situations and transforming reality. Guided by Holy Scripture, you will be able to recognize the Lord's presence in your daily life; and even the "desert" can then become a "garden", where it is possible for the creature to talk familiarly with the Creator: "When I am reading the divine Scripture, God walks again in the earthly Paradise" (St. Ambrose, *Epistle* 49, 3).

7. *Jesus lives among us in the Eucharist*, the supreme fulfillment of his real presence, a presence that is contemporary with the history of humankind. Amidst the uncertainties and distractions of daily life, imitate the disciples on their way to Emmaus; like them, say to the Risen One, revealed in the act of breaking the bread: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent" (*Lk* 24:29). Call out to Jesus to remain with you always along the many roads to Emmaus of our time. May He be your strength, your point of reference, your enduring hope. May the Eucharistic Bread, dear young people, never be lacking on the tables of your existence. And may you draw from this Bread the strength to bear witness to the faith!

Around the Eucharistic table the harmonious unity of the Church is realized and made manifest; the mystery of missionary communion, in which all feel that they are children, sisters and brothers, without any exclusion or difference from race, language, age, social situation or culture. Dear young people, make your generous and responsible contribution to the constant building up of the Church as a family, a place of dialogue and mutual acceptance, a space of peace, mercy and pardon.

8. Enlightened by the Word and strengthened by the Bread of the Eucharist, dear young people, you are called to be credible witnesses to the Gospel of Christ, who makes all things new.

But how are you to be recognized as true disciples of Christ? By the fact that you have "love for one another" (*Jn* 13:35) after the example of his love: a love that is freely given, infinitely patient and denied to no one (cf. *1 Cor* 13:4-7). Fidelity to the new commandment will be the guarantee that you are consistent with respect to what you are proclaiming. This is the great "novelty" which can amaze a world that, unfortunately, is still torn and divided by violent conflicts that at times are clearly evident, at times subtle and hidden. In this world you are called to live fraternally, not as a Utopia but as a real possibility; in this society you are called, as true missionaries of Christ, to build the civilization of love.

9. On 30 September 1997 will occur the centenary of the death of St. Teresa of Lisieux. Hers is a figure that, in her own country, cannot fail to draw the attention of a great many young pilgrims; Teresa, precisely, is a young Saint, and her message today is simple and suggestive, brimming over with amazement and gratitude: God is Love; every person is loved by God, who expects to be welcomed and loved by each one. This is a message, young people of today, that you are called to receive and to shout aloud to those of your own age: "Man is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church" (cf. *Christifideles Laid*, 34).

From the youth of Teresa of the Child Jesus spring forth her enthusiasm for the Lord, the intensity of her love, the realistic daring of her great projects. The charm of her holiness is confirmation that God grants in abundance, even to the young, the treasures of his wisdom.

Walk with her the humble and simple way of Christian maturity, at the school of the Gospel. Stay with her in the "heart" of the Church, living radically the option for Christ.

10. Dear young people, in the house where Jesus dwells meet the most sweet presence of the Mother. It is in Mary's womb that the Word was made flesh. Accepting the role assigned to her in the plan of salvation, the Virgin became a model for every disciple of Christ.

I entrust to Her the preparation and the celebration of the XII World Youth Day, together with the hopes and expectations of the young people who, with Her, are repeating in every corner of the planet: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (cf. *Lk* 1:38); and who are going to meet Jesus, to stay with Him, ready then to proclaim to their contemporaries, as did the Apostles: "We have found the Messiah!" (*Jn* 1:41).

With this message I cordially greet each one of you and, accompanying you with my prayer, I bless you.

From Castel Gandolfo, 15 August 1996, Solemnity of the Assumption into Heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Message for the Fifth World Day of the Sick

JOHN PAUL II

I. The next World Day of the Sick will be celebrated on February II, 1997 at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, in the noble nation of Portugal. The place chosen is particularly significant for me. I in fact wished to go there on the anniversary of the assassination attempt I suffered in St. Peter's Square, in order to thank Divine Providence, according to whose inscrutable design the dramatic event had mysteriously coincided with the anniversary of the first appearance of the Mother of Jesus on May 13, 1917, at the Cave of Ma.

I am therefore happy that the official celebration of a Day like that of the Sick, which is especially close to my heart, should be held at Fatima. It will afford each of us the opportunity to listen once again to the message of the Virgin, whose basic core is "the call to conversion and penance, as in the Gospel. This call was pronounced at the beginning of the twentieth century and has thus been addressed to this century in particular. The Lady of the message seems to read the signs of the times — the signs of our time — with special insight" (*Allocution at Fatima*, May 13, 1982, in *Insegnamenti* V/2 [1982], p. 1580).

In listening to the Most Blessed Virgin it will be possible to rediscover her mission in the mystery of Christ and of the Church in a vital and moving way — a mission which is already found to be indicated in the Gospel, when Mary asks Christ to begin to perform his miracles, saying to the servants at the wedding banquet at Cana- in

Galilee, "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2:5). At Fatima She echoed a specific word pronounced by her Son at the outset of his public mission: "The time is fulfilled...; repent and believe in the Gospel" (*Mk* 1:15). The insistent invitation of Mary Most Holy to penance is nothing but the manifestation of her maternal concern for the fate of the human family, in need of conversion, of forgiveness.

2. Mary became the spokeswoman for other words of Christ at Fatima. Christ's invitation especially resounded in the Cave of Iria: "Come to me, all you that labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest" (*Mt* 11:28). Are the throngs of pilgrims who hasten to that blessed land from all over the world not perhaps eloquent testimony of the need for relief and comfort which numberless persons experience in their lives?

Above all, it is the suffering who feel attracted by the perspective of "relief which the Divine Physician is able to offer those who turn to Him with trust. And in Fatima this relief is found: sometimes it is physical relief, when, in his providence, God grants healing from illness; more often it is spiritual relief, when the soul, pervaded by the inner light of grace, finds the strength to accept the painful weight of infirmity, transforming it, through communion with Christ, the suffering servant, into an instrument of redemption and salvation for oneself and one's brothers and sisters.

The direction to move in, on this hard road, is pointed out to us by the motherly voice of Mary, who, in the history and life of the Church, has always continued to repeat — and in a special way in our time — the words "Do whatever He tells you."

3. The World Day of the Sick, then, is a precious occasion to hear again and accept the exhortation of the Mother of Jesus, who, at the foot of the Cross, was entrusted with mankind (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27). The World Day is situated in the first year of the Triduum preparatory to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000: a year entirely dedicated to reflection on Christ. Precisely this reflection on the centrality of Christ "cannot be detached from recognition of the role played by his Most Holy Mother ... Indeed, Mary perennially points to her Divine Son and proposes Herself to all believers as a model of lived faith" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 43).

The exemplariness of Mary is conveyed in the most lofty fashion by the invitation to look at the Crucified One so as to learn from Him, who, in completely taking on the human condition, freely wished to burden Himself with our sufferings and offer Himself to the Father as an innocent victim for us men and for our salvation, "with loud cries and tears" (*Heb 5:7*). He thus redeemed suffering, transforming it into a gift of salvific love.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters who are suffering in spirit and in body! Do not yield to the temptation to regard pain as an experience which is only negative, to the point of doubting God's goodness. In the suffering Christ every sick person finds the meaning of his or her afflictions. Suffering and illness belong to the condition of man, a fragile, limited creature, marked by original sin from birth on. In Christ, who died and rose again, however, humanity discovers a new dimension to its suffering: instead of a failure, it reveals itself to be the occasion for offering witness to faith and love.

Dear people who are sick, be able to find in love "the salvific meaning of your pain and valid answers to all your questions" (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 31). Yours is a mission of most lofty value for both the Church and society. "You that bear the weight of suffering occupy the first places among those whom God loves. As with all those He met along the roads of Palestine, Jesus directs a gaze full of tenderness at you; his love will never be lacking" (*Address to the Sick and Suffering*, Tours, September 21, 1996, 2, in *L Osservatore Romano*, September 23-24, 1996, p. 4). Manage to be generous witness to this privileged love through the gift of your suffering, which can do so much for the salvation of the human race.

In a society like the present one, which is seeking to build its future on well-being and consumerism and measures everything in terms of efficiency and profit, illness and suffering, which cannot be denied, are either removed or emptied of their meaning in the illusion of their being overcome exclusively through the means offered by the progress of science and technology.

Illness and suffering no doubt remain a limit and a trial for the human mind. In the light of Christ's Cross, however, they become a privileged moment for growth in faith and a precious instrument to

contribute, in union with Jesus the Redeemer, to implementing the divine project of salvation.

5. In the page of the Gospel referring to the Last Judgment, when "the Son of man comes in his glory with all his angels" (Aft 25:31), the criteria on the basis of which the sentence will be pronounced are indicated. As we know, they are summarized in the solemn concluding affirmation: "In truth, I tell you: every time you did these things to a single one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Aft 25:40). Among these "least of my brothers" are the sick (cf. Aft 25:36), who are often alone and marginalized by society. To make public opinion sensitive to them is one of the main goals of celebrating the World Day of the Sick: to be close to those suffering so that they will be able to make their suffering fruitful, also by way of the help of those who are at their side to provide care and assistance — this is the commitment the World Day is calling for.

Following the example of Jesus, as "Good Samaritans" we must approach a suffering man. We must learn to "serve the Son of man men," as Blessed Luigi Orione said (cf. *Scritti*, 57, 104). We must be able to see the sufferings of our brothers and sisters with the eyes of solidarity, not "pass by," but "become a neighbor," pausing at their side, with gestures of service and love aimed at the integral health of the human person. A society is characterized by the attention it devotes to those suffering and by the attitude it adopts towards them.

Too many human beings in the world in which we live remain excluded from the love of the family and social community. In appearing in Fatima to three poor little shepherds to make them announcers of the Gospel message, the Most Blessed Virgin renewed her liberating *Magnificat*, speaking on behalf of "those who do not passively accept the adverse circumstances in personal and social life and are not victims of 'alienation' — as it is termed today — but, rather, proclaim with Her that God *raises high the lowly* and, when appropriate, *pulls down princes from their thrones*" (*Homily at the Sanctuary of Zapopan*, January 30, 1979, 4, in *Insegnamenti* JJ/1 [1979], p. 295).

6. On this occasion, too, I thus renew & forceful appeal to public leaders, international and national organizations in the health field, health care workers, volunteer associations, and all men of good will, that they join

in the commitment of the Church, which, in adhering to Christ's teaching, seeks to announce the Gospel through the witness of service to those who suffer.

May the Most Blessed Virgin, who has dried so many tears in Fatima, help everyone to transform this World Day of the Sick into a distinctive moment for "new evangelization."

With these wishes, as I invoke the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Lord and our Mother, for the initiatives undertaken in connection with this Day, I willingly impart my affectionate Blessing to you, dear people who are ill, your relatives, health care workers, volunteers, and all who, in a spirit of solidarity, are close to you in your sufferings.

From the Vatican, October 18, 1996.

(The English text of the *Message* has been prepared by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers).

Homily for the Feast of Presentation: Welcome the Light of Christ's Revelation

JOHN PAUL H

"Together with the elderly Simeon and the prophetess Anna, let us go to meet the Lord in his temple. Let us welcome the light of his Revelation, committing ourselves to spreading it among our brothers and sisters in view of the now imminent Great Jubilee of the Year 2000", the Holy Father said in his homily on Sunday, 2 February, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, during the Mass he celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica. The Pope made particular reference to the World Day for Consecrated Life, which is being celebrated for the first time this year. Here is a translation of his homily, which was given in Italian.

1. *Lumen ad revelationem gentium*: a light for revelation to the Gentiles (cf. Lk 2:32).

Forty days after his birth, Jesus was taken by Mary and Joseph to the temple to be presented to the Lord (cf. Lk 2:22), according to what the law of Moses prescribes: "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord" (Lk 2:23); and to offer in sacrifice "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons, in accord with the dictate in the law of the Lord" (Lk 2:24).

In recalling these events, the liturgy intentionally and precisely follows the sequence of Gospel events: the completion of the 40 days following Christ's birth. It does the same, later, with regard to the period between the Resurrection and the Ascension into heaven.

Three basic elements can be seen in the Gospel event celebrated today: the mystery of the *coming*, the reality of the *meeting* and the proclamation of the *prophecy*.

2. First of all, the *mystery of the coming*. The biblical readings we have heard stress the *extraordinary nature* of God's coming: the prophet Malachi announces it in a transport of joy, the responsorial psalm sings it and Luke's Gospel text describes it. We need only listen, for example, to the responsorial psalm: "Lift up, O gates, your lintels ... that the king of glory may come in! Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle ... The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory" (Ps 23[24]:7-8;10).

Behold the true and eternal High Priest

He who had been awaited for centuries enters the temple of Jerusalem, he who fulfills the promise of the Old Covenant: the Messiah foretold. The psalmist calls him "the king of glory". Only later will it become clear that his kingdom is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36) and that those who belong to this world are not preparing a royal crown for him, but a crown of thorns.

However, the liturgy looks beyond. In that 40-day-old infant it sees the "light" destined to illumine the nations, and presents him as the "glory" of the people of Israel (cf. Lk 2:32). It is he who must conquer death, as the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims, explaining the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Heb 2:14), having taken on human nature.

After describing the mystery of the Incarnation, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews presents the mystery of Redemption: "Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (ibid., 2:17-18). This is a deep and moving presentation of the mystery of Christ. The passage from the Letter to the Hebrews helps us to understand better why this coming to Jerusalem of Mary's newborn Son

should be a decisive event in the history of salvation. Since it had been built, the temple was awaiting in a most exceptional way the One who had been promised. Thus his coming has a priestly meaning: "*Ecce sacerdos magnus*"; behold, the true and eternal High Priest enters the temple.

3. The second characteristic element of today's celebration is *the reality of the meeting*. Even if no one was waiting for Joseph and Mary when they arrived hidden among the people at the temple in Jerusalem with the baby Jesus, something most unusual occurs. Here they meet persons guided by the Holy Spirit: the elderly Simeon of whom St. Luke writes: "This man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Lk 2:25-26), and the prophetess Anna, who had lived "with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day" (Lk 2:36-37). The Evangelist continues: "And coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38).

Coming of the Messiah did not pass unobserved

Simeon and Anna: a man and a woman, representatives of the Old Covenant, who, in a certain sense, had lived their whole lives for the moment when the temple of Jerusalem would be visited by the expected Messiah. Simeon and Anna understand that the moment has come at last, and reassured by the meeting, they can face the last phase of their life with peaceful hearts: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Lk 2:29-30).

At this discreet encounter, the words and actions effectively express the reality of the event taking place. The coming of the Messiah has not passed unobserved. It was recognized through the penetrating gaze of faith, which the elderly Simeon expresses in his moving words.

4. The third element that appears in this feast is *prophecy*: today truly prophetic words resound. Every day the Liturgy of the Hours ends the day with Simeon's inspired canticle: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of your people Israel" (Lk 2:29-32).

The elderly Simeon adds, turning to Mary: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35).

Thus while we are still at the dawn of Jesus' life, we are already oriented to Calvary. It is on the Cross that Jesus will be definitively confirmed as a sign of contradiction, and it is there that his Mother's heart will be pierced by the sword of sorrow. We are told about it all from the beginning, on the 40th day after Jesus' birth, on the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, so important in the Church's liturgy.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, today's feast is enriched this year with a new significance. In fact, for the first time we are celebrating the *Day for Consecrated Life*.

Let us spread the light among **our** brothers **and** sisters

Dear men and women religious and you, dear brothers and sisters, members of secular institutes and societies of apostolic life, you are all entrusted with the task of proclaiming, by word and example, the primacy of the Absolute over every human reality. This is an urgent task in our time, which often seems to have lost the genuine sense of God. As I recalled in *the Message I addressed to you for this first Day for Consecrated Life*: "Truly there is great urgency that the consecrated life show itself ever more 'full of joy and of the Holy Spirit', that it forge ahead dynamically in the paths of mission, that it be backed up by the strength of lived witness, because 'modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and 'if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses' (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41)" (*V Osservatore Romano* English edition, 29 January 1997, p. 3).

Together with the elderly Simeon and the prophetess Anna, let us go to meet the Lord in his temple. Let us welcome the light of his Revelation, committing ourselves to spreading it among our brothers and sisters in view of the now imminent Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

May the Blessed Virgin,
Mother of hope and joy,
accompany us
and grant that all believers
may be witnesses to the salvation
which God has prepared in the presence of all peoples
in his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for the glory of his people Israel.
Amen!

Sunday Angelus: Every Human Life is Sacred

JOHN PAUL H

"Life one's own and that of others, cannot be disposed of at will: it belongs to the Author of life. Love inspires the culture of life, while selfishness inspires the culture of death", the Holy Father said before praying the Angelus on Sunday, 2 February, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, as well as the first World Day for Consecrated Life and, in Italy, Pro-Life Day. Here is a translation of the Pope's reflection, which was given in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today, the feast of Candlemass, we recall the presentation of Jesus in the temple. Forty days after his birth, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to offer him to the Lord as prescribed by the law of Moses. This is an episode that fits within the perspective of the People of Israel's special consecration to God. But it also has a broader meaning: it recalls the *gratitude* we owe the Creator for every human life.

Life is a great gift of God, to be always welcomed with thanksgiving. If last Sunday I was concerned about the absence of values that threatens our society, today I would like forcefully to recall one of these *basic values* which must be absolutely recovered if we do not want to fall headlong into the abyss. I am referring to *the sacred value of life, of every human life*, from its origin in the mother's womb to its natural end.

I say this, recalling that in Italy today *Pro-Life Day* is being celebrated, a favourable opportunity for vigorously affirming that life, one's own and that of others, cannot be disposed of at will: it belongs to the Author of life. Love inspires the culture of death. Choose life, says the Lord, that you and your descendants may live! (cf. Dt 30:19).

2. In the temple of Jerusalem, according to the Gospel account, Simeon, an elderly man of God, takes Jesus in his arms and recognizes that in him salvation has come for Israel and for all peoples: *the Light of the Gentiles* (cf. Lk 2:30:31).

The words of the holy old man express the longing that pervades human history. They express that *waiting for God*, that universal desire, unconscious perhaps, but ineffaceable, that he would come to meet us so that we might be able to share in his life. Simeon embodies the image of humanity striving to grasp that ray of light which renews all things, the seed of life that transforms all old age into everlasting youth.

3. In this context, the *Day for Consecrated Life* that we are celebrating today for the first time takes on a special significance. For some time the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple has brought together in diocesan communities the members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, to show God's People the joy of unreserved commitment to the Lord and his kingdom. I wanted this experience to be extended to the whole Church, to give thanks to God for the great gift of consecrated life and to encourage ever greater gratitude and esteem for it. We are also spurred by the recently celebrated Synod of Bishops on the consecrated life, whose results are contained in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

As I invite you to pray, dear friends, for our brothers and sisters who offer their witness to the poor, chaste and obedient Christ, my thoughts turn in a particular way to all those who have enriched their service to the Church with the sacrifice of their lives. I have just heard the news of the tragic death of Fr. Guy Pinard, a Missionary of Africa, who was cruelly killed this morning as he celebrated Mass at his parish church in Ruhengeri, Rwanda. Let us pray to the Blessed Virgin for him, for his loved ones and for his people, that they may once again find peace in the respect for life.

After praying the Angelus the Holy Father said:

Today the Diocese of Rome joins the *Week of the Family* with Pro-Life Day. Truly, married life, lived according to God's plan, is itself a "gospel" which the world needs, just as it needs the witness offered by consecrated life. May all families, and in particular those in Rome, be leaders on the missionary journey of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000.

I also express my deep satisfaction with the symposium on the theme, *"The Genome and Aging: The Mystery of Man"*, which was held in Rome these past few days. I hope that this interdisciplinary study will help to promote the dignity and rights of human life.

The Advent Season Before the Great Jubilee

OSCAR V. CRUZ

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever"
(Heb 13:8)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ: We are providentially in the last three years of the Second Millennium. In his very first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) our Holy Father, John Paul II, announced: "This time which God in his hidden design has entrusted to me, is already very close to the year 2000. For the Church, it will be the year of a Great Jubilee" (RH 1).

And now in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, the Pope speaks of the preparation for the Great Jubilee of our Redemption as "a hermeneutical key" of his Pontificate (TMA 23) and the time leading to it as "a new advent", an extended advent season" (TMA 23) to "renew our hope in the definitive coming of the kingdom of God" (TMA 46).

The Holy Father calls on all of us in the local churches to prepare and celebrate the 2000th anniversary of Christ's incarnation and of our redemption "as it involves a special grace for the whole of humanity" (TMA 46). It is, therefore, a great opportunity for us to proclaim with our lips and with our deeds our faith in the one mediator between God and Men, "Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8), "the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, to whom all time belongs, all ages, all glory and power" (Easter Vigil).

I. PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE JUBILEE

We highly recommended the reading and rereading of the text *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* as it concretely contains the master plan of the Holy Father for the next three years. What is the primary objective of the Great Jubilee? The primary objective of the Jubilee is *"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 a context of even more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbor, especially the most needy"* (TMA 42).

The strengthening of faith and of witness cannot be achieved without personal conversion and renewal, through intense prayer and witnessing service as well as "a personal acceptance of the person of Jesus as Lord and Saviour" (cf. PCP-JI 64, 73-79). This advent season for the Great Jubilee, this time of grace and the Lord's visitation, will be to some extent "a three-year retreat" with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity as our focus and with Mary as our companion and guide. But our prayer must also resonate with our growing in solidarity with one another, especially with the most needy through our recommitment to the message of salvation and liberation as we have announced in our Second Plenary Council of the Philippines.

To celebrate "the new springtime of Christian-life" (TMA 18), we all need purification and examination of conscience. The joy of the Great Jubilee must be based on the forgiveness of sins, on penance and reconciliation. We cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium, the Holy Father tells us, without purifying ourselves, through repentance, of past errors and infidelity, of inconsistency and slowness to act, of being the cause of division, intolerance and violence (cf. TMA 33-35). In this respect, the celebration of the Great Jubilee of Redemption will be both a personal and social event. Society will be transformed to the extent that we individually and personally are converted and reconciled.

II. THE PATH FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Following Vatican JJ's path of renewal and revitalization of Christian Life (cf. TMA 19), we celebrated in 1991 the Second Plenary

Council of the Philippines, formulated in 1992 our CBCP Vision and Mission Statement, and approved in 1993 our National Pastoral Plan. We can appropriately say that PCP-II was for the Church in the Philippines a "providential event" for the immediate preparation of the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, as Vatican II was for the Universal Church.

Already in PCP-U (87) we grappled with the question: "What kind of Church must we be to meet the challenge of our society as we enter the Third Millennium?" What is our path for the next three years? The answer of PCP-II is summarized in our National Pastoral Plan (4) as follows: *"Given the stark reality of the country, its widespread poverty and tainted structural and cultural systems, PCP-II adopted the Community of Disciple as its primary model. A special attribute of this church that the Council emphatically stated was its option to be a Church of the Poor ... The conciliar thrust to be a Community of Disciples where the poor have preferential and participative functions, generated the motive to engage in a renewed integral evangelization with its dual message of salvation and liberation".*

Impelled by the spirit of Vatican II and the challenges of PCP-II, local churches have held or started to prepare their respective diocesan synods or pastoral assemblies. Considering the complementarity and basic commonalities of the thrusts of Vatican II, the PCP-U, the TMA and our respective Provincial Councils or Diocesan Synods and Pastoral Assemblies, we recommend in the implementation thereof a *convergence* of key elements, stressing the Trinitarian Focus of *Tertio Millennia Adveniente*.

1. *The path of radical discipleship.* For 1997, this year, the overriding focus is JESUS CHRIST, Son of God made-man (advent), the only Saviour of mankind (Lent), who conquers death and sin (Easter-Pentecost). In this year we are challenged to *re-discover* Jesus Christ, to *re-tell* his story (cf. PCP-U 36), and celebrate our discipleship in all its radicality. We are called upon to renew our interest in the Bible and Catechesis as well as our appreciation of our Baptism, especially as the basis of Christian Unity and Ecumenism, which the Holy Father enjoins us to foster during this celebration (TMA 4). The path that Jesus Christ is pointing is the path of radical discipleship. The Basic

Ecclesial Communities, which are a "pastoral priority" and pastoral thrust of the Philippine Church (PCP-II 140) must consequently become Communities of Disciples of the Lord, where the Gospel and the Social Teachings shall bear fruit in the renewal of the moral spiritual order. We start the year of Jesus Christ with the celebration of the Fifth Eucharistic Congress on January 22-26.

2. *The path of renewed integral evangelization.* The focus of 1998 is the HOLY SPIRIT who is the "principal agent of evangelization", the Counsellor whom the Father will send in Jesus' name and who will teach us all things (cf. Jo 14:26). The path of the Holy Spirit leads us to the promotion of Vatican n's ecclesiology and the appreciation of our Confirmation as impelling us to the apostolate of the laity. Genuine evangelization is undertaken by truly spirited, spirit-filled, "spiritual persons" (PCP-II 215), just as it was "in the power of the Spirit" that Christ carried out his evangelizing work. To hasten the advent of the Kingdom in our midst, the fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit must be manifested in poverty alleviation, environmental concerns, cooperative developments as well as socio-economic and political reforms.

3. *The path of "a Church of the Poor".* In 1999, the focus is GOD THE FATHER, who is rich in mercy and compassion, the beginning and destiny of Christ's, and of our, earthly pilgrimage. In this year we are enjoined to respond to the call for radical conversion and reconciliation. Two commitments should characterize this year: the first is meeting the challenge of inter-religious dialogue towards a culture of peace with our brothers and sisters of different faiths. (TMA 53; PCP-II 111); the second greater preferential option for the poor (TMA 51; PCP-II 125f.) May our vision of becoming a church of the poor "harness the transformative power of the poor among us toward the justice and love of God".

To be "a Church of the Poor" is a radical decision that is urgently demanded "in our country where a very great number of our people wallow in abject poverty and misery, while the tremendous social privileges and deferences are accorded the rich and the powerful" (PCP-II 312). In the Gospel, the spirit of the Father has always led Jesus towards the path where he met the poor, the sick, the sinner, the

marginalized and excluded members of his own people. To live the Gospel in its radicality is to follow the spirit of the Father which led Jesus to embrace altruistic and pastoral poverty for himself in order to serve the most needy. We are, therefore, enjoined to a greater solidarity with the poor through commitment to justice and peace as a necessary condition for the celebration of the Jubilee. We must lend our voices and hands on behalf of the poor, the disadvantaged and violated in every way, by bridging and helping eliminate the great gap that divide the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless in our so-called Christian society.

What we have broadly traced for more specific and concrete planning in the diocesan levels are three interdependent and interconnected paths, like three tributaries pouring their water into a single river.

In the journey toward the Third Millennium, Mary, our Blessed Mother will accompany us, as our model, our guide, and above all, as our Mother. In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, we are provided a precise Marian Itinerary. We will contemplate Mary in her triple role as mother of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, as the handmaid docile to the Holy Spirit, and as the beloved daughter of the Father. Mary will be for us in the way to the Great Jubilee of the Third Millennium the star which safely guides our path to the Lord (cf. TMA 63).

ni. SOME PASTORAL INDICATIONS

In *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* we are enjoined to prepare and celebrate the Great Jubilee both locally in our respective dioceses and universally in union with the whole church. The jubilee of our local churches and the remembrance of the men and women responsible for the implantation and growth of our faith-life will reveal to us the historical paths of our individual churches forming the mosaic of 2000 years of journey of the Church.

To achieve the main objective of the Jubilee which is the "strengthening of our faith and witness" (cf. TMA 42) we recommend the following pastoral indications and specific proposals:

1. For a more intensive promotion of the themes of the Great Jubilee, it will be helpful to constitute either a diocesan or interdiocesan

speakers' bureau composed of priests, religious and lay leaders, tasked to speak on the various aspects of the theme of the Jubilee in the parishes or vicariates.

2. Together with the Commission on Catechesis, the above speakers' bureau, shall offer appropriate catechesis on various topics described in the TMA master plan, v.g. Baptism (1997), Confirmation (1998), Penance (1999), relating them to the yearly trinitarian focus.

3. Novenas and homilies in preparation for parish fiestas must be used as occasions to develop and explain the themes and programs of the Great Jubilee. The lives of saints are a reflection of the grace of redemption which originated from the Trinity.

4. Diocesan/Regional/National Conventions of religious or lay associations, organizations and movements could be venues for highlighting the preparation and celebration of the Great Jubilee.

5. It is recommended that each Ecclesiastical Province or region have a common gathering (convention or congress) each year of the preparation in order to highlight the Great Jubilee; it will already have the characteristics of ecclesial and communal celebration of the Gift of Redemption, which is too great and too profound to be limited to one single celebration.

6. Recollections and retreats of various groups could be occasion to explain and/or celebrate the Great Jubilee. For example: a retreat on "radical discipleship", or on "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit" or on "God, rich in mercy and compassion".

7. Each region is encouraged to have a Great Jubilee song without prejudice to the adoption of a common Great Jubilee Song.

8. The Great Jubilee Prayer may be integrated with other common prayers during benedictions, prayer services, novenas and meetings as well as in Eucharistic Celebrations.

9. The Jubilee of Parishes, Religious Institutions and Churches may be celebrated in view of the Great Jubilee, reflecting humanity's sharing in the grace of Redemption.

In this time of the "new advent", we look forward to the approach of the Third Millennium with anticipated joy knowing that the gift of Redemption has already been given to us. We look forward to the year 2000 with deep gratitude for the outpouring of the fullness of grace and life. We look forward to the year 2000 with enthusiastic eagerness and readiness for what it will reveal to us, as we generously open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our collaborators in the ministry: as we exhort you to be one with us in the preparation and celebration of the year 2000 as a year of the Blessed Trinity, to whom all power, honor and glory belong, we make as our own the following exhortation of Pope John Paul II:

"Christians are called to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the beginning of the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in their hearts, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context, and in world history itself (TMA 46).

We entrust ourselves and our celebration of the Great Jubilee to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother, Queen of all Nations. May she accompany us in our "walking in the new life with Christ" (1997 Theme).

Theological Reflections on the Lineamenta of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia

LEONARDO LEGASPI, OP

I am happy to be with you on the occasion of your University Week. For this opportunity, I wish to thank your Dean, Rev. Fr. Braulio Pefia, O.P. and the Chairman of the Committee for Continuing Education, Rev. Fr. Vicente G. Cajilig, O.P. who extended their invitation to me, requesting a talk on "Theological Reflections on the Lineamenta of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia".

To do justice to this topic, I wish to make some introductory statements defining what a "lineamenta" is and its function within the total process of a Synod of Bishops. For this explanation, I am relying principally on Cardinal Jan Pieter Schotte, C.I.C.M.'s presentation of the *Lineamenta* which he made at a press conference in Rome on September 3rd, 1996 and which was published in *L'Osservatore Romano* on September 11th, 1996.

The *Lineamenta* is the first in a series of documents related to the preparatory phase of a Synod, in our case, of the Special Assembly for Asia. It was drafted by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in cooperation with the members of a Pre-Synodal Council appointed by the Holy Father and composed for the most part of Bishops from Asia.

As its name suggests, the *Lineamenta* is a brief presentation of the synodal topic together with a series of questions whose purpose is to generate widespread and thorough reflection on the topic at all levels

of Church life. In the words of Cardinal Schotte: "The sole purpose of the text is to foster among the local Churches in Asia, as well as among all interested parties associated with this Special Assembly, a communal reflection and prayer on the synod topic so as to generate information for use by the Episcopal Conferences and other interested parties in composing their official responses for submission to the General Secretariat." Thus, being in the nature of a broad outline, the *Lineamenta* is not intended "to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject nor a theological treatise".

The more substantial synodal text will be the *Instrumentum laboris* or "working document" which is an organic summary of the responses to the questions of the *Lineamenta*. Thus we see that the principal stages in the preparation of a Special Assembly are divided into two phases: the remote preparation begins with the *Lineamenta* whose responses are used to compose the *Instrumentum laboris* or "working document" of the synodal assembly. The proximate preparation takes place once the *Instrumentum laboris* has been drafted since its content will serve as the point of reference in the discussions during the Synodal Assembly itself.

Synodal Theme

As a result of consultations with the Pre-Synodal Council for the Special Assembly for Asia, the Holy Father chose as topic for the Synod for Asia the following: "Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: "that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

This topic places an emphasis on the centrality of the Person of Christ and His Mission as Mediator and as the One and Only Savior in God's Eternal Plan of Salvation. The Holy Father hopes that with a proper understanding of these theological facts, the Church in Asia will be better prepared to fulfill Christ's evangelizing mission of love and service in Asia: "that they may have life and have it more abundantly". That, in summary, is the challenge facing you as Asian theologians and pastors.

Outline of the *Lineamenta*

Let us now examine with broad strokes the main parts of the *Lineamenta*. The document begins with a *Preface* which provides background information as to its nature and purpose as well as practical points on the drafting and submission of official responses to the General Secretariat.

Based on the etymological meaning of the word "synod" which means "to walk together", the *Introduction* describes the Church in Asia as engaged in a journey with the Lord Jesus Christ, with the churches on the continent, with the various peoples of Asia and with the Universal Church. This is a journey of faith which takes place in the context of Church history as well as in the rich diversity of peoples and cultures characteristic of Asia. This brief section concludes with the hope that the synodal movement will further promote the work of evangelization in Asia.

The main body of the *Lineamenta* is composed of six chapters.

Chapter One gives a broad description of the real-life situations in Asia today, presenting its lights and shadows especially in the areas of socio-economic development and political life. It concludes by stating that these realities are the living contexts in Asia in which the mystery of Christ's redemption is still at work through the presence of the Church and her members.

Chapter Two presents highlights of the history of evangelization in Asia, starting with the Apostles up to the modern Christian Mission era which links missionary activity to the period of exploration of the European countries. The re-awakening in the last century of missionary consciousness in Asia and Europe is then treated as well as significant events in evangelization which have taken place in this century in Asia. It concludes by reflecting on the lessons learned from the history of mission in Asia.

Chapter Three focusses on God's salvific design in history beginning with the work of the Holy Spirit in creation to the work of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is then introduced as the goal for Asia's natural

longing for God and the fullness of life. It concludes by stating that access to Christ is through the Holy Spirit present in the Church.

Chapter Four is of special interest to theologians. It is a theological presentation on salvation in Jesus Christ as the Fulfillment and Fullness of Life as well as the One and Only Savior. On this basis, the work of evangelization is described as the Church's offering of the Person of Jesus Christ to all the peoples of Asia. One can say that this is the Christological chapter of the document.

Chapter Five shows the Church as continuing the mission of Jesus Christ in the Spirit and as engaged in the work of bringing all things to fulfillment through the power of the Trinity. The mission is first realized in the Universal Church as a communion uniting all its members. But the Church always seeks to share this communion with others so that she can truly be the sacrament of unity for all humanity. This could be considered the Ecclesiological chapter of the *Lineamenta*.

Chapter Six treats in detail the Church's mission of love and service on the Asian continent, beginning with a presentation of the various elements in a renewed understanding of mission in Asia today. The programs of evangelization are then treated, namely: the message of evangelization, its agents and their formation, the paths to be followed such as witness of life, Word of God, prayer, contemplation, dialogue, inculturation, human liberation and promotion. This chapter concludes in highlighting the essential role of Mary as Mother and Model of Evangelization. Perhaps this part of the document could broadly be considered its Soteriological chapter.

The *Conclusion* links the context of the Asian Synod with the approach of the Third Millennium which provides the context for its celebration. The Church in Asia is asked to make good use of the occasion to vigorously promote spiritual renewal among her members and to make greater efforts at a new beginning in evangelizing the peoples of Asia. Incidentally, the date for the Asian Synod has not yet been determined but it is expected to be scheduled shortly before the advent of the third millennium.

The Role of Theologians

As has been noted, the quality of the *Instrumentum laboris* will depend on the quality of the official responses coming from the churches in Asia to which will be added those from the Departments of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. An intensive and widely participative response from the whole Church in Asia will assure that the Synod Fathers when they do meet in the Special Assembly will have in their hands an in-depth treatment of this important topic.

Among the vital contributors to this process of discussing and thoroughly examining the synod topic are you, theologians in the Philippines. As men and women committed to that systematic effort whereby faith seeks understanding (to use St. Anselm of Canterbury's definition), you must be seriously involved in the process to think about and struggle with the possible meanings and expressions in Asia **and** for Asians of the synodal topic.

It is also my view that your theological world is not cocooned in a purely intellectual understanding of our faith. Rather, it also aims to contribute at realizing new possibilities of existence. One can then say that theological understanding results also in new ethical and social praxis.

Topical Outline

I plan to divide my presentation today into three main points. It is not my intention to expand, at great length on each point but rather to pose questions for theological investigation.

These three topics are the following:

1. The Christological question: Who do Filipinos think Jesus Christ to be?
2. The Ecclesiological question: What kind of Philippine Church do Filipinos expect?
3. The Soteriological question: What are the relevant and effective instruments for the Church in the Philippines to utilize in order to implement the New Evangelization?

The Christological Question

The fundamental Christological question has always been: Who was this Jesus of Nazareth? And its corollary question: Who is Jesus Christ for us today?

To answer this question, theologians have gone back to the sources to find out whether they provide us with faithful historical testimonies of the Church's faith in Jesus Christ as true man and true God. As you know, one of the great theological efforts to do this was the emergence of the historical and critical method and its quest for the historical Jesus. The German theologian and bishop, Walter Kasper describes its perspectives as an effort to grapple with "the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, the eschatological character of Jesus' message, and the associated problem of the delayed *parousia*, the theme of the political Jesus and the problem of the later spiritualization of his message. Lessing summarized the result exactly when he called the religion of Christ and the Christ of religion 'two quite different things.'"¹

One result of this approach was that the *unity of the Jesus* of history and the Christ of faith was threatened. This was because the attempt to discover the Jesus of history was placed in the context of a struggle to free the figure of Jesus from dogma and the Christology of Chalcedon.

However, for me to pursue today this line of thought would be to stray from my limited terms of reference in this talk. It seems to me that the wider theological debates that grew from the historical quest into the life of Jesus Christ, the studies arising from the school of form criticism, and the question of the interpretation of myth in the life of Jesus — do not agitate the minds of Philippine-based theologians. Perhaps this is because the Filipino faithful's confession of Jesus Christ is not made in an abstract and speculative way. The Filipino does not experience Christ in terms of an eternal Logos but in the more concrete manifestations of the Sto. Nifio and the Black Nazarene. The Filipino's faith in Jesus Christ is not dependent on his and her understanding

¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Paulist Press, 1976) p. 29.

of the life of the Trinity but rather on a Christ whom they can encounter **through** their various rituals which make up their popular religion.

Not being a Semite culturally, nor a Westerner intellectually, the Filipino would give his or her own unique response to the question of Jesus Christ: Who do you say that I am? It would be a response-permeated by the existential situation of poverty and native religiosity in which Filipinos find themselves historically. It would be in the tradition of the search for a Christology with an Asian face, of a Jesus Christ as a poor monk who unites himself to the poverty of the masses and to their inherent religiousness.²

The early theologians, when faced with the question of who Jesus is and how the infinite, the immortal, the invisible could become finite, mortal, visible, formulated the majestic sentences embodied in the Nicene Creed: "...the only-begotten of the Father...light from light... begotten not made, one in being with the Father..." But to render this ancient formula understandable to the Filipino faithful, the theologian has to go to a Christ encountered in the poverty of Smokey Mountain, in the lonely lives of overseas workers, in the abiding faith of Mount Pinatubo's victims. Filipino Christology perhaps cannot be initially constructed around the figure of the Christ of the Transfiguration but around the Christ of the Cross who emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and suffered and died on the Cross.

But a corrective is needed when evaluating our popular religiosity. The Christ of the Cross has at times been linked by Filipinos to a fatalistic view of life. It could lead to a ritualistic, private faith, one removed, in the words of Segundo Galilea, "from ethical, communal and social demands".³ A Christology fixated on a limited and narrow interpretation of the meaning of the Cross can lead to a defective Christology. It could be satisfied with mere codes of ascetical practices and rituals where God is stoically experienced with fear.

¹ Peter C. Phan, "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face: (*Theological Studies*, Sept. 1996, vol. 57, no. 3) pp. 399-430.

³ Segundo Galilea, *The Challenge of Popular Religiosity* (Claretian Publications, 1988), p. 46.

But the *Lineamenta* offers a corrective to a fatalistic approach by linking the suffering of Jesus Christ to his mission of love and service. The Cross is not a symbol of suffering for the sake of suffering, but one whose meaning lies in a God-given mission of love and service. Asians with their ancient religions are not strangers to codes of ascetical practices. But the "newness" of the Christian message is not in its codes and rituals but in the Person it offers to Asia — a Person who alone can answer fully the Asian peoples quest for liberation and the fullness of life.

Perhaps, this occasion of responding theologically to the *Lineamenta* will further promote our ongoing efforts to come up with a Christology that responds to the deepest spiritual, intellectual and cultural needs not only of our people but of our Asian neighbors as well.

The Ecclesiological Question

Chapter Five of the *Lineamenta* has for its title: "The Church as Communion: Continuing the Mission of Jesus Christ and the Spirit." It gives this explanation: "The Church is the necessary corollary to the mission of the Son and of the Spirit and their saving activity in the world. It is no way an appendix to their mission, or something marginal or complementary. The Church is the necessary and essential consequence of the divine salvific mission..." (no. 26).

The Church therefore is the *locus* of God's encounter with humanity. What kind of encounter-site is it? In its reply, the *Lineamenta* goes back to the life of the Trinity. It is the *koinonia* between the Father, the Son and the Spirit which leads to ecclesial *koinonia*. The 1984 Synod of Bishops puts it in this way: "(1) the ecclesiology of communion is founded on the Trinitarian communion; (2) the Church, the people of the new covenant, is the sign and binding force of the communion between God and humanity; (3) the Church is essentially a communion of all the disciples of Jesus in him and among themselves; and (4) the Church is the *locus* and symbol of the communion of all peoples" (*Lineamenta*, no. 27).

This ecclesiology reminds us of that one outlined by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. In PCP-JJ, this question was posed: "What kind of a Church must we be to meet the challenge of our society

as we turn into the third millennium?" (PCP-IJ Acts, no. 87). And it responded by recalling the model of the early Church as a communion of life, love and truth. In other words: a Community of the Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, since this Philippine *koinonia* was situated in a milieu of poverty and suffering, PCP-II characterized this community as striving in its pilgrim state to be a true Church of the Poor in imitation of its Founder. By relating the ecclesiology of PCP-II with that of the *Lineamenta*, theologians can mutually enrich both perspectives.

Another possible topic for theological reflection is contained in the *Lineamenta's* section entitled: "Towards sharing communion". Here, the Church in Asia is reminded of its burden of disunity and its responsibility for the sins of division in the Church, past and present (no. 28). Our reflections here need not be limited to the disunity prevailing in the region, but also to our own burden and guilt of disunity within the Philippine community. A shining model of Christian living, the Philippines certainly is not. Our continuing failure to solve our internal violence, corruption and drift towards undisciplined and disorderly conduct prevents us from giving cogent and credible testimony to the power of Christianity to produce a humane society. How can we, as a people, proclaim the Good News of a better life to our Asian neighbors when we have failed these past 400 years to set our house in order?

Therefore, it seems to me that theologians have to study in what sense is the concept of community being understood by Filipinos? Can theology not deepen and enlarge the sociological and anthropological versions of what constitutes community? As you are well aware, there have been many studies showing how Filipinos build up egocentric networks limited to their families and clans whose consciousness does not include the nation and to questions of justice for others. Thus the challenge to theologians to help inculturate the Christian concept of community in the Filipino family culture.

The Soteriological Question

The essence of evangelization lies primarily in God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. The *Lineamenta*, quoting from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' Final Statement on Evangelization,

reminds us that "The proclamation of Jesus Christ is the centre and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity" (*Lineamenta*, no. 31).

When describing the various "Paths of evangelization" the *Lineamenta*, lists the following: contemplation, dialogue, inculturation, human liberation and promotion (n. 33). I would like to focus on three of these paths, namely, on inculturation, dialogue, and human liberation and promotion.

"In the Asian context, dialogue is of primary importance for the future of Christian mission, since it has to do with millennia-old cultures and religions. The Church in Asia, therefore, must enter into ever deeper dialogue with the great religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Traditional Religion without, at the same time, falling into syncretism, eclecticism, or a relativization of the Christian faith."

Immediately the difficulty of implementing this task presents itself: "How do you dialogue with those whose ideas are shaped by another world view? More particularly we are confronted with truly vexing questions: What is *the meaning of mission*? Is it part of the new evangelization's thrust to plant the church among the non-Christians and to bring about the conversion? What does Christianity have to offer the believers of other religions? What is meant by the Christian presence in countries whose values have been defined and nourished for centuries by other religions? These are religions which have become, in the view of the historian Arnold Tonybee, the chrysalises of new civilizations. (Arnold Tonybee, *A Study of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 380).

The *Lineamenta* does not answer the questions; it seeks the answers of the Asian bishops. When the bishops go back to their various documents their answers will not be far from repeating the following:

The Church in Asia is a pilgrim Church in dialogue. It is a dialogue to be initiated and pursued in three inter-related spheres, namely, with Asian *religions*, with Asian *cultures* and with Asia's *poor*. Without allowing us to go too far from our main purpose, allow me to briefly recall the meanings of the dialogue in each of these three areas:

a) The dialogue with Asian religions, the very first Plenary Assembly held in Taiwan in 1974 describes this dialogue:

"In this dialogue we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experiences of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been - and continue to be- the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and home of their contemplation and prayer. They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our own nations." (For all the Peoples, p. 14)

As for the dialogue with Asian cultures, I will later on take this up under *inculturation*.

Finally the dialogue with Asia's *poor*. For the asian bishops, this means experiencing and understanding this poverty as pre-conditions for working to transform those structures and situations which deprive the poor of access to basic resources which they need to create a truly human life (Ibid. p. 15).

Pusillus Grex

In no. 28 of the *Lineamenta* we read: "The Church in Asia is a "little flock", a very small minority, except for the Philippines. She lives among hundreds and thousands of Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, brethren and followers of Traditional Religion."

I ask: will the Church remain a silent spectator to this search for a meaningful paradigm of life? Will the Church in Asia find its fulfillment as a permanent "minority culture" living a ghetto-like existence with no influence on the *majority* culture? Is that what it means to be a *pusillus grex* in Asia?

Perhaps the Asian bishops' answer will be not to look at the aspect of pusillanimity but rather emphasize the pastoral courage and creativity.

The FABC articulates the reality of a small Church journeying with the multitudes of Asia, a journey in which the Church as a pilgrim discovers its role and mission in today's Asia.

One of the more complex areas facing theology today is the interaction between Christian faith and cultures. The relationship between faith and culture has a long history. To explain this relationship, the term longest used was "adaptation", that is, that faith would accommodate itself in some limited ways to a specific cultural expression in order to communicate its message. This concept, however, is considered today to be inadequate. Next came the term "incarnation". The analogy here is with the incarnation of Christ so that faith as it were imitates Jesus Christ in being truly part of a human culture. Today, this term, although still used from time to time, is being replaced by "inculturation". This term has the advantage of echoing the concept of incarnation while preserving the dynamism of cultures. Inculturation sees the relationship between faith and culture, not as a static or once-for-all encounter, but as an ongoing process. The *Lineamenta* adopts as definition of inculturation, the one given at the 1985 Synod of Bishops, namely: " ... it means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures" (*Lineamenta*, no. 33).

There are several dimensions to a theological discussion of inculturation. Among these are:⁴ (1) Where is the appropriate place to begin: with the gospel message or with culture? (2) To what extent is the gospel message supra-culture and to what extent is it inextricably embedded in a culture? (3) What is an appropriate model for the analysis of culture? In addition, Cardinal Ratzinger in a 1993 paper read in Hong Kong entitled: "Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures" asks: What happens when the faith and its culture meet another culture hitherto foreign to it? Is it a question of dissolving the duality of the cultures to the advantage of the one or the other?

⁴ As listed by Robert J. Schmitter, C.P.P.S. in his article: "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church" (*Theological Studies*, Dec. 1989, vol. 50, no. 4) pp. 757-758.

These are questions that intimately affect the evangelization process. Our Asian neighbors with their rich cultural and spiritual resources ask what the cost to their heritage would be were they to accept the Christian message. In order to avoid such tensions, there are theologians who subscribe to a form of relativism where the proclamation of Christian truth is given up and there is substituted in its place the praxis of working together for a better society. But the *Uneamenta* firmly rejects this line of thought by pointing out that Jesus Christ alone "is the fullness of life, truth and goodness. All the hopes and longings of the human heart find fulfillment in him ... in him are fulfilled the religious quest and longing for final liberation ..." (no. 22). Therefore, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as God's Good News of salvation is a responsibility no Christian can shirk from.

Challenges of Modernization

The *Uneamenta* has an important paragraph about the challenges of socio-economic development. "In the process of development," it says, "materialism and secularism are (also) gaining ground, especially in urban areas. These ideologies which undermine traditional social and religious values threaten Asia's great cultures with incalculable damage." (n. 5).

The *Uneamenta* does not mention which particular ideology is impacting on the Asians. But it is not difficult to see that as we enter the third millennium it is the capitalist ethic that will impose itself in Asia as it has done elsewhere. Already a paradigm shift has taken place in Asia from precapitalist to capitalist cultures. This entails significant changes not only in spending habits but also in the moral virtues promoted by the capitalist system. This then is the dual predicament faced by the Church in Asia: how to proclaim the Gospel to a vast multitude whose hunger for transcendence finds its fulfillment in the bosom of ancestral religions and yet whose entry into the modern economic system is dictated by secularism where God becomes "an unnecessary hypothesis". The insight of the Holy Father on this is very instructive:

"Even more striking than Asia's recent material progress has been the transformation of the spiritual landscape of the continent. Religious indifferentism and exaggerated individualism now threaten the traditional value which, generally speaking, bestowed meaning and harmony on the life of the individual and on the communities they composed. The forces of secularization tend to undermine your rich religious and cultural heritage." (Address to FABC, OR 25 January 1995, p. 5).

Conclusion

I wish to conclude by recalling once more the purpose of the *Lineamenta* and the role and task of theologians related to its process. As Cardinal Schotte explains it, the *Lineamenta's* sole purpose is to provide a text to foster common reflection and prayers on the topic, thereby generating suggestions and observations to help the Synod Fathers who will gather in the Special Assembly for Asia. Thus the hope is for as wide a participation of lay organizations, pastoral councils, parish communities, etc. who will reflect on the Questions attached at the end of the *Lineamenta*. In this participative process, theologians have an essential supportive role to help deepen and systematize the responses and to correlate the laity's pastoral expressions and experiences with theological principles and insights.

In this paper, I do not claim to have covered all the major points in the *Lineamenta* upon which theological reflections can focus. Certainly, there are many other areas which I have missed and of which you are aware as fruitful topics for your study. Before ending, I only wish to point to another area, namely, that of Mariology, the wide-ranging discussions that the *Lineamenta* will catalyze in our country will certainly touch on Mary and her influence in the faith-life of Filipinos. One can confidently state that the vocation and mission of the Filipino to be a disciple of Jesus Christ cannot reach full maturity without a deeper understanding of Mary's role in our lives. I trust you will not neglect this important topic.

I wish to congratulate you for the meaningful programs of this year's University Week and I thank you for your patience in listening to my brief exposition on some theological notes on the *Lineamenta*.

1997 National Eucharistic Congress "The Eucharist: Freedom for Building a New World"

JAIME CARD. SIN

It is my privilege, in the name of our archdiocese and in my own name, to bid you welcome to our city of Manila for the Fifth National Eucharistic Congress of the Philippines. We welcome you, all of you, with open arms and wide-open hearts.

I welcome with special joy His Eminence Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, who comes to us as legate *a latere* ("from the side") of our beloved Pope John Paul n. We remember that the papal legate to our first and only International Eucharistic Congress, held here in 1937, was Dennis Cardinal Dougherty then Archbishop of Philadelphia. Cardinal Bevilacqua is the present Archbishop of Philadelphia, and recalls to us that unforgettable event, which still lives on in the memory of our city. Thrice welcome, then, Your Eminence!

This Congress, with its theme, "the Eucharist and Freedom," meets at the confluence of at least three great streams present in our contemporary history:

- the preparation for our centennial of Philippine Independence, highlighted only last month with our celebration of **the** martyrdom of our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, only a short distance from this very place;
- the first year of the "*Tertio millenio adveniente*" triduum, the year dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ;

— the beginnings of the momentous emergence of what the secular press calls "the Asian century" in the world history.

In a true sense, our Eucharistic Congress takes on a special significance, face to face with each of these three historical movements, which confront us and challenge us at this hour.

[The "Asian century"

The newsmedia reviewed the year 1996 as it was ending, and invariably "the big news" was that the "great Asian miracle" was surging ahead, as the world today moves toward the 21st century. This is mostly in the economic areas, it is true. But changes in the economics of a nation set off earthquakes in all sectors of a society. TIME magazine's impressionistic sketch is by now well-known: Asia is "skyscrapers and subways and bullet trains." Its "electronic empires supply the world," its manufacturers and finance firms "each earn tens of billions of dollars a year." Asia is "universities and research labs, apartment houses, family cars, jet package tours" to every part of the world. It is the latest in jeans and dresses, in computer and cellular phones; the top of the line in five-star hotels and shopping malls and restaurants; "lively streets aboil with direction and purpose," a world which only one word can describe: *dynamic*. Asia is the present "state-of-the-art" of humanity.

But there is another side to this at-first-dazzling panorama. Again and again, since the 1970s in their many statements on the Asian scene, the Asian bishops have called attention to "the underside of the Asian miracle". Beneath the glitter and the gold, the high-tech corporate empires and the great houses of finance - are the teeming slums and the smokey mountains; the exploited poor; the victims of the sex-trades and the street-children, - not by the hundreds only, but by the hundreds of thousands. Overseas workers by the millions and broken families left behind; the drug traffic and rising crime rates. - The culture of death in its many tragic forms, and the destruction of millennial cultures and their meanings and values, and their communities which held peoples and civilizations together in ages past. All this, too, is part of the reality of the Asian world today; this is also the Asian present, its shadow side, its poverty and pain.

This world is the background of our Eucharistic Congress; as we gather here, it is this Asia to which we must bring Jesus and his Eucharist; to this world that we must raise up Jesus and his Gospel, raise up Jesus and the freedom and justice and love which are his gift, which he alone can give. If we look upon our Congress and its bottom-line meaning, this is the vision we must see. For we have only one word to speak, one witness to give, and that is: *Jesus Christ*, Jesus who has given his life for us and set us free to give our lives for our brothers and sisters.

[Tertio millenio adveniente]

This Congress, dear brothers and sisters, is effectively the solemn opening of the "TMA triennium" for our whole country. On the First Sunday of Advent, we, here in Manila launched the *triennium* with a joyous rally at the Luneta. If that was our opening salyo for Manila, *this* Congress marks a common beginning for all of the Philippines. You who are here represent all our people, every diocese in our Philippine Church, our 70 million Filipinos "from Apari to Jolo."

Pope John Paul II has assigned 1997 as our "Year with Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary." That is why it is so fitting that we begin the year with this festival of the Eucharist. For our journey to the new millennium is *per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso*: through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. Our Eucharistic Congress prays: "Jesus, be with us on this journey!"

[The Eucharist: Christ in us, hope of glory]

In the context of "Asian century" arising around us and in our own country, what does this Congress mean? It is a proclamation of our faith and hope in Jesus Christ as our light and our life: a new announcement of good tidings to our people, the word of the Gospel "for all the peoples of Asia."

How does the Eucharist proclaim Christ? Listen to St. Paul's words:

... the Lord, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said "This is my body, which is for you. Do this, as a memorial of me." In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me." *For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.*

Paul says to us: renewing the Eucharistic deed, eating the bread and drinking the cup, *is itself proclaiming his death*, until he comes again. Celebrating the Eucharist together announces in God's name to all the world that the *Crucified and Risen Christ is Lord, that Jesus lives, that Jesus will come again!* Paul could not be clearer: when the Church breaks the bread of Jesus and shares the cup of Jesus, in Jesus' name, Christ is spoken *into* the whole world, Christ is proclaimed again in human history.

How are we to understand this? In the Old Testament the prophets often perform strange deeds, symbolic actions which *in fact really bring about, accomplish what they signify*. We see it very powerfully in Ezekiel, whose prophetic acts enact the destruction of Jerusalem. What he does, in fact happens. Jesus moves in the same prophetic tradition, as he gives us the Eucharist. Yet he also goes beyond it, supremely. He takes the bread, says over it, "This is my body." He breaks the bread and gives it to be eaten. Then he goes forth to accomplish what he has enacted at table with his disciples. *He* becomes "body broken and given", *he* becomes "blood outpoured" on the cross. Risen on Easter morning, he becomes our life, fullness of life for always and for all people.

What is God doing in Christ in the Eucharist? He is giving himself to us and to all the world as our deepest life. Salvation is God uniting us to himself; salvation is God's life outpoured and living in us. The Eucharist is salvation, in Christ Jesus, made ours in a way we could never have imagined: Jesus himself becomes ours, entering within us to penetrate our lives and everything that is ourselves. We can apply here what Paul said of "the secret hidden for long ages and many generations: *Christ in you, the hope of the glory come.*" (Col 1, 27)

It is this presence of Christ in us and in our communities of discipleship *which makes us free* to do what Jesus did: give our lives for others, even as he. Notice that in the post-Easter appearances of Jesus, there is his coming to the disciples who gather together; there is the meal - the Eucharist, we believe — which he shares with them. And then, invariably, he sends them forth. He has given them his presence. He has given them his body and blood; himself and his life. Then *they* must go forth, "not so much with Christ or for Christ, but in Christ and *ay Christ*." With his every coming, with every sharing at table, their mission begins.

[The Philippine Independence Centennial:
Call to Renewed Patriotism]

Thirdly, how is this Eucharistic Congress linked to the celebration - and the meaning — of the centennial of Philippine Independence, first proclaimed in 1898? What is its connection with our government's drive for "Philippines 2000"? — These national movements summon us to a renewed patriotism, that necessary love for and loyalty to our country which, many say, is so sadly lacking among us as a people.

Yes, this centennial summons us to a renewed love of our land and our people, a renewed commitment to the deepest vocation of our country as a nation 90% *Christian*, to a renewed dedication to liberty and democratic freedoms. This centennial summons us to that form of charity, love of our national community, that *pietas* toward the *patfia*, which the Popes and theologians like Thomas Aquinas have called "an integral dimension of the right order of Christian charity."

As we remember Jose Rizal, we might ask, what did he understand by patriotism, by rightly ordered nationalism? We have the answer, given by one of our great historians.

"There is no question but that by nationalism Rizal meant, first and foremost, sacrifice. The true patriot is he who is ready at all times to forego his own personal and private advantage in order to advance the welfare of his people. The common good of a nation is a fine thing; it is a precious thing. But like all fine

and precious things it has an exorbitant price. That price is sacrifice, and the true patriot is he who is willing to pay that price; to pay it '*sin dudas, sin pesar*', that is to say, without thinking twice about it, and without calculating the cost."

That, the patriot-priest Horacio de la Costa tells us, is how our patriot-martyr Rizal understood patriotism, that love of one's people, land and nation which Christian charity demands of us. For Rizal, nationalism is: "The readiness to pay the price to sacrifice oneself for the advancement of the common welfare of our people."

If that is the patriotism we are called to, what is its link with the Eucharist? If Rizal is right, if sacrifice of self in the name of love and loyalty to our nation, where does the Eucharist enter in all this?

But, have we not seen, the Eucharist is, precisely, "food for sacrifice, food for selfless self-giving!" And this, on the bottom-line for us Christians, can only be realized from the freedom with which Christ makes us free! As our faith, so our Eucharist is not separated from our lives as citizens of our land and our country. Prayer and faith, devotion to Mary and love of our Eucharistic Lord fed into the freedom and courage that was the EDSA revolt of peace. Faith, prayer and Eucharist fired the hearts which loved our people's liberty enough to die for it, during those four fateful days of February! Yes, the Eucharist is food for freedom and freedom's self-gift. Food for sacrifice: because it is Christ's own sacrifice which the Eucharist not only proclaims but "real-iz^s" in our lives, in our personal and public lives, as citizens and believers.

Did Jesus not tell us, with crystal clarity, that his death was his total self-giving in freedom, out of love of his Father, out of his love for us?

In this does the Father love me [Jesus said]
that I lay down my life, to take it back again.
No one robs me of it;
I am laying it down of my own free will.
I am free to lay it down and free to take it back again.
This charge I have received from my Father. (John 10, 17-18)

You and I know, from the teaching of the saints, and from our own life-experience as well, that it is the Eucharist which frees us from our self-seeking, our petty desires, our fearful self-protection, and opens us out to the Father's will and to others' needs and concerns, others' aspirations and lives, so that we can become more and more "for others" as Jesus was, as *Jesus is forever*.

"Unless the Lord build the city, in vain do the workmen labor," the Psalmist says (Ps 27, 1). Where, dear brothers and sisters, will we draw the "divine energies" to bring the Gospel and its truth and life into "Philippines 2000", if not from *the body and blood of our Christ*? How will the *message of Jesus* be heard in our homes and schools, our halls and corridors of government, our factories and boardrooms, unless our words and our lives bring it there, by the grace of the Eucharist? How will the *Spirit of Jesus* dwell in the hearts of our citizens, so that this nation shall be a land of justice and peace, — unless it first inhabits our own hearts, the Spirit poured into them by Christ in the Paschal Mystery? How will *the justice and compassion of Jesus* enter into our world of human and social relationships, except from that fountain of mercy and holiness, of reconciliation and unity, which is the Heart of Christ? To build Philippines 2000, through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, must we not gather, and then radiate, all the divine energies Jesus makes ours when he comes to us in our Eucharist? So that, with Paul, we may cry out, "The love of Christ drives us forward!" So that the great secret bursts forth in deeds of our freedom. "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" — *Christ in us*, hope of our land, hope of the fullness of time and the fullness of life!

At our Shrine of Mary Queen of Peace at EDSA, as many of you know, artists have painted a mural of the history of our EDSA revolution, a history of that time when prayer-power and people-power became one, to bring freedom and justice back to our land. Recently, the priest who has succeeded Father Patrick Peyton in the Family Rosary Crusade saw that mural for the first time. He was much moved by the story of how women and men and children changed history ... through prayer, through rosaries recited together, through offering the Eucharist as one people. He said, "The world does not really know of this. You must tell this story to the world!"

Yes, there is an "explosive secret" hidden in that story told graphically at the EDSA Shrine. Everything in that story has the Cross and the Eucharist of Jesus behind it. In our EDSA Shrine everything comes to focus on the great figure of Christ at the center: Christ crucified, Christ risen: Christ in the Eucharist, Christ taking the world in his hands and lifting it up to God. Christ making us free to be in our turn *himself* in our time, *himself* in our world! We hear Paul's words again, "*Christ in you*, the hope of glory."

[Prayer]

Lord Jesus Christ, come into our hearts, fill us with your life. Come into us as a people, give us your gift of freedom to become like you: free to love as you loved, free to sacrifice ourselves as you did, free to give our lives for the Kingdom of your Father. Make us instruments of the coming of that Kingdom: in our country, and in all of this new Asia arising around us at this hour of history.

Mary, Mother of Christ and mother of our people, lead us to your Son, so that in the Eucharist he may make us free, free to be other Christs, free to work with him in redeeming the world, to work with him as he renews the face of the earth! Amen! Amen!

Cases & Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, OP

THE CHURCH AND FREEMASONRY

The question which quite often comes up in our meetings is: "What is the Church's true opinion or judgement on Freemasonry now, since the old condemnation had disappeared and has been deleted from the new Codex?"

Some priests say they know masons who are good Catholics and are not bothered or molested in the least by other members of the masonic Association to which they belong. Moreover, some masons are good friends of the Church's dignitaries, even some Bishops. Hence, they continue their masonic activities with clean conscience.

I think that some information should be given in the Boletiri Ecclesiastico, so that we priests may guide our faithful when they seek our advice on the matter. I hope this request will be favorably answered. We will be really grateful.

A Parish Priest

I am willing to answer favorably the request of the Consultant parish Priest and try to clarify the Church's teaching or judgement on Freemasonry at present.

First of all, I cannot agree on what the Consultant says: "that some of the Church's dignitaries are friends of some members of the Freemasonry. Our Bishops know very well the Church's true teaching

or judgement on masonic associations. What happens is that members of the Freemasonry keep on spreading their propaganda, saying that "there is nothing religious in their associations, and that their activities are purely social and civil." And to prove what they say they mention the fact that "many outstanding Catholics are also members of masonic societies without being bothered by the Church nor by the high officers of the Freemasonry." The Consultant parish Priest should not be so naive believing what these "good" masons say in their active campaign looking for sympathizers and possible members.

We encourage our readers to reflect carefully on the true teaching of the Church concerning this matter. The following paragraphs reflect the Church's constant teaching on masonic associations. No essential change can be seen on her judgement; on the contrary, she reaffirms her old firm opposition to Freemasonry.

1. a) Canon 2335 of the 1917 Code states: "those who enlist in Masonic sects or other Associations of the same kind, which plot against the Church or against lawful civil authority, *ipso facto* incur the excommunication simply reserved to the Apostolic See".

Two different groups of associations were specifically mentioned in this canon, namely: "Masonic or other Associations of the same kind, that plot against the Church or against lawful civil authority." It should be noted that Freemasonry was forbidden by some States even before the Church made a declaration against it: for instance, by Holland in 1735 and by France in 1737. The first prohibitions of the Church took place on April 1738 by Clement XR in his Constitution "*In Eminenti*" and by Benedict XIV in "*Providas*" of March 18, 1751. Secrecy, the essential characteristic of all masonic sects, as well as their own ritual and organization, seemed to be the reason to forbid them, although there was no strict uniformity in demanding these observances everywhere.

The reason given by the Church in canon 2335 of the old Code why she condemned the masonic sects and other similar Associations was their "*plotting either against the Church or against the legitimate civil power*". This could happen against the Church when her dogmas, her disciplinary or administrative laws or her hierarchy or ministers were attacked (Cfr. Leo XII, in "*quo graviora*" of March 13, 1825). The plotting against legitimate civil authority could occur by stirring the

people in overthrowing the legitimate government. In general, a government is said to be legitimate when it is recognized by other nations with diplomatic relations and is represented in the United Nations.

b) The new Codex of 1983 states in its canon 1374: "Those who become members of an Association, which plots against the Church, should be punished with a just penalty; those, however, who promote or direct such Association are to be punished with an interdict."

With respect to masonic associations it is obvious that the Church has not changed her negative judgement about them. The S. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a *Declaration* on November, 1983, stating that the Church has not changed her views on the Freemasonry and that her prohibition against masonic societies was still in full force. Here are some quotations concerning this matter:

"It has been asked whether there has been any change in the Church's decision with regard to masonic associations, since the new Code does not mention them expressly, unlike the previous Code. This Sacred Congregation is in a position to reply that this circumstance is due to an editorial criterion which was followed also in the case of other associations likewise unmentioned inasmuch as they are contained in wider categories."

"Therefore, the Church's negative judgement with regard to masonic associations remains unchanged, since their principles have always been considered irreconcilable with the doctrine of the Church and, therefore, membership in them remains forbidden. The faithful who enroll in masonic associations are in state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion."

"It is not within the competence of local ecclesiastical authorities to give a judgement on the nature of masonic associations which would imply a derogation from what has been decided above and this is in line with the *Declaration* of this Sacred Congregation issued on 17 February 1981 (cfr. ASS 73, 1981, pp. 240-241.)"

"In an audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II approved and ordered the publication of this *Declaration* which has been decided in an ordinary meeting of this Sacred Congregation."

"Rome, from the Office of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 26 November, 1983."

(Sgd.) Card. RATZINGER, Prefect.

Moreover, on March 11, 1985, a little more than a year from the publication of the above *Declaration* on masonic associations, *U Osservatore Romano* published an article entitled "*Irreconcilability between Christian Faith and Freemasonry*," reaffirming what the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has declared with regard to masonic associations. The said article was reprinted in *Boletín Eclesiástico*, July-August, 1985, p. 429. It mentions the Encyclical *Humanum Genus* of April 20, 1884, where Leo XIII explained how the Freemasonry's philosophical ideas and moral conceptions are opposed to Catholic doctrine. Likewise the same Pontiff declared in his Letter "*Custodi*" of December 8, 1892 that "Christianity and Freemasonry are essentially irreconcilable, so that enrolment in one means separation from the other."

What we have said above proves clearly that the Church's prohibition concerning the affiliation or membership of the faithful to any masonic association continues in full force. Both the Church and Freemasonry are irreconcilable in their philosophical and moral tenets. The fact that the excommunication imposed before upon masons has been deleted from the new Code does not mean in any way that the masonic associations are acceptable now to the Church. Canon 1374 of the new Code says that simple membership to this kind of associations is sanctioned with a just penalty to be inflicted by the competent ecclesiastical authority and those who promote or direct them are to be penalized with an interdict. The mere declaration of the Holy See that the faithful who enrol in this kind of associations are in state of grave sin and may not receive Holy Communion should be a clear warning to those who consider Freemasonry not harmful and hostile association to Christian belief. They should be grateful to God and keep themselves far from this kind of associations.

QUESTIONS ON FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

I am a priest involved in pastoral work and I have been asked several times the question: does drinking of liquids, such as beer, milk, coffee, etc., break the fast and abstinence to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

I know that they do break the Eucharistic fast. But it is a different kind of fast for it has a different purpose. I appreciate to get some light for this matter.

A concerned priest

I have been entrusted to answer your query by Fr. Excelso Garcia, O.P., who is already retired. He should have answered it himself, but he finds it quite difficult to read and write.

The saying has been that: liquids do not break the fast and abstinence to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. One exception, however, is to be made: liquids that have nutritive effects, such as milk, liquified chocolate, broth, eggs, etc., are not to be taken, as Prummer says. Regarding beer and other alcoholic drinks, although in our belief they do not break the fast/abstinence, they however should not be taken in the spirit of mortification proper of the season.

Fr. DANILO TAG-AT, OP

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers

July-August 1997

EFREN RIVERA, OP

July 6, 1997

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 6:1-16
DESPISED PROPHET

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The affirmation of members is one of the pillars needed to build Christian Community. When a prophet is not affirmed by his own people, he cannot form a community with them. This is what Jesus experienced at Nazareth.

Focus Points. (1) V. 2b "Where did he get all this? What kind of wisdom is he endowed with? How is it that such miraculous deeds are accomplished by his hands?" Wisdom and power are God's prerogatives and if a man has them, he must be an agent of God. However, the Jewish authorities who opposed Jesus refused to recognize this obvious fact. Here, therefore, we have Mark's equivalent of the Johannine observation: "To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him" (Jn 1:11).

(2) V. 3 **"Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, a brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters our neighbors here?"** The people of Nazareth refuse to recognize as a prophet one who is so familiar to them. Even people today fall into the same mistake. So many fail to see the hand of God behind ordinary persons and day-to-day happenings. < Incidentally, this verse raises the question of Jesus' "brothers and sisters," and critics of **the Catholic** Church use it to attack the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity. A Catholic apologist should point out that the text does not say that the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus are the children of Mary. They could well be his cousins or even distant relatives both of Mary's side and Joseph's.

(3) V. 4 **"No prophet is without honor except in his native place, among his own kindred, and in his own house."**

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus because they refused to change their pre-conceived ideas about the kingdom and the messiah. They could not acknowledge that one of their own townsfolk was the Son of God. In view of their belief in only one God whose holiness sets him apart from people, Jesus' claim to divine sonship was a tremendous challenge. Their belief in Monotheism and God's Transcendence was being tested. Jesus wanted to engraft something new into this belief system, but his people would not allow him to do this.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: It is but natural for people to resist change, especially in fundamental beliefs. It is the Holy Spirit that makes such changes possible. Ask yourself: in my own life, have I allowed the Holy Spirit to lead me to change my beliefs? Share the results of your reflection with your small group.

2. The Incarnation of God's Son meant that he became an ordinary human being. In the words of our text, he became **"the carpenter, the son of Mary, a brother..."** For such an ordinary, humble, human being

to claim divine sonship was *"too much,"* in other words, a SCANDAL, for the people of Nazareth. Today, the humility of Jesus continues to be an obstacle to faith in him.

2.1 Pointer for sharing. Have you met people who have been scandalized by the humility of Jesus? Share your experience with your small group.

3. Biblical history is full of stories of prophets who were rejected by their own people. To be a prophet, one must be ready to be a martyr. Vatican U. reminds us that each and everyone of us is called to exercise a prophetic mission. Taking to heart the lesson of today's gospel reading, the challenge of Vatican n means that we, too, must be ready to proclaim the Good News in spite of opposition and rejection by society.

3.1 Pointer for sharing. It is bad enough to be rejected by ordinary people. The much greater challenge is to be rejected by those in authority, for example, priests. A lot of wisdom and spiritual strength is needed to survive from such a situation. Has experience given you this wisdom?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? In the exercise of our prophetic mission, we will be wounded by opposition and rejection. It is important to open the wound by sharing our sad experience with others. Otherwise, the wound might destroy our spiritual life.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Our caring for a person must be strong enough to discern his or her God-given mission in life. In a special way, this caring must be shown by parents towards their children and by brothers and sisters towards their siblings.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? We must accept the fact that each person is different from others. Only then can we affirm people who show their uniqueness.

4. FORGIVENESS. The humanity of Jesus was so complete that he was *"distressed"* by the rejection he suffered from his own townsfolk

(see v. 4). Eventually, however, he forgave them and won some of them over to his side.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS*. Aside from being a prophet, *Jesus is a healer*, and he heals even to those who initially reject him (see v.5).

C. STORY: The Meaning of LXX

A gentleman professor had explained the origins of the Septuagint translation of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek, and wished to see how much his students had learned. Next day he wrote on the blackboard "LXX" and asked what it meant.

One eager female student replied: "Love and kisses, professor."

It was not the right answer, but the professor felt affirmed by what the lady said. The professor gave his lesson that day better than usual.

JULY 13, 1997

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 6:7-13 URGENT MISSION

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEPS 3

The twelve Apostles were called not merely to form Jesus' new family but also to share in his mission "to preach and cast out demons" (see Mk 3:14-15). However, they were entrusted with an apprentice mission only after they had witnessed the people's mixed reception of Jesus' own preaching. Mark undoubtedly wishes his readers to recognize in this mission the model of the church's universal mission for all time.

Focus Points. (1) V.7 & 12b "Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two... (to preach the need of repentance), giving them authority over unclean spirits." The role of the Twelve Apostles, like that of Jesus, is essential to preach

repentance. This preaching is authenticated by signs, specially (in Mark) exorcism, and for this purpose they are invested with Jesus' own authority over the unclean spirits.

(2) V. 8-9a & 13 "He instructed them to take nothing on their journey but a walking stick — no food, no traveling bag, not a coin in the purses in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals... they expelled many demons, anointed the sick with oil, and worked many cures." The only articles that the twelve Apostles are allowed on this mission are a staff and sandals, symbols of a traveler. Otherwise, they are to be completely detached, having nothing for their journey. This is an expression of the **URGENCY** of their mission. Did they succeed? Yes, to some extent, because they healed many people and motivated the crowds to go and seek Jesus. Verses 10-11, however, imply that they met much opposition.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The church, of which the Twelve Apostles are the model, has a prophetic mission in the world today. Its vocation is to herald God's rule, to demonstrate that the fulfillment of all men's hopes is to be found in Jesus. This mission is never popular because it involves people's radical conversion from sinful ways and the expulsion of selfishness, people's psychological demon.

1.1 Pointer for sharing. To what extent are we carrying out the church's prophetic mission? Share the results of your reflection with your small group.

2. As we approach the third millennium, we should recapture the sense of **URGENCY** we find in the passage of Mark's gospel. Pope John Paul II said that in his youth, one of the reasons that led him to embrace the priesthood was the thought that humankind is already in the 20th century of the Christian era. Now, in his advanced years, he invites people, especially the youth, to join in spreading the Good News, because the hour is already late. We are in the threshold of the year 2000.

2.1 *Pointer for sharing.* Are we doing as much for Christ as other people — Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. — are doing for their religion? Share the fruits of your reflection with your small group.

BIBLIARSAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* People spontaneously share good news. By contrast, many people keep bad news to themselves. If we really believe that the Christian message is Good News, why don't we share it?

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ goes hand in hand with caring for the good health of people.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* We affirm people as heroes when we entrust to them the noble task of being missionaries.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* To preach repentance includes preaching the Good News that God is ready to forgive his people.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* In the Christian way, healing goes hand in hand with preaching.

C. STORY: Division of Labor

A lay Catholic Charismatic preacher was challenged by some ecclesiastics to explain the difficult texts of the Bible.

He told them: "The parts of the Bible I understand make me so busy that I don't worry about the parts I don't understand. It is for you, clerics, to study and explain those parts."

JULY 20, 1997

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 6:30-34
TEACHER SHEPHERD

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Jesus showed a shepherdly care for his flock that consisted of his disciples and the crowds that came streaming to him from all points. This pastoral care includes the office of TEACHING, that nurtures the seeds sown by preaching repentance.

Like Jesus, the Church has the mission to nourish all people with the food that is the "GOSPEL," the food that is JESUS. The Church is not an in-group. We must share our Good News with all comers.

Focus Points. (1) V. 30 "The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and what they had taught" This verse makes it clear that the mission of the Twelve Apostles is not just to preach repentance and heal people, but also to TEACH. The Evangelist Mark, however, fails to tell us just what the apostles taught. We can presume that they taught whatever they learned from Jesus up to the time of their mission.

(2) V. 31 "He said to them: Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little." With this invitation to rest, Jesus shows his pastoral care for his disciples. Most probably, he also wanted to continue teaching them.

(3) V. 34 "Upon disembarking Jesus saw a vast crowd. He pitied them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them at great length." Although Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught in so many words, he does point to Christ's EXAMPLE OF COMPASSION. This example is more meaningful than a whole page of discourse.

B. REFLECTION POINTS
BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN
& SHARE

1. Pope John Paul II points out that in the modern world, people do not care to be taught philosophy, not even the philosophy of life. But they are eager to listen to WITNESSES. The Church's teaching mission (MAGISTERIUM) continues to be valid. But for it to attract the attention of people in the contemporary world, it must go hand in hand with witnessing.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Are you both a teacher and a witness to the Christian way of life? Share the fruits of your reflection with your small group.

2. Jesus cares for shepherds as well as for sheep. In today's gospel passage he shows his pastoral care for the Twelve Apostles by inviting them to rest

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. We must see to it that our pastors get enough time to rest. Reflect on this and share the fruits of your reflection with your small group.

3. It seems that Jesus revised his plan to teach the Twelve Apostles what they will later teach to the crowds. Instead, he teaches the crowds in the presence of his Twelve Apostles. He demonstrates to the apostles what they will teach to others. The outstanding lesson of this episode is his COMPASSION for the people.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. How do you train trainors? Share your experience with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Jesus shared his TIME with his disciples. We must provide for sharing quality time with our loved ones.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? We must be aware of people's need for DOCTRINE. This food is more important than material food. But doctrine does not mean dry dogmatic definitions. In

teaching, too, we must follow the example of Jesus, who clothed God's divine revelation with the garments of ordinary things and events of human life..

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* By inviting his disciples to rest after their preaching mission, it is as if Jesus affirmed them. It was his way of saying, "Well done!"

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Since the Twelve Apostles were just apprentice preachers at this time in their lives, they probably committed a lot of mistakes. But nothing is ever said about these. They were not important enough to be mentioned. They were mistakes that were immediately forgiven.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Crowds heard about Jesus the Healer, and so they flocked to them. They were welcomed by Jesus the Good Shepherd.

C. STORY: Situational Teaching

To prepare for next Sunday's sermon a preacher asked his congregation to read, as their home work, Chapter 17 of the Gospel of Mark.

Next Sunday, the homilist began by asking who of those present had done their homework. The whole assembly indicated that they complied with the assignment by raising hands.

When the pastor saw that everyone had a raised hand, he said: "Very well, my dear people. This sermon is about lying. The Gospel of Mark has only 16 chapters."

JULY 27, 1997

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

JOHN 6:1-15

THEY ELECTED JESUS TO BE THEIR KING

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Today and in the next four Sundays we have the "Johannine insertion (Jn 6)" in the Cycle B (Ordinary Time) of Liturgical Readings.

Mention the Multiplication of Loaves by Jesus and chances are, today, an instant theologian will pop the question: did it really happen? This shows that the problem of the SIGNS performed by Jesus is still a problem. In fact, it has been compounded. In the olden times the problem was only on the MEANING of the SIGNS. Today, we also have to deal with the problem of whether a miracle happened or not. It is a frustrating question. For those who believe, no proof is needed. For those who do not believe, no amount of proof will be enough. It is our intention to simplify matters by just following John's thoughts on the meaning of the multiplication of the loaves as a SIGN performed by Jesus.

Focus Points. (1) V. 2 & 14 "A vast crowd kept following him because they saw the SIGNS he was performing for the sick... When the people saw the SIGN he had performed they began to say, **This is undoubtedly the Prophet who is to come into the world.**" John the Evangelist is the only one who describes the miracles of Jesus as SIGNS (Greek *semeion*). They were polyvalent, and therefore they could be misunderstood. The people did in fact misunderstand the Multiplication of Loaves as the signal for them to make Jesus their king: see v.14. They misunderstood the miracle as a sign that Jesus was the prophet who will re-enact the marvels of the Exodus (see Ex 16:4-30) as a politico-military leader who will re-instate their independence as a nation. Hence, they wanted to make him a king, that is, a temporal messiah. This is a temptation for Jesus. He is being given the option to become a popular, spectacular messiah. Jesus, however, resolutely refuses to take this option. In doing so he reveals that (1) he is not

the kind of messiah the people expected and (2) the multiplication of loaves has a deeper meaning to be grasped only by those who have faith. John aims, in chapter 6, to lead his readers to a profound understanding of Jesus' SIGNS.

(2) V. 9 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish, but what good is that for so many?' Commentators have been struck by the role of this lad, who is mentioned only by John and not by the synoptic gospels. He seems to represent the generous giver, in contrast to the other disciples who were hesitant about sharing their meager supply with others.

(3) V. 11 "Jesus then took the loaves of bread, gave thanks, and passed them around to those reclining there..." These words are almost identical with those used by Jesus for the institution of the Holy Eucharist: see Mt 26:26, Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19. This bridge indicates that, even before the writing of the Gospels, Christians saw a close connection between the Feeding of the Five Thousand through the multiplied loaves and the feeding of the Church through the Eucharistic Bread of the Last Supper.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. We are fortunate in having both John's explanation of the people's mistake and his elucidation of Jesus' sign (Jn 6:25-71, see 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st Sundays). We must beware, however, of being lulled into a complacency that comes from thinking that we, as Christians, understand the sign. Rather, we must see ourselves as among the people who, perhaps until now, do not interpret Jesus' signs correctly. We must submit to the teaching of John in chapter 6 of his gospel. We are always in danger of accommodating God's revelation to our own ideas, instead of being converted to it.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you found John's book of the Gospel helpful in spiritual growth? Why? Share your answer with your small group.

2. John 6:9 is a very significant passage for pointing out the role of the YOUTH in the life of the Church.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. The young people, prompted by the Holy Spirit, can contribute immensely to the happening of wonderful things in the Church. The sad thing is that, sometimes (maybe often), the youth are not allowed to be creative and innovative. Quite often too, they perpetuate the bad habits of their elders. Think about this and share the fruits of your reflection with your small group.

3. It is important to recognize the Holy Eucharist as the sacramental Bread of Life. But it would be disastrous to the maturing of faith if we think that the Bread of Life can be found only in the Eucharist. It is also spiritually unhealthy to make the mistake of thinking that a sacrament and what-a-sacrament-points-to-or-contains are one and the same thing.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. What do you see as the link between the miracle of the Multiplication of Loaves to feed 5,000 hungry people and the Holy Eucharistic Sacrament instituted by Christ as the Last Supper? Share your reflection with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Let us share as the youth in Jn 6:9 shared.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Let us imitate the caring that Jesus manifested in the entire episode of the Multiplication of Loaves to feed 5,000 people (maybe 10,000 counting the women and children).

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* The people's desire to make Jesus their king was well intentioned (w. 14-15). But it was not according to God's plan and thus it was a temptation that Jesus had to flee from. We must seek guidance so that our affirmation of others will come from a discernment of God's plan for them.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* The people failed to forgive Jesus for refusing to be their king and therefore, in the end, asked for his blood: see Mt 27:25.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Jesus plans beforehand the good deeds that he will perform for his people (see v.6).

C. STORY: Reminiscences

In a certain parish, three Catechists who had been teaching for 25 years were being honored. As they reminisced about their experiences, the talk got focused on the story of the multiplication of loaves.

One Catechist said: "I remember the time when I asked my class why Jesus did the miracle of the multiplication of loaves. A smart fellow answered: The Lord first teased his disciples (Jn 6:5), and when they did not succeed in feeding the people, he performed the miracle himself."

Another Catechist said: "Well, as for me, I once asked my pupils to retell the story in their own words. A nine-year-old boy said: The Lord saw how his disciples took away the sandwiches of the little boys, and he got so angry that he multiplied the bread that the apostles confiscated to give it away to the hungry people."

The third Catechist said: "I cannot forget the time when I asked my class why Jesus told the disciples to collect the left-overs (Jn 6:12). A little girl who had pets at home replied: To feed the rabbits."

AUGUST 3, 1997

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

JOHN 6:24-35

GOD'S WORD: THE BREAD OF LIFE

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Nothing can become more profoundly part of us than our food or drink. Together with the air that we breath, it is by these that we live. To acknowledge Jesus as the Bread of Life is to claim that we live by him, that is, by the Revelation that he has communicated to us. We should not forget that this is summed up in the one thing that

proceeds from the God who is love: the commandment to love one another.

This part of the discourse on the Bread of Life is "sapiential", that is, the Bread of Life is God's Word, God's Revelation (see the New Jerusalem Bible, Jn 6, notes *k* and *p.*). The sacramental or Eucharistic dimension of the discourse properly starts at v. 51 (see 19th and 20th Sundays).

Focus Points. (1) After having reproached the people for their superficial understanding of the SIGN of the multiplied loaves and fishes, Jesus begins to explain its real meaning: (v.27) **"You should not be working for perishable food but for food that remains unto life eternal, food which the Son of Man will give you; it is on him that God the Father has set his seal."** So, the material bread of Jn 6:2-15 is presented as the sign of a spiritual bread that the Son of man, that is, Jesus, will give (in the future). This spiritual bread will be the source of eternal life. In the wider context of the fourth gospel, the source of eternal life is God the Father revealing himself in the person of his Son (see Jn 3:16). In the immediate setting of Jn 6, this revelation is presented in terms of food, against the background of the Jewish manna tradition. The manna was already understood by Jews as a sign of God's word (see Dt 8:5). Jesus claims that it is a sign or type of himself as the WORD of the Father: (v.32-33): **"I solemnly assure you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from the heavens; it is my Father who gives you the real heavenly bread. God's bread comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."**

(2) V. 35 **"I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall ever thirst."** Bread is a symbol of life. Thus, in using this metaphor, Jesus presents himself as God's life-giving Word. It is the Father himself who is the ultimate source of life, but he gives this life to the world through his Son, his Word. Thus the life that is communicated is the life of God himself. Similarly, eating and drinking are symbols of communion (not the act of receiving the Eucharist but the unity that is forged between two persons). In describing the life of faith through metaphors, Jesus presents believing in him as the most profound way of communing with God. Just as we live naturally by eating and drinking, so, by believing in Jesus, that is, by welcoming his revelation, we enjoy eternal life.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. God's Revelation or his Word reaches humankind through deeds in salvation history (including the deeds of Jesus), the spoken words of the prophets (including Jesus), the written words of the Sacred Scriptures, and most of all through the life or person of Jesus Christ. We must therefore avoid the simplistic idea that the Word of God and the Bible are interchangeable. The Bible is just one of the many ways by which God's Word has been preserved and transmitted to people.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. How true is the assertion that "God still speaks"? Reflect on this and share the results with your small group.

2. We can have access to the Bread of Life, the Person of Jesus, at any time and in any place through our faith.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do you seek communion with Jesus even without recourse to the Holy Eucharist? Share your answer to this question with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Just as we can share bread, we can share the Bread of Life (God's Revelation) by telling others what God has done for us to show us his goodness and love.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Our caring for others that reveals, concretely, God's love for us all, is an excellent way of giving the Bread of Life to the world.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Affirmation is the food we give to the hearts of people.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* If you try to eat the Bread of Life without forgiving your offending brothers and sisters, you will get a stomach ache.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* The true Bread from heaven is not the manna given to the Israelites during their desert journey. It is no other than Jesus Christ, whom God has given to the whole world.

C. STORY: PARABLE OF THE BREAD

There was once a very poor mother with three children. And next door lived a very rich lady, who also had three children. This lady was so stingy that she would never give anything to poor people.

It so happened that the poor mother was again all out of bread. Her children were very hungry. So she went to the rich lady and said, "Could you please give me just one loaf of bread for my poor children, who are almost starving?"

"I don't have any bread for myself," the rich lady lied. "So how can I give some to you?"

"But," said the poor lady, "you are so rich. I am sure that you must have a little bit of bread somewhere in your cupboard."

"No, I don't. If I do, then may God change every bit of it into stone," said the rich lady.

So the poor lady went away crying. And the rich lady said to her children, "Now let's go and make a nice jam and butter sandwich." So she went to the cupboard to take out the bread. But all the bread had turned to stone.

"Don't worry about it," said the rich lady. So she gave some money to the children and a market basket, and told them to go to the bakery and get three loaves of fresh bread. But when they put the basket on their table and unwrapped the bread, the loaves, too, had turned into stone.

The rich lady was shocked. Off she ran straight to the bakery and bought bread for the poor lady. And she also got some butter, cheese, and sausages to go along with it. "My good woman," she said to her neighbor, "I will never again be selfish. God has turned all my bread into stone. If it would only turn back into bread, so my children would have something to eat..."

Then she went back home and the stones in the basket and the cupboard turned back into bread. Since then the rich lady has become generous to poor people around her.

AUGUST 10, 1997

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

JOHN 6:41-51

HE WHO BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL LIFE

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Many people still think that eternal life begins after earthly death. This is one of the catechetical teachings we must unlearn. Eternal life is not the life after we leave this world. It is the "SUPER"/"MACRO"/"MEGATULTRA" or TRANSCENDENTAL life that Jesus gives to his disciples as soon as they have faith in him. Faith, therefore, not death, is the transition from the time-bound life of this physical, passing world, enslaved by Satan, to the higher quality of life which is marked by freedom from earthly bounds. We can enjoy this kind of life even while we are on earth.

Focus Points. (1) V. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; I will raise him up on the last day." To believe in Jesus is the work of God within the believer. The human being's role is not to produce the act of faith but to open his heart and let God come in. It is allowing God to make the human body his temple. This temple will crumble at death, but Jesus will raise it up as a new and eternal edifice.

(2) V. 47 "Let me firmly assure you, he who believes has eternal life." The human being who believes is like an open bottle thrown into the ocean. It is filled with water and water is also all around it. Similarly, God fills the believer with his presence, but God is not limited by the limits of the believer.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Openness to God is what we must try to develop in our life. This is what will give us a better and better quality of life.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. The "better quality of life" that modern people are looking for cannot be attained simply through material comforts. Material goods will just bind us to the material level of life. What we need is to go to higher and more spiritual levels. Reflect on this in the light of your life experiences and share the results with your small group.

2. The unbeliever is like a corked up bottle. Even if you throw it to the sea, the sea water will not fill it up. As it floats, it risks being dashed to the rocks, o Eternal life begins on earth through the gift of faith that comes to those who open their hearts to God. After Christians finish their earthly life, their capacity for the godly life is not diminished but increased. That is why death, for the Christian, is not something to be shunned but something to be welcomed when God wants it to happen.

2.1 Pointer for sharing. Ask yourself: how seriously have I accepted the teaching of Jesus: "He who believes has eternal life?" Share the results of your reflection with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Sharing and openness go together. We share in the life of the Holy Trinity by opening our hearts so that they can come in. Then we share our blessings with other people by also opening our hearts so that we can reach out to them.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? When we care for other people our capacity for eternal life increases.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? We affirm other people by recognizing them as temples of God.

4. *FORGIVENESS*. When we get hurt, we retreat into our shell for protection. When we forgive those who have hurt us, we open ourselves again: There is the risk of being hurt again, but we also get in touch with the beauty of life outside our shell.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS*. "He who believes has eternal life" (Jn 6:47)

C. STORY: THE PARABLE OF THE PHOTO

In the olden days in Papua New Guinea, a missionary took a photo of his parishioners. To his surprise, when he showed this photo to them, they could not recognize themselves. For them, the photo was just a small piece of paper. It could not be them, because they are real people, with specific shape, size, weight, changing expressions, etc.

When the missionary went home on vacation and he assisted in giving sermons, he used the photo as a parable of life on earth compared to life in heaven. Life on earth is like the photo — it lacks certain dimensions that are inseparable from reality. You can try talking to a photo of your friend but you can't shake hands with it. Life in heaven is like the reality seen in a photo, with all the dimensions in place.

The missionary concluded his sermon saying: All the good and nice things on this earth are but two-dimensional photos of the reality in heaven, that will be as superior to these as a real person or plate or things is superior to its snapshot.

AUGUST 17, 1997

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

JOHN 6:51-58

EAT THIS AND LIVE FOREVER

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The sacramental or Eucharistic dimension is introduced into the Discourse on the Bread of Life starting at v. 51b.

Focus Points. (1) V. 51b & 53-34 **"The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world... if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I will raise him up on the last day."** Theoretically, the "flesh" of Jesus can be understood as his "self" but the Greek verb *trogein* in v. 54 (English translation: "feeds on") indicates a physical munching. Besides, the traditional metaphorical meaning of the Jewish phrase, "to eat or feed on some one's flesh" is to calumniate that person, a meaning totally out of place in the present context. There is enough basis, therefore to conclude that there is a shift at this point, and ***the Bread of Life in this discourse is henceforth the sacrament of the Eucharist.*** It is true that at this point in Christ's life he still had to institute the sacrament. But this would be just one more reason why his audience could not grasp what he meant. In any case, the discourse was written from a Christian perspective, and its Christian readers, who celebrated the sacrament of the Eucharist, certainly thought of it at this point if not earlier. As the New Jerusalem Bible says, "the word 'flesh' suggests a connection between Eucharist and Incarnation: the Word made flesh, 1:14, is real food" (Jn 6 note p). "The life that the Father communicates to the Son passes to the faithful through the Eucharist" (Jn 6 note r).

(2) V. 57 **"Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me."** There is a life-chain uniting the Father, Jesus, and the believing person. Through this chain, the human being is raised to the level of the divine. That is to say that the human being is transformed.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the Bread of Life. The Council of Trent teaches that through transubstantiation, Jesus becomes truly present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. The trouble with this terminology is that the Council of Trent understood "substance" in a philosophical, scholastic sense, while modern people understand it in a chemical sense. The Body of Christ present in the Eucharist is his resurrected and therefore transworldly body, not the chemical body he had on earth. Hence, by eating the Eucharist, Christians do not become cannibals, since cannibalism has to do with earthly flesh.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Even when we, as good Catholics, accept the Council of Trent's teaching on transubstantiation, we must distinguish between the sacramental signs that bring the person of Jesus to our human level, and the person of Jesus himself which is a transcendental reality and cannot be confined in material enclosures. As St. Thomas Aquinas says in his poem, *Adoro te devote*, we adore the hidden Deity (Jesus) and distinguish him from the "figures" that hide him. Think about this and share your insights with your small group.

2. In the natural order, the eaters transform their food into themselves. But in the heavenly order, the Eucharistic Food transforms the eaters into his Body.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Without the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, the Church, will become malnourished and die. Reflect on this and share your insights with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Just as the sharing of common meals build up the fabric of a family, sharing in the Eucharist builds up the Church, the Body of Christ.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? The sharing of the Eucharist is robbed of its meaning when it does not go hand in hand with caring for the needy members of the Body of Christ

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? We affirm love and unity in the Church when we celebrate the Eucharist.

4. FORGIVENESS. For people to be admitted to the celebration of the Eucharist, they must first forgive one another. This is the significance of the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Holy Mass.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. Jesus in the Holy Eucharist lives with us to transform us into his Body.

C. STORY: THE EUCHARIST IN CHINA

Stories continue to be told of the heroic efforts made by Chinese Catholic priests loyal to the Pope to keep alive the faith of similarly loyal Catholic Chinese faithful. One such story tells of a priest who lives and works as a laborer. By means of pre-arranged sign language, he gets out the message when he is in the neighborhood. It tells the faithful where they can find him: usually in a corner stall of a local market, where he will be selling a certain kind of soap.

Customers who, when buying the soap, give a secret sign — just as the early Christian did among themselves — are handed two bars of soap wrapped in paper. Between the bars of soap will be a consecrated Eucharistic bread. The Chinese Christian take his purchase home and after a short family service, receives Communion.

Though this is indeed a commendable "soap opera" people pray for the day when it will no longer be necessary, that is, when Chinese Catholics loyal to the Pope could celebrate Mass and partake in Eucharistic Communion openly, as Catholics in the rest of the world do.

AUGUST 24, 1997

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

**JOHN 6:60-69
TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?**

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

In the Eucharist we are not the mere beneficiaries of Jesus' body and blood, we are also their instruments. The ultimate change that occurs is of ourselves into the body of Christ, a change that enables us to give our "flesh and blood", that is, our lives in the service of others. Through his church Jesus is continually giving his "flesh for the life of the world."

Focus Points. (1) V. 63 **"It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I spoke to you are spirit and life."** Unless Jesus' words about his flesh and blood are understood "spiritually", that is, with the help of the Holy Spirit given by the Risen Christ, they will not change the life of people.

(2) V. 68 **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's holy one."** Although Simon Peter did not, at that time, fully understand the teaching of Jesus about his flesh and blood, he placed his trust in the person of Jesus. Faith, we must remember, is not given to the formulation of the message, but first and foremost, to the person whose authority the believer accepts.

B. REFLECTION POINTS BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. The Christian perspective **is** the post-resurrectional viewpoint, when the faithful are aided by the Holy Spirit given by the Risen Christ.

/./ Pointer for Sharing. Reflect on the help you have received from the Holy Spirit in order to understand Christian teaching, and share the results of your reflection with your small group.

2. Ultimately, when people believe in Jesus, it is because they have learned to love him as a person.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Is it possible at all to separate true faith from the love of the person on whom you are anchoring your faith? Reflect on your life experiences in this regard and share the results with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* The other disciples shared in the faith of Simon Peter, their spokesman.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Jesus cared for Peter and that's why Peter loved him. Love for Jesus then strengthened Peter's faith to the point of prodding him to profess his loyalty.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* In this episode we have an example of Peter affirming Jesus.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* It seems that some of the disciples who turned their backs on Jesus later repented and asked for his forgiveness. In any case, on Pentecost day, the disciples were more than the Twelve Apostles (Judas had not yet been replace).

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Jesus has the words of eternal life. In fact, he is the Word which is Eternal Life.

C. STORY: CHAPLAINS' CHOICES

At a training school for Army Chaplains, the trainer asked a Catholic priest and a Baptist minister what they would take with them to the front-line if their load is limited to the barest essentials, and to give the reason why.

The Baptist minister said: "I'll bring my compact Bible. It occupies little space, it is very light, and I'll need it for counseling the soldiers who face possible death."

The Catholic priest said: "I'll bring my compact Mass Kit It includes a compact Missal, which for practical purposes, has all the texts of the Bible I need. And besides I'll need the kit to consecrate the Eucharist that can bring the greatest comfort to embattled soldiers."

AUGUST 31, 1997

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
HUMAN VERSUS DIVINE TRADITION

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The semi-continuous reading of Mark is resumed this Sunday.

The non-conformity of the disciples of Jesus with the tradition of the elders in the matter of purifications before meals is both a provocation for the Pharisees and scribes and the occasion for Jesus' reminder about the true nature of purity.

In our reflection on this gospel passage we must realize that there is only one distinguishing mark of the church: the commandment of love. We must never allow any of the practical applications of this norm to obscure or sterilize it.

Focus Points. (1) V. 8 "You disregard God's commandment and cling to what is human tradition." The Jewish lawyers had allowed the original commandments of God to become overgrown by their own traditions, in some instances even preferring the human to the divine.

(2) V. 20-23 "What emerges from within a man, that and nothing else is what makes him impure. Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, an obtuse spirit. All these come from within and render a man impure." Reviving the teaching of the prophets (Is 29:13; Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:26; Ps 51:10; 15:2), Jesus teaches that

it is the heart alone that renders a man pure or impure. He thus appeals for a conversion of the heart.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Critics mistakenly believe that Catholics, like the Jews, put human traditions above the divine commandments. What is true is that Catholics believe that some traditions are divine, not merely human. For example, the tradition of baptizing "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," (before being written down by the evangelist Matthew in the year 70 or 80 AD.) is a divine tradition.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Although Catholics are in the right track with regard to their veneration of divine traditions on equal footing with Sacred Scriptures, they must be cautious even with good human traditions, lest they fall into the mistakes of the Jewish lawyers reprimanded by Jesus. Ask yourself: am I cautious with regards to traditions? Share the results of your reflection with your small group.

2. The conversion of the heart is something that must be done again and again. Once is not enough.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you experience a repeated need for a conversion of the heart? Share your experiences on this matter with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* The beauty of sharing as an approach to learning is that it blocks the excessive influence of authoritative people who want to impose their views on others.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Caring is the opposite of the evil that comes from the heart.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* We should affirm people who act from the goodness placed by God's Spirit in their hearts.

4. *FORGIVENESS*. When the desire for repentance and forgiveness is authentic, it leads to the purification of the heart.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS*. Jesus came to set our hearts in tune with his heart.

C. STORY: TAMPERING WITH SCRIPTURE

At a party for scripture translators, with a *lechon* on the table, the guests were invited to serve themselves on the condition that they quote an appropriate text from the Scriptures.

One came forward and quoted Jn 18:10: "Peter cut off the ear of Malchus." And gone was the *lechon's* ear.

Another said, "Give me on a platter the head of John the Baptist" (Mk 6:25), And gone was the head.

The next came and said, "Mary chose the better part" (Lk 10:42). And gone was one of the legs.

To top it all, someone quoted Mt 2:21, "Joseph took the mother and child, and went off to Egypt," and took everything away.