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DIES DOMINI

John Paul II

TRANSLATION OF LITURGICAL
TEXTS

Episcopal Commission on Liturgy

THE SPIRIT AND MARY UNFOLD
GOD'S LOVING DESIGN

James Kroeger

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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Day of the Lord

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

When we get in the Church to participate in the mass in our parish churches, very often we meet men and women, young and old, not properly dressed for the occasion. Some come in shorts, casual slippers, sleeveless clothes, awful stringed blouses, etc.: all not fit to wear in the sanctuary of the Lord. Preachers are rather silent about the matter. Parents are not conscious enough in reminding their children regarding wearing the proper clothes in the weekly liturgical celebration. Could we allow the things to go as they are?

Our publication this time is featuring a very important document entitled *Dies Domini* (The Day of the Lord). The Day of the Lord is a day of joy, rest and solidarity. The command of the Lord to observe the Sabbath day existed ever since Jesus Christ was a faithful observant; and the early Christians gathered in prayers and sharing the eucharist on the day of the Lord.

The Sundays of the liturgical year, as it is taught by the Second Vatican Council, should always be the fountain and apex of the hebdomadal activities of the faithful. Norms for the liturgical celebration ought to be revisited by the pastors of our parishes.

May this document awaken in all of us that importance of the day set for the Lord; and the people should participate in the rites with enthusiasm, due respect, proper demeanor, and appropriate attire.

DOCUMENTATION

Dies Domini

JOHN PAUL II

*My esteemed Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

THE LORD'S DAY — as Sunday was called from Apostolic times¹ — has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. In fact in the weekly reckoning of time Sunday recalls the day of Christ's Resurrection. It is *Easter* which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfillment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). It is the day which recalls in grateful adoration the world's first day and looks forward in active hope to "the last day", when Christ will come in glory (cf. Acts 1:11; 1 Th 4:13-17) and all things will be made new (cf. Rev 21:5).

Rightly, then, the Psalmist's cry is applied to Sunday: "This is the day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad

¹ Cf. Rev 1:10: "*Kyriake hemera*", cf. also the *Didache* 14, 1, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 9, 1-2; *SC* 10, 88-89.

in it" (Ps 118:24). This invitation to joy, which the Easter liturgy makes its own, reflects the astonishment which came over the women who, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, found the tomb empty when they went there "very early on the first day after the Sabbath" (Mk 16:2). It is an invitation to relive in some way the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus, who felt their hearts "burn within them" as the Risen One walked with them on the road, explaining the Scriptures and revealing himself in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:32, 35). And it echoes the joy — at first uncertain and then overwhelming — which the Apostle experienced on the evening of that same day, when they were visited by the Risen Jesus and received the gift of his peace and of his Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23).

The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). It is an astonishing reality, fully grasped in the light of faith, yet historically attested to by those who were privileged to see the Risen Lord. It is a wondrous event which is not only absolutely unique in human history but which lies *at the very heart of the mystery of time*. In fact, "all time belongs to [Christ] and all the ages", as the evocative liturgy of the Easter Vigil recalls in preparing the Paschal Candle. Therefore, in commemorating the day of Christ's Resurrection not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church seeks to indicate to every generation the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads.

It is right, therefore, to claim, in the words of a fourth century homily, that "the Lord's Day" is "the lord of days".² Those who have received the grace of faith in the Risen Lord cannot fail to grasp the significance of this day of the week with the same deep

² Pseudo-Eusebius of Alexandria, *Sermon* 16: PG 86, 416.

emotion which led Saint Jerome to say: "Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, it is the day of Christians, it is our day".³ For Christians, Sunday is "the fundamental feast-day",⁴ established not only to mark the succession of time but to reveal time's deeper meaning.

The fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized through two thousand years of history and was emphatically restated by the second Vatican Council: "Every seven days, the Church celebrates the Easter mystery. This is a tradition going back to the Apostles, taking its origin from the actual day of Christ's Resurrection — a day thus appropriately designated the 'Lord's Day' ".⁵ Paul VI emphasized this importance once more when he approved the new General Roman Calendar and the Universal Norms which regulate the ordering of the Liturgical Year.⁶ The coming of the Third Millennium, which calls believers to reflect upon the course of history in the light of Christ, also invites them to rediscover with new intensity the meaning of Sunday; its "mystery", its celebration, its significance for Christian and human life.

I note with pleasure that in the years since the Council this important theme has prompted not only many interventions by you, dear Brother Bishops, as teachers of the faith, but also different pastoral strategies which — with the support of your clergy — you have developed either individually or jointly. On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, it has been my wish to offer you this Apostolic Letter in order to support your pastoral efforts in this vital area. But at the same time I wish to turn

³ *In Die Dominica Paschae II*, 52: CCL 78, 550.

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cf. *Motu Proprio Mysteriorum paschalis* (14 February 1969): *MS* 61 (1969), 222-226.

to all of you, Christ's faithful, as though I were spiritually present in all the communities in which you gather with your Pastors each Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist and "the Lord's Day". Many of the insights and intuitions which prompt this Apostolic Letter have grown from my Episcopal service in Krakow and, since the time when I assumed the ministry of Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter, in the visits to the Roman parishes which I have made regularly on the Sundays of the different seasons of the Liturgical Year. I see this Letter as continuing the lively exchange which I am always happy to have with the faithful, as I reflect with you on the meaning of Sunday and underline the reasons for living Sunday as truly "the Lord's Day". Also in the changing circumstances of our own times.

Until quite recently, it was easier in traditionally Christian countries to keep Sunday holy because it was an almost universal practice and because, even in the organization of civil society, Sunday rest was considered a fixed part of the work schedule. Today, however, even in those countries which give legal sanction to the festive character of Sunday, changes in socio-economic conditions have often led to profound modifications of social behaviour and hence of the character of Sunday. The custom of the "weekend" has become more widespread, a weekly period of respite, spent perhaps far from home and often involving participation in cultural, political or sporting activities which are usually held on free days. This social and cultural phenomenon is by no means without its positive aspects if, while respecting true values, it can contribute to people's development and to the advancement of the life of society as a whole. All of this responds not only to the need for rest, but also to the need for celebration which is inherent in our humanity. Unfortunately, when Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes merely part of a "weekend", it can happen that people stay locked within a horizon

so limited that they can no longer see "the heavens".⁷ Hence, though ready to celebrate, they are really incapable of doing so.

The disciples of Christ, however, are asked to avoid any confusion between the celebration of Sunday, which should truly be a way of keeping the Lord's Day holy, and the "weekend", understood as a time of simple rest and relaxation. This will require a genuine spiritual maturity, which will enable Christians to "be what they are", in full accordance with the gift of faith, always ready to give an account of the hope which is in them (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). In this way, they will be led to a deeper understanding of Sunday, with the result that, even in difficult situations, they will be able to live it in complete docility to the Holy Spirit.

From this perspective, the situation appears somewhat mixed. On the one hand, there is the example of some young Churches, which show how fervently Sunday can be celebrated, whether in urban areas or in widely scattered villages. By contrast, in other parts of the world, because of the sociological pressures already noted, and perhaps because the motivation of faith is weak, the percentage of those attending the Sunday liturgy is strikingly low. In the minds of many of the faithful, not only the sense of the centrality of the Eucharist but even the sense of the duty to give thanks to the Lord and to pray to him with others in the community of the Church, seems to be diminishing.

It is also true that both in mission countries and in countries evangelized long ago the lack of priests is such that the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist cannot always be guaranteed in every community.

⁷ Cf. Pastoral Note of the Italian Episcopal Conference "*// giorno del Signore*" (15 July 1984), 5: *Enchiridion CEI* 3, 1398.

Given this array of new situations and the questions which they prompt, it seems more necessary than ever *to recover the deep doctrinal foundations* underlying the Church's precept, so that the abiding value of Sunday in the Christian life will be clear to all the faithful. In doing this, we follow in the footsteps of the age-old tradition of the Church, powerfully restated by the Second Vatican Council in its teaching that on Sunday "Christian believers should come together in order to commemorate the suffering, Resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus, by hearing God's Word and sharing the Eucharist, and to give thanks to God who has given them new birth to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (cf. 1 Pt 1:3)".⁸

The duty to keep Sunday holy, especially by sharing in the Eucharist and by relaxing in a spirit of Christian joy and fraternity, is easily understood if we consider the many different aspects of this day upon which the present Letter will focus our attention.

Sunday is a day which is at the very heart of the Christian life. From the beginning of my Pontificate, I have not ceased to repeat: Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!".⁹ In the same way, today I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: *Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ!* Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. He is the One who knows the secret of time and the secret of eternity, and he gives us "his day" as an ever new gift of his love. The rediscovery of this day is a grace which we must implore, not only so that we may live the demands of faith to the full, but also so that we may respond concretely to the deepest human yearnings. Time given to Christ is never

⁸ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106.

⁹ Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Pontificate (22 October 1978), 51AAS 70 (1978), 947.

time lost, but rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human.

CHAPTER I

Dies Domini

The Celebration of the Creator's Work

'Through him all things were made' (Jn 1:3)

For the Christian, Sunday is above all an Easter celebration, wholly illumined by the glory of the Risen Christ. It is the festival of the "new creation". Yet, when understood in depth, this aspect is inseparable from what the first pages of Scripture tell us of the plan of God in the creation of the world. It is true that the Word was made flesh in "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4); but it is also true that, in virtue of the mystery of his identity as the eternal Son of the Father, he is the origin and end of the universe. As John writes in the Prologue of his Gospel: "Through him all things were made, and without him was made nothing that was made" (1:3). Paul too stresses this in writing to the Colossians "In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.... All things were created through him and for him (1:16). This active presence of the Son in the creative work of God is revealed fully in the Paschal Mystery, in which Christ, rising as "the first fruits of those who had fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), established the new creation and began the process which he himself will bring to completion when he returns in glory to "deliver the kingdom to God the Father..., so that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

Already at the dawn of creation, therefore, the plan of God implied Christ's "cosmic mission". This *Christocentric perspective*, embracing the whole arc of time, filled God's well-pleased gaze when, ceasing from all his work, he "blessed the seventh

day and made it holy" (Gn 2:3). According to the Priestly writer of the first biblical creation story, then was born the "Sabbath", so characteristic of the first Covenant, and which in some ways foretells the sacred day of the new and final Covenant. The theme of "God's rest" (cf. Gn 2:2) and the rest which he offered to the people of the Exodus when they entered the Promised Land (cf. Ex 33:34; Dt 3:20; 12:9; Jos 21:44; Ps 95:11) is re-read in the New Testament in the light of the definitive "Sabbath rest" (Heb 4:9) into which Christ himself has entered by his Resurrection. The People of God are called to enter into this same rest by persevering in Christ's example to filial obedience (cf. Heb 4:3-16). In order to grasp fully the meaning of Sunday, therefore, we must re-read the great story of creation and deepen our understanding of the Theology of the "Sabbath".

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Gn 1:1)

The poetic style of the Genesis story conveys well the awe which people feel before the immensity of creation and the resulting sense of adoration of the One who brought all things into being from nothing. It is a story of intense religious significance, a hymn to the Creator of the universe, pointing to him as the only Lord in the face of recurring temptations to divinize the world itself. At the same time, it is a hymn to the goodness of creation, all fashioned by the mighty and merciful hand of God.

"God saw that it was good" (Gn 1:10, 12, etc.). Punctuating the story as it does, this refrain *sheds a positive light upon every element of the universe* and reveals the secret for a proper understanding of it and for its eventual regeneration: the world is good insofar as it remains tied to its origin and, after being disfigured by sin, it is again made good when, with the help of grace, it returns to the One who made it. It is clear that this process directly concerns not inanimate objects and animals but

human beings, who have been endowed with the incomparable gift and risk of freedom. Immediately after the creation stories, the Bible highlights the dramatic contrast between the grandeur of man, created in the and likeness of God, and the fall of man, which unleashes on the world the darkness of sin and death (cf. Gn 3).

Coming as it does from the hand of God, the cosmos bears the imprint of his goodness. It is a beautiful world, rightly moving us to admiration and delight, but also calling for cultivation and development. At the "completion" of God's work, the world is ready for human activity. "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done". (Gn 2:2). With this anthropomorphic image of God's "work", the Bible not only gives us a glimpse of the mysterious relationship between the Creator and the created world, but also casts light upon the task of human beings in relation to the cosmos. The "work" of God is in some way an example for man, called not only to inhabit the cosmos, but also to "build" it and thus become God's "co-worker". As I wrote in my Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, the first chapters of Genesis constitute in a sense the first "gospel of work".¹⁰ This is a truth which the Second Vatican Council also stressed: "Created in God's image, man was commissioned to subdue the earth and all it contains, to rule the world in justice and holiness, and, recognizing God as the creator of all things, to refer himself and the totality of things to God so that with everything subject to God, the divine name would be glorified in all the earth".¹¹

The exhilarating advance of science, technology and culture in their various forms — an ever more rapid and today even overwhelming development — is the historical consequence of the

¹⁰ N. 25: AAS 73 (1981), 639.

¹¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*,

mission by which God entrusts to man and woman the task and responsibility of filling the earth and subduing it by means of their work, in the observance of God's Law.

'Shabbat': the Creator's joyful rest

If the first page of the Book of Genesis presents God's "work" as an example for man, the same is true of God's "rest": "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done" (Gn 2:2). Here too we find an anthropomorphism charged with a wealth of meaning.

It would be banal to interpret God's "rest" as a kind of divine "inactivity". By its nature, the creative act which founds the world is unceasing and God is always at work, as Jesus himself declares in speaking of the Sabbath precept: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn 5:17). The divine rest of the seventh day does not allude to an inactive God, but emphasizes the fullness of what has been accomplished. It speaks, as it were, of God's lingering before the "very good" work (Gn 1:13) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it *a gaze full of joyous delight*. This is a "contemplative" gaze which does not look to new accomplishments but enjoys the beauty of what has already been achieved. It is a gaze which God casts upon all things, but in a special way upon man, the crown of creation. It is a gaze which already discloses something of the nuptial shape of the relationship which God wants to establish with the creature made in his own image, by calling that creature to enter a pact of love. This is what God will gradually accomplish, in offering salvation to all humanity through the saving covenant made with Israel and fulfilled in Christ. It will be the Word Incarnate, through the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit and the configuration of the Church as his Body and Bride, who will extend to all humanity the offer of mercy and the call of the Father's love.

In the Creator's plan, there is both a distinction and a close link between the order of creation and the order of salvation. This is emphasized in the Old Testament, when it links the "*shabbat*" commandment not only with God's mysterious "rest" after the days of creation (cf. Ex 20:8-11), but also with the salvation which he offers to Israel *in the liberation from the slavery of Egypt* (cf. Dt 5:12-15). The God who rests on the seventh day, rejoicing in his creation, is the same God who reveals his glory in liberating his children from Pharaoh's oppression. Adopting an image dear to the Prophets, one could say that in both cases *God reveals himself as the bridegroom before the bride* (cf. Hos 2:16-24; Jer 2:2; Is 54:4-8).

As certain elements of the same Jewish tradition suggest,¹² to reach the heart of the "*shabbat*", of God's "rest", we need to recognize in both the Old and the New Testament the nuptial intensity which marks the relationship between God and his people. Hosea, for instance, puts it thus in this marvelous passage: "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (2:18-20).

¹² For our Jewish brothers and sisters, a "nuptial" spirituality characterizes the Sabbath, as appears, for example, in texts of *Genesis Rabbah* such as X, 9 and XI, 8 (cf. J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, vol. I Atlanta 1985, p. 107 and p. 117). The song *Leka Dodi* is also nuptial in tone: "Your God will delight in you, / as the Bridegroom delights in the Bride... In the midst of the faithful of your beloved people, come O Bride, O *Shabbat Queen*" (cf. *Preghiera serale del sabato*, issued by A. Toaff, Rome, 1968-69, p. 3).

'God blessed the seventh day and made it holy' (Gn 2:3)

The Sabbath precept, which in the first Covenant prepares for the Sunday of the new and eternal Covenant, is therefore rooted in the depths of God's plan. This is why, unlike many other precepts, it is set not within the context of strictly cultic stipulations but within the Decalogue, the "ten words" which represent the very pillars of the moral life inscribed on the human heart. In setting this commandment within the context of the basic structure of ethics, Israel and then the Church declare that they consider it not just a matter of community religious discipline but *a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God*, announced and expounded by biblical revelation. This is the perspective within which Christians need to rediscover this precept today. Although the precept may merge naturally with the human need for rest, it is faith alone which gives access to its deeper meaning and ensures that it will not become banal and trivialized.

In the first place, therefore, Sunday is the day of rest because it is the day "blessed" by God and "made holy" by him, set apart from the other days to be, among all of them, "the Lord's Day".

In order to grasp fully what the first of the biblical creation accounts means by keeping the Sabbath "holy", we need to consider the whole story, which shows clearly how every reality, without exception, must be referred back to God. Time and space belong to him. He is not the God of one day alone, but the God of all the days of humanity.

Therefore, if God "sanctifies" the seventh day with a special blessing and makes it "his day" *par excellence*, this must be understood within the deep dynamic of the dialogue of the Covenant, indeed the dialogue of "marriage". This is the dialogue of love which knows no interruption, yet is never monotonous. In fact, it employs the different registers of love, from the ordinary and indirect to those more intense, which the words Scripture and

the witness of so many mystics do not hesitate to describe in imagery drawn from the experience of married love.

All human life, and therefore all human time, must become praise of the Creator and thanksgiving to him. But man's relationship with God also *demand times of explicit prayer*, in which the relationship becomes an intense dialogue, involving every dimension of the person. "The Lord's Day" is the day of this relationship *par excellence* when men and women raise their song to God and become the voice of all creation.

This is precisely why it is also *the day of rest*. Speaking vividly as it does of "renewal" and "detachment", the interruption of the often oppressive rhythm of work expresses the dependence of man and the cosmos upon God. *Everything belongs to God!* The Lord's Day returns again and again to declare this principle within the weekly reckoning of time. The "Sabbath" has therefore been interpreted evocatively as a determining element in the kind of "sacred architecture" of time which marks biblical revelation.¹³ It recalls that *the universe and history belong to God*; and without a constant awareness of that truth, man cannot serve in the world as co-worker of the Creator.

To 'keep holy' by 'remembering'

The commandment of the Decalogue by which God decrees the Sabbath observance is formulated in the book of Exodus in a distinctive way: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (20:8). And the inspired text goes on to give the reason for this, recalling as it does the work of God: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the

¹³ Cf. A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (22nd ed., 1995), pp. 3-24.

Sabbath day and made it holy" (v. 11). Before decreeing that something be *done*, the commandment urges that something be *remembered*. It is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to *rest*. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only *as* God rested, but to rest *in* the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse.

The connection between Sabbath rest and the theme of "remembering" God's wonders is found also in the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12-15), where the precept is grounded less in the work of creation than in the work of liberation accomplished by God in the Exodus: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Dt 5:15).

This formulation complements the one we have already seen; and taken together, the two reveal the meaning of "the Lord's Day" within a single theological vision which fuses creation and salvation. Therefore, the main point of the precept is not just any kind of *interruption* of work, but the *celebration* of the marvels which God has wrought.

Insofar as this "remembrance" is alive, *full of thanksgiving and of the praise of God*, human rest on the Lord's Day takes on its full meaning. It is then that man enters the depths of God's "rest" and can experience a tremor of the Creator's joy when, after the creation, he saw that all he had made "was very good" (Gn 1:31).

From the Sabbath to Sunday

Because the Third Commandment depends upon the remembrance of God's saving works and because Christians saw the definitive time inaugurated by Christ as a new beginning, they made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day, for that was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead. The Paschal Mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world's origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of the world. What God accomplished in Creation and wrought for his People in the Exodus has found its fullest expression in Christ's Death and Resurrection, though its definitive fulfillment will not come until the *Parousia*, when Christ returns in glory. In him, the "spiritual" meaning of the Sabbath is fully realized, as Saint Gregory the Great declares: "For us, the true Sabbath is the person of our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ".¹⁴ This is why the joy with which God, on humanity's first Sabbath, contemplates all that was created from nothing, is now expressed in the joy with which Christ, on Easter Sunday, appeared to his disciples, bringing the gift of peace and the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23). It was in the Paschal Mystery that humanity, and with it the whole creation, "groaning in birth-pangs until now" (Rom 8:22), came to know its new "exodus" into the freedom of God's children who can cry out with Christ, "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). In the light of this mystery, the meaning of the Old Testament precept concerning the Lord's Day is recovered, perfected and fully revealed in the glory which shines on the face of the Risen Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). We move from the Sabbath to the "first day after the Sabbath", from the seventh day to the first day: the *dies Domini* becomes the *dies Christi*!

¹⁴ "Verum autem sabbatum ipsum redemptorem nostrum Iesum Christum Dominum habemus": *Epist.* 13, 1 CCL 140A, 992.

CHAPTER II

Dies Christi

The Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit

The weekly Easter

"We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we do so not only at Easter but also at each turning of the week": so wrote Pope Innocent I at the beginning of the fifth century,¹⁵ testifying to an already well established practice which had evolved from the early years after the Lord's Resurrection. Saint Basil speaks of "holy Sunday, honoured by the Lord's Resurrection, the first fruits of all the other days";¹⁶ and Saint Augustine calls Sunday "a sacrament of Easter".¹⁷

The intimate bond between Sunday and the Resurrection of the Lord is strongly emphasized by all the Churches of East and West. In the tradition of the Eastern Churches in particular, every Sunday is the *anastasimos hemera*, the day of Resurrection,¹⁸ and this is why it stands at the heart of all worship.

In the light of this constant and universal tradition, it is clear that, although the Lord's Day is rooted in the very work of creation and even more in the mystery of the biblical "rest" of God, it is nonetheless to the Resurrection of Christ that we must look in order to understand fully the Lord's Day. This is what the Christian Sunday does, leading the faithful each week to ponder and live the event of Easter, true source of the world's salvation.

¹⁵ *Ep. Ad Decentium* XXV, 4, 7: PL 20, 555.

¹⁶ *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* II, 8: SC 26, 184.

¹⁷ Cf. *In Io. Ev. Tractatus* XX, 20, 2: CCL 36, 203; *Epist.* 55, 2: CSEL 34, 170-171.

¹⁸ The reference to the Resurrection is especially clear in Russian, which calls Sunday simply "Resurrection" (*Voskresenie*).

According to the common witness of the Gospels, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead took place on "the first day after the Sabbath" (Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1). On the same day, the Risen Lord appeared to the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35) and to eleven Apostles gathered together (cf. Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19). A week later — as the Gospel of John recounts (cf. 20:26) — the disciples were gathered once again, when Jesus appeared to them and made himself known to Thomas by showing him the signs of his Passion. The day of Pentecost—the first day of the eighth week after the Jewish Passover (cf. Acts 2:1), when the promise made by Jesus to the Apostles after the Resurrection was fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4-5) — also fell on a Sunday. This was the day of the first proclamation and the first baptisms: Peter announced to the assembled crowd that Christ was risen and "those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). This was the epiphany of the Church, revealed as the people into which are gathered in unity, beyond all their differences, the scattered children of God.

The first day of the week

It was for this reason that, from Apostolic times, "the first day after Sabbath", the first day of the week, began to shape the rhythm of life for Christ's disciples (cf. 1 Cor 16:2). "The first day after the Sabbath" was also the day upon which the faithful of Troas were gathered "for the breaking of bread", when Paul bade them farewell and miraculously restored the young Eutychus to life (cf. Acts 20:7-12). The Book of Revelation gives evidence of the practice of calling the first day of the week "the Lord's Day" (1:10). This would now be a characteristic distinguishing Christians from the world around them. As early as the beginning of the second century, it was noted by Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, in his report on the Christian practice "of gathering together on a set day before sunrise and singing among themselves

a hymn to Christ as to a god".¹⁹ And when Christians spoke of the "Lord's Day", they did so giving to this term the full sense of the Easter proclamation: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:11; cf. Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3). Thus Christ was given the same title which the Septuagint used to translate what in the revelation of the Old Testament was the unutterable name of God: YHWH.

In those early Christian times, the weekly rhythm of days was generally not part of life in the regions where the Gospel spread, and the festive days of the Greek and Roman calendars did not coincide with the Christian Sunday. For Christians, therefore, it was very difficult to observe the Lord's Day on a set day each week. This explains why the faithful had together before sunrise.²⁰ Yet fidelity to the weekly rhythm became the norm, since it was based upon the New Testament and was tied to Old Testament revelation. This is eagerly underscored by the Apologists and the Fathers of the Church in their writings and preaching where, in speaking of the Paschal Mystery, they use the same Scriptural texts which, according to the witness of Saint Luke (cf. 24:27, 44-47), the Risen Christ himself would have explained to the disciples. In the light of these texts, the celebration of the day of the Resurrection acquired a doctrinal and symbolic value capable of expressing the entire Christian mystery in all its newness.

Growing distinction from the Sabbath

It was this newness which the catechesis of the first centuries stressed as it sought to show the prominence of Sunday relative to the Jewish Sabbath. It was on the Sabbath that the Jewish people had to gather in the synagogue and to rest in the way prescribed by the Law. The Apostles, and in particular Saint Paul,

¹⁹ *Epist.* 10, 96, 7.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* In reference to Pliny's letter, Tertullian also recalls the *coetus antelucani* in *Apologeticum* 2, 6: CCL 1, 88; *De Corona* 3, 3: CCL 2, 1043.

continued initially to attend the synagogue so that there they might proclaim Jesus Christ, commenting upon "the words of the prophets which are read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:27). Some communities observed the Sabbath while also celebrating Sunday. Soon, however, the two days began to be distinguished ever more clearly, in reaction chiefly to the insistence of those Christians whose origins in Judaism made them inclined to maintain the obligation of the old Law. Saint Ignatius of Antioch writes: "If those who were living in the former state of things have come to a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath but keeping the Lord's Day, the day on which our life has appeared through him and his death... that mystery from which we have received our faith and in which we persevere in order to be judged disciples of Christ, our only Master, how could we then live without him, given that the prophets too, as his disciples in the Spirit, awaited him as master?".²¹ Saint Augustine notes in turn: "Therefore the Lord too has placed his seal on his day, which is the third after the Passion. In the weekly cycle, however, it is the eighth day after the seventh, that is after the Sabbath, and the first day of the week".²² The distinction of Sunday from the Jewish Sabbath grew ever stronger in the mind of the Church, even though there have been times in history when, because the obligation of Sunday rest was so emphasized, the Lord's Day tended to become more like the Sabbath. Moreover, there have always been groups within Christianity which observe both the Sabbath and Sunday as "two brother days".²³

²¹ *To the Magnesians* 9, 1-2: SC 10, 88-89.

²² *Sermon 8 in the Octave of Easter* 4: PL 46, 841. This sense of Sunday as "the first day" is clear in the Latin liturgical calendar, where Monday is called *feria secunda*, Tuesday *feria (ertia)* and so on. In Portuguese, the days are named in the same way.

²³ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *De Castigatione*: PG 46, 309. The Maronite Liturgy also stresses the link between the Sabbath and Sunday, beginning with the "mystery of Holy Saturday" (cf. M. Hayek, *Maronite [Eglise]*, *Dictionnaire de spiritualite* X [1980] 632-644).

The day of the new creation

A comparison of the Christian Sunday with the Old Testament vision of the Sabbath prompted theological insights of great interest. In particular, there emerged the unique connection between the Resurrection and Creation. Christian thought spontaneously linked the Resurrection, which took place on "the first day of the week", with the first day of the cosmic week (cf. Gn 1:1 - 2:4) which shapes the creation story in the Book of Genesis: the day of the creation of light (cf. 1:3-5). This link invited an understanding of the Resurrection as the beginning of a new creation, the first fruits of which is the glorious Christ, "the first born of all creation" (Col 1:15) and "the first born from the dead" (Col 1:18).

In effect, Sunday is the day above all other days which summons Christians to remember the salvation which was given to them in baptism and which has made them new in Christ. "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12; cf. Rom 6:4-6). The liturgy underscores this baptismal dimension of Sunday, both in calling for the celebration of baptisms—as well as at the Easter Vigil—on the day of the week "when the Church commemorates the Lord's Resurrection",²⁴ and in suggesting as an appropriate penitential rite at the start of Mass the sprinkling of holy water, which recalls the moment of Baptism in which all Christian life is born.²⁵

The eighth day: image of eternity

By contrast, the Sabbath's position as the seventh day of the week suggests for the Lord's Day a complementary symbolism,

²⁴ *Rite of Baptism of Children*, n. 9; cf. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 59.

²⁵ Cf. *Roman Missal*, Rite of Blessing and sprinkling of Holy Water.

much loved by the Fathers. Sunday is not only the first day, it is also "the eighth day", set within the sevenfold succession of days in a unique and transcendent position which evokes not only the beginning of time but also its end in "the age to come." Saint Basil explains that Sunday symbolizes that truly singular day which will follow the present time, the day without end which will know neither evening nor morning, the imperishable age which will never grow old; Sunday is the ceaseless foretelling of life without end which renews the hope of Christians and encourages them on their way.²⁶ Looking towards the last day, which fulfills completely the eschatological symbolism of the Sabbath, Saint Augustine concludes the Confessions describing the *Eschaton* as "the peace of quietness, the peace of the Sabbath, a peace with no evening".²⁷ In celebrating Sunday, both the "first" and the "eight" day, the Christian is led towards the goal of eternal life.²⁸

The day of Christ-Light

This Christocentric vision sheds light upon another symbolism which Christian reflection and pastoral practice ascribed to the Lord's Day. Wise pastoral intuition suggested to the Church the christianization of the notion of Sunday as "the day of the sun", which was the Roman name for the day and which is retained in some modern languages.²⁹ This was in order to draw the faithful away from the seduction of cults which worshipped the sun, and to direct the celebration of the day to Christ, humanity's true "sun".

²⁶ Cf. Saint Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 27, 66: SC 17, 484-485. Cf. also *Letter of Barnabas* 15, 8-9: SC 172, 186-189; Saint Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 24: 138: PG 6, 528, 793; Origen, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 118 (119), 1: PG 12, 1588.

²⁷ "Domine, praestitisti nobis pacem quietis, pacem sabbati, pacem sine vespera": *Confess.*, 13, 50: CCL 27, 272.

²⁸ Cf. Saint Augustine, *Epist.* 55, 17: CSEL 34, 188: "Ita ergo erit octavus, qui primus, ut prima vita sed aelerna reddatur".

²⁹ Thus in English "Sunday" and in German "Sonntag".

Writing to the pagans, Saint Justin uses the language of the time to note that Christians gather together "on the day named after the sun",³⁰ but for believers the expression had already assumed a new meaning which was unmistakably rooted in the Gospel.³¹ Christ is the light of the world (cf. Jn 9:5; also 1:45, 9), and, in the weekly reckoning of time, the day commemorating his Resurrection is the enduring reflection of the epiphany of his glory. The theme of Sunday as the day illuminated by the triumph of the Risen Christ is also found in the Liturgy of the Hours³² and is given special emphasis in the *Pannichida*, the vigil which in the Eastern liturgies prepares for Sunday. From generation to generation as she gathers on this day, the Church makes "her own the wonderment of Zechariah as he looked upon Christ, seeing in him the dawn which gives "light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk 1:78-79), and she echoes the joy of Simeon when he takes in his arms the divine Child who has come as the "light to enlighten the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32).

The day of the gift of the Spirit

Sunday, the day of light, could also be called the day of "fire", in reference to the Holy Spirit. The light of Christ is intimately linked to the "fire" of the Spirit, and two images together reveal the meaning of the Christian Sunday.³³ When he appeared to the Apostles on the evening of Easter, Jesus breathed upon them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any,

³⁰ *Apologia I*, 67: PG 6, 430.

³¹ Cf. Saint Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* 44, 1: CCL 23, 178; *Sermo* 53, 2: CCL 23, 219; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Comm. in Ps.* 91: PG 23, 1169-1173.

³² See, for example, the Hymn of the Office of Readings: "*Dies aetasque ceteris I octava splendet sanctior I in te quam, lesu, consecras I primitiae surgentium*" (Week I); and also: "*Salve dies, dierum gloria, /dies felix Christi victoria, I dies digna iugi laetitia I dies prima. I Lux divina caecis irradiat, I in qua Christus infernum spoliat, I mortem vincit et reconciliat I summis ima*" (Week II). Similar expressions are found in hymns included in the Liturgy of the Hours in various modern languages.

³³ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 138, 1-2: PG 9, 364.

they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they retained" (Jn 20:22-23). The outpouring of the Spirit was the great gift of the Risen Lord to his disciples on Easter Sunday. It was again Sunday when, fifty days after the Resurrection, the Spirit descended in power, as "a mighty wind" and "fire" (Acts 2:2-3), upon the Apostles gathered with Mary. Pentecost is not only the founding event of the Church, but is also the mystery which for ever gives life to the Church.³⁴ Such an event has its own powerful liturgical moment in the annual celebration which concludes "the great Sunday",³⁵ but it also remains a part of the deep meaning of every Sunday, because of its intimate bond with the Paschal Mystery. The "weekly Easter" thus becomes, in a sense, the "weekly Pentecost", when Christians relive the Apostles joyful encounter with the Risen Lord and receive the life-giving breath of his Spirit.

The day of faith

Given these different dimensions which set it apart, Sunday appears as the supreme *day of faith*. It is the day when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the Church's living "memory" (cf. Jn 14:26), the first appearance of the Risen Lord becomes an event renewed in the "today" of each of Christ's disciples. Gathered in his presence in the Sunday assembly, believers sense themselves called like the Apostle Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands. Put out your hand, and place it in my side. Doubt no longer, but believe" (Jn 20:27). Yes, Sunday is the day of faith. This is stressed by the fact that the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, like the liturgy of other solemnities, includes the Profession of Faith. Recited or sung, the Creed declares the baptismal and Paschal character of Sunday, making it the day on which in a special way the baptized renew their adherence to Christ and his

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 22-26: AAS 78 (1986), 829-837.

³⁵ Cf. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, *Sunday Letters* 1, 10: PG 26, 1366.

Gospel in a rekindled awareness of their baptismal promises. Listening to the word and receiving the Body of the Lord, the baptized contemplate the Risen Jesus present in the "holy signs" and confess with the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

An indispensable day!

It is clear then why, even in our own difficult times, the identity of this day must be protected and above all must be lived in all its depth. An Eastern writer of the beginning of the third century recounts that as early as then the faithful in every region were keeping Sunday holy on a regular basis.³⁶ What began as a spontaneous practice later became a juridically sanctioned norm. The Lord's Day has structured the history of the Church through two thousand years: how could we think that it will not continue to shape her future? The pressures of today can make it harder to fulfill the Sunday obligation; and, with a mother's sensitivity, the Church looks to the circumstances of each of her children. In particular, she feels herself called to a new catechetical and pastoral commitment, in order to ensure that, in the normal course of life, none of her children are deprived of the rich outpouring of grace which the celebration of the Lord's Day brings. It was in this spirit that the Second Vatican Council, making a pronouncement on the possibility of reforming the Church calendar to match different civil calendars, declared that the Church "is prepared to accept only those arrangements which preserve a week of seven days with a Sunday".³⁷ Given its many meanings and aspects, and its link to the very foundations of the faith, the celebration of the Christian Sunday remains, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, an indispensable element of our Christian identity.

³⁶ Cf. Bardesanes. *Dialogue on Destiny*, 46: PS 2, 606-607.

³⁷ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Appendix: Declaration on the Reform of the Calendar.

CHAPTER III

Dies Ecclesiae

The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday

The presence of the Risen Lord

"I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). This promise of Christ never ceases to resound in the Church as the fertile secret of her life and the wellspring of her hope. As the day of Resurrection, Sunday is not only the remembrance of a past event: it is a celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people.

For this presence to be properly proclaimed and lived, it is not enough that the disciples of Christ pray individually and commemorate the death and Resurrection of Christ inwardly, in the secrecy of their hearts. Those who have received the grace of baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God.³⁸ It is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the *ekklesia*, the assembly called together by the Risen Lord who offered his life "to reunite the scattered children of God" (Jn 11:52). They have become "one" in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) through the gift of the spirit. This unity becomes visible when Christians gather together: it is then that they come to know vividly and to testify to the world that they are the people redeemed, drawn "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). The assembly of Christ's disciples embodies from age to age the image of the first Christian community which Luke gives as an example in the Acts of the Apostles, when he recounts that the first baptized believers

³⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 9.

"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42).

The Eucharistic assembly

The Eucharist is not only a particularly intense expression of the reality of the Church's life, but also in a sense its "fountain-head".³⁹ The Eucharist feeds and forms the Church: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Because of this vital link with the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the mystery of the Church is savoured, proclaimed, and lived supremely in the Eucharist.⁴⁰

This ecclesial dimension intrinsic to the Eucharist is realized in every Eucharistic celebration. But it is expressed most especially on the day when the whole community comes together to commemorate the Lord's Resurrection. Significantly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life".⁴¹

At Sunday Mass, Christians relive with particular intensity the experience of the Apostles on the evening of Easter when the Risen Lord appeared to them as they were gathered together (cf. Jn 20:19). In a sense, the People of God of all times were present in that small nucleus of disciples, the first fruits of the Church. Through their testimony, every generation of believers hears the greeting of Christ, rich with the messianic gift of peace, won by

³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae cenae* (24 February 1980), 4: AAS 72 (1980), 120; Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 62-64: AAS 78 (1986), 889-894.

⁴⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus* (4 December 1988), 9: AAS 81 (1989), 905-906.

⁴¹ N. 2177.

his blood and offered with his Spirit: "Peace be with you!". Christ's return among them "a week later" (Jn 20:26) can be seen as a radical prefiguring of the Christian community's practice of coming together every seven days, on "the Lord's Day" or Sunday, in order to profess faith in his Resurrection and to receive the blessing which he had promise: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20:29). This close connection between the appearance of the Risen Lord and the Eucharist is suggested in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the two disciples of Emmaus, whom Christ approached and led to understand the Scriptures and then sat with them at table. They recognized him when he "took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them" (24-30). The gestures of Jesus in this account are his gestures at the Last Supper, with the clear allusion to the "breaking of bread", as the Eucharist was called by the first generation of Christians.

The Sunday Eucharist

It is true that, in itself, the Sunday Eucharist is no different from the Eucharist celebrated on other days, nor can it be separated from liturgical and sacramental life as a whole. By its very nature, the Eucharist is an epiphany of the Church;⁴² and this is most powerfully expressed when the diocesan community gathers in prayer with its Pastor: "The Church appears with special clarity when the holy People of God , all of them, are actively and fully sharing in the same liturgical celebrations — especially when it is the same Eucharist — sharing one prayer at one altar, at which the Bishop is presiding, surrounded by his presbyters and his ministers".⁴³ This relationship with the Bishop and with the entire

ⁿ Cf. John Paul U, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus* (4 December 1988), 9: AAS 81 (1989), 905-906.

^o Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41; cf. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christ us Dominus*, 15.

Church community is inherent in every Eucharistic celebration, even when the Bishop does not preside, regardless of the day of the week on which it is celebrated. The mention of the Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer is the indication of this.

But because of its special solemnity and the obligatory presence of the community, and because it is celebrated "on the day when Christ conquered death and gave us a share in his immortal life",⁴⁴ the Sunday Eucharist expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension. It becomes the paradigm for other Eucharistic celebrations. Each community, gathering all its members for the "breaking of the bread", becomes the place where the mystery of the Church is concretely made present. In celebrating the Eucharist, the community opens itself to communion with the universal Church,⁴⁵ imploring the Father to "remember the Church throughout the world" and make her grow in the unity of all the faithful with the Pope and with the Pastors of the particular Churches, until love is brought to perfection.

The day of the Church

Therefore, the *dies Domini* is also the *dies Ecclesiae*. This is why on the pastoral level the community aspect of the Sunday celebration should be particularly stressed. As I have noted elsewhere, among the many activities of a parish, "none is as vital or as community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist".⁴⁶ Mindful of this the Second Vatican

⁴⁴ These are the words of the Embolism, formulated in this or similar ways in some of the Eucharistic Prayers of the different languages. They stress powerfully the "Paschal" character of Sunday.

⁴⁵ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of the Church as Communion *Communio in notio* (28 May 1992), 11-14: AAS 85 (1993), 844-847.

⁴⁶ *Speech to the Third Group of the Bishops of the United States of America* (17 March 1998), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 March 1998, 4.

Council recalled that efforts must be made to ensure that there is "within the parish, a lively sense of community, in the first place through the community celebration of Sunday Mass".⁴⁷ Subsequent liturgical directives made the same point, asking that on Sundays and holy days the Eucharistic celebrations held normally in other churches and chapels be coordinated with the celebration in the parish church, in order "to foster the sense of the Church community, which is nourished and expressed in a particular way by the community celebration on Sunday, whether around the Bishop, especially in the Cathedral, or in the parish assembly, in which the pastor represents the Bishop".⁴⁸

The Sunday assembly is the privileged place of unity: it is the setting for the celebration of the *sacramentum unitatis* which profoundly marks the Church as a people gathered "by" and "in" the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their "ministry" as "domestic churches",⁵⁰ when parents, share with their children at the one Table of the word and of the Bread of Life. We do well to recall in this regard that it is first of all the parents who must teach their children to participate in Sunday Mass; they are assisted in this by catechists, who are to see to it that initiation into the Mass is made a part of the formation imparted to the children entrusted to their care, explaining the important reasons behind the obligatory nature of the precept. When circumstances suggest

⁴⁷ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42.

⁴⁸ Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 26: AAS 59 (1967), 555.

⁴⁹ Cf. Saint Cyprian, *De Oral. Dom.* 23: PL 4, 553; *De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, 7: CSEL 3/1, 215; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n. 4; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 26.

⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), 57; 61: AAS 74 (1982), 151;154.

it, the celebration of Masses for Children, in keeping with the provisions of the liturgical norms,⁵¹ can also help in this regard.

At Sunday Masses in parishes, insofar as parishes are "Eucharistic communities",⁵² it is normal to find different groups, movements, associations and even the smaller religious communities present in the parish. This allows everyone to experience in common what they share most deeply, beyond the particular spiritual paths which, by discernment of Church authority,⁵³ legitimately distinguish them. This is why on Sunday, the day of gathering, small group Masses are not to be encouraged: it is not only a question of ensuring that parish assemblies are not without the necessary ministry of priests, but also of ensuring that the life and unity of the Church community are fully safeguarded and promoted.⁵⁴ Authorization of possible and clearly restricted exceptions to this general guidelines will depend upon the wise discernment of the Pastors of the particular Churches, in view of special needs in the area of formation and pastoral care, and keeping in mind the good of individuals or groups — especially the benefits which such exceptions may bring to the entire Christian community.

A pilgrim people

As the Church journeys through time, the reference to Christ's Resurrection and the weekly recurrence of this solemn memorial

⁵¹ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory for Masses with Children* (1 November 1973): AAS 66 (1974), 30-46.

⁵² Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 26: AAS 59 (1967), 555-556; Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Ecclesiae imago* (22 February 1973), 86c: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2071.

⁵³ Cf. John Paul U, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), 30: AAS 81 (1989), 446-447.

⁵⁴ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Masses for Particular Groups* (15 May 1969), 10: AAS 61 (1969), 810.

help to remind us of *the pilgrim and eschatological character of the People of God*. Sunday after Sunday the Church moves towards the final "Lord's Day", that Sunday which knows no end. The expectation of Christ's coming is inscribed in the very mystery of the Church⁵⁵ and is evidenced in every Eucharistic celebration. But, with its specific remembrance of the glory of the Risen Christ, the Lord's Day recalls with greater intensity the future glory of his "return". This makes Sunday the day on which the Church, showing forth more clearly her identity as "Bride", anticipates in some sense the eschatological reality of the heavenly Jerusalem. Gathering her children into the Eucharistic assembly and teaching them to wait for the "divine Bridegroom", she engages in a kind of "exercise of desire",⁵⁶ receiving a foretaste of the joy of the new heavens and new earth, when the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down from God, "prepared as bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

The day of hope

Viewed in this way, Sunday is not only the day of faith, but is also *the day of Christian hope*. To share in "the Lord's Supper" is to anticipate the eschatological feast of the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Celebrating this memorial of Christ, risen and ascended into heaven, the Christian community waits "in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ".⁵⁷ Renewed and nourished by this intense weekly rhythm, Christian hope becomes the leaven and the light of human hope. This is why the Prayer of the Faithful responds not only to the needs of the particular Christian community but also to those of all humanity; and the

⁵⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 48-51.

⁵⁶ *Haec est vita nostra, ut desiderando exerceamur*": Saint Augustine, *In Prima Ioan. Tract.* 4, 6: SC 75, 232.

⁵⁷ *Roman Missal*, Embolism after the Lord's Prayer.

Church, coming together for the Eucharistic celebration, shows to the world that she makes her own "the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of the poor and all those who suffer".⁵⁸ With the offering of the Sunday Eucharist, the Church crowns the witness which her children strive to offer every day of the week by proclaiming the Gospel and practising charity in the world of work and in all the many tasks of life; thus she shows forth more plainly her identity "as a sacrament, or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race".⁵⁹

The table of the word

As in every Eucharistic celebration, the Risen Lord is encountered in the Sunday assembly at the twofold table of the word and of the Bread of Life. The table of the word offers the same understanding of the history of salvation and especially of the Paschal Mystery which the Risen Jesus himself gave to his disciples: it is Christ who speaks, present as he is in his word "when Sacred Scripture is read in the Church".⁶⁰ At the table of the Bread of Life, the Risen Lord becomes really, substantially and enduringly present through the memorial of his Passion and Resurrection, and the Bread of Life is offered as a pledge of future glory. The Second Vatican Council recalled that "the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely joined together that they form a single act of worship".⁶¹ The Council also urged that "the table of the word of God be more lavishly

⁵⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 1.

⁵⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 1; cf. John Paul II Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 61-64: AAS 78 (1986), 888-894.

⁶⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7; cf. 33.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56; cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, n.10.

prepared for the faithful, opening to them more abundantly the treasures of the Bible".⁶² It then decreed that, in Masses of Sunday and holy days of obligation, the homily should not be omitted except for serious reasons.⁶³ These timely decrees were faithfully embodied in the liturgical reform, about which Paul VI wrote, commenting upon the richer offering of biblical readings on Sunday and holy days: "All this has been decreed so as to foster more and more in the faithful 'that hunger for hearing the word of the Lord' (Am 8:11) which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit spurs the People of the New Covenant on towards the perfect unity of the Church".⁶⁴

In considering the Sunday Eucharist more than thirty years after the Council, we need to assess how well the word of God is being proclaimed and how effectively the People of God have grown in knowledge and love of Sacred Scripture.⁶⁵ There are two aspects of this — that of *celebration* and that of *personal appropriation* — and they are very closely related. At the level of celebration, the fact that the Council made it possible to proclaim the word of God in the language of the community taking part in the celebration must awaken a new sense of responsibility towards the word, allowing "the distinctive character of the sacred text" to shine forth "even in the mode of reading or singing".⁶⁶ At the level of personal appropriation, the hearing of the word of God proclaimed must be well prepared in the souls of the faithful by an apt knowledge of Scripture and, where pastorally

⁶² Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 52; *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 767, §2; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 614.

⁶⁴ Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (3 April 1969): AAS 61 (1969), 220.

⁶⁵ The Council's Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaks of "*suavis el vivus Sacrae Scripturae affectus*" (n.24).

⁶⁶ John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae cenae* (24 February 1980), 10: AAS 72 (1980), 135.

possible, by *special initiatives designed to deepen understanding of the biblical readings*, particularly those used on Sundays and holy days. If Christian individuals and families are not regularly drawing new life from the reading of the sacred text in a spirit of prayer and docility to the Church's interpretation,⁶⁷ then it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. This is the value of initiatives in parish communities which bring together during the week those who take part in the Eucharist — priest, ministers and faithful⁶⁸ — in order to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed. The objective sought here is that the entire celebration — praying, singing, listening, and not just the preaching — should express in some way the theme of the Sunday liturgy, so that all those taking part may be penetrated more powerfully by it. Clearly, much depends on those who exercise the ministry of the word. It is their duty to prepare the reflection on the word of the Lord by prayer and study of the sacred text, so that they may then express its contents faithfully and apply them to people's concerns and to their daily lives.

It should also be borne in mind that the *liturgical proclamation of the word of God*, especially in the Eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a *dialogue between God and his People*, a dialogue in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated. On their part, the People of God are drawn to respond to this dialogue of love by giving thanks and praise, also by demonstrating their fidelity to the task of continual "conversion". The Sunday assembly commits us therefore to an inner renewal of our baptismal promises, which are in a sense

⁶⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 25.

^a Cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, Chap. ID.

implicit in the recitation of the Creed, and are an explicit part of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil and whenever Baptism is celebrated during Mass. In this context, the proclamation of the word in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration takes on the solemn tone found in the Old Testament at moments when the Covenant was renewed, when the Law was proclaimed and the community of Israel was called — like the People in the desert at the foot of Sinai (cf. Ex 19:7-8; 24:3, 7) — to repeat its "yes", renewing its decision to be faithful to God and to obey his commandments. In speaking his word, God awaits our response: a response which Christ has already made for us with his "Amen" (cf. 2 Cor 1:20-22), and which echoes in us through the Holy Spirit so that we hear may involve us at the deepest level.⁶⁹

The table of the Body of Christ

The table of the word leads naturally to the table of the Eucharistic Bread and prepares the community to live its many aspects, which in the Sunday Eucharist assume as especially solemn character. As the whole community gathers to celebrate "the Lord's Day", the Eucharist appears more clearly than on other days as the great "thanksgiving" in which the Spirit-filled Church turns to the Father, becoming one with Christ and speaking in the name of all humanity. The rhythm of the week prompts us to gather up in grateful memory the events of the days which have just passed, to review them in the light of God and to thank him for his countless gifts, glorifying him "through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit". The Christian community thus comes to a renewed awareness of the fact that all things were created through Christ (cf. Col. 1:16; Jn 1:3), and that in Christ, who came in the form of a slave to take on and redeem our human condition, all things have been restored (cf.

^M Cf. *Ordo Lectionum Missae, Praenotanda*, Chap. I, n. 6.

Eph 1:10), in order to be handed over to God the Father, from whom all things come to be and draw their life. Then, giving assent to the Eucharistic doxology with their "Amen", the People of God look in faith and hope towards the eschatological end, when Christ "will deliver the kingdom to God the Father ... so that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

This "ascending" movement is inherent in every Eucharistic celebration and makes it a joyous event, overflowing with gratitude and hope. But it emerges particularly at Sunday Mass because of its special link with the commemoration of the Resurrection. By contrast, this "Eucharistic" rejoicing which "lifts up our hearts" is the fruit of God's "descending" movement towards us, which remains for ever etched in the essential sacrificial element of the Eucharist, the supreme expression and celebration of the mystery of the *kenosis*, the descent by which Christ "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross" (Phil 2:8).

The Mass in fact *truly makes present the sacrifice of the Cross*. Under the species of bread and wine, upon which has been invoked the outpouring of the Spirit who works with absolutely unique power in the words of consecration, Christ offers himself to the Father in the same act of sacrifice by which he offered himself on the Cross. "In this divine sacrifice which is accomplished in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once and for all in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner".⁷⁰ To his sacrifice Christ unites the sacrifice of the Church: "In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and

⁷⁰ Ecumenical Council of Trent, *Session XXII, Doctrine and Canons on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, II: DS 1743; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1366.

so acquire a new value".⁷¹ The truth that the whole community shares in Christ's sacrifice is especially evident in the Sunday gathering, which makes it possible to bring to the altar the week that has passed, with all its human burdens.

Easter banquet and fraternal gathering

The communal character of the Eucharist emerges in a special way when it is seen as the Easter banquet, in which Christ himself becomes our nourishment. In fact, "for this purpose Christ entrusted to the Church this sacrifice: so that the faithful might share in it, both spiritually, in faith and charity, and sacramentally, in the banquet of Holy Communion. Sharing in the Lord's Supper is always communion with Christ, who offers himself for us in sacrifice to the Father".⁷² This is why the Church *recommends that the faithful receive communion when they take part in the Eucharist*, provided that they are properly disposed and, if aware of grave sin, have received God's pardon in the Sacrament of Reconciliation,⁷³ in the spirit of what Saint Paul writes to the community at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-32). Obviously, the invitation to Eucharistic communion is more insistent in the case of Mass on Sundays and holy days.

It is also important to be ever mindful that communion with Christ is deeply tied to communion with our brothers and sisters. The Sunday Eucharistic gathering is *an experience of brotherhood*,

⁷¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1368.

⁷² Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 3b: AAS 59 (1967), 541; cf. Pius XII Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), II: AAS 39 (1947), 564-566.

⁷³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1385; cf. also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Reception of Eucharistic Communion by Divorced and Remarried Faithful* (14 September 1994): AAS 86 (1994), 974-979.

which the celebration should demonstrate clearly, while ever respecting the nature of the liturgical action. All this will be helped by gestures of welcome and by the tone of prayer, alert to the needs of all in the community. The sign of peace — in the Rome Rite significantly placed before Eucharistic communion — is a particularly expressive gesture which the faithful are invited to make as a manifestation of the People of God's acceptance of all that has been accomplished in the celebration⁷⁴ and of the commitment to mutual love which is made in sharing the one bread, with the demanding words of Christ in mind: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

From Mass to 'mission'

Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit *the tasks which await them in their ordinary life*. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. Like the first witnesses of the Resurrection, Christians who gather each Sunday to experience and proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord are called *to evangelize and bear witness* in their daily lives. Given this, the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rite — the Final Blessing and the Dismissal — need to be better valued and appreciated, so that all who have shared in the Eucharist may come to a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them. Once the assembly disperses, Christ's disciples return to their everyday surroundings with the commitment to make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because

⁷⁴ Cf. Innocent I, *Epist.* 25, 1 to Decentius of Gubbio: *PL* 20, 553.

of what they have receive in the celebration, not unlike the disciples of Emmaus who, once they had recognized the Risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:30-32), felt the need to return immediately to share with their brothers and sisters the joy of meeting the Lord (cf. Lk 24:33-35).

The Sunday obligation

Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the Church have not ceased to remind the faithful of *the need to take part in the liturgical assembly*. "Leave everything on the Lord's Day", urges the third century text known as the *Didascalia*. "and run diligently to your assembly, because it is your praise of God. Otherwise, what excuse will they make to God, those who do not come together on the Lord's Day to hear the word of life and feed on the divine nourishment which lasts forever?".⁷⁵ The faithful have generally accepted this call of the Pastors with conviction of soul and, although there have been times and situations when this duty has not been perfectly met, one should never forget the genuine heroism of priests and faithful who have fulfilled this obligation even when faced with danger and the denial of religious freedom, as can be documented from the first centuries of Christianity up to our own time.

In his first Apology addressed to the Emperor Antoninus and the Senate, Saint Justin proudly described the Christian practice of the Sunday assembly, which gathered in one place Christians from both the city and the countryside.⁷⁶ When, during the persecution of Diocletian, their assemblies were banned with the greatest severity, many were courageous enough to defy the imperial decree and accepted death rather than miss the Sunday

⁷⁵ n, 59, 2-3: ed. F. X. Funk, 1905, pp. 170-171.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Apologia I*, 67, 3-5: *PG* 6, 430.

Eucharist. This was the case of the martyrs of Abitina, in Proconsular Africa, who replied to their accusers: "Without fear of any kind we have celebrated the Lord's Supper, because it cannot be missed; that is our law"; "We cannot live without the Lord's Supper". As she confessed her faith, one of the martyrs said: "Yes, I went to the assembly and I celebrated the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters, because I am a Christian".⁷⁷

Even if in the earliest times it was not judged necessary to be prescriptive, the Church has not ceased to confirm this obligation of conscience, which rises from the inner need felt so strongly by the Christians of the first centuries. It was only later, faced with the half-heartedness or negligence of some, that the Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass: more often than not, this was done in the form of exhortation, but at times the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts. This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the Council of Elvira of 300, which speaks not of an obligation but penalties after three absences)⁷⁸ and most especially from the sixth century onwards (as at the Council of Agde in 506).⁷⁹ These decrees of local Councils led to a universal practice, the obligatory character of which was taken as something quite normal.⁸⁰

The Code of Canon Law of 1917 for the first time gathered this tradition into a universal law.⁸¹ The present Code reiterates this, saying that "on Sundays and other holy days of obligation

⁷⁷ *Acta SS. Saturnini, Dativi et aliorum plurimorum Martyrum in Africa*, 7, 9, 10: PL 8, 707, 709-710.

⁷¹ Cf. Canon 21, Mansi, *Cone. U*, 9.

⁷⁹ Cf. Canon 47, Mansi, *Cone. VIII*, 332.

^{*0} Cf. the contrary proposition, condemned by Innocent XI in 1679, concerning the moral obligation to keep the feast-day holy: DS 2152.

¹¹ Canon 1248: "*Festis depraecepto diebusMissa audienda est*": Canon 1247, 1: "*Dies festi sub praecepto in universa Ecclesia sunt ... omnes et singuli dies dominici*".

the faithful are bound to attend Mass."⁸² This legislation has normally been understood as entailing a grave obligation: this is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,⁸³ and it is easy to understand why if we keep in mind how vital Sunday is for the Christian life.

Today, as in the heroic times of the beginning, many who wish to live in accord with the demands of their faith are being faced with difficult situations in various parts of the world. They live in surroundings which are sometimes decidedly hostile and at other times — more frequently in fact — indifferent and unresponsive to the Gospel message. If believers are not to be overwhelmed, they must be able to count on the support of the Christian community. This is why they must be convinced that it is crucially important for the life of faith that they should come together with others on Sundays to celebrate the Passover of the Lord in the sacrament of the New Covenant. It is the special responsibility of the Bishops, therefore, "to ensure that Sunday is appreciated by all the faithful, kept holy and celebrated as truly 'the Lord's Day', on which the Church comes together to renew the remembrance of the Easter mystery in hearing the word of God, in offering the sacrifice of the Lord, in keeping the day holy by means of prayer, works of charity and abstention from work".⁸⁴

Because the faithful are obliged to attend Mass unless there is a grave impediment, Pastors have the corresponding duty to offer to everyone the real possibility of fulfilling the precept. The

¹² *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1247; the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 881, §1, prescribes that "the Christian faithful are bound by the obligation to participate on Sundays and feast days in the Divine Liturgy or, according to the prescriptions or legitimate customs of their own Church *sui iuris*, in the celebration of the divine praises".

⁸³ N. 2181: "Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin".

^M Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Ecclesiae imago* (22 February 1973), 86a: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2069.

provisions of Church law move in this direction, as for example in the faculty granted to priests, with the prior authorization of the diocesan Bishop, to celebrate more than one Mass on Sundays and holy days,⁸⁵ the institution of evening Masses⁸⁶ and the provision which allows the obligation to be fulfilled from Saturday evening onwards, starting at the time of First Vespers of Sunday.⁸⁷ From a liturgical point of view, in fact, holy days begin with First Vespers.⁸⁸ Consequently, the liturgy of what is sometimes called the "Vigil Mass" is in effect the "festive" Mass of Sunday, at which the celebrant is required to preach the homily and recite the Prayer of the Faithful.

Moreover, Pastors should remind the faithful that when they are away from home on Sundays they are to take care to attend Mass wherever they may be, enriching the local community with their personal witness. At the same time, these communities should show a warm sense of welcome to visiting brothers and sisters, especially in places which attract many tourists and pilgrims, for whom it will often be necessary to provide special religious assistance.⁸⁹

A joyful celebration in song

Given the nature of Sunday Mass and its importance in the lives of the faithful, it must be prepared with special care. In

^a Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 905, §2.

^M Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Christus Dominus* (6 January 1953): AAS 45 (1953), 15-24; *Motu Proprio Sacram Communionem* (19 March 1957): AAS 49 (1957), 177-178. Congregation of the Holy Office, Instruction on the Discipline concerning the Eucharist Fast (6 January 1953): AAS 45 (1953), 47-51.

⁷Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1248, §1; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 881, §2.

** Cf. *Missale Romanum, Normae Universales de Anno Liturgico et de Calendario*, 3.

" Cf. Sacred Congregation of Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Ecclesiae imago* (22 February 1973), 86: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 4, 2069-2073.

ways dictated by pastoral experience and local custom in keeping with liturgical norms, efforts must be made to ensure that the celebration has the festive character appropriate to the day commemorating the Lord's Resurrection. To this end, it is important to devote attention to the *songs used by the assembly*, since singing is a particularly apt way to express a joyful heart, accentuating the solemnity of the celebration and fostering the sense of a common faith and a shared love. Care must be taken to ensure the quality, both of the texts and of the melodies, so that what is proposed today as new and creative will conform to liturgical requirements and be worthy of the Church's tradition which, in the field of sacred music, boasts a priceless heritage.

A celebration involving all

There is a need too to ensure that all those present, children and adults, take an active interest, by encouraging their involvement at those points where the liturgy suggests and recommends it.⁹⁰ Of course, it falls only to those who exercise the priestly ministry to effect the Eucharistic Sacrifice and to offer it to God in the name of the whole people.⁹¹ This is the basis of the distinction, which is much more than a matter of discipline, between the task proper to the celebrant and that which belongs to deacons and the non-ordained faithful.⁹² Yet the faithful must realize that, because of the common priesthood received in Baptism, "they participate in the offering of the Eucharist".⁹³

⁹⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14; 26; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus* (4 December 1988), 4; 6; 12: AAS 81 (1989) 900-901; 902; 909-910.

" Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 10.

⁹² Cf. Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions concerning the Collaboration of Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de mysterio* (15 August 1997), 6; 8: AAS 89 (1997), 869; 870-872.

⁹³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 10: "*in oblationem Eucharistiae concurrunt*".

Although there is a distinction of roles, they still "offer to God the divine victim and themselves with him. Offering the sacrifice and receiving holy communion, they take part actively in the liturgy",⁹⁴ finding in it light and strength to live their baptismal priesthood and the witness of a holy life.

Other moments of the Christian Sunday

Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this. In this fact, the Lord's Day is lived well if it is marked from beginning to end by grateful and active remembrance of God's saving work. This commits each of Christ's disciples to shape the other moments of the day — those outside the liturgical context: family life, social relationships, moments of relaxation — in such a way that the peace and joy of the Risen Lord will emerge in the ordinary events of life. For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity not only to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and more reflective moments. Even in lay life, when possible, why not make provision for special *times of prayer* — especially the solemn celebration of Vespers, for example — or *moments of catechesis*, which on the eve of Sunday or on Sunday afternoon might prepare for or complete the gift of the Eucharist in people's hearts?

This rather traditional way of keeping Sunday holy has perhaps become more difficult for many people; but the Church shows her faith in the strength of the Risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit by making it known that, today more than ever, she is unwilling to settle for minimalism and mediocrity at the level of faith. She wants to help Christians to do what is most correct and pleasing to the Lord. And despite the difficulties, there are positive and encouraging signs. In many parts of the Church,

* Ibid., 11.

a new need for prayer in its many forms is being felt; and this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is also a rediscovery of ancient religious practices, such as pilgrimages; and often the faithful take advantage of Sunday rest to visit a Shrine where, with the whole family perhaps, they can spend time in a more intense experience of faith. There are moments of grace which must be fostered through evangelization and guided by genuine pastoral wisdom.

Sunday assemblies without a priest

There remains the problem of parishes which do not have the ministry of a priest for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. This is often the case in young Churches, where one priest has pastoral responsibility for faithful scattered over a vast area. However, emergency situations can also arise in countries of long-standing Christian tradition, where diminishing numbers of clergy make it impossible to guarantee the presence of a priest in every parish community. In situations where the Eucharist cannot be celebrated, the Church recommends that the Sunday assembly come together even without a priest,⁹⁵ in keeping with the indications and directives of the Holy See which have been entrusted to the Episcopal Conferences for implementation.⁹⁶ Yet the objective must always remain the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the one way in which the Passover of the Lord becomes truly present, the only full realization of the Eucharistic assembly over which the priest presides *in persona Christi*, breaking the bread of the word and the Eucharist. At the pastoral level, therefore, everything has to be done to ensure that the Sacrifice of the Mass is made available as often as possible to

⁹⁵ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1248, §2.

⁹⁶ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest *Christi Ecclesia* (2 June 1988): *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 11, 442-468; Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions concerning the Collaboration of Lay Faithful in the Ministry of Priests *Ecclesiae de mysterio* (15 August 1997): AAS 89 (1997), 852-877.

the faithful who are regularly deprived of it, either by arranging the presence of a priest from time to time, or by taking every opportunity to organize a gathering in a central location accessible to scattered groups.

Radio and television

Finally, the faithful who, because of sickness, disability or some other serious cause, are prevented from taking part, should as best they can unite themselves with the celebration of Sunday Mass from afar, preferably by means of the readings and prayers for that day from the Missal, as well as through their desire for the Eucharist.⁹⁷ In many countries, radio and television make it possible to join in the Eucharist celebration broadcast from some sacred place.⁹⁸ Clearly, this kind of broadcast does not in itself fulfill the Sunday obligation, which requires participation in the fraternal assembly gathered in one place, where Eucharistic communion can be received. But for those who cannot take part in the Eucharist and who are therefore excused from the obligation, radio and television are a precious help, especially if accompanied by the generous service of extraordinary ministers who bring the Eucharist to the sick, also bringing them the greeting and solidarity of the whole community. Sunday Mass thus produces rich fruits for these Christians too, and they are truly enabled to experience Sunday as "the Lord's Day" and "the Church's day".

⁹⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1248, §2; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Sacerdotium ministeriale* (6 August 1983), IE: AAS 75 (1983), 1007.

⁹⁸ Cf. Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, Instruction *Communio et progressio* (23 May 1971), 150-152; 157: AAS 63 (1971), 645-646; 647.

CHAPTER IV
Dies Hominis
Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest and Solidarity

The 'full joy' of Christ

"Blessed be he who has raised the great day of Sunday above all other days. The heavens and the earth, angels and of men give themselves over to joy".⁹⁵ This cry of the Maronite liturgy captures well the intense acclamations of joy which have always characterized Sunday in the liturgy of both East and West. Moreover, historically — even before it was seen as a day of rest, which in any case was not provided for in the civil calendar — Christians celebrated the weekly day of the Risen Lord primarily as a day of joy. "On the first day of the week, you shall all rejoice", urges the *Didascalia*.¹⁰⁰ This was also emphasized by liturgical practice, through the choice of appropriate gestures.¹⁰¹ Voicing an awareness widespread in the Church, Saint Augustine describes the joy of the weekly Easter: "Fasting is set aside and prayers are said standing, as a sign of the Resurrection, which is also why the Alleluia is sung on every Sunday".¹⁰²

Beyond particular ritual forms, which can vary in time depending upon Church discipline, there remains the fact that

⁹⁵ This is the Deacon's proclamation in honour of the Lord's Day: cf. the Syriac text in the Missal of the Church of Antioch of the Maronites (edition in Syriac and Arabic), Jounieh (Lebanon) 1959, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ V, 20, 11: ed. F. X. Funk, 1905, p. 298; cf. *Didache* 14, 1: ed. F. X. Funk, 1901, p. 32; Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 16, 11: CCL 1, 116. See in particular the *Epistle of Barnabas*, 15, 9: SC 172, 188-189: "This is why we celebrate as a joyous feast the eighth day on which Jesus was raised from the dead and, after having appeared, ascended into heaven".

¹⁰¹ Tertullian for example tells us that on Sunday it was forbidden to kneel, since kneeling, which was then seen as an essentially penitential gesture, seemed unsuited to the day of joy. Cf. *De Corona* 3, 4: CCL 2, 1043.

¹⁰² *Ep.* 55. 28: CSEL 34/2, 202.

Sunday, as a weekly echo of the first encounter with the Risen Lord, is unfailingly marked by the joy with which the disciples greeted the Master: "The disciples rejoiced to see the Lord" (Jn 20:20). This was the confirmation of the words which Jesus spoke before the Passion and which resound in every Christian generation: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy" (Jn 16:20). Had not he himself prayed for this, that the disciples would have "the fullness of his joy" (cf. Jn 17:13)? The festive character of the Sunday Eucharist expresses the joy that Christ communicates to his Church through the gift of the Spirit. Joy is precisely one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22).

Therefore, if we wish to rediscover the full meaning of Sunday, we must rediscover this aspect of the life of faith. Certainly, Christian joy must mark the whole of life, and not just one day of the week. But in virtue of its significance as *the day of the Risen Lord*, celebrating God's work of creation and "new creation", Sunday is the day of joy in a very special way, indeed the day most suitable for learning how to rejoice and to rediscover the true nature and deep roots of joy. This joy should never be confused with shallow feelings of satisfaction and pleasure, which inebriate the senses and emotions for a brief moment, but then leave the heart unfulfilled and perhaps even embittered. In the Christian view, joy is much more enduring and consoling; as the saints attest, it can hold firm even in the dark night of suffering.¹⁰³ It is, in a certain sense, a "virtue" to be nurtured.

Yet there is no conflict whatever between Christian joy and true human joys, which in fact are exalted and find their ultimate foundation precisely in the joy of the glorified Christ, the perfect

¹⁰³ Cf. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, *Derniers entretiens*, 5-6 July 1897, in: *Oeuvres complètes*, Cerf — Desclee de Brouwer, Paris, 1992, pp. 1024-1025.

image and revelation of man as God intended. As my revered predecessor Paul VI wrote in his Exhortation on Christian joy: "In essence, Christian joy is a sharing in the unfathomable joy, at once divine and human, found in the heart of the glorified Christ".¹⁰⁴ Pope Paul concluded his Exhortation by asking that, on the Lord's Day, the Church should witness powerfully to the joy experienced by the Apostles when they saw the Lord on the evening of Easter. To this end, he urged pastors to insist "upon the need for the baptized to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in joy. How could they neglect this encounter, this banquet which Christ prepares for us in his love? May our sharing in it be most worthy and joyful! It is Christ, crucified and glorified, who comes among his disciples, to lead them all together into the newness of his Resurrection. This is the climax, here below, of the covenant of love between God and his people: the sign and source of Christian joy, a stage on the way to the eternal feast".¹⁰⁵ This vision of faith shows the Christian Sunday to be a true "time for celebration", a day given by God to men and women for their full human and spiritual growth.

The fulfillment of the Sabbath

This aspect of the Christian Sunday shows in a special way how it is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath. On the Lord's Day, which — as we have already said — the Old Testament links to the work of creation (cf. Gn 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11) and the Exodus (cf. Dt 5:12-15), the Christian is called to proclaim the new creation and the new covenant brought about in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Far from being abolished, the celebration of creation becomes more profound within a Christocentric perspective, being seen in the light of the God's plan "to unite all things

¹⁰⁴ Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete in Domino* (9 May 1975), H: AAS 67 (1975), 295.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* VII, I.e., 322.

in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). The remembrance of the liberation of the Exodus also assumes its full meaning as it becomes a remembrance of the universal redemption accomplished by Christ in his Death and Resurrection. More than a "replacement" for the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfillment, and in certain sense its extension and full expression in the ordered unfolding of the history of salvation, which reaches its culmination in Christ.

In this perspective, the biblical theology of the "Sabbath" can be recovered in full, without compromising the Christian character of Sunday. It is a theology which leads us ever anew and in unfailing awe to the mystery of the beginning, when the eternal Word of God, by a free decision of love, created the world from nothing. The work of creation was sealed by the blessing and consecration of the day on which God ceased "from all the work which he had done in creation" (Gn 2:3). This day of God's rest confers meaning upon time, which in the sequence of weeks assumes not only a chronological regularity but also, in a manner of speaking, a theological resonance. The constant return of the "*shabbat*" ensures that there is no risk of time being closed in upon itself, since, in welcoming God and his *kairoi* — the moments of his grace and his saving acts — time remains open to eternity.

As the seventh day blessed and consecrated by God, the "shabbat" concludes the whole work of creation, and is therefore immediately linked to the work of the sixth day when God made man "in his image and likeness" (cf. Gn 1:26). This very close connection between the "day of God" and the "day of man" did not escape the Fathers in their meditation on the biblical creation story. Saint Ambrose says in this regard: "Thanks, then, to the Lord our God who accomplished a work in which he might find rest. He made the heavens, but I do not read that he found rest there; he made the stars, the moon, the sun, and neither do I read that he found rest in them. I read instead that he made man and

that then he rested, finding in man one to whom he could offer the forgiveness of sins".¹⁰⁶ Thus there will be for ever a direct link between the "day of God" and the "day of man". When the divine commandment declares: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8), the rest decreed in order to honour the day dedicated to God is not at all a burden imposed upon man, but rather an aid to help him recognize his life-giving and liberating dependence upon the Creator, and at the same time his calling to cooperate in the Creator's work and to receive his grace. In honouring God's "rest", man fully discovers, and thus the Lord's Day bears the profound imprint of God's blessing (cf. Gn 2:3), by virtue of which, we might say, it is endowed in a way similar to the animals and to man himself, with a kind of "fruitfulness" (cf. Gn 1:22, 28). This "fruitfulness" is apparent above all in filling and, in a certain sense, "multiplying" time itself, deepening in men and women the joy of living and the desire to foster and communicate life.

It is the duty of Christians therefore to remember that, although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone, surpassed as they are by the "fulfillment" which Sunday brings, the underlying reasons for keeping "the Lord's Day" holy — inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments — remain valid, though they need to be reinterpreted in the light of the theology and spirituality of Sunday. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Then you shall do no work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your servant, or your maid, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your beasts, or the foreigner within your gates, that your servant and maid may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your

¹⁰⁶ *Hex.* 6, 10, 76: *CSEL* 321, 261.

God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded that you keep the Sabbath day" (Dt 5:12-15). Here the Sabbath observance is closely linked with the liberation which God accomplished for his people.

Christ came to accomplish a new "exodus", to restore freedom to the oppressed. He performed many healings on the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12:9-14 and parallels), certainly not to violate the Lord's Day, but to reveal its full meaning: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). Opposing the excessively legalistic interpretation of some of his contemporaries, and developing the true meaning of the biblical Sabbath, Jesus, as "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk 2:28), restores to the Sabbath observance its liberating character, carefully safeguarding the rights of God and the rights of man. This is why Christians, called as they are to proclaim the liberation won by the blood of Christ, felt that they had the authority to transfer the meaning of the Sabbath to the day of the Resurrection. The Passover of Christ has in fact liberated man from a slavery more radical than any weighing upon an oppressed people — the slavery of sin, which alienates man from God, and alienates man from himself and from others, constantly sowing within history the seeds of evil and violence.

The day of rest

For several centuries, Christians observed Sunday simply as a day of worship, without being able to give it the specific meaning of Sabbath rest. Only in the fourth century did the civil law of the Roman Empire recognize the weekly recurrence, determining that on "the day of the sun" the judges, the people of the cities and the various trade corporations would not work.¹⁰⁷ Christians

¹⁰⁷ Cf. J. G. E. D. of Constantine, 3 July 321: *Codex Theodosianus* U, tit. 8, 1, ed. T. Mommsen, 1/2, p. 87; *Codex Iustiniani*, 3, 12, 2, ed. P. Krueger, p. 248.

rejoiced to see thus removed the obstacles which until then had sometimes made observance of the Lord's Day heroic. They could now devote themselves to prayer in common without hindrance.¹⁰⁸

It would therefore be wrong to see in this legislation of the rhythm of the week a mere historical circumstance with no special significance for the Church and which she could simply set aside. Even after the fall of the Empire, the Councils did not cease to insist upon the arrangements regarding Sunday rest. In countries where Christians are in the minority and where the festive days of the calendar do not coincide with Sunday, it is still Sunday which remains the Lord's Day, the day on which the faithful come together for the Eucharistic assembly. But this involves real sacrifices. For Christians it is not normal that Sunday, the day of joyful celebration, should not also be a day of rest, and it is difficult for them to keep Sunday holy if they do not have enough free time.

By contrast, the link between the Lord's Day and the day of rest in civil society has a meaning and importance which go beyond the distinctly Christian point of view. The alternation between work and rest, built into human nature, is willed by God himself, as appears in the creation story in the Book of Genesis (cf. 2:2-3; Ex 20:8-11): rest is something "sacred", because it is man's way of withdrawing from the sometimes excessively demanding cycle of earthly tasks in order to renew his awareness that everything is the work of God. There is a risk that the prodigious power over creation which God gives to man can lead him to forget that God is the Creator upon whom everything depends. It is all the more urgent to recognize this dependence in our own time, when science and technology have so incredibly increased the power which man exercises through his work.

Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, 4, 18: PG 20, 1165.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that even in our own day work is very oppressive for many people, either because of miserable working conditions and long hours — especially in the poorer regions of the world — or because of the persistence in economically more developed societies of too many cases of injustice and exploitation of man by man. When, through the centuries, she has made laws concerning Sunday rest,^m the Church has had in mind above all the work of servants and workers, certainly not because this work was any less worthy when compared to the spiritual requirements of Sunday observance, but rather because it needed greater regulation to lighten its burden and thus enable everyone to keep the Lord's Day holy. In this matter, my predecessor Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Rerum novarum* spoke of Sunday rest as a worker's right which the State must guarantee.¹¹⁰

In our own historical context there remains the obligation to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day of the week on which people can *both* rest and celebrate. Naturally, this right of workers to rest presupposes their right to work and, as we reflect on the question of the Christian understanding of Sunday, we cannot but recall with a deep sense of solidarity the hardship of countless men and women who, because of the lack of jobs, are forced to remain inactive on workdays as well.

¹⁰⁹ The most ancient text of this kind is can. 29 of the Council of Laodicea (second half of the fourth century): Mansi, II, 569-570. From the sixth to the ninth century, many Councils prohibited "*opera ruralia*". The legislation on prohibited activities, supported by civil laws, became increasingly detailed.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Encyclical Letter *Rerum novarum* (15 May 1891): *Acta Leonis XIII* 11 (1891), 127-128.

Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature — too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself — can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full. As the day on which man is at peace with God, with himself and with others, Sunday becomes a moment when people can look anew upon the wonders of nature, allowing themselves to be caught up in that marvelous and mysterious harmony which, in the words of Saint Ambrose, weds the many elements of the cosmos in a "bond of communion and peace" by "an inviolable law of concord and love".¹¹ Men and women then come to a deeper sense, as the Apostle says, that "everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4-5). If after six days of work — reduced in fact to five for many people — people look for time to relax to pay more attention to other aspects of their lives, this corresponds to an authentic need which is in full harmony with the vision of the Gospel message. Believers are therefore called to satisfy this need in a way consistent with the manifestation of their personal and community faith, as expressed in the celebration and sanctification of the Lord's Day.

Therefore, also in the particular circumstances of our own time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy. In any case, they are obliged in conscience to arrange their Sunday rest in a way which allows them to take part in the Eucharist, refraining from work and activities which are incompatible with the sanctification of the

¹¹ *Hex.* 2, 1, 1: *CSEL* 32/1, 41.

Lord's Day, with its characteristic joy and necessary rest for spirit and body.¹¹²

In order that rest may not degenerate into emptiness or boredom, it must offer spiritual enrichment, greater freedom, opportunities for contemplation and fraternal communion. Therefore, among the forms of culture and entertainment which society offers, the faithful should choose those which are most in keeping with a life lived in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Sunday rest then becomes "prophetic", affirming not only the absolute primacy of God, but also the primacy and dignity of the person with respect to the demands of social and economic life, and anticipating in a certain sense the "new heavens" and the "new earth", in which liberation from slavery to needs will be final and complete. In short, the Lord's Day thus becomes in the truest sense *the day of man* as well.

A day of solidarity

Sunday should also give the faithful an opportunity to devote themselves to works of mercy, charity and apostolate. To experience the joy of the Risen Lord deep within is to share fully the love which pulses in his heart: there is no joy without love! Jesus himself explains this, linking the "new commandment" with the gift of joy: "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:10-12).

The Sunday Eucharist, therefore, not only does not absolve the faithful from the duties of charity, but on the contrary commits

¹¹² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1247; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 881, §1; §4.

them even more "to all the works of charity, of mercy, of apostolic out-reach, by means of which it is seen that the faithful of Christ are not of this world and yet are the light of the world, giving glory to the Father in the presence of men".¹¹³

Ever since Apostolic times, the Sunday gathering has in fact been for Christians a moment fraternal sharing with the very poor. "On the first day of the week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn" (1 Cor 16:2), says Saint Paul referring to the collection organized for the poor Churches of Judaea. In the Sunday Eucharist, the believing heart opens wide to embrace all aspects of the Church. But the full range of the apostolic summons needs to be accepted: far from trying to create a narrow "gift" mentality, Paul calls rather for a demanding *culture of sharing*, to be lived not only among the members of the community itself but also in society as a whole.¹¹⁴ More than ever, we need to listen once again to the stern warning which Paul addresses to the community at Corinth, guilty of having humiliated the poor in the fraternal *agape* which accompanied "the Lord's Supper": "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Cor 11:20-22). James is equally forceful in what he writes: "If a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'Take a seat here,

¹¹³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Cf. also Saint Justin, *Apologia I*, 67, 6: "Each of those who have an abundance and who wish to make an offering gives freely whatever he chooses, and what is collected is given to him who presides and he assists the orphans, the widows, the sick, the poor, the prisoners, the foreign visitors — in a word, he helps all those who are in need": *PG* 6, 430.

please', while you say to the poor man, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (2:2-4).

The teachings of the Apostles struck a sympathetic chord from the earliest centuries, and evoked strong echoes in the preaching of the Fathers of the Church. Saint Ambrose addressed words of fire to the rich who presumed to fulfill their religious obligations by attending church without sharing their goods with the poor, and who perhaps even exploited them: "You who are rich, do you hear what the Lord God says? Yet you come into church not to give to the poor but to take instead".¹¹⁵ Saint John Chrysostom is no less demanding: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk only then to neglect him outside where he suffers cold and nakedness. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same One who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me'... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices, when he is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well".¹¹⁶

These words effectively remind the Christian community of the duty to make the Eucharist the place where fraternity becomes practical solidarity, where the last are the first in the minds and attentions of the brethren, where Christ himself — through the generous gifts from the rich to the very poor — may somehow prolong in time the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *De Nabuthae*, 10, 45: "Audis, dives, quid Dominus Deus dicat? Et tu ad ecclesiam venis, non ut aliquid largiaris pauperi, sed ut auferas": CSEL 32/2, 492.

¹¹⁶ Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, 50, 34: PG 58, 508-509.

¹¹⁷ Saint Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 13, 11-12 to Pammachius: CSEL 29, 92-93. The Roman Senator is praised because, by combining participation in the Eucharist with distribution of food to the poor, he in a sense reproduced the Gospel miracle.

The Eucharist is an event and programme of true brotherhood. From the Sunday Mass there flows a tide of charity destined to spread into the whole life of the faithful, beginning by inspiring the very way in which they live the rest of Sunday. If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behaviour that we cannot be happy "on our own". They look around to find people who may need their help. It may be that in their neighbourhood or among those they know there are sick people, elderly people, children or immigrants who precisely on Sundays feel more keenly their isolation, needs and suffering. It is true that commitment to these people cannot be restricted to occasional Sunday gestures. But presuming a wider sense of commitment, why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table.

Lived in this way, not only the Sunday Eucharist but the whole of Sunday becomes a great school of charity, justice and peace. The presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his people becomes an undertaking of solidarity, a compelling force for inner renewal, an inspiration to change the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled. Far from being an escape, the Christian Sunday is a "prophecy" inscribed on time itself, a prophecy obliging the faithful to follow in the footsteps of the One who came "to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives and new sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19). In the Sunday commemoration of Easter, believers learn from Christ, and remembering his promise: "I leave you peace, my peace I give you" (Jn 14:27), they become in their turn *builders of peace*.

CHAPTER V
Dies Dierum
**Sunday: The Primordial Feast, Revealing
the Meaning of Time**

Christ the Alpha and Omega of time

"In Christianity time has a fundamental importance. Within the dimension of time the world was created; within it the history of salvation unfolds, finding its culmination in the 'fullness of time' of the Incarnation, and its goal in the glorious return of the Son of God at the end of time. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, time becomes a dimension of God, who is himself eternal".¹¹⁸

In the light of the New Testament, the years of Christ's earthly life truly constitute the *centre of time*; this centre reaches its apex in the Resurrection. It is true that Jesus is God made man from the very moment of his conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, but only in the Resurrection is his humanity wholly transfigured and glorified, thus revealing the fullness of his divine identity and glory. In his speech in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (cf. Acts 13:33), Paul applies the words of Psalm 2 to the Resurrection of Christ: "You are my Son, this day I have begotten you" (v. 7). It is precisely for this reason that, in celebrating the Easter Vigil, the Church acclaims the Risen Christ as "the Beginning and End, the Alpha and Omega". These are the words spoken by the celebrant as he prepares the Paschal candle, which bears the number of the current year. These words clearly attest that "Christ is the Lord of time; he is its beginning and its end; every year, every day and every moment are embraced by his Incarnation and Resurrection, and thus become part of the 'fullness of time' ".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), 10: AAS 87 (1995), 11.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Since Sunday is the weekly Easter, recalling and making present the day upon which Christ rose from the dead, it is also the day which reveals the meaning of time. It has nothing in common with the cosmic cycles according to which natural religion and human culture tend to impose a structure on time, succumbing perhaps to the myth of eternal return. The Christian Sunday is wholly other! Springing from the Resurrection, it cuts through human time, the months, the years, the centuries, like a directional arrow which points them towards their target: Christ's Second Coming. Sunday foreshadows the last day, the day of the *Parousia*, which in a way is already anticipated by Christ's glory in the event of the Resurrection.

In fact, everything that will happen until the end of the world will be no more than an extension and unfolding of what happened on the day when the battered body of the Crucified Lord was raised by the power of the Spirit and became in turn the well-spring of the Spirit for all humanity. Christians know that there is no need to wait for another time of salvation, since, however long the world may last, they are already living in *the last times*. Not only the Church, but the cosmos itself and history are ceaselessly ruled and governed by the glorified Christ. It is this life-force which propels creation, "groaning in birth-pangs until now" (Rom 8:22), towards the goal of its full redemption. Mankind can have only a faint intuition of this process, but Christians have the key and the certainty. Keeping Sunday holy is the important witness which they are called to bear, so that every stage of human history will be upheld by hope.

Sunday in the Liturgical Year

With its weekly recurrence, the Lord's Day is rooted in the most ancient tradition of the Church and is vitally important for the Christian. But there was another rhythm which soon established itself: *the annual liturgical cycle*. Human psychology in fact desires

the celebration of anniversaries, associating the return of dates and seasons with the remembrance of past events. When these events are decisive in the life of a people, their celebration generally creates a festive atmosphere which breaks the monotony of daily routine.

Now, by God's design, the great saving events up-on which the Church's life is founded were closely linked to the annual Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost, and were prophetically foreshadowed in them. Since the second century, the annual celebration of Easter by Christians — having been added to the weekly Easter celebration — allowed a more ample meditation on the mystery of Christ crucified and risen. Preceded by a preparatory fast, celebrated in the course of a long vigil, extended into the fifty days leading to Pentecost, the feast of Easter — "solemnity of solemnities" — became the day *par excellence* for the initiation of catechumens. Through baptism they die to sin and rise to a new life because Jesus "was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25; cf. 6:3-11). Intimately connected to the Paschal Mystery, the Solemnity of Pentecost takes on special importance, celebrating as it does the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles gathered with Mary and inaugurating the mission to all peoples.¹²⁰

A similar commemorative logic guided the arrangement of the entire Liturgical Year. As the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Church wished to extend throughout the year "the entire mystery of Christ, from the Incarnation and Nativity to the Ascension, to the day of Pentecost and to the waiting in blessed hope for the return of the Lord. Remembering in this way the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the treasury of the Lord's power and merits, making them present in

Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 731-732.

some sense to all times, so that the faithful may approach them and be filled by them with the grace of salvation".¹²¹

After Easter and Pentecost, the most solemn celebration is undoubtedly the Nativity of the Lord, when Christians ponder the mystery of the Incarnation and contemplate the Word of God who deigns to assume our humanity in order to give us a share in his divinity.

Likewise, "in celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, the holy Church venerates with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, united forever with the saving work of her Son".¹²² In a similar way, by inserting into the annual cycle the commemoration of the martyrs and other saints on the occasion of their anniversaries, "the Church proclaims the Easter mystery of the saints who suffered with Christ and with him are now glorified".¹²³ When celebrated in the true spirit of the liturgy, the commemoration of the saints does not obscure the centrality of Christ, but on the contrary extols it, demonstrating as it does the power of the redemption wrought by him. As Saint Paulinus of Nola sings, "all things pass, but the glory of the saints endures in Christ, who renews all things, while he himself remains unchanged".¹²⁴ The intrinsic relationship between the glory of the saints and that of Christ is built into the very arrangement of the Liturgical Year, and is expressed most eloquently in the fundamental and sovereign character of Sunday as the Lord's Day. Following the seasons of the Liturgical Year in the Sunday observance which structures it from beginning to end, the ecclesial and spiritual commitment of Christians comes to be profoundly

¹²¹ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 102.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹²⁴ *Carm.* XVI, 3-4: "*Omnia praetereunt, sanctorum gloria durat I in Christo qui cuncta novat, dum permanet ipse*": CSEL 30, 67.

anchored in Christ, in whom believers find their reason for living and from whom they draw sustenance and inspiration.

Sunday emerges therefore as the natural model for understanding and celebrating these feast-days of the Liturgical Year, which are of such value for the Christian life that the Church has chosen to emphasize their importance by making it obligatory for the faithful to attend Mass and to observe a time of rest, even though these feast-days may fall on variable days of the week.¹²⁵ Their number has been changed from time to time, taking into account social and economic conditions, as also how firmly they are established in tradition, and how well they are supported by civil legislation.¹²⁶

The present canonical and liturgical provisions allow each Episcopal Conference, because of particular circumstances in one country or another, to reduce the list of Holy Days of obligation. Any decision in this regard needs to receive the special approval of the Apostolic See,¹²⁷ and in such cases the celebration of a mystery of the Lord, such as the Epiphany, the Ascension or the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, must be transferred to Sunday, in accordance with liturgical norms, so that the faithful are not denied the chance to meditate upon the mystery.¹²⁸ Pastors

¹²³ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1247; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 881, §1; §4.

¹²⁶ By general law, the holy days of obligation in the Latin Church are the Feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Body and Blood of Christ, Mary Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, Saint Joseph, Saints Peter and Paul and All Saints: cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1246. The holy days of obligation in all the Eastern Churches are the Feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Dormition of Mary Mother of God and Saints Peter and Paul: cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 880, §3.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1246, §2; for the Eastern Churches, cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 880, §3.

¹²⁸ Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Normae Universales de Anno Liturgico et de Calendario* (21 March 1969), 5, 7: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 3, 895; 897.

should also take care to encourage the faithful to attend Mass on other important feast-days celebrated during the week.¹²⁹

There is a need for special pastoral attention to the many situations where there is a risk that the popular and cultural traditions of a region may intrude upon the celebration of Sundays and other liturgical feast-days, mingling the spirit of genuine Christian faith with elements which are foreign to it and may distort it. In such cases, catechesis and well-chosen pastoral initiatives need to clarify these situations, eliminating all that is incompatible with the Gospel of Christ. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that these traditions — and, by analogy, some recent cultural initiatives in civil society — often embody values which are not difficult to integrate with the demands of faith. It rests with the discernment of Pastors to preserve the genuine values found in the culture of a particular social context and especially in popular piety, so that liturgical celebration — above all on Sundays and holy days — does not suffer but rather may actually benefit.¹³⁰

Conclusion

The spiritual and pastoral riches of Sunday, as it has been handed on to us by tradition, are truly great. When its significance and implications are understood in their entirety, Sunday in a way becomes a synthesis of the Christian life and a condition for living it well. It is clear therefore why the observance of the Lord's Day is so close to the Church's heart, and why in the Church's discipline it remains a real obligation. Yet more than as a precept, the observance should be seen as a need rising from the depths of Christian life. It is crucially important that all the faithful should be convinced that they cannot live their faith or share fully in

¹²⁹ Cf. *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, ed. typica 1995, n. 230.

¹³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, n. 233.

the life of the Christian community unless they take part regularly in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly. The Eucharist is full realization of the worship which humanity owes to God, and it cannot be compared to any other religious experience. A particularly efficacious expression of this is the Sunday gathering of the entire community, obedient to the voice of the Risen Lord who calls the faithful together to give them the light of his word and the nourishment of his Body as the perennial sacramental wellspring of redemption. The grace flowing from this wellspring renews mankind, life and history.

It is with this strong conviction of faith, and with awareness of the heritage of human values which the observance of Sunday entails, that Christians today must face the enticements of a culture which has accepted the benefits of rest and free time, but which often uses them frivolously and is at times attracted by morally questionable forms of entertainment. Certainly, Christians are no different from other people in enjoying the weekly day of rest; but at the same time they are keenly aware of the uniqueness and originality of Sunday, the day on which they are called to celebrate their salvation and the salvation of all humanity. Sunday is the day of joy and the day of rest precisely because it is "the Lord's Day", the day of the Risen Lord.

Understood and lived in this fashion, Sunday in a way becomes the soul of the other days, and in this sense we can recall the insight of Origen that the perfect Christian "is always in the Lord's Day, and is always celebrating Sunday".¹³¹ Sunday is a true school, an enduring programme of Church pedagogy — an irreplaceable pedagogy, especially with social conditions now marked more and more by a fragmentation and cultural pluralism which constantly test the faithfulness of individual Christians to the practical demands of their faith. In many parts of the world,

¹³¹ *Contra Celsum* VIII, 22: SC 150, 222-224.

we see a "diaspora" Christianity, which is put to the test because the scattered disciples of Christ can no longer easily maintain contact with one another, and lack the support of the structures and traditions proper to Christian culture. In a situation of such difficulty, the opportunity to come together on Sundays with fellow believers, exchanging gifts of brotherhood, is an indispensable help.

Sustaining Christian life as it does, Sunday has the additional value of being a testimony and a proclamation. As a day of prayer, communion and joy, Sunday resounds throughout society, emanating vital energies and reasons for hope. Sunday is the proclamation that time, in which he who is the Risen Lord of history makes him home, is not the grave of our illusions but the cradle of an ever new future, an opportunity given to us to turn the fleeting moments of this life into seeds of eternity. Sunday is an invitation to look ahead; it is the day on which the Christian community cries out to Christ, "*Marana tha*: Come, O Lord!" (1 Cor 16:22). With this cry of hope and expectation, the Church is the companion and support of human hope. From Sunday to Sunday, enlightened by Christ, she goes forward towards the unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem, which "has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23).

As she strains towards her goal, the Church is sustained and enlivened by the Spirit. It is he who awakens memory and makes present for every generation of believers the event of the Resurrection. He is the inward gift uniting us to the Risen Lord and to our brothers and sisters in the intimacy of a single body, reviving our faith, filling our hearts with charity and renewing our hope. The Spirit is unfailingly present to every one of the Church's days, appearing unpredictably and lavishly with the wealth of his gifts. But it is in the Sunday gathering for the weekly celebration of Easter that the Church listens to the Spirit in a special way and

reaches out with him to Christ in the ardent desire that he return in glory: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Rev 22:17). Precisely in consideration of the role of the Spirit, I have wished that this exhortation aimed at rediscovering the meaning of Sunday should appear in this year which, in the immediate preparation for the Jubilee, is dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that it may be received and put into practice by the Christian community. Without in any way detracting from the centrality of Christ and his Spirit, Mary is always present in the Church's Sunday. It is the mystery of Christ itself which demands this: indeed, how could she who is *Mater Domini* and *Mater Ecclesiae* fail to be uniquely present on the day which is both *dies Domini* and *dies Ecclesiae*?

As they listen to the word proclaimed in the Sunday assembly, the faithful look to the Virgin Mary, learning from her to keep it and ponder it in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19). With Mary, they learn to stand at the foot of the Cross, offering to the Father the sacrifice of Christ and joining to it the offering of their own lives. With Mary, they experience the joy of Resurrection, making their own the words of the Magnificat which extol the inexhaustible gift of divine mercy in the inexorable flow of time: "His mercy is from age to age upon those who fear him" (Lk 1:50). From Sunday to Sunday, the pilgrim people follow in the footsteps of Mary, and her maternal intercession gives special power and fervour to the prayer which rises from the Church to the Most Holy Trinity.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the imminence of the Jubilee invites us to a deeper spiritual and pastoral commitment. Indeed, this is its true purpose. In the Jubilee year, much will be done to give it the particular stamp demanded by the ending of the Second Millennium and the beginning of the Third since the Incarnation of the Word of God. But this year and this special

time will pass, as we look to other jubilees and other solemn events. As the weekly "solemnity", however, Sunday will continue to shape the time of the Church's pilgrimage, until that Sunday which will know no evening.

Therefore, dear Brother Bishops and Priests, I urge you to work tirelessly with the faithful to ensure that the value of this sacred day is understood and lived ever more deeply. This will bear rich fruit in Christian communities, and will not fail to have a positive influence on civil society as a whole.

In coming to know the Church, which every Sunday joyfully celebrates the mystery from which she draws her life, may the men and women of the Third Millennium come to know the Risen Christ. And constantly renewed by the weekly commemoration of Easter, may Christ's disciples be ever more credible in proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and ever more effective in building the civilization of love.

My blessing to you all!

(From the Vatican, on 31 May, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 1998, the twentieth of my Pontificate)

Ad Ttiendam Fidem

JOHN PAUL II

On 9 January 1989, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published new formulas for the Professio Fidei et Iusiurandum fidelitatis in suscipiendo officio nomine Ecclesiae exercendo (AAS 57 [1989], 104-106), to replace the previous formula of 1967. These formulas were approved by the Roman Pontiff in a special Rescript (Rescriptum ex Audientia SS. mi Quod attinet, Formulas professionis fidei et iuris iurandi fidelitatis contingens foras datur, 19 septembris 1989: in AAS 81 [1989J, 1169). Given that the authentic text of the new Code of Canon Law, which had been promulgated on 25 January 1983 and published in Acta Apostolicae Sedis, did not contain the new formula of the Professio Fidei, which in addition to the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed, enunciates three categories of truths, it became apparent that the Code of Canon Law, and later the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, lacked juridical, disciplinary and penal provisions for the second category of truths.

Consequently, once this lacuna in the Church's universal legislation had become clear, and given the compelling need to forestall and refute the theological opinions being raised against this second category of truths, the Holy Father decided to

promulgate the Apostolic Letter Ad tuendam fidem, by which precise norms are established in canon law regarding the second category of truths indicated in the second paragraph of the concluding formula of the Professio Fidei, through modification to canons 750 and 1371, n. 1 of the CIC and to canons 598 and 1436 of the CCEO.

TO PROTECT THE FAITH of the Catholic Church against errors arising from certain members of the Christian faithful especially from among those dedicated to the various disciplines of sacred theology, we, whose principal duty is to confirm the brethren in the faith (Lk 22:32), consider it absolutely necessary to add to the existing texts of the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* new norms which expressly impose the obligation of upholding truths proposed in a definitive way by the Magisterium of the Church, and which also establish related canonical sanctions.

From the first centuries to the present day, the Church has professed the truths of her faith in Christ and the mystery of his redemption. These truths were subsequently gathered into the Symbols of the faith, today known and proclaimed in common by the faithful in the solemn and festive celebration of Mass as the *Apostles' Creed* or the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*.

This same *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* is contained in the *Profession of Faith* developed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,¹ which must be made by specific members of the faithful when they receive an office that is directly or indirectly related to deeper investigation into the truths of faith and morals, or is united to a particular power in the governance of the Church.²

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity* (9 January 1989): AAS 81 (1989), 105.

² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 833.

The *Profession of Faith*, which appropriately begins with the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, contains three propositions or paragraphs intended to describe the truths of the Catholic faith, which the Church, in the course of time and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit "who will teach the whole truth" (Jn 16:13), has ever more deeply explored and will continue to explore.³

The first paragraph states: "With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the Word of God whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed".⁴ This paragraph appropriately confirms and is provided for in the Church's legislation in canon 750 of the *Code of Canon Law*⁵ and canon 598 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.⁶

The third paragraph states: "Moreover I adhere with submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman

³ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canon 747, § 1; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 595, § 1.

⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, n. 25; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, n. 5; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis* (24 May 1990), n. 15: *MS* 82 (1990), 1556.

⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, canon 750 — Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ's faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium. All are therefore bound to avoid any contrary doctrines.

⁶ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 598 — Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ's faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium. All Christian faithful are therefore bound to avoid any contrary doctrines.

Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act".⁷ This paragraph has its corresponding legislative expression in canon 752 of the *Code of Canon Law** and canon 599 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.⁹

The second paragraph, however, which states: "I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals",¹⁰ has no corresponding canon in the Codes of the Catholic Church. This second paragraph of the *Profession of Faith* is of utmost importance since it refers to truths that are necessarily connected to divine revelation. These truths in the investigation of Catholic doctrine, illustrate the Divine Spirit's particular inspiration for the Church's deeper understanding of a truth concerning faith and morals, with which they are connected either for historical reasons or by a logical relationship.

⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis* (24 May 1990), n. 17: AAS 82 (1990), 1557.

⁸ *Code of Canon Law*, canon 752: While the assent of faith is not required, a religious submission of intellect and will is to be given to any doctrine which either the Supreme Pontiff or the College of Bishops, exercising their authentic Magisterium, declare upon a matter of faith and morals, even though they do not intend to proclaim that doctrine by definitive act. Christ's faithful are therefore to ensure that they avoid whatever does not accord with that doctrine.

⁹ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, canon 599 — While the assent of faith is not required, a religious submission of intellect and will is to be given to any doctrine which either the Supreme Pontiff or the College of Bishops, exercising their authentic Magisterium, declare upon a matter of faith and morals, even though they do not intend to proclaim that doctrine by definitive act. Christ's faithful are therefore to ensure that they avoid whatever does not accord with that doctrine.

¹⁰ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum veritatis* (24 May 1990), n. 16: AAS 82 (1990), 1557.

Moved therefore by this need, and after careful deliberation, we have decided to overcome this lacuna in the universal law in the following way:

a) Canon 750 of the *Code of Canon Law* will now consist of two paragraphs; the first will present the text of the existing canon; the second will contain a new text. Thus, canon 750, in its complete form, will read:

Canon 750 — § 1. Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ's faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium. All are therefore bound to avoid any contrary doctrines.

§ 2. Furthermore, each and everything set forth definitively by the Magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held; namely those things required for the holy keeping and faithful exposition of the deposit of faith; therefore, anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Canon 1371, n. 1 of the *Code of Canon Law*, consequently, will receive an appropriate reference to canon 750, § 2, so that it will now read:

Canon 1371 — The following are to be punished with a just penalty:

1° a person who, apart from the case mentioned in canon 1364, § 1, teaches a doctrine condemned by the Roman Pontiff,

or by an Ecumenical Council, or obstinately rejects the teachings mentioned in canon 750, § 2 or in canon 752 and, when warned by the Apostolic See or by the Ordinary, does not retract;

2° a person who in any other way does not obey the lawful command or prohibition of the Apostolic See or the Ordinary or Superior and, after being warned, persists in disobedience.

b) Canon 598 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* will now have two paragraphs: the first will present the text of the existing canon and the second will contain a new text. Thus canon 598, in its complete form, will read as follows:

Canon 598 — § 1. Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ's faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium. All Christian faithful are therefore bound to avoid any contrary doctrines.

§ 2. Furthermore, each and everything set forth definitively by the Magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held; namely, those things required for the holy keeping and faithful exposition of the deposit of faith; therefore, anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Canon 1436, § 2 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, consequently, will receive an appropriate reference to canon 598, § 2, so that it will now read:

Canon 1436 — § 1. Whoever denies a truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or who calls into doubt, or who totally repudiates the Christian faith, and does not retract after having been legitimately warned, is to be punished as a heretic or an apostate with a major excommunication, a cleric moreover can be punished with other penalties, not excluding deposition.

§ 2. In addition to these cases, whoever obstinately rejects a teaching that the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops, exercising the authentic Magisterium, have set forth to be held definitively, or who affirms what they have condemned as erroneous, and does not retract after having been legitimately warned, is to be punished with an appropriate penalty.

We order that everything decreed by us in this Apostolic Letter, given *motu proprio*, be established and ratified, and we prescribe that the insertions listed above be introduced into the universal legislation of the Catholic Church, that is, into the *Code of Canon Law* and into the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, all things to the contrary notwithstanding.

(Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on 28 May, in the year 1998, the twentieth of our Pontificate).

Translation of Liturgical Texts

EPISCOPAL COMMISSION ON LITURGY

At the conclusion of the 13th National Meeting of the Diocesan Directors of Liturgy held in Davao City from September 7 to 10, 1998 the 106 delegates passed the resolution that two important letters regarding the translation and revision of liturgical texts be widely circulated for the information and guidance of all concerned. The delegates wish to remind all that no translation or revision of liturgical texts may be made by private persons for public use without the authorization of the respective local Ordinary and the diocesan or regional commissions on liturgy. Following are pertinent excerpts of the two letters.

The first was signed by Archbishop Geraldo Agnelo, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship (Prot. n. CD 847/89) addressed to Archbishop Onesimo Gordoncillo, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy. The second was the response of the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, signed by Archbishop Onesimo Gordoncillo, Chairman, and Anscar J. Chupungco, Executive Secretary, to questions regarding the diffusion and use of an earlier translation of the Roman Sacramentary. The letter was addressed to Msgr. Luigi Balquiedia, President of the Regional Commission for Tagalog in the Liturgy.

VATICAN NORMS ON TRANSLATION AND REVISION OF LITURGICAL TEXTS

"All liturgical translations or texts must be duly approved by the Episcopal Conference. The request for confirmation by the Holy See is to be signed by the President and General Secretary of the Conference, and attested with the seal of the Conference.

Information is to be given concerning the vote. Three copies of the texts, along with any explanations that may be considered important, are to accompany the formal letter of request.

In addition, in the case of liturgical translations to be used only in one region, they must have received the previous consensus of all bishops of the region and approved by the Episcopal Conference. They may then be presented by the President and the General Secretary of the same Conference, in the manner indicated above.

Once the texts have been confirmed by the Holy See, they may be promulgated by the same conference with a decree signed by the President of the Episcopal Conference".

AKLAT NG PAGMIMISA SA ROMA

"Last July 12, 1997 the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy received a letter from the Regional Commission for Tagalog in the Liturgy which you chair. In the said letter your Commission brought to our attention the reprinting and wide distribution of an older Tagalog translation of the Roman Missal made by Msgr. Jose Abriol. Your Commission requests the Episcopal Commission to act on this matter because of its profound consequences.

In response to the letter I discussed the issue with the bishop members and consultors of the Episcopal Commission. They unanimously agreed to send the following answer:

1. The Tagalog translation *Pagmimisa sa Roma* was approved by the CBCP on April 18, 1978 and subsequently confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship under Prot. CD 925/78 and CD 915/81. With the Congregation's confirmation the older translation by Msgr. Abriol, which at an earlier date had been approved *ad interim* by the Holy See, has been superseded.

In view of the aforementioned facts, the Episcopal Commission wishes to remind all that the *Pagmimisa sa Roma* is the **SOLE CANONICALLY APPROVED** Tagalog translation of the Roman Missal of Paul VI.

2. The Episcopal Commission furthermore reminds all of the Instruction *Constitutione Apostolica* issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship on October 20, 1969: "There is to be a single translation of the text for the Order of Mass for all regions using the same language" (no. 4).

3. Our Commission compared the formula for the words of institution in the eucharistic prayer found in the translation of Msgr. Abriol and discovered that it differed from the officially approved formula in the *Pagmimisa sa Roma*.

It will be recalled that on October 25, 1973 Pope Paul VI reserved to himself the power to approve personally all translations of the sacramental forms into the vernacular. These include above all the words of institution. On January 25, 1974 the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith reiterated this with the declaration *Instauratio liturgica*, reminding the conferences of bishops that "the Holy See examines the translation of a sacramental form into the vernacular and, when it judges that the translation rightly

expresses the meaning intended by the Church, approves and confirms the translation".

4. Our Commission is aware that there are linguistic and stylistic complaints regarding the *Pagmimisa sa Roma*. It is our considered stand, however, that these complaints are not a valid reason to revert to the older translation. Such would create an unnecessary division among pastors and faithful and hamper the progress of liturgical renewal in the country.

We suggest to your Commission to consider the complaints and embark as soon as possible on the revision of the *Pagmimisa sa Roma* according to the norms issued by the Holy See on this matter. It is your task meanwhile to provide parishes with copies of the approved translation".

The Core of Priestly Spirituality

PEDRO TEJERO, OP

1. The priest, by the power of the sacred order, is consecrated as minister of Christ and made a living instrument for the distribution and sharing of Christ's salvific mysteries. In virtue of this consecration, the priest lives and acts in the Person of Christ, and continues and fulfills the mission which Christ received from the Father. It is in this line that the priest is called: *Alter Christus*.

There is, then, a deep and intimate relationship binding Christ, the supreme and eternal priest, with his minister. This relationship, in turn, manifests the fundamental nature of priestly vocation and points out, unequivocally, where the center and core of priestly spirituality lie. When the bishop imposes his hands upon the candidate for ordination, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit takes place, then a new and powerful dimension becomes present in the very depth of the priest's soul leading him and calling him to a gradual and steadfast identification with Christ, the Head and Model. From this moment on, no other main purpose or ambition should breathe in his life but to strive earnestly to become one with Christ and to think, love and act as Christ does. When the life of a priest follows this pattern of action, no crisis of identity

will ever happen. To be identified with Christ implies to become a faithful servant and a docile instrument in God's plans.

2. In the following lines, certain practical guidelines are presented to help priests in their endeavor to become one with Christ, their model and head, notwithstanding human frailty and sin.

3. To be a priest is to be a disciple of the Lord. When Christ called his disciples to follow him, he asked them to be poor and detached. "They left everything and followed him" (Lk 5, 11). They abandoned all they had, possessions, occupations, family and country in a total dedication of themselves for the service of men. It is in this vein why Christ expects from his priest to give up many of the things of this world as well as important values pertaining to his person. Christ wants to see his priests poor and detached not only from economical values but even, in no few cases, from cultural and social ranks. Priesthood can never be an occasion to gain back what was given up for the sake of God's kingdom. Priesthood will be degraded when converted into a stepping stone for privileges and dignities. In contemporary society where the total attention of men and women is focused on material and secular values, priests should shine with a life of simplicity and detachment, mortification and self-denial in the example of Christ.

4. Priests are the ministers of God's Word. But before this ministry is imparted to the faithful, priests should welcome in their own lives the richness of such Divine Word. They should hold fast to the Sacred Scripture through diligent reading, careful study and loving meditation. The priestly mission would be void and fruitless if deprived of the abundant wealth of the Divine Word. To be in touch with God's message will bring forth "the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Ph 3, 8).

5. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the careful preparation of the faithful for a worthy reception of the Body and Blood of Christ constitute the most significant and dedicated task of the priestly ministry. The Mass, therefore, should be looked upon as the center and core of priestly ministry and spirituality. How attentively and devoutly he should celebrate his daily Mass. It is at this precise moment when Christ and the priest reach the peak of their mutual relationship, the Lord as the Head, and the priest as his minister and instrument in the dispensation of God's graces. To be aware, in the faith, of these surpassing and mysterious truths should help the priest to realize that the Eucharist is the source and apex of the whole priestly vocation.

Aside from this, the celebration of the Mass should help the priest to understand that he, too, should make a total offering of himself, expressed in his vow of celibacy, for the good of others and for the intercession of the sins of the world.

Furthermore, the Mass makes the priest stand as a sign and symbol of Christian unity and universal love.

6. The adoration of Christ in the Tabernacle is certainly one of the best means and ways to foster and nourish priestly spirituality. The real presence of Christ should fill the soul of the priest with great joy and contentment. The Lord enjoys, especially, when the priest visits him, and he is always ready to listen to him in his moment of solitude, affliction, temptation, discouragement and abandonment. But Jesus is also in the Eucharist to share with his friend, the priest, moments of joy, friendliness and happiness.

7. In the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, the priest must also be ready to give up his life for the sake of the people entrusted to him. The meaning of his life is marked out by his zeal and commitment in behalf of the souls. No other dedication, no other undertaking should occupy him but the education,

guidance and furtherance in the faith of his flock. The most needy and afflicted should be the ones to attract his attention and preference. Ever conscious that Christ is the one who saves and cures through his grace, the priest offers his ministry as a docile instrument in the hands of Christ. This fact should never lead to think that his collaboration and participation in the way of salvation is less important. Because of his union with Christ through the sacramental character or power, he is enabled to act in the name of the Lord and do marvelous things which surpass all human understanding. The sacrament of penance exemplifies what we are saying. As he sits at the confessional and hears the sins of the repentant sinner, he utters these impressive words: "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Who can forgive sins? Only God and those chosen by Christ in the sacrament of Order: "the sins you shall forgive, shall be forgiven". Great is indeed the dignity and power conferred by Christ to his priests.

The Spirit and Mary Unfold God's Loving Design

JAMES KROEGER, M.M.*

Inaugurating the "Year of the Holy Spirit" in the Church's preparation for the new millennium, Pope John Paul II noted: "Today, the First Sunday of Advent, begins the *second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee* of the Year 2000, the year 'dedicated in a particular way to the *Holy Spirit* and to his sanctifying presence within the community of Christ's disciples' (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 44). The faithful are invited to rediscover this 'Gift' *par excellence* which is the Spirit of God."

In the same Angelus message (November 30, 1997), the Pope exhorted Christians: "Let us turn our gaze to Mary, 'the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness, a woman of hope' (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 48)."

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Responsive to the pope's exhortation, this extended theological meditation aims to explore the loving presence of the Holy Spirit in the life and person of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit has emerged in recent studies of Pneumatology and Mariology as an exceedingly rich source of theological inspiration for Christian life and spirituality. The "Year of the Holy Spirit" provides an opportune moment for further exploration of this Spirit-Mary relationship.

ANTECEDENTS OF THE JUBILEE CELEBRATION

Celebrating the millennial Jubilee has continually occupied John Paul II since he became pope in 1978. His first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), takes note of the approaching millennium in both its opening and closing sections (1, 22). The pope carefully notes how "the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth . . . under the special influence of the Holy Spirit" (22).

The inspirational encyclical on the Holy Spirit issued in 1986 (*Dominum et Vivificantem*) is replete with allusions to the Jubilee and to Mary (49-54, 59-66). *"The Church's mind and heart turn to the Holy Spirit as this twentieth century draws to a close and the third Millennium since the coming of Jesus Christ into the world approaches"* (49). This Jubilee "has a *pneumatological aspect*, since the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished 'by the power of the Holy Spirit'" (50). Thus, "The Church cannot *prepare* for the Jubilee in any other way than *in the Holy Spirit*" (51).

The Jubilee becomes the opportune time for "seeing with the eyes of faith the *two thousand years of the action of the Spirit of truth*" (53). It is "the Holy Spirit, who is the *source of all God's salvific activity in the world*" (54). The pope concludes: "The Church wishes to *prepare* for this Jubilee *in the Holy Spirit*,

just as the Virgin of Nazareth in whom the Word was made flesh was prepared by the Holy Spirit" (66).

The Church received an encyclical on Mary (*Redemptoris Mater*) from the hands of John Paul II in 1987, a special Marian Year. Explaining his motivation for writing the document, the pope said: "The circumstance which now moves me to take up this subject once more is *the prospect of the year 2000*, now drawing near, in which the Bimillennial Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ at the same time directs our gaze toward his Mother" (3). The pope deemed it fitting to promote the observation of "a similar Jubilee in celebration of the birth of Mary" (3). In addition, explicitly linking the roles of Mary and the Holy Spirit, John Paul II determined that the "Marian Year *will begin on the Solemnity of Pentecost* [and that it will end] *on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven*" (49).

In his 1994 programmatic apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (*The Approaching Third Millennium*), John Paul II devoted a special section to the Holy Spirit and Mary (44-48). "1998, the *second year* of the preparatory phase, will be dedicated in a particular way to the *Holy Spirit* [emphasizing that] the Church cannot prepare for the new millennium 'in any other way than *in the Holy Spirit*'" (44). In this year of the Spirit, Mary "will be contemplated and imitated . . . as the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit" (48).

This brief panorama of antecedents for the Jubilee has highlighted the references to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary — all as a prelude to the main body of this presentation. To take one year (1998) to reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit and to use Mary as a model for this reflection will facilitate depth preparation for the Jubilee. In the vision of John Paul II, this current renewal continues the new Pentecost already initiated in the extraordinary event of Vatican II, for "*the*

Second Vatican Council was a providential event, whereby the Church began the more immediate preparation for the Jubilee of the Second Millennium" (TMA 18).

A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK OF INTERPRETATION

Reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Mary is enriched if set within a comprehensive theological framework. Conversely, the various events found in Scripture that portray the Mary-Spirit relationship may appear fragmentary if they are not integrated into an overall synthesis. Isolated Gospel events take on an enhanced depth of meaning when understood within a comprehensive interpretation.

Such an interpretive key is suggested by the full title that Vatican II gave to its eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* where one finds the Council's discussion on Mary. The Latin original reads: "*De Beata Maria Virgine Deipara in mysterio Christi et Ecclesiae.*" In the English translation of W. Abbott, it is rendered: "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church" (Abbott, p. 85).

Following the lead of the Council, this presentation adopts the framework that locates Mary *within the divine mystery of salvation*. Admittedly, this is not an original insight. Yet, it needs to be noted. At every turn, the isolated instances where Mary is presented in Scripture are integrated within a total history of salvation. Mary is thus portrayed as having a unique role in unfolding God's salvific design through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Paul VI: C, pp. 200-201).

As one reads the voluminous literature that has flowed from the hand — and heart — of John Paul II, it becomes eminently clear that he too speaks within such a comprehensive framework,

whether he treats of moral, doctrinal, pastoral, spiritual, or social questions. The pope anchors his thought in "the eternal design of God," *"the divine plan of salvation,"* "the saving mystery of Christ and the Church" (RM 7, 38). And, CELEBRATING GOD'S DESIGN OF SALVATION is the very PURPOSE OF THE GREAT JUBILEE. The pope readily admits that the Jubilee Year 2000 *"has become as it were a hermeneutical key of my Pontificate"* (TMA 23).

A brief excursus into the thought of St. Paul (employed by Vatican II and John Paul II) will further illumine the comprehensive theological framework within which the roles of Mary and the Holy Spirit unfold. At the core of Pauline theology, one encounters the *mysterion*, understood as God's universal loving plan of salvation for all peoples (cf. Eph. 1:3-14; 3:1-13; Col. 1:24-29; 4:2-6; I Cor. 2:7-10; Rom. 16:25-27).

Paul is absolutely certain that God has a wonderful, marvelous, design of salvation for the whole world. His letter to the Ephesians convincingly — almost mystically — explains how "God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery" (1:9), the mysterious design which for ages was hidden in God" (3:9).

Pauline reflection on God's loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*) synthesizes his belief that this design has been fully revealed in Christ the Savior and will be recapitulated in Christ at the end of time (Eph. 1:10). This manifestation is focused on salvation, not condemnation or judgment, and is open to all peoples (Rom. 16:25-27). It unfolds in many facets and stages: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Church, Mary, the world; humanity's response is faith or personal appropriation of the *mysterion*.

Paul was a true minister and servant of the *mysterion*; he believed, lived, prayed, labored, and suffered (cf. JJ Cor. 11:23-28) so that God's loving plan for the redemption of humanity would

become known and graciously received. Christians, in like manner, live the *mysterion* (spirituality), celebrate it (liturgy), share it (mission), and look forward to its final fulfillment in the parousia. Like St. Paul, Christians strive to develop a deep "*mysterion*-consciousness."

This brief excursus into Pauline *mysterion* theology provides that comprehensive framework for interpreting the Spirit-Mary relationship (cf. RM 5). It undergirds the main body of this presentation as it elucidates how Mary in the power of the Spirit unfolds God's *mysterion*. This piece unfurls Mary's inspiring journey of faith, accompanying her as she generously surrenders to her God-given role in the *mysterion* — all in response to the gentle action of God's Spirit. "God has used her [Mary] for the service of his own mystery . . . when it pleased him to make this mystery a reality in this world" (Durrwell, p. 7).

ADDITIONAL SIGNPOSTS OF INTERPRETATION

In preparation for our contemplation on the Holy Spirit's chief actions in her whom God chose for his mother, some few additional guidelines are offered.

Mary's role must always be seen as subordinate to and anchored within God's *mysterion*. Paul VI clearly held to a basic principle in Pneumatology and Mariology: "the Holy Spirit first, Mary second" (Paul VI: B, p. 101; cf. Miihlen, p. 289; Suenens: A, pp. 197-200). The Spirit made Mary his collaborator in the work of humanity's salvation. He intervened in Mary's life in a personal way. As Person-Love of the Father and Son, the Spirit "acted with both infinite power and infinite gentleness in perfectly adapting the person of Mary and her dynamic powers of body and spirit to the role assigned her in the plan of redemption [*mysterion*]" (Paul VI: B, p. 102).

Mary is always an active recipient of God's action, yet, a true collaborator. Her entire life — from beginning to glorification — is a constant faith response to the action of the Spirit. Faith continually opens Mary to an ever more profound unfolding of the *mysterion*; her life becomes a *series of fiats*. As recorded in the New Testament, her many "yes-responses" enable the ONE *mysterion* to be manifested on many occasions and in diverse ways (cf. Suenens: B, pp. 8-10).

It would be inaccurate to somehow "semi-deify" Mary because she gave such a perfect faith-response to God's action in her life. Likewise, it would minimize her true "pilgrimage of faith" if, because she was perceived as "super-human," Mary's faith-struggles (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Calvary, etc.) were not those of a fully human person. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Mater* speaks eloquently of "her personal journey of faith . . . [within] the mystery of salvation" (RM 5). Mary is a genuine, faith-full disciple. Through faith she enabled the Holy Spirit to abide in her as in a holy temple; her human personality became transparent to the Spirit; she can properly be called "Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit" (Paul VI: B, p. 102).

In Mary's words, actions, silence and contemplation, God's *mysterion* (loving design of salvation) unfolds; through Mary there are many epiphanies of God's action. Her relationship was one of an ever-increasing docility and surrender to the Spirit. Her being and her awareness were transformed; yes, she developed a profound "mysterio/z-consciousness." In the Holy Spirit, Mary manifests how intensely God loves the world. John Paul U writes, "*At the center of this mystery*, in the midst of this wonderment of faith, stands Mary" (RM 51).

KEY MOMENTS OF THE SPIRIT'S ACTION IN MARY'S LIFE

Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (26-27), encouraged Christians to reflect on the theme of Mary and the Holy Spirit. The pope noted that it is sometimes said that "many spiritual writings today do not sufficiently reflect the whole doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit." Specifically, he asked that theologians "meditate more deeply on the workings of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation. . . . Such a study will bring out in particular the hidden relationship between the Spirit of God and the Virgin of Nazareth" (MC 27).

Paul VI realized that, while Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* (52-69) had presented a beautiful overview of Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church, the Council had not given "a complete doctrine on Mary" (LG 54). Nor did the Council give a formal treatment of the relationship of Mary to the Holy Spirit; it had mentioned the Spirit about a dozen times in chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* and once related Mary to the Holy Spirit in the Decree on Mission (*Ad Gentes A*).

Yet, since the Council, several authors (noted in the bibliography) have explored a theology of Mary and the Holy Spirit. This presentation now shifts to an examination of those KEY MOMENTS drawn from Scripture and Church reflection wherein the Spirit-Mary relationship is expressed.

At the outset, it should be observed that as each "event" is presented, its SOURCE in Scripture and Church teaching will be indicated; insights from popes, saints, theologians, etc. will elucidate the SPIRIT-MARY DYNAMIC of the event; finally, an appropriate THEME FOR REFLECTION will be suggested. This approach intends to enhance the reader's *reflective understanding and appreciation of Mary and the Spirit* as the Church renews herself in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000. Admittedly,

this presentation intends to be a theological reflection and therefore does not lay claim to being a comprehensive Pneumatological-Mariological synthesis.

(1) MARY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Pope Pius IX in *Ineffabilis Deus* on December 8, 1854 wrote: "we declare, pronounce and define: the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful" (Neuner-Dupuis, pp. 260-261).

Paul VI described Mary's Immaculate Conception by noting that "It was the Holy Spirit who filled Mary with grace in the very first moment of her conception, thus redeeming her in a more sublime way in view of the merits of Christ, the Savior of mankind, and making her the Immaculate One" (Paul VI: B, p. 102). From the very first moment of her existence Mary was being prepared by the Spirit for the sublime task that awaited her.

The Immaculate Conception does not signify a special grace that was given to Mary at some later point of her life; it describes her person, her nature — from the beginning of her existence. She can truly say (as she did to Bernadette): I am the Immaculate Conception. Mary's whole being becomes a temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in her in a very special way (cf. Campbell, p. 16).

Mary's role in God's plan of salvation [*mysterion*] begins in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. Without doubt, this is a special "irruption of grace"; a new and decisive stage in God's design has begun; the Holy Spirit is acting; the new creation is

dawning. Mary has been "fashioned by the Holy Spirit into a new substance and new creature" (LG 56). Through the power of the Spirit, God has enacted a marvelous "turning point" in salvation. Contemplating this event, one can assert: GOD IS FAITHFUL; THE *MYSTERION* UNFOLDS WITH LOVE.

(2) **THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY**

St. Luke's beautiful story of the Annunciation (1:26-38) is a very clear statement on the role of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow" (1:35). "For nothing is impossible to God" (1:36). "I am the handmaid of the Lord . . . *fiat mini secundum verbum tuum*" (1:37-38).

All is grace: the angel Gabriel announces the unfolding of the mystery through the power of the Spirit. Mary's response — free, prayerful, generous — is that she be worthy of the divine mysteries to unfold in her life. "Mary's 'yes' to God was flaming with faith; it was an unqualified assent, without reserve and without either false humility or futile dramatics. It was given in holy silence. . . . Mary [became] the perfect type of the servant and agent of the Holy Spirit" (Wright, p. 10).

God's action overwhelms with its love. Life will spring forth from a peasant girl — filled with the Spirit. Mary rejoices to surrender herself — body, soul, and spirit. In the Annunciation she certainly moved to a new level of consciousness; she became more deeply aware of the *mysterion* — and her role in its unfolding. She now has a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, whom John Paul II calls "Person-love" and "Person-gift" (DV 10, 22, 50). This relationship will grow, blossom, and bear fruit in her very being, her person.

What richness is included in that simple word: *fiat*. It is the only authentic response possible to God's marvelous design. John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* is fashioned around Mary's *fiat*, her faith; the pope writes: "In these reflections... I wish to consider primarily that 'pilgrimage of faith' in which 'the Blessed Virgin advanced'"(5). St. Augustine poetically captures Mary's profound faith when he writes: "*Maria concepit Christum in corde [mente] priusquam in came [ventre]*" (Jelly, p. 71). Yes, Mary's conception *in her faith* precedes the conception *in her flesh*.

The Second Vatican Council notes: "By thus consenting to the divine utterance . . . in subordination to Him and along with Him, by the grace of almighty God, she served the mystery of redemption. [Mary is thus] cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience" (LG 56).

The words of John Paul II speak eloquently: "This *fiat* of Mary — 'let it be to me' — was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. . . . The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her *fiat*... [that is in] as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan.... Mary uttered this *fiat in faith*" (RM 13).

Succinctly, "faith is contact with the mystery of God. . . . From the moment of the Annunciation, the mind of the Virgin-Mother has been initiated into the radical 'newness' of God's self-revelation and has been made aware of the mystery" (RM 17). Faith is nothing less than *living into mystery*. Readers will find much to contemplate as they consider MARY'S FIAT AND HER FREE RESPONSE OF FAITH.

(3) THE VIRGINAL CONCEPTION

Flowing from Mary's *fiat* is her virginal conception of the Word-made-flesh. In Matthew's Gospel (1:18-25) it is stated that

Mary the Virgin is "with child through the Holy Spirit" (1:18). Joseph is advised that "what she has conceived is in her by the Holy Spirit" (1:20).

Paul VI notes that it was the Spirit that inspired Mary's consent "to the virginal conception of the Son of the Most High and made her womb fruitful so that she might bring forth the Savior" (Paul VI: B, p. 103). John Paul II declares that the "union of divinity and humanity in the one Person of the Word-Son, that is the 'hypostatic union,' . . . is the Holy Spirit's greatest accomplishment in the history of creation and in salvation history" (June 6, 1990 Audience).

This unique moment in salvation history "was a complete and therefore hypostatic descent of the Holy Spirit and entry to the Virgin Mary. . . . [Through] his coming into the Virgin Mary [he] identifies himself in a way with her through her God-motherhood, [and] he does not at all leave her after the birth of Christ, but remains forever with her in the full force of the Annunciation" (O'Carroll, p. 332). The Holy Spirit abides "in the ever-virgin Mary as in a holy temple, while her human personality seems to become transparent to Him" (*Ibid.*). Enduring intimacy is a defining characteristic of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

Matthew notes that the fruit of this virginal conception will be a son to be called Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us" (1:23) — equivalently "Word-made-flesh" (John 1:14). All this is made possible because Mary gave the Spirit total freedom in her life. It is accurate to hold that Mary's fundamental charism was that of receiving the gift of the Spirit; she allowed the Christ-seed to be sown in her; she allowed the Body of the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, to be formed in her. Mary accepts the Redemption into her own heart; "the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of Mary" (Arevalo, p. 42).

The Incarnation is truly a profound mystery. By her consent to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, Mary "gave an extraordinary demonstration of faith." Through the power of the Holy Spirit, she "expressed her acceptance of the divine gift of salvation, not only for herself but for all mankind; . . . her involvement in God's saving plan [*mysterion*] was not to be limited to that single moment. In God's design she was to continue to be intimately involved in the great saving mission of her Son. She was destined by God to be his Mother, not only in the physical sense, or in the private sphere of the home, but also in the public domain, on the plane of the history of salvation: she was to be his Mother too in his role as Redeemer of mankind" (McNamara: A, pp. 6-7). Our reflection can center on: FAITH BEARS FRUIT; FOR US, THE WORD IS MADE FLESH.

(4) THE VISITATION TO ELIZABETH

The Visitation story is chronicled in Luke 1:39-45. The scene presents Mary, filled with the Holy Spirit and impelled by love, rushing to the aid of her cousin Elizabeth who also is pregnant — even in her old age. In God's loving plan, nothing is impossible. What a scene of great joy! Mary and Elizabeth, both faithful women of Israel, have been blessed by the Most High.

When Mary enters Zechariah's house, Elizabeth replies to Mary's greeting and feels the child leap in her womb; being filled with the Holy Spirit, she greets Mary enthusiastically: "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (1:42).

Note the active presence of the Holy Spirit in this scene. Mary, prompted by the Spirit undertakes a difficult journey into the hill country; she went in haste; she was on a mission of service. She could have rationalized staying at home. When she arrives at Zechariah's house, her presence brings the Holy Spirit to both

Elizabeth and the child in her womb. Prompted by the Spirit, Elizabeth responds with a blessing; the unborn baby leaps in her womb.

It seems that every word of Elizabeth's final greeting has a special meaning: "Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (1:45). Who is blessed? The one who *believes* in God's promise, God's design, God's *mysterion*.

Note that Luke says that Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:41) when she uttered these words. Those filled with the Spirit can recognize God's plan, praise and thank God for it, and joyfully accept their role in the unfolding of this loving plan. Two generous, holy women share their faith. Both would be mothers of important and significant figures in God's salvific design; faith-filled, Spirit-inspired women are central to the workings of God.

The Visitation scene prompts reflection on a gift from the Holy Spirit: A LIVELY SENSE OF MISSION AND SERVICE.

(5) MARY'S SPIRIT-INSPIRED MAGNIFICAT

The prayerful, poetic genius of St. Luke is manifested in Mary's hymn of praise known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55); it is sung daily in the heart of the Church during Vesper prayer. Paul VI writes: "It was the Holy Spirit who filled her [Mary's] soul with jubilant gratitude and moved her to sing the *Magnificat* to God her Savior" (Paul VI: B, p. 103). When the Church celebrates Marian feasts, her liturgy notes that "it is our special joy to echo her song of thanksgiving [Magnificat]. What wonders you have worked throughout the world. All generations have shared the greatness of your love" (Second Preface of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

This beautiful song of gratitude, sung under the Spirit's inspiration, is a brief, yet profound, synopsis of HOW God intends to unfold his *mysterion*, WHAT his plan of salvation entails, and WHAT ROLE Mary will play within this unfolding design. The Magnificat asserts many profound truths: salvation comes from a loving God and is a cause for rejoicing; lowly servants like Mary play important roles in God's design; God does great deeds for his faithful people; mercy, shown to Israel's ancestors, will extend from age to age and the promises to Israel will be fulfilled; the world's secular values will be subverted and inverted; God's plan will be for all peoples and for all generations. The Magnificat is a sublime example of authentic prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit.

John Paul II calls Mary's Magnificat an "*inspired profession of her faith*"; it is "*her response to the revealed word*"; in it "Mary's personal experience, the ecstasy of her heart, shines forth." Here one sees a brilliant "ray of the mystery of God, the eternal love which, as an irrevocable gift, enters into human history." These Spirit-inspired utterances reveal "the deepest truth about God and [humanity's] salvation." Mary is "aware that concentrated within herself as the Mother of Christ is *the whole salvific economy*" (RM 36).

Mary's Magnificat "is both *personal* ('he who is mighty has done great things for *me*' [Lk 1:49]) and *social* (her proclamation serves Elizabeth's faith). The experience of the Spirit always involves seeing and hearing; it is never a private, purely inner and mental relationship with God. Elizabeth and Mary, then, serve one another, each in a unique way; . . . one charism calls forth another, and the faith of one aids the faith of another" (Muhlen, p. 291).

As the Church-in-mission journeys toward the celebration of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, John Paul II reminds Christians: "The

Church's *love of preference for the poor* is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's *Magnificat*. . . . Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the 'poor of Yahweh'." Thus, "Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that *the truth about God who saves*, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, *cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble*." The entire Church looks to Mary "as Mother and Model . . . in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission" (RM 37). Meditating on Mary's *Magnificat*, readers can reflect on the fact that AUTHENTIC PRAYER INCLUDES GRATITUDE, PRAISE, SOCIAL AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT.

(6) MARY REFLECTS ON THE EVENTS OF JESUS' BIRTH-CHILDHOOD

This section presents a composite picture of the role of Mary **and** the Holy Spirit in the events of the birth and childhood of Jesus. It incorporates several passages from the infancy narratives of Luke and Matthew: **birth (Lk. 2:1-7)**; **visit of shepherds** (Lk. 2:8-20); **visit of magi** (Mt. 2:1-12); **sojourn in Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15)**; **life at Nazareth** (Lk. 2:39-52; Mt. 2:19-23); **presentation in the temple** (Lk. 2:22-38). How did Mary follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit during those many years of her "hidden life" with Jesus and Joseph?

It is valid to assert that the Spirit inspired Mary to be a "giver" of Jesus to people. In the mystery of Jesus' birth, she gave him to the world; she presented him to the shepherds and the magi; she presented him to the joyful, old man Simeon. Mary struggled with giving Jesus to the temple teachers, fearing that he had been lost. Many works of Christian art consistently show Mary in a

"presenting-mode"; she presents Jesus to all peoples of the world — represented by the various Scripture scenes listed earlier.

Luke also portrays Mary as a woman of constant reflection. In three instances, he focuses on Mary's "response of the heart." As the shepherds depart, Luke writes: "As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). Simeon in the temple predicts that "the secret thoughts of many hearts [including Mary's] will be laid bare" (2:34-35). When the Holy Family returned to Nazareth after Jesus was found in the temple, "his mother stored up all these things in her heart" (2:51).

A particular manifestation of the Spirit's presence in Mary is seen in her ability to insightfully read the deep meaning of the mysteries unfolding in her life; Mary contemplated the wonders of God — often in eloquent silence. Through meditation and the "storing of all things in her heart" she discovered God; she lived the injunction of the Hebrew Scriptures: Be still and know that I am God.

In her response of active contemplation, Mary deepens her relationship with the Spirit throughout her entire life. Mary continually realizes that the *fiat* she spoke when the Spirit came upon her in Nazareth was actually a commitment to an ongoing submission to God and his *mysterion*. Reflective faith is most characteristic of Mary, as St. Luke took care to note.

One example succinctly illustrates Mary's "response of the heart." When Luke describes Simeon's role during the presentation of Jesus in the temple, he specifically links Simeon to the Holy Spirit three times. Simeon speaks God's word to Mary; in particular, he points out that her role in God's unfolding mystery will entail suffering. Mary accepts this difficult dimension of the *mysterion* in faith, a faith that only emerges from deep contemplation and a true commitment of the heart.

This scene — and Mary's overall faith response — is well captured by John Paul II. "Simeon's words seem like a *second Annunciation* to Mary, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely in misunderstanding and sorrow. . . . [They reveal that] she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful" (RM 16).

As the whole panorama of events mentioned in this section serves to illustrate, Mary's participation and insight into God's *mysterion* demand constant reflection and meditation. Learning from Mary's experience and practice, Christians realize that MEDITATION (PRAYER OF THE HEART) IS ESSENTIAL FOR INTEGRATING OUR FAITH AND OUR CONCRETE LIVES.

(7) THE MOTHER OF JESUS AT CANA

Examination of the text of John 2:1-11 that records the wedding at Cana reveals no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Paul VI identifies this as an important event that manifests Mary's responsive openness to the Spirit: "It was the Holy Spirit who urged the compassionate Mary to ask her Son for that miraculous change of water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, which marked the beginning of Jesus' activity as a wonderworker and led his disciples to believe in him" (Paul VI: B, p. 103).

The encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* devotes a lengthy section to the Cana scene and Mary's Spirit-inspired actions on that occasion. "Mary is present at Cana in Galilee as the *Mother of Jesus*, and in a significant way she *contributes* to that 'beginning of the signs' which reveal the messianic power of her Son" (RM 21); a new stage in the unfolding of the *mysterion* begins in Cana.

The Cana event also "outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say *Mary's solicitude for human beings*; . . . this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission; . . . the episode at Cana in Galilee offers us a *sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation*, wholly oriented toward Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power" (RM 21-22).

Some Scripture exegetes see a second pneumatological theme in the Cana narration; they hold that Cana parallels/foreshadows Pentecost. John 2:1-11 has many aspects of a Pentecostal meditation, with striking similarities to the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts. Only in John 2:1 and Acts 1:14 is the precise expression "the mother of Jesus" used; the old wine has run out and the disciples and the mother of Jesus ask for the new wine of the Spirit, which is given in abundant measure to those obedient to Jesus' command; they then brim with the Spirit and bring this gift to others (cf. Grassi, pp. 131-136).

The liturgical Preface for Our Lady of Cana builds on this double, pneumatological theme: "With loving care for the bridegroom and his bride, she turns to her Son for help and tells the servants to do what he commands. Water is changed into wine [and] the wedding guests rejoice. . . . In this great sign, the presence of the Messiah is proclaimed, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is foretold, and the hour of salvation is foreshadowed." A theme that suggests itself for reflection is: SENSITIVITY AND COMPASSION FOR HUMAN NEED RESULT IN OUTPOURINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

(8) MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

The coat-of-arms of John Paul II graphically illustrates this *stabat mater* scene of Mary standing at the foot of the cross. On

the right side of the seal under the bold cross, one finds the capital letter "M" in the place usually thought of as Mary's position at the crucifixion. John Paul II frequently returns to this poignant scene for his meditations; it seems "he cannot write or speak at any length on the mystery of the Redemption without taking us to Mary's side at the foot of the Cross" (Arevalo, p. 42).

Vatican II gave prominence to this scene: "the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan [*mysterion*] (cf. John 19:25). There she united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (LG 58).

In Paul VFs understanding, "It was the Holy Spirit who strengthened the soul of the Mother of Jesus as she stood beneath the cross, and inspired her once again, as he had at the Annunciation, to consent to the will of the heavenly Father who wanted her to be associated as a mother with the sacrifice her Son was offering for mankind's redemption" (Paul VI: B. p, 103).

Numerous writers carefully note that Calvary was a significant moment in Mary's *fiat*. Her surrender and consent "did not remain on the level of her initial response. It grew through the darkness of the Cross . . . [as] an actual and personal reality" (Seunens: A, p. 203). "Mary will live this consent [*fiat*] to communion with Jesus without restriction until Calvary" (Laurentin, p. 287).

"At the foot of the Cross especially did Mary experience the final purification of the Holy Spirit. . . . She wrung from the depths of her being, through the power of the Holy Spirit's faith, hope, and love within her, her renewed '*fiat*.' . . . The unifying, transforming power of the Holy Spirit brought Mary into a new level of oneness with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that was in proportion to her sorrows" (Maloney, p. 92).

In the same vein, John Paul II writes in his encyclical on Divine Mercy: "*No one has experienced, to the same degree as the Mother of the Crucified One, the mystery of the Cross... No one has received into his heart, as much as Mary did, that mystery, that truly divine dimension of the Redemption effected on Calvary by means of the death of the Son, together with the sacrifice of her maternal heart, together with her definitive 'fiat' (Dives in Misericordia 9).*

The pope extols Mary's *fiat*: "How great, how heroic then is the *obedience of faith* shown by Mary in the face of God's 'unsearchable judgments!' . . . And how powerful too is the action of grace in her soul, how all pervading is the influence of the Holy Spirit and of his light and power" (RM 18). Christians join Mary in her FIDELITY IN TRIAL, SUFFERING, AND EVEN DEATH on all the Calvaries of the world.

(9) MARY AND HER MATERNAL MISSION

With great tenderness John the Evangelist (John 19: 26-27) records the words of Jesus on Calvary to "his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her." The Spirit's presence and action in the episode is noted: "It was the Holy Spirit who filled the Sorrowful Mother with immense love, widening and deepening her heart, as it were, so that she might accept as a last testament from the lips of her Son her maternal mission with regard to John, the beloved disciple: a mission which, 'as the Church has always understood it,' prefigured her spiritual motherhood toward mankind as a whole" (Paul VI: B, p. 103).

Mary's maternity unfolds in this pattern: "Under the leading of the Spirit, Mary consents actively to the Redemption. By receiving the words 'Behold your Son,' she opens her Immaculate Heart to receive the Heart of her Son . . . into her own heart. Thus, she becomes manifestly to the world the Mother of the

Redeemed. . . . And we — each one of us, like John the disciple — can go to her" (Arevalo, p. 44).

This marvelous fact does NOT make Mary "Co-redeemer" (a term avoided by Vatican II). Under the Spirit's influence, Mary humanly cooperated in the acceptance of God's salvation. The words of Vatican II are clear: "The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes [the] unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (LG 60). However, the Council does speak of Mary as "Mediatrice" in a carefully nuanced presentation (LG 62). The entire third chapter of *Redemptoris Mater* is devoted to a reflection on the "Maternal Mediation of Mary" (RM 38-50).

This Calvary scene is understood as one of three key moments in Mary's motherhood. First, in Nazareth Mary becomes the mother of Jesus spiritually [*mente*] and physically [*ventre*] by welcoming him into her heart in faith. Secondly, at the foot of the Cross she becomes the Spiritual Mother of all (represented by St. John). Finally, at Pentecost she becomes specifically "Mother of the Church" — a Marian title announced by Paul VI on November 21, 1964 (cf. McNamara: A, p. 8).

John Paul II's words again prove enlightening. Under the Cross, "Mary's motherhood of the human race . . . is clearly stated and established. It *emerges* from the definitive accomplishment of *the Redeemer's Paschal Mystery*. The Mother of Christ, who stands at the very center of this mystery — a mystery which embraces each individual and all humanity — is given to every single individual and all mankind." The pope observes, "the Council did not hesitate to call Mary 'the Mother of Christ and mother of mankind'" (RM 23).

Some writers see in John 19:30 a "protoPentecost" when Jesus "gave up his spirit" as he died on the cross (Cantalamessa, pp. 190ff., Laurentin, p. 287; Mihihlen, p. 291). An adequate discussion

of that point is beyond the scope of this theological meditation. Through frequent reflection, CHRISTIANS EXPERIENCE AN INTIMACY WITH MARY THEIR MOTHER; they praise God for sharing his mother with all humanity.

(10) MARY WITH THE CHURCH AT PRAYER AND PENTECOST

Building upon the Lukan narration of the Church at prayer (*ecclesia orans*) and the Pentecost event (Acts 1:14-2:13), Paul VI writes in his characteristically poetic manner: "It was the Holy Spirit who raised Mary on the burning wings of love so that she might be a model intercessor during those hours in the Upper Room when the disciples of Jesus 'together . . . devoted themselves to constant prayer' along with 'some women . . . and Mary the Mother of Jesus' and waited for the promised Paraclete" (Paul VI: B, p. 103).

Several eminent theologians have written on the role of the Spirit and on the presence of Mary at Pentecost, when the Church is fully born and sent into the world in the power of the Spirit. Hans Urs von Balthasar holds that at Pentecost the Church as a subject begins to be present in Mary and is perfected through the mystery of the Holy Spirit; "Mary's living faith is the perfect prototype of what is expected in the life of the Church" (von Balthasar, p. 170). Carroll observes: "Mary is herself a member of the Church, joined to her Son by her pilgrimage of faith on earth, joined now to the Risen Christ, and in both stages under the influence of the sanctifying Spirit" (Carroll, p. 69).

For Schmemmann, "Mary is truly the icon and the epiphany of the Church — of the Church as life in Christ and of the Church as Christ's life in us" (Schmemmann, p. 75). Congar writes: "Mary has a pre-eminent place in the Christian mystery as the model of the Church and of universal intercession. This is the work of the

Spirit in her" (Congar, p. 164). Would that space permitted an extended commentary on these profound insights.

Other writers highlight the clear parallelism between the Incarnation and Pentecost. They see that the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost is, in fact, the continuation of the mystery of the Incarnation that took place in Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Arevalo, p. 44). In both cases the Spirit overshadows, first Mary alone and then Mary with the first believers. There is the birth of the bodily Christ, then the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ (cf. Maloney, p. 81; O'Donnell: A, pp. 89-90).

This beautiful parallelism is captured well by Bishop Kevin McNamara: "At the Annunciation Mary co-operated with the Spirit in the Incarnation of the messiah, destined to be the Saviour and ruler of his people; at Pentecost she co-operates with the Spirit in the emergence of that people on to the stage of human history. She who had first become the Mother of Christ is now revealed as Mother of the Church, and central to her motherhood on each occasion are the humility, obedience and loving trust in God which unite her profoundly to the Holy Spirit" (McNamara: B, p. 13).

On this point John Paul II, once again, manifests his eloquence: "And so, in the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: *Mary at Nazareth* and *Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem*. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of 'birth from the Holy Spirit.' Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes — by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit — present in the mystery of the Church" (RM 24).

In contemplating Mary at prayer in Nazareth and in the Upper Room, Christians will deepen their awareness that PRAYER BEGETS RADICAL OPENNESS TO AN OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

(11) THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY INTO HEAVEN

On November 1, 1950 in the apostolic constitution *Minificentissimus Deus* Pius XII defined as an article of faith the Assumption of Mary into the glory of heaven. Twenty-five years later, another pope wrote: "It was the Holy Spirit who brought love to its supreme pitch in the soul of Mary while she was still a pilgrim on earth and made her yearn for reunion with her glorified Son. The Holy Spirit thereby disposed her for her crowning privilege: her Assumption body and soul into heaven" (Paul VI: B, p. 103).

The Assumption, as understood by Byzantine Christians, is "Mary's demise, *koimisis*, a dormition, a restful sleep, a repose rather than a death" (Maloney, p. 93). When Pius XII defined the dogma, he carefully noted: "Mary ever Virgin, when the course of her earthly life was ended, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven" (Neuner-Dupuis, p. 264). St. John Damascene asserted that Mary's earthly departure should not be called death. In addition, Vatican II asserts Mary's Assumption "upon the completion of her earthly sojourn" (LG 59). These few quotes enable believers to understand the Assumption as the Spirit's unique gift to Mary (cf. O'Donnell: A, p. 90).

Belief in the Assumption affirms Mary's link to Jesus within the mystery of salvation. Through His resurrection, which was a work of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 1:3-4), Jesus is Lord of lords, the conqueror of sin and death. Mary, through her Assumption, becomes more thoroughly conformed to her Risen Son. Christ's

Resurrection and subsequently Mary's Assumption stand as two pillars of Christian faith in full resurrection. Through the power of the Spirit, Mary remains uniquely linked to Christ — whether in the Incarnation, the life at Nazareth, Calvary, or in her glorious Assumption.

John Paul II affirms this beautiful gift of the Spirit to Mary: "By the mystery of the Assumption into heaven there were definitely accomplished in Mary all the effects of the one mediation of *Christ the Redeemer of the world and Risen Lord*: 'In Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ' (I Cor. 15:22-23)" (RM 41). Looking to Christ as Risen Lord and believing in Mary's Assumption, CHRISTIANS STRENGTHEN THEIR FAITH IN THE RESURRECTION, which they believe will also be a personal event for them in God's unfolding *mysterion*.

(12) MARY AS OUR HEAVENLY INTERCESSOR

Although enjoying the full glory of heaven, Mary does not abandon her sons and daughters in the Church. Vatican II expresses Mary's continual maternal presence in this way: "For, taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation" (LG 62). Or again, "In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church . . ." (LG 68). "Mary's maternity will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect" (LG 62). Indeed, "Mary [is] a Sign of Sure Hope and of Solace for God's People in Pilgrimage" (title for sections 68-69 of LG).

Paul VI speaks eloquently on this special gift of the Spirit enabling Mary to be our Intercessor. He notes that her place in

heaven does not "put an end to Mary's mission as associate of the Spirit of Christ in the mystery of salvation. . . . She continues to be spiritually present to all her redeemed children. . . . Mary's motherhood in the economy of grace goes on unceasingly" (Paul VI: B, p. 104).

On this same theme, permit the introduction of a lengthy passage (because of its clarity and eloquence) from Paul VI's writings.

"We must therefore keep in mind that the activity of the Mother of the Church in behalf of the redeemed neither substitutes for nor rivals the omnipotent, universal action of the Spirit. Mary's role is rather to impenetrate and prepare for the action of the Holy Spirit, not only through intercessory *prayer* that accords with the divine plan she contemplates in the beatific vision but also through the direct influence of her *example*, including the supremely important example of her docility to the inspirations of the divine Spirit. Thus it is always in dependence on the Holy Spirit that Mary leads souls to Jesus, forms them in his image, inspires them with good counsel, and acts as a living bond of love between Jesus and the faithful" (*Ibid*).

Without doubt, Mary's role as spiritual mother and intercessor is, in the writings of Paul VI and John Paul II, not something vague, remote or abstract. It is an intimate, consoling, fruitful relationship. The Spirit is always at work here; every spiritual experience, including our relationship with Mary as mother and intercessor, is accomplished only through the mediation of the Spirit of Christ. This means, therefore, that as Christians seek to draw closer to Mary in the Church, they will concomitantly become more aware of the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives. "The more Mary, the Spirit and the Church merge into one another

in our thoughts, in our prayers, in our lives, the more authentic is our vision of God's plan of salvation [*mysteri*ori]" (McNamara: B, p. 22).

Totus Tuus in John Paul II's coat-of-arms proclaims his total dedication to Mary as Intercessor and Mother of the Church. In the Spirit he frequently implores Mary to show a mother's love, care, and protection for the Church (a mission similar to his own). To Mary he commits every aspect of the Church's life; to her he entrusts his own Papal ministry. Even in times of great difficulty and suffering (e.g. the assassination attempt), John Paul II, quoting St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, proclaims: "*Totus tuus sum, O Maria, et omnia mea tua sunt*" (LeFrois, p. 28). All Christians rejoice to have MARY AS THEIR MATERNAL INTERCESSOR IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT; each Christian also proclaims *Totus tuus sum*.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In the introductory comments of this theological meditation, it was noted that "this presentation adopts the framework that locates Mary *within the divine mystery of salvation*." Through examining key events in Mary's life, a deeper awareness and appreciation of the Spirit-Mary relationship has emerged. Continuing personal reflection will reveal many additional insights—more profound than the points considered here. The author's hope has been that his cursory treatment would evoke in readers a personal reflection on the role of the Spirit in Mary's life — and in their own lives — in this "Year of the Holy Spirit."

Mary's faith-journey is a precious treasure for Christians who wish to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in one of God's humble handmaids; Mary's experience is a gift of the Spirit. Since "she is a charism of the Spirit in person," Christians can learn from Mary "to believe more purely, to discern the Spirit more

clearly, to listen to the Word more intently, and to await more creatively the hour of the Lord's coming" (Suenens: A, p. 211). Yes, through Mary and the Spirit, all can enter more fully into God's *mysterion*—in its profound beauty.

Mary's relationship to the Spirit is at its foundation an *awareness and surrender* to God's infinite love and action in her person and her life; Mary brimmed with "*mysterion-consciousness*." She allowed herself to be "a woodwind for the Lord," to play God's song with the Spirit's "pure and tranquil tone" (Maloney, p. 95). She said *fiat*: "I am your reed. . . . Now, if you will, breathe out your joy in me" (Houselander, p. 53).

Mary invites all her children to discover and open themselves to the Spirit. Her faith-response can serve as a sure and inspiring criterion for appreciating the revelation and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Mary continues to remain "present in the mystery of the Church as a *moder* (RM 44). Those who allow themselves to come under the dominion of the Spirit will find they are also more closely united with Mary.

In the Holy Year of 1975 Paul VI spoke words appropos to the Year of the Holy Spirit (1998). He noted: "the faithful must cultivate an outstanding devotion to the Spirit as the supreme source of love, unity, and peace. At the same time however, and in harmony with this first devotion which draws ever new strength from the fire of the Divine Love, the faithful should also be deeply devoted to the great Mother of God who is Mother of the Church" (Paul VI: B, p. 106).

The prayer of Ildefonsus of Toledo (cf. O'Carroll, p. 330) is a fitting way to conclude these reflections and humbly lay them at the feet of Mary:

I beg you, I beg you, O holy Virgin, that I may
have Jesus from the Spirit from whom you conceived

Jesus. May my soul receive Jesus through the Spirit, through whom your flesh conceived the same Jesus. Let it be granted to me to know Jesus from the Spirit, from whom it was given to you to know, to have and to bring forth Jesus. May I in my lowliness speak exalted things of Jesus in that Spirit, in whom you confess yourself to be the handmaid of the Lord, choosing that it be done unto you according to the angel's word. May I love Jesus in that Spirit in which you adore him as Lord, contemplate him as your Son.

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Cases & Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, OP

CIVIL MARRIAGE IS NOT FOR CATHOLICS

It is a lamentable fact that many Catholics are living in concubinage. They prefer to enter into a civil marriage and do not bother to legalize their union by contracting a valid marriage in the Catholic Church. These Catholics pose a serious problem to the local Hierarchy, since they are incorporated to the Church, though their incorporation is not what it should be. They debar themselves from the reception of the sacraments due to their habitual unworthiness to receive them. "Their condition can not be accepted by the Church. There is no consistency between their choice of life and the faith they profess... The pastors of the Church will regrettably not be able to admit them to the sacraments" (Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, n. 82)

Please write about this sad situation of our brothers and sisters. Thank you.

A Priest

What our Consultant says is unfortunately true. The Church teaches that marriage has undoubtedly from its origin a sacred character due to its divine institution. Jesus Christ, knowing that the married state implies serious duties and difficulties, restored marriage for His followers to its original purity and raised it up to the dignity of a sacrament, thus placing it in the supernatural order of divine grace. Hence Christian spouses may fulfill their marital duties and overcome the difficulties encountered in the married state.

Marriage, being a sacrament among Christians, is under the Church jurisdiction. Pope Leo XIII said: "Christ, having raised marriage to such and so great excellence, commended and entrusted all the discipline bearing upon this matter to His Church" (Enc. *Arcanum*, Feb. 10, 1880, n. 13). It was the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which established the canonical form to prevent clandestine marriages. Our new Code of Canon Law describes it in canon 1108, by saying: "Only those marriages which are contracted in the presence of the local Ordinary or parish priests, or a priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who in the presence of two witnesses, assists, are valid." Obviously marriages of Catholics not celebrated in conformity with the foregoing norm are to be regarded as null and void. And canon 1117 determines carefully the persons who are bound to observe the ordinary canonical form, established in can. 1108: "The form prescribed above is to be observed if at least one of the parties contracting marriage was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not by a formal act defected from it." Catholics, therefore, who contract only civil marriage, without getting married according to the canonical form established by the Church, are not validly married.

What is civil marriage? *Civil marriage* is a marital contract carried out before a civil official according to civil laws only. Civil marriage is threefold, namely:

a) *Compulsory*, if it is prescribed by the Government under penalties to all citizens who want to get married, both baptized and pagans. Marriage impediments imposed by religious associations or churches are not acknowledged by the Government, since the State is the only authority to establish them, as well as to judge by its own tribunals whether all marriages celebrated conform or not to civil laws.

b) *Optional*, if the contracting parties are left free to contract marriage either before a church's minister, authorized by the religious church they belong to or before the civil official, following civil laws, provided that the religious minister is authorized by the State and all marriages he solemnizes be registered in the civil office.

c) *Subsidiary*, for those who want to get married and cannot contract marriage according to the religious laws acknowledged only by the State. This happens in countries where the Catholic canonical form is the only one recognized in the whole nation.

What kind of civil marriage do we have in the Philippines? It is certainly *not compulsory*, in the sense that Catholics are not compelled to go through the civil marriage ceremony before the civil official. It is rather *optional*, since those who want to marry, can do it either before the civil official of the State or before the Church's minister, as long as the latter enjoys the State's authorization and the celebration of marriage according to the canonical form established by the Church is registered in the Civil registrar.

Hence, there is no reason whatsoever for Catholics to get married civilly only. A Catholic marriage contracted in the Church according to the canonical form enjoys all civil effects granted to the civil marriage. Catholics who go through the civil marriage ceremony alone and do not marry before the Church's minister and live together as husband and wife, should realize that they are living in a real concubinage. They are deprived of divine grace

granted to worthy recipients of the sacraments. Truly, they are not separated from the Church, but they lack full communion with her, since they have no access to the reception of the sacraments as long as they refuse to legalize their union before the Church (cfr. L.G. 14 and CCC, n. 837).

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers **January - February 1999**

EFREN RIVERA, OP

JANUARY 1, 1999

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

NUMBERS 6:22-27

MAY YAHWEH BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU

LUKE 2:16-21

SHEPHERDS VISIT JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The Liturgy for the first of January is a rich combination of many themes. Firstly, it is the octave day of Christmas, and thus prolongs it. Secondly, Jesus was circumcised a week after his birth. Thirdly, this is the day when the baby born in Bethlehem received the name Jesus. Fourthly, the feast occurs on the first day of the civil year when people wish each other "A HAPPY NEW YEAR" — and mainly because of this, our First Reading for today is the Priestly Blessing in the Book of Numbers. Last but not least, from the time of Pope Paul VI, today is the World Day of Peace.

Focus Points. (1) Numbers 6:27 ...So shall (the priests) invoke my name upon the Israelites and I will bless them. All readers of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures (the Bible) have been struck by the beauty of what is known as "the Priestly Blessing." Since the elements of this blessing are three short pairs, namely, (1) bless / keep; (2) face shine / be gracious; (3) show his face / bring peace, some Fathers of the Church have given this text a Trinitarian dimension. God the Father (Yahweh) BLESSES US by sending his Son to us. Through the birth of Jesus, GOD'S FACE (see Heb 1:1-3) now shines on us. Through the work of Redemption accomplished through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, the Father and the Son can now give us the Spirit as then-gift of PEACE.

(2) Lk 2:19-20 Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, in accord with what had been told them. What Mary did upon hearing the Good News of the coming of the Savior, the shepherds also do: they glorify and praise God. By now, however, Mary is one step ahead. She treasures all the Word-Events connected with Jesus and reflects on them in her heart. In this way she becomes the First Disciple of her Son and our model of Christian Discipleship.

For more on Lk 2:16-21 see Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers (HBP) January 1, 1996.

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

1. The Incarnation of God's Word is the greatest blessing given to us by Yahweh, Our Father. Through this blessing He has shown that He *cares* for us, that is, He keeps us close to His

heart. "Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son..." (Jn 3:16).

1.1 Pointer for sharing: The good-night kiss that fathers and mothers give to their children should be taken as a sacramental (visible sign) of Yahweh's blessing and caring for us, his sons and daughters. Share with your small group whether you agree strongly, a little, or not at all, with this statement.

2. Non-Catholics often make the mistake of thinking that Catholics have singled out Mary for special honor. No, it is in fact God the Father Himself, who chose Mary to be the special Woman who will cooperate with Him for the salvation of humankind. Other human beings cannot aspire for Mary's dignity as Mother of God. But we can all take her as model in being disciples of Jesus Christ.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: What events in your life have you treasured in your heart (as Mary treasured the events surrounding Christ's birth)? Have they helped you understand God's loving care for you? Share your answer with your small group.

Muntinlupa Parishes

Muntinlupa in Metro Manila is not only the location of the National Penitentiary but also of three uniquely named parishes. Three young people found themselves arguing one day about how special is the name of their parish.

One teenager from Victoria Homes said, "Our parish has a very special name, because it is in Italian. It is called 'L'Annunziata'."

Another, who was from Soldiers' Hill Village, said, "The name of our parish, makes people happy. It is 'Mary, Cause of Our Joy'."

The third teenager, who was from Bayanan, on the National Road, boasted, "We're the only parish that celebrates its fiesta on New Year's day. The whole world joins us. We are the 'Parish of Mary, Mother of God'."

JANUARY 3, 1999

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 60:1-6

THE GLORY OF YAHWEH IS RISING ON YOU

MATTHEW 2:1-12

THE VISIT OF THE MAGI

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Yahweh started the work of creation by saying, "Let there be light." He also started the restoration of Jerusalem by giving it light. Similarly, he started the work of restoring the gentiles to God's family by guiding the Magi through a star.

Focus Points. (1) Is 60:1, 3 "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, / the glory of the Lord shines upon you... / Nations shall walk by your light, / and kings by your shining radiance. These are the opening lines of a song about the restoration of Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians and upon the return of the exiles to Babylon. In the original Hebrew there are two imperatives here: "Rise up!" "Be refulgent!" It is Yahweh himself who enables Jerusalem to obey his commands. The "glory of the Lord (Yahweh)" is an extraordinary illumination caused by the presence of Yahweh within the city, radiating a dazzling light. **Verse 3** emphasizes that the restoration of Jerusalem will also benefit all nations. They too will be restored, i.e., to the family of Yahweh.

In the Christian re-reading of this prophecy it is the presence of Jesus within Israel (in Bethlehem rather than Jerusalem) that brings to it "the glory of the Lord" and the "Light" by which all nations will walk.

(2) Mt 2:2b, 9b-10. "We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage..." The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them and came to a standstill over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star. Although it was once thought that the star observed by the Magi was a celestial phenomenon, and there are still some who think so until now, most biblical scholars recognize that the midrashic literary genre of the story warns readers to pay attention to the message rather than to the form through which it is conveyed. In brief, the message is that God has guided the gentiles, represented by the Magi, to come and pay homage to the king of kings, Jesus Christ. This indeed is the fulfillment of God's plan to bless all nations through Abraham's posterity (see Gn 12:2; 18:18; 22:18).

For more on Mt 2:1-12 see HBP Epiphany 1996.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Just as it was Yahweh Our Father who created us, it is He who restores us. He restored the Israelites to their homeland, He restores all nations to His Family. Of course He does not do this alone but "in Christ" and with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity in fact works through the Church to get all nations to walk by the divine light.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you lead your life "in the light" and not in darkness? Can you do this without your Christian faith? Share your answers with your small group.

2. Epiphany, as a folkloric event, is the feast of the Three Kings. But if we follow the teaching of the Bible, Epiphany should be centered on Christ and it should be the feast of the King of Kings revealed by Yahweh's Light (star).

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Has the knowledge of Jesus Christ given you joy that is comparable to the joy of the Magi upon seeing the star that led them to Bethlehem (Mt 2:9-10)? Share your answer with your small group.

Kiloloron Experience

There is a stream in the municipality of Real, Quezon Province, called Kiloloron. It goes from the mountain through the forest to Lamon Bay in the Pacific ocean. In good weather, it is easy to ford the stream since the water is only about one to two feet deep. A group of hikers once forded it 30 times going to and from a destination up the mountain. But that was in good weather and in plain daylight. They made the mistake of repeating the hike in stormy weather and starting at about two o'clock in the afternoon.

Even before the hikers reached their destination, the waters had risen up to the waist. On the trek back to base, the water was breast high and the current was very strong. If one gets carried away, one would surely drown. Worse, daylight faded away and the group was soon just groping in the dark.

The group survived thanks to two guides who helped them cross the stream one by one at dangerous points. Moreover, one of the guides "borrowed" (or requisitioned) an improvised torch from an indigenous family. There were fireflies along the path, but they provided entertainment rather than light to guide the way.

One of the guides chanced upon an acquaintance and asked him to go ahead of the group to get a flashlight or a gas lamp. However, because of the dangerous fords, this runner could not go quickly enough. It was only after crossing the last ford that the group was welcomed by bright gas lamps held by would be rescuers.

I was with that group of hikers. Two or three times I really feared for my life because I felt the current pulling me away. But my guide clutched me firmly by the hand and pulled me to safety. When I saw the bright light of the gas lamps, it was like finally reaching heaven.

JANUARY 10, 1999

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

ISAIAH 42:1-4, 6-7
YAHWEH'S CHOSEN ONE... FOR JUSTICE
TO THE NATIONS

MATTHEW 3:13-17

YAHWEH'S FAVOR RESTS ON HIM

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River marks the beginning of his messianic mission. While it was undoubtedly a historical event, its interest for the Synoptic writers and for us is mainly in its value as a sign which relates both to the ancient prophecies and to their ultimate fulfillment at Jesus' death and resurrection when, in Yahweh's eyes and for the Church, he was enthroned as the Messiah-Savior. The Eastern Churches, knowing this theology well, have centered the feast of the Epiphany more on the Baptism of Christ than on the visit of the Magi.

Focus Points. (1) Is 42:1 Here is my servant whom I uphold, / my chosen one with whom I am pleased, / Upon whom I have put my spirit; / he shall bring forth justice to the nations... This is the beginning of the first Servant Song (there are four of these songs in Deutero-Isaiah: 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 - 53:12). Verse 1a is taken up in the Gospel Reading, Mt 3:17. < The four Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah, if taken together, describe the career of a mysterious person who begins his life as a *prophet*, proceeds to be a teacher and, meeting the opposition and antagonism of his own people, ends his life as a self-sacrificing *priest*, only to triumph even over death and be vindicated. The parallel between Jesus' career as it is outlined by the Gospels and that of the Servant is obvious. < The Servant is commissioned to bring "justice" (Hebrew *mishpaf*), that is, a legal decision ratifying and executing the divine will. The Bible, except in rare cases (Jgs 4:5; 1 Sm 7:6; 3:20), reserved that power to *kings*, *priests*, and local magistrates. < In brief, Yahweh's Servant is a Prophet, Priest and King.

(2) Mt 3:13 Later Jesus, coming from Galilee, appeared before John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. Historically, the baptism of Jesus was the inauguration of his mission of preaching, teaching and working miracles. Symbolically, the baptismal setting of the introduction of Jesus as the Servant foretold by Deutero-Isaiah underlies the fact that Jesus fulfills his messianic role only through his death and resurrection. Immersion in water was a common symbol of suffering and death (Gn 6:17; Ex 14:28).

(3) Mt 3:16-17 After Jesus was baptized, he came directly out of the water. Suddenly the sky opened and he saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and hover over him. With that, a voice from the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him." Jesus' ascent from the water is a symbol of his resurrection from the dead, The opening of the heavens is

a symbol of the new relationship established between people and Yahweh by the resurrection. The descent of the Spirit is both a suggestion that with the resurrection the new people of Yahweh is created and an introduction to Jesus as the Messiah, upon whom the Spirit rests (see Is 11:2). Thus the mention of the Spirit makes Jesus both an individual: the Messiah, and a community: the new Israel. Yahweh's voice specifies the kind of Messiah Jesus is: the *Servant Messiah, a Prophet, Priest and King*.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Through our Christian baptism we were enabled to share in the functions of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, and this means too that we have become sharers in Christ mission of being God's Servant. Because of Jesus Christ, whose likeness we bear, Yahweh Our Father is pleased with us.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you live as someone truly pleasing to Yahweh, your Father? How? Share your answer with your small group.

2. Our baptism must be seen in the light of Jesus' baptism. His ritual baptism in the Jordan River was a sign of his real baptism which took place at his death and resurrection. Our sacramental baptism is a sign of the same reality: our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ: "Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death (Rm 6:3)?" *Our real baptism is our actual life, death and resurrection in union with Christ.* Thus our sacramental baptism is our initiation into Christ's saving mission. *As for Jesus, so for us, baptism marks the beginning of a life of service.* For we are baptized not just for our own good but for the benefit of others.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Do you feel that you have to be "mandated" to spread the Kingdom of God, or that you already received your mandate at your baptism?

3. Heaven is now open to us. Yahweh has initiated a new, affectionate relationship with us. We can now call Him "Abba."

3.1 Pointer for sharing: Have you changed from being a person who was afraid of God to a person who is confident of his affectionate love and care? Share your answer with your small group.

Serve as Jesus Served

Like thousands of teenagers after graduation, Maria was trying to get her first job. She read of a vacant clerical position in a factory office, and she planned to be there when the employment desk opened.

It was a wet and stormy day. On the bus Maria noticed several young girls, prettier and better dressed than she, and they left the bus when she did. Apparently they, too, wanted work. "Please, dear God," Maria prayed, "help me. Money is so desperately needed at home."

Just then a middle-aged woman alighted from the bus, slipped on the muddy curb, and fell. The girls glanced at her but kept on walking. The woman seemed dazed. Her glasses and purse were lying at her feet. For a moment, Maria hesitated. If she helped her, the other girls would get their applications in before her and be interviewed first. She felt, in that situation, she wouldn't have a chance. Then a phrase her mother often repeated came to mind: The mark of a true Christian is consideration for others; serve as Jesus served. Maria stopped and helped the woman to her feet and picked up her possessions.

"Could you help me to the office?" she pleaded. "I feel rather shaky." At a snail's pace they walked to the factory. Maria told her she had come to apply for work. As they reached the building, the lady thanked her and limped down the hall. Later, Maria was ushered into the employment manager's office, the last among the applicants. To her surprise, the lady whom she helped turned out to be the employment manager. "I have been waiting for you," she said. "I turned down all the other applicants we saw in the bus. The opening is for a receptionist. A bright girl who is kind and considerate... you have those qualities. You can start reporting for work tomorrow."

Adapted from Lovasik and Frank Mihalic

JANUARY 10, 1999

FEAST OF THE STO. NINO, YEAR A

ISAIAH 9:1-6

A SON IS GIVEN TO US

MATTHEW 18:1-5, 10

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Catholic Churches worldwide celebrate the feast of the Sto. Nino or the Bambino of Bethlehem on Christmas Day. In the Philippines we have an added Feast Day to commemorate how the evangelization of our country had its beginnings in the baptism of the King and Queen of Cebu who were converted to Christianity by the missionaries accompanying Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. As a baptismal gift, the Queen was given an image of the Infant Jesus of Prague. When the second Spanish expedition headed by Legazpi and Fr. Urdaneta arrived in 1565, they found the statue

still being venerated by the Cebuanos although they had lost contact with Christianity. The venerated image became the rallying point of the new evangelization which never ceased thereafter.

Focus Points. (1) Is 9:5 For a child is born to us, a son is given us; / upon his shoulder dominion rests. / They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. Isaiah used perfect tenses but in fact he was foretelling a future event, the coming of the ideal Davidic king. This ideal king will have the wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, and the religious virtues of Abraham (Father of the race because of his faith) and Moses (a humble, peaceful leader or "prince", see Nu 12:3). It is implied that the ideal Davidic king, through wise governance, will bring prosperity to his people. No historical king of Judah ever had all these attributes, and Christian tradition has rightly seen in Jesus Christ the ideal Davidic King.

(2) Mt 18:4 Whoever makes himself lowly, becoming like this child, is of greatest importance in that heavenly reign. Jesus gave this teaching to his disciples as a grown man, but long before that, he exemplified the teaching by himself becoming in reality a little child.

For more on Mt 18:1-5, 10 see HBP Santo Nino 1996.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. It is said in Is 9:6 that the zeal of Yahweh will make all his promises come to pass. Indeed, Yahweh, Our Father, has fulfilled all his promises by giving us Jesus who first came to the world as a Santo Nino (holy child).

/./ Pointer for sharing: Since Yahweh Our Father promised to give prosperity to his children through the ideal Davidic King,

and this King is no other than Jesus Christ, can you say that Yahweh has indeed made you prosperous? Share your answer with your small group.

2. In the Bible, the "Prince of Peace" is presented as a person who is outstanding in meekness or humility.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Are you a disciple of the "Prince of Peace"? Share your answer with your small group.

Through the Eyes of a Child

Thorwaldsen, the great sculptor, once carved a statue of Jesus. He wished to see if the statue would cause the right reaction in those who saw it. He brought a little child to look at the statue and asked, "Who do you think that is?"

The child answered, "It is a great man."

Thorwaldsen knew that he had failed. So he scrapped his statue and began again. Once more, when he had finished, he brought back the child and asked the same question. The child smiled and answered, "That is Jesus who said, 'Let the children come to me.'"

Thorwaldsen knew that this time he had succeeded. The statue had passed the test of a child's eyes.

That is no bad test. Someone once said that he placed no value on the alleged Christianity of a man or woman at whose door, or at whose garden gate, the children were afraid to play. If a child thinks a person good, the likelihood is that he is good. If a child shrinks away, a person may be great but (s)he is certainly not Christlike.

Adapted from William Barclay and Frank Mihalic

JANUARY 24, 1999

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A

National Bible Week starts January 25 (Monday), 1999

ISAIAH 8:23 - 9:3

YAHWEH MAKES PEOPLE REJOICE

MATTHEW 4:12-23 (OR 4:12-17)

**JESUS, THE LIGHT AND THE GOOD NEWS
FROM GOD**

**(The longer reading includes the call of the first four
disciples)**

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Matthew is the Evangelist who takes pains in showing that the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus, and therefore he is the promised Messiah. He sees in Jesus' arrival in Capernaum the fulfillment of the great messianic oracle of Is 8:22 - 9:6.

Focus Points. (1) Is 9:1b-3 The people who walked in darkness / have seen a great light; / Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom / a light has shone. / You have brought the abundant joy / and great rejoicing, / As they rejoice before you as at the harvest, / as men make merry when dividing spoils. / For the yoke that burdened them, / the pole on their shoulder, / And the rod of their taskmaster / you have smashed, as on the day of Midian. Originally this oracle was probably pronounced on the occasion of the deportation of Galileans by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser in 732 BC. It was a message of comfort to these exiles, centered on the figure of the future Messiah, possibly the Immanuel of Is 7:14. He is the **Light** that will put an end to the darkness being suffered by the captives.

The captive's condition is compared to that of a harnessed farm animal, a fairly common image of enslavement. Usually the yoke was made of wood but sometimes of metal. The "pole" was the bar of the yoke that pressed down on the captive's shoulders. Isaiah in 10:27 and 14:25 compares the liberation of Israel from Assyrian captivity to the breaking of a yoke and the lifting of a burden. The "day of Midian" is an allusion to Gideon's victory over the Midianites in Judges 7:16-25.

(2) Mt 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to proclaim this theme: "Reform your lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand." For Matthew the new era of peace and prosperity prophesied by Isaiah has dawned with Jesus, only he does not establish his kingdom by military power. His peace is achieved peacefully. Jesus' kingdom is brought about by the interior, personal revolution of conversion. His only weapon is his WORD which brings LIGHT to all people held captive by Satan, the real enemy. Thus his rule is not imposed from outside his subjects but from inside by the appeal of his WORD/LIGHT. It is those who listen to his teaching and carry it out who belong to his kingdom. The kingdom is the object of the Good news (see Mt 4:23) which people do not only receive but to which they contribute by their conversion. The Good News is that peoples' lives can now be changed under the influence of the Messiah's WORD/LIGHT.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. If we read Isaiah's oracle up to its conclusion in v. 6 (not included in the liturgical passage) we are assured that the prophecy will be fulfilled because of the "zeal" (Hebrew *qin'a*) of Yahweh for his people. Freedom, peace and prosperity are what Our Father really wants for us. If, instead, we experience bondage

of any kind, turmoil, and destitution, it is because of our rebellion against him either individually or collectively.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Some people blame God for their misery. From your experience, is there ever any reason for doing this? Share your answer with your small group.

2. Yahweh Our Father and Eternal King begins his reign in our personal lives when we recognize and respond to Christ's WORD addressed to each of us individually and collectively. The LIGHT which this WORD brings is one which illumines and banishes the dark spots in our lives: our animosity towards others, our prejudice, our jealousy, our hatred, our selfishness. It is from these that we must be released if we are to be members of God's kingdom.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: When did you experience your first great conversion from the bondage of sinfulness or indifference to the freedom of serving God and his people? Share your answer with your small group.

Jesus, the Persian Rug Weaver

When a Persian rug is being woven, it is mounted on a large frame which is standing upright. On various stools and ladders behind the rug are perched the little boys who help along with the work. The weaver stands in front of the rug and shouts directions to the little boys on the other side.

Sometimes one of the boys makes a mistake: he puts the wrong-colored thread in the wrong place. Then here is what happens. Most of the time the weaver does not remove the wrong-colored thread. If he is a really great artist, he works the thread into a new design. He improves with it. Today it is the true mark of a genuine Persian rug that it has at least one such mistake or a bit of asymmetry in its design.

Similarly, if we get converted from sin and enter into the employ of Jesus, the Master Weaver of that "Persian rug" which is the Kingdom of God, he will know how to disregard our mistakes and adapt them into a new design. No matter what our mistake, he can turn it into something helpful to the grand artwork he is directing.

Adapted from Burn Hagspiel and Frank Mihalic

JANUARY 31, 1999

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A

Today is National Bible Sunday:

Special collection in churches for the Biblical Apostolate

ZEPHANIAH 2:3; 3:12-13

SEEK YAHWEH... ALL YOU ANAWIM

MATTHEW 5:1-12

THE REIGN OF GOD IS THEIRS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The so-called "Sermon on the Mount" — which is in fact an artificial collection of sayings pronounced by Jesus on different times, places and occasions and adapted by the evangelist to suit his Christian Community's concerns — provides an example of Jesus' preaching (proclamation of the Kingdom and invitation to repentance) and teaching (instruction) which change people's lives and thus install God's reign in the world. The Beatitudes which introduce it are both a proclamation that the kingdom has arrived and an enumeration of the qualities required for entry into the kingdom. They proclaim the happiness of the ANAWIM. The Oracle of Zephaniah throws light on who the ANAWIM really were.

Focus Points. (1) Seep 2:3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth, / who have observed his law; / Seek justice, seek humility; / perhaps you may be sheltered / on the day of the Lord's anger. The word ANAWIM does not refer to any person who is poor but to the FEW ISRAELITES WHO REMAINED TRUE TO THEIR RELIGION in spite of all the calamities that they suffered in the hands of their enemies. Living in humility (as a remnant) in the land where their ancestors were once prosperous, they nevertheless serve and obey Yahweh. They withstand the temptation to adopt as their own the religion and gods of their foreign oppressors.

(2) Seep 3:12-13 But I will leave a remnant in your midst / a people humble and lowly, / Who shall take refuge in the name of the Lord: / the remnant of Israel. / They shall do no wrong / and speak no lies; / Nor shall there be found in their mouths / a deceitful tongue; / They shall pasture and couch their flock / with none to disturb them. This passage is very helpful in understanding who are the "poor in spirit". They are the few remaining people in Judas who strive to renew themselves externally and internally, in their religion, views of morality, and practical social justice. This remnant shall rely heavily upon God in making its decisions. They are those who realize that prosperity and possessions do not constitute morality and right, but being faithful to Yahweh does. Because they strive for virtue, truth and sincerity, the remnant shall be gifted by Yahweh with peace and prosperity in the end.

For more on Mt 5:1-12 see { 1 } HBP November 1, 1998 and { 2 } HBP, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time 1996.

Beatitudes of Mo. Teresa

(WITH SUBTITLES)

1 POOR IN SPIRIT

"The poor are very great people,
they can teach us many beautiful things."

2 SORROWING

"Instead of death and sorrow,
let us bring peace and joy to the world."

3 LOWLY

"If you are humble, nothing will touch you,
neither praise nor disgrace,
because you know what you are."

4 HUNGER FOR HOLINESS

"The world today is hungry not only for bread
but hungry for love; hungry to be wanted;
to be loved."

5 SHOW MERCY

"If you really want to love,
you must learn to forgive."

6 SINGLE-HEARTED

"We can do no great things;
only small things with great love."
"It is not how much we do, but how
much love we put into what we do."

7 PEACEMAKERS

"Works of love
are always works of peace."

8a PERSECUTED FOR HOLINESS

"Do not allow yourself to be
disheartened by any failure
as long as you have done your best."

8b WHEN THEY INSULT YOU

"Give until it hurts — with a smile."

8c BE GLAD AND REJOICE

"I am so used to seeing the smile on our people,
even the dying ones smile."

FEBRUARY 7, 1999

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A

ISAAC 58: 7-10
YAHWEH'S COOPERATORS

MATTHEW 5:13-16
EVANGELIZATION BY PRAXIS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

New Evangelization in Asia today has to be done through a dialogue of life with other religions, local cultures and with the poor. This necessitates the praxis of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, from which the Gospel for today is drawn. This also presupposes authentic religious renewal, which is the underlying principle of the First Reading.

Focus Points. (1) Is 58:7, 9b-10 Share your bread with the hungry, / shelter the oppressed and the homeless; / Clothe the naked when you see them, / and do not turn your back on your own... If you remove from your midst oppression, / false accusation and malicious speech; / If you bestow your bread on the hungry / and satisfy the afflicted; / Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, / and the gloom shall become for you like midday. This poetic text from Deutero-Isaiah was addressed to the Israelites who had returned from exile and were engaged in rebuilding their nation. Many concentrated on the revival and intensification of religious practices like fasting. But the prophet gently reminds them that Yahweh will be with them, cooperate with them, and make them a LIGHT for the nations only if they show justice and love to their fellow Israelites — Yahweh's own children — who have fallen into hard times.

(2) Mt 5:13-16 You are the salt of the earth... the light of the world... Both salt and light are most valuable commodities. Without the one food is tasteless, without the other it is impossible to see. But both were symbols of the people of God for the Jews. Israel, by the observance of the mosaic law, was called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the nations. In attributing these characteristics to the Church Jesus makes it **THE NEW AND THE TRUE ISRAEL**, commissioned to carry out the role of serving the world. For light and salt are symbols of service: neither the one nor the other exists for itself. The disciples' light consists in their good works, that is, their behavior inspired by Jesus' teaching. Thus it is not merely by word that they are his instruments but **BY ACTUALLY LIVING THE GOSPEL**. It is this new way of life that adds taste to the earth and enlightens the world.

For more on Mt 5:13-16 see HBP, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time 1996.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. In the past as in the present many people have thought that service to God is done in the Temple/Synagogue or in the Church/Shrine/Chapel building, while service to fellow human beings is done outside. But in all the great periods of **RENEWAL** in the Judeo-Christian religion, Yahweh's messengers have emphasized that services of justice and love done for fellow human beings is what He wants people to undertake. In this sense the whole world is God's Temple. There should be no contradiction between religious practices like prayers, fasting, pilgrimages, etc. and services to the oppressed and the needy. In the Biblical gesture of prayer, people raise both arms to God. One arm should stand

for religious practices and the other arm for services of justice and charity.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Are you undergoing a RENEWAL in your spiritual life and attending to what God really wants? Share your answer with your small group.

2. To be a Christian requires sharing in the mission of Jesus Christ to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to be Yahweh's Servant for the salvation of all people. Certainly, to be a Christian means first of all to lead the life revealed by Jesus. But precisely, this is a life of service to God and to fellow human beings. It has a missionary dimension. Every Christian must be, like Jesus, a missionary.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Have you every thought of yourself as being a missionary even if you stay at home in your own country? Share your answer with your small group.

LIGHTNING FLASHES

A man is going home from visiting a friend who just transferred to a new house up in the mountains. He lost his way when he thought of taking a short-cut and what he surmised was just going to be an hour's hike dragged on and on until it was totally dark. He had no torch or lamp of any kind. A thunderstorm then came up. The only way he could see where he was going was when there were flashes of lightning. During such times he would look quickly and run where he saw an opening in the woods. He did this time and again, pausing whenever there were no lightning flashes. In this manner he finally found the way home.

The times of renewal in our individual and ecclesial lives are like those flashes of lightning. By availing ourselves of providential lights, we get home.

FEBRUARY 14, 1999

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR A

SIRACH 15:15-20
LOYALTY TO YAHWEH

MATTHEW 5:17-37 (OR 5:20-22; 27-28, 33-34, 37)
SPIRITUAL OLYMPICS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

In Olympic sports competition, athletes are urged to perform better than in previous meets. They must strive to go "faster, higher, stronger." It seems that in his time, Jesus also set goals for his disciples that, spiritually, match the Olympic dream. Their righteousness has to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were already following quite lofty standards as reflected in First Reading from the book of Sirach.

Focus Points. (1) 15:15-17 If you choose you can keep the commandments; / it is loyalty to do his will. / There are set before you fire and water; / to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. / Before man are life and death, / whichever he chooses shall be given him... A reader of **Sirach** is struck by the idea that the opposite of a sinful life is a wise one. For Sirach, Wisdom and Righteousness go together, if they are not really the same. Neither Wisdom nor sin (foolishness) comes to people as an imposition from God. We have, in this passage, one of the clearest assertion in the Old Testament of human free will or freedom of choice. Sin is not from God since God hates sin. The person who similarly hates sin is the one loyal to God.

(2) Mt 5:17-37 (Jesus' teaching on murder... adultery; his repudiation of divorce... his rejection of any kind of oath). The

four contrasts between the pharisaic interpretation of the law and Jesus' radicalization of it are only examples of Jesus' NEW PIETY, but they are sufficient to give us a clear idea of the spirit which should inspire all Christian behavior. In his teaching on both murder and adultery Jesus intimates the primacy of the heart. Sin is a matter, not merely of external actions, but of interior disposition. His repudiation of divorce shows his adhesion to the original teaching on marriage implied in Gn 2:24 in contrast to the vacillations of later Jewish legislation. His rejection of any kind of oath is a blow for integrity and simplicity.

*For more on Matthew 5:17-37 see **HBP**, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time 1996.*

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. God's Ten Commandments must not be considered as a burden that God wants us to carry as a kind of trial before he gives us a reward. Rather, we must have the wisdom to seem them as the blueprint of our happiness on earth which is a prelude of our eternal happiness in Our Father's house. Loyalty to the Ten Commandments is loyalty to the Wisdom of Yahweh Our Father.

/./ Pointer for sharing: In your life as a Christian, do you think you have been loyal to the Wisdom of Yahweh Your Father? Share your answer with your small group.

2. Jesus' ethic is that of the new covenant, written not on stone but on people's hearts (see Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:25-28). It is new, not in the sense that it annuls the law and the prophets but in the sense that it goes to the heart of the teaching of the law and the prophets in a way which was not realized before Jesus but which was announced by the prophets themselves.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: Have you come to the point of interiorizing your moral life, or cultivating a religion of the heart rather than one of external observances? Share your answer with your small group.

Ten 'Cannots'

1. You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift.
2. You cannot help small men by tearing down big men.
3. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.
4. You cannot lift the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer.
5. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich.
6. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn.
7. You cannot further the brotherhood of man by inciting class hatred.
8. You cannot establish security on borrowed money.
9. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.
10. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.

Attributed to Abraham Lincoln

FEBRUARY 21, 1999
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR A

GENESIS 2:7-9; 3:1-7
YAHWEH, SOURCE OF HUMAN LIFE

MATTHEW 4:1-11
LIFE... FROM GOD'S WORD

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

As we begin Lent in the Year of Yahweh Our Father, it seems most appropriate to focus its observance on the sacredness of human life, *any human life*. This is not to deny that the most precious human life of all was that of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact we take his human life as the best model for our every own. And we are happy to realize, upon reflecting on today's Gospel, that Jesus applied to the care of his life the very same principles we are being instructed by our Catechism (see Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258-2330) to apply to the life of any human being.

The Catechism reminds us: "*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being." (CCC 2258).

Focus Points. (1) Gn 2:7-9 The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden... with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good

and bad. Human life is sacred because it is a participation in the breath of God (His Holy Spirit). In Yahwist theology, God originally intended that human beings would live indefinitely and that is why the Garden of Eden was provided with the Tree of Life. Before the first sin was committed, human beings had access to this tree any time they wanted. The main privilege they lost upon being banished from the garden was precisely this free access. In other words, because of sin human beings became subject to death and decay (and the sicknesses that were a prelude to death), as well as to other miseries.

(2) Mt 4:4 Scripture has it: 'Not on bread alone is man to live but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God.' Jesus quotes from Dt 8:3 (and in v. 7 he quotes from Dt 6:16; in v. 10 from Dt 6:13). In the Old Testament book the context speaks of the manna from heaven and it is taken as a prophetic symbol. It represents the Word of God coming down from heaven and showing people how to live a life pleasing to God. The life meant is not a "spiritual life" abstracted from the body, but a bodily, earthly life that is meaningful because it is lived according to God's guidance. As used by Jesus to contradict Satan's suggestion, the quote means that Jesus prefers to be guided by God's plan for him and for the common good of humankind rather than satisfy a temporary hunger in a selfish way that deviates from his mission.

For more on Mt 4:1-11 see HBP, First Sunday in Lent 1996.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights

of a person — among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life" (CCC 2270). "Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life...not thereby to restrict the scope of mercy. Rather, she makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as to the parents and the whole of society (CCC 2272).

1.1 Pointer for sharing: Have you any experience regarding abortion? Share it with your small group.

2. "Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good" (CCC 2288). Jesus Christ followed this rule. It was for the sake of the common good — the salvation of the human race — that he refused to break his fast at the suggestion of Satan.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: What sacrifices in health (and maybe in possessions) have you accepted for the common good? Share your experience with your small group.

Dynamite or Peace, Death or Life

They said he had died!

One morning in 1888 Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who had amassed a fortune manufacturing and selling weapons of destruction, awoke to read his own obituary in the newspaper.

Actually, it was his brother who had died, but a reported mistakenly wrote Alfred's obituary.

For the first time Alfred Nobel saw himself as the world saw him: "the dynamite king" and nothing more. Nothing was mentioned about his efforts at breaking down barriers between

people and ideas. He was simply a merchant of death, and he would be remembered for that alone.

Alfred was horrified. He determined that the world would know the true purpose of his life. So he wrote his last will and testament and left his fortune to establish that most valued of all prizes: the Nobel Peace Prize.

Now, the world has forgotten his dynamite legacy.

Quote

FEBRUARY 28, 1999
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, **YEAR A**

GENESIS 12:1-4
YAHWEH'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

MATTHEW 17:1-9
THE SON ON WHOM GOD'S FAVOR RESTS

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The Transfiguration of Jesus is like a SUMMIT where the two sides of a mountain meet. On one hand Jesus is painted in divine color, for white is the color of divinity (see Dn 7:9). He enjoys God's presence and shares in his kingdom. On the other hand the story makes it clear that Jesus will attain glory only at the cost of suffering, humiliation and death. Since we are celebrating the Year of God the Father, our reflection will be on the side of Jesus' relationship with his Father. From this viewpoint he is the New Abraham, bearer of El Shaddai's ultimate favor and ultimate achiever of His promises.

Focus Points. (1) Gn 12:2-3 "I will make you a great nation, / and I will bless you; / I will make your name great, / so that you will be a blessing. / I will bless those who bless you / and curse those who curse you. / All the communities of the earth / shall find blessing in you." Abram, an obscure Semite, is called by Yahweh (identified also as El Shaddai in Gn 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; and 49:25, mainly in the Priestly tradition) who requires him (1) to disassociate himself from his past and (2) migrate to a land of Yahweh/El Shaddai's choice. The reward of his response in faith is the divine blessing affecting himself and his descendants. God's promise and its unfailing fulfillment becomes a main theme of the Bible. < "El Shaddai" is usually translated as "Almighty God" but scholars consider this inaccurate. Etymologically, they prefer "God of the Mountain" or "God of the open wastes". Disregarding etymology, we can simply say that El Shaddai was the "God of Abraham" or the "God of the Patriarchs." He is, in reality if not in name, the same as the God of Jesus Christ.

(2) Mt 17:5b Out of the cloud came a voice which said, "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests. Listen to him." There are two revelations here, one about God the Father (Yahweh), and the other about the character of Jesus' Messiahship. Yahweh is revealed as a Father who LOVES His Son and wants people to listen to him. Jesus is revealed as the Servant of Yahweh (see Is 42:1 and the other three songs of the Servant). He is not the royal conquering Messiah of Jewish popular expectation.

For more on Mt 17: 1-9 see HBP, Second Sunday in Lent 1996.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

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

1. Mt 1:1 refers to Jesus as the "son of David, son of Abraham" in his genealogy, but in an expanded (patristic) biblical typology he is called the New David and the New Abraham. It was because of him that God's promises to Abraham were brought to their ultimate fulfillment. The divine approval shown by God to Abraham and the Patriarchs (see Hebrews 11:2) also reach its culmination in the divine favor that rests upon Jesus Christ (see today's Gospel Reading). < The Catholic Church Catechism says: "In order to gather together scattered humanity God calls Abram from his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and makes him Abraham, that is, "the father of a multitude of nations." "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." (59). This was one of the initial stages of God's "Plan of Loving Goodness" (see CCC 51 ff.)

/./ Pointer for sharing: Do you know that God has a "Plan of Loving Goodness" for you and the whole human race? Share your answer with your small group.

2. The Apostle John teaches that "God is love" (1 Jn 1:5; 4:8). The Catechism of the Catholic Church elaborates on this by saying: "God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange" (221). In today's Gospel reading, the Father's love for Jesus is not for him merely individually but as the corporate personality of the Church, that is, of all the faithful, of us all.

2.1 Pointer for sharing: How often do you think of yourself as a beloved son/daughter of Yahweh, your Father? Share your answer with your small group.

We All Want To Be Loved By God

Lucy was a barmaid. A few weeks earlier she already had the permission of her boss to go to midnight Mass. From the time she left school, she had never missed midnight Mass. The little flame of religion which she had from home still burned a bit.

"Good night," said Lucy to her fellow workers as she left the bar at eleven. "Good night, Lucy," they answered.

Lucy brought the smile of God's love back from midnight Mass. She wanted to get right back to work. But a silence fell upon the room and all eyes were on Lucy.

One of the girls asked Lucy, "Tell me, did you go to Communion?"

"Yes," she said.

"Then you have the good Lord in your heart."

"That's right."

"Then kiss me, will you?" And Lucy did.

Then the others all shouted, "Me too. Me too."

"I had to kiss every one of them. I have never given such chaste kisses, free of all human feelings. And I must say that none of them had ever received a kiss in such a respectful way."

Willi Hoffsuemmer and Frank Mihalic

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