

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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DURING THE TIME OF TERROR

John Paul II

PASTORAL STATEMENT: PRAY FOR PEACE

Jaime Card. Sin, DD

COLUMBAN MISSION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Columban Missionary

**THE NEED OF VALUE FORMATION:
AN IMPERATIVE TO CATHOLIC TEACHERS
COMMITMENT**

Anthony Lobo

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The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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(2001)

EDITORIAL

Memory as Theology

(Blessed are the eyes that see...)

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

Talking one day to a priest, I learned one viewpoint. He said that there must be a monument erected to keep the memory of the victims of the attack to the two towers of New York. For memory is part and parcel of human experience and history: especially when there are people, an event, or transition that takes place as part of the unfolding of the economy of the whole human experience.

Just on that same day, I had the privilege of beholding one monument of a memory: Mary in the history of salvation of humanity. I was beholding the famous image of our Lady of the Rosary of La Naval. Surrounding the most venerated image, in the course of four hundred years of the history of faith in the country, were other images of great men and women of the Dominican Order. They, too, serve as reminders of the great faith, work, example and fulfillment in their lives as believers.

The Gospel portrays the return of the disciples, one day satisfied and exhorted by the Lord after their ministry. The Master praised them: *"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."* (Lk.

10: 23) The disciples of Jesus did and saw many things. Just as the Master deserved to be remembered and so would the apostles be.

The problem that the Catholic Church has faced in the past and of the present, and will be in the future, is how to satisfactorily explain the veneration of holy men and women with out giving scandal. Many other people who also call themselves Christian, the fundamentalist ones, accuse the faithful and the Church to be adoring idols. But this is never the teaching of the Church. Yet the risk and the misinterpretation always take place.

Presenting our veneration to Our Lady of La Naval and the other saints in the Church as people to be remembered, and the memory of their *orthopraxical* theology, meaning, they put into their lives their faith, may be a good alternative way of presenting our love and devotion to those who have been ahead of us in this vale of tears and joys, and officially recognized in the list of saints, whom we remember during the first day of November.

As early as in the time of the Apostles, there were reports of people who got healed because the shadow of Peter fell on some sick lined along the pathway of Peter, so we constantly find people who will testify how their show of devotion to our Lady or to any other Saint, brings them an experience of healing, prayers answered, etc. They would then acknowledge the working of faith and prayers in their lives. No one could stop such expression of gratitude. May other fundamentalist brothers and sisters in Jesus see our devotions to saints in the light of memory as theology.

During the Time of Terror*

JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 12 September 2001

I cannot begin this audience without expressing my profound sorrow at the terrorist attacks which yesterday brought death and destruction to America, causing thousands of victims and injuring countless people. To the President of the United States and to all American citizens I express my heartfelt sorrow. In the face of such unspeakable horror we cannot but be deeply disturbed. I add my voice to all the voices raised in these hours to express indignant condemnation, and I strongly reiterate that the ways of violence will never lead to genuine solutions to humanity's problems.

Yesterday was a dark day in the history of humanity, a terrible affront to human dignity. After receiving the news, I followed with intense concern the developing situation, with heartfelt prayers to the Lord. How is it possible to commit acts of such savage cruelty? The human heart has depths from which schemes of unheard-of ferocity sometimes emerge, capable of destroying in a moment the

* Letters of the Holy Father after the September 11, 2001 tragedy.

normal daily life of a people. But faith comes to our aid at these times when words seem to fail. Christ's word is the only one that can give a response to the questions which trouble our spirit. Even if the forces of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say. Christian hope is based on this truth; at this time our prayerful trust draws strength from it.

With deeply felt sympathy I address myself to the beloved people of the United States in this moment of distress and consternation, when the courage of so many men and women of good will is being sorely tested. In a special way I reach out to the families of the dead and the injured, and assure them of my spiritual closeness. I entrust to the mercy of the Most High the helpless victims of this tragedy, for whom I offered Mass this morning, invoking upon them eternal rest. May God give courage to the survivors; may he sustain the rescue-workers and the many volunteers who are presently making an enormous effort to cope with such an immense emergency. I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to join me in prayer for them. Let us beg the Lord that the spiral of hatred and violence will not prevail. May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy, fill the hearts of all with wise thoughts and peaceful intentions.

Today, my heartfelt sympathy is with the American people, subjected yesterday to inhuman terrorist attacks which have taken the lives of thousands of innocent human beings and caused unspeakable sorrow in the hearts of all men and women of good will. Yesterday was indeed a dark day in our history, an appalling offence against peace, a terrible assault against human dignity.

I invite you all to join me in commending the victims of this shocking tragedy to Almighty God's eternal love. Let us implore his comfort upon the injured, the families involved, all who are doing their utmost to rescue survivors and help those affected.

I ask God to grant the American people the strength and courage they need at this time of sorrow and trial.

Wednesday 19 September 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. It is a dark night; devouring wild beasts are perceived in the surroundings. The one who prays is waiting for the coming of dawn so that the light will dispel the darkness and fear. This is the background of Psalm 56 (57) on which we reflect today. It is a night prayer made by the one who prays at the break of day, anxiously awaited, in order to be able to praise the Lord with joy (cf. vv. 9-12). In fact, the psalm passes from dramatic lament addressed to God to serene hope and joyful thanksgiving, the latter using words that resound again in another psalm (cf. Ps 107 [108], 2-6).

In reality, one assists at the passage from fear to joy, from night to day, from nightmare to serenity, from supplication to praise. It is an experience that is often described in the Psalter: "You changed my mourning into dancing, you took off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. Lord, my God, forever will I will give you thanks" (Ps 29,12-13).

Fear

2. Psalm 56 (57) that we are meditating on has two parts. The first part is the experience of fear before the assault of the evil which tries to strike the just one (cf. vv. 2-7). At the centre of the scene there are lions poised to attack. In no time this image is transformed into a picture of war, complete with spears, arrows, and swords. The one who prays feels assailed by a kind of death squadron. Around him there is a band of hunters, setting traps and digging pits to capture their prey. But this tense atmosphere is suddenly dissolved. In fact, already at the beginning (cf. v. 2), the protective symbol of the divine wings appears which refer, specifically, to the Ark of the Covenant with the winged cherubim,

sign of the presence of God among the faithful in the holy temple on Mt. Zion.

3. The one who prays asks God insistently to send from heaven his messengers to whom he assigns the symbolic names of "Faithfulness" and "Grace" (v. 4), the qualities proper to the saving love of God. For that reason, even if he shudders at the terrible roaring of the wild beasts and the perfidy of his persecutors, the faithful one remains serene and confident within, like Daniel in the lions' den (cf. Dn 6,17-25).

Confidence

The presence of the Lord does not delay in showing its efficacy by means of the self inflicted punishment of his adversaries: they tumble into the pit which they had dug for the just one (cf. v. 7). Such confidence in divine justice, which is always expressed in the Psalter, wards off discouragement and surrender to the power of evil. Sooner or later, God sides with the faithful one upsetting the manoeuvres of the wicked, tripping them up in their own evil plots.

4. Now we reach the second part of the Psalm, that of thanksgiving (cf. vv. 8-12). There is a passage which shines because of its intensity and beauty: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody. Awake my soul. Awake O harp and lyre. I will awake the dawn" (vv. 8-9). Now the darkness has been dispelled: the dawn of salvation has coloured the song of the one who prays.

Applying this image to himself, the Psalmist seems to translate into terms that belong to the religious imagery of the Bible, which is rigorously monotheistic, the custom of the Egyptian or Phoenician priests who were in charge of "awakening the dawn", of making the sun reappear, since it was considered a beneficent god. He also alludes to the use of hanging up musical instruments and covering

them in a time of mourning and trial (cf. Ps 136 [137], 2), and of "reawakening" them to a festive sound in times of liberation and joy. Hope blossoms from the liturgy: one turns to God asking him to draw near to his people again and to hear their prayer. In the Psalter, dawn is often the moment when God grants a favour after a night of prayer.

Divine Intervention

5. The Psalm closes with a hymn of praise to the Lord, who works with his two great saving qualities, that already appear with different names in the first part of the supplication (cf. v. 4). Now virtually personified, divine Goodness and Faithfulness enter the scene. They flood the heavens with their presence and are like light that shines in the darkness of trials and persecutions (cf. v. 11). For this reason the Christian tradition has used Psalm 56 (57) as a canticle of awakening to Easter light and joy, which shines out to the faithful removing the fear of death and opening the horizon of heavenly glory.

6. Gregory of Nyssa discovers in the words of the Psalm a kind of typical description of what happens in every human experience open to the recognition of the wisdom of God. "Indeed, He saved me - he exclaims - by shading me with the cloud of the Spirit, and those who trampled me underfoot were humiliated" (From the Italian translation of *On the Titles of the Psalms*, Rome, 1994, p. 183).

Later, quoting the expressions at the end of the Psalm, where it says, "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be above the earth", he concludes, "To the degree that the glory of God is extended on earth, increased by the faith of those who are saved, the heavenly powers extol God, exulting for our salvation" (*ibid.* p. 184).

*Letter of Condolence to Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick,
Archbishop of Washington*

Dear Cardinal McCarrick,

I join my prayers to those of all assembled in the National Shrine for the Mass of suffrage celebrated for those who lost their lives in last Tuesday's terrorist attack on the Pentagon. I am confident that in this time of trial all Americans will find their religious faith a source of renewed hope and the impetus for an ever more determined resolve to reject the ways of hatred and violence.

To those affected by this immense tragedy I hold up the light of the Gospel and pray that by the prompting of the Holy Spirit they will be led to an ever closer union with the Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of His cross and resurrection. To all I solemnly repeat the Gospel injunction not to be conquered by evil, but to conquer evil with good (*Rom 12,21*), to trust in the power of God's grace to transform human hearts and to work fearlessly to shape a future of justice, peace and security for the children of our world. Upon you, Archbishop O'Brien, Bishop Loverde and all the military and civilian personnel who have gathered to commend the departed to the infinite mercy of God our loving Father, I cordially invoke the divine gifts of wisdom, strength and perseverance in good. To all the faithful I cordially impart my apostolic blessing as a pledge of comfort and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 15 September 2001.

Pastoral Statement: Pray for Peace

JAIME CARD. SIN, DD

Circular No. 2001-48
September 12, 2001

World peace is in a very fragile condition right now. The senseless terroristic attack on America was done to all of us who love and cherish peace. It was not only an act of terrorism on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. It was committed against all of us who belong to one family under the Fatherhood of God.

We bow our heads in shame and sorrow at the loss of innocent lives. Let us pray for the eternal repose of those perished. Let us pray for those who survived the tragedy and are suffering from the death of their loved ones.

Let us not forget that those responsible for this crime are still and will always be our brothers and sisters. In spite of the wretchedness of their act against humankind, we must pray for their conversion of heart that they may see the magnitude of their cruelty and return to the fold of law and order.

We pray for world leaders specially the American government. May they be blessed with wisdom, prudence and commitment to peace in the face of this serious threat to world peace. Let us not allow more blood to be shed uselessly and needlessly.

I encourage our Catholic faithful to gather and pray the rosary for world peace. Our Mass on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14 must be offered for the intentions of world peace. May Mary, our Lady of Sorrows bring us all to Jesus who is our peace.

An Open Letter to President George W. Bush

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA

October 4, 2001

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of the Christian Conference of Asia, an ecumenical organization based in Hong Kong, we would like to convey our deepest sympathy to the families of the victims of the hijacking attacks in the US last September 11. We feel very deeply with all the American people and other affected nationals as you all grieve the loss of innocent lives, including the lives of the rescue workers who had put their own lives at risk in the course of their duty.

In our grief and solidarity with you, we strongly condemn such a heinous crime against humanity, even as we condemn all forms of violence against any people, nation or community.

As an ecumenical organization comprising of 221 member Churches and National Councils of Churches from 18 Asian countries, with a membership of more than 55 million individuals,

we strongly believe that suffering at any level by anyone anywhere must be overcome. Our faith always reminds us that God sent to the world the Christ so that everyone might have the "fullness of life".

Aware of the many forms of violence that continue to be faced by the peoples of Asia, the Christian Conference of Asia has affirmed our ecumenical mission of proclaiming in word and deed the saving will of God for fullness of life for all. As a concrete form of this proclamation, we have committed ourselves to the work of "Cultivating the Culture of Peace" as a way of overcoming violence. We made this commitment early this year in the wake of the violence that continues to plague many parts of Asia — due to injustice and poverty, to ethnic and religious enmity, to political and cultural rivalries, and to senseless power struggle and arms race.

It is in this spirit that we appeal to you, the US government and all its allies, including a number of governments from Asia, to prayerfully think of how best to deal with the situation that has been created following the Sept. 11 incident.

We who have lived in a violence-ridden region like Asia know how the cycle of violence can only breed more violence. We also know what it is like when a politically- or economically-motivated war is turned into a religious war. Until now, we continue to live with this problem here in Asia. We therefore need to clarify that this is not a war of religions or of civilizations. We also must understand what it is like to feel real anger and rage at injustice, suffering, and oppression.

In solidarity with you, we want to share with you our own hard-earned lesson: to carefully understand the real roots of the problem. What very often lies beneath "terrorism" or "fundamentalism" is a deep anger or rage resulting from a deep sense of

threat or exclusion as well as long exposure to violence itself. It is amazing to know that a number of suicide bombers in some Asian countries are actually orphans whose parents were killed in previous violent experiences. We particularly note that the situation of the Palestinians and Iraqi civilians, and especially the aspiration of the Palestinians for a clearly Palestinian state, is in need of urgent attention by the international community.

We do not support any call for military war, whether through strikes by air, land or sea. We are in fact concerned about how your call for support from other governments can further excite communal violence in many Asian countries along religious and communal lines. Even as there are talks about "proportionate response", we know that Afghanistan and several Asian countries are already ravaged by years of war and are still trying to survive. It is very clear that any course of action you will decide on will drastically affect Asian peoples. And so we ask that even as you consider the human rights of the thousands who were killed on Sept. 11, it is also important to seriously consider the human rights of the Afghan and other Asian peoples. We are particularly concerned about the people of Pakistan, including the Christians who are a minority there, who seem to be caught in the middle of all this.

Military retaliation will not be the best way to deal with the September 11 attacks. It may be the response expected of a powerful nation like the United States. It may also be the expected response of a group of people who are ready to die and would not mind others dying with them in the process. But the real proof of power is in how the United States, and all countries in solidarity with her, can learn and live out the hard way of genuine peace with justice.

It is time that we all begin to think of security not in terms of the usual "national security" concept which is ensured by

military might and arms capability. If we are to hold this one world together, we need to work for a "common security and universal prosperity" for all — ensured by the meeting of people's most basic needs for food and land; for respect of their civil and political rights and their basic human aspirations. We must join hands to attain this common security of peace, mutual understanding and goodwill to all.

Our prayer remains: "Give peace a chance."

Very sincerely,

AHN Jae Woong
General Secretary

Bishops wants G8 Summit to address imbalances

THE BISHOPS OF LIGURIA

**Technology Created New Global Economy; Respect Person,
Family, Town, Church, School in Global Society.**

Dear Faithful of the Churches of Liguria, we greet you with the words of the Apostle Paul:

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1, 3).*

Among the many voices that are raised around G8, we want to speak as Bishops of the Ligurian Region, where the meeting will be held. We do it with this letter, letting you share in some pastoral concerns.

**Faith guides and enlightens discernment especially for an event
like the meeting of G8**

1. In doing this, we are moved by faith in God. Our faith sheds light on the problems presented by G8. It reveals the design of God, Creator and Father. He wants humanity to form one family, in which all people are recognized as entitled to the same rights and obligations, with a common and identical personal

dignity. To do so, God puts in hearts the moral law that binds them to live according to justice, solidarity and love.

It is Jesus Christ, the "heart" of the faith, who has definitely revealed the immeasurable greatness of the personal dignity of each person. In Jesus Christ, as the Second Vatican Council writes, "Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed ... has been raised in us to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Jesus Christ is the foundation of the unity of the human race as he is the living principle, with the gift of his Spirit, of the new commandment of charity, the supreme norm of social coexistence.

Our pastoral concern directs us to address those who are hosting G8 and are involved in it; both for the problems and difficulties of their daily lives as far as home, work and travel go, and more for the need to reflect on the issues the event raises.

2. G8 is an occasion that should awaken a strong sense of responsibility because it will address important and crucial problems that refer to the phenomenon of the current globalization and the future as well.

The security needs and a responsible dialogue between the authorities and outspoken citizens that took place in recent weeks, must not make us lose sight of the expectation linked to G8: to answer the serious imbalances and injustices existing in the world and made more acute by uncontrolled globalization.

The eight Governments meeting here are a minority of the world and cannot speak for the whole, but their meeting is important for the discussion of the great problems of the globe. It is a meeting that will decide what commitment the eight most advanced countries will take regarding the growth of the decidedly poor economies, and also what they will do to protect the environment.

Need to awaken with great urgency a new global morality to deal with serious problems

3. As Bishops, we feel strongly the need to reawaken a new 'morality' in everyone with great urgency, beginning with those responsible for government. The need becomes more urgent when one considers the tragic problems in the economic, financial, health care, social, cultural, environmental and political orders. They are connected with the kind of globalization that does not respect the fundamental human rights of every human being.

They are problems that cannot fail to challenge everyone's conscience, especially those who have the leading role in setting directives for the development of peoples and who have greater access to instruments for guiding this development.

Therefore, we wish to call upon the Heads of State and of Governments themselves, who will be meeting in Genoa. Since they are aware of their influence on the political, economic, social and environment destiny of the globe, they should know how to listen to the cry of the many peoples of the world.

They are poor peoples whose fundamental human rights have been trampled upon, who have been deprived of the minimum economic means for subsistence, who lack instruction, who are prevented from freely participating in social life, and are stricken by famine, disease, violence and war. We are therefore convinced that the first priority on G8's agenda should be the battle against poverty.

The poor peoples are young peoples: the majority of young people on this earth! And among human rights, there is a right for the young to hope, a right to build - with the generosity and courage that young people draw from hope - for themselves and for the world, for a profoundly different future, than the world which welcomed them.

Justice only exists when human rights are respected and promoted

4. We want to make ourselves the voice of these peoples, the young and poor. We want to invoke justice and solidarity for them. But justice - a fundamental and indispensable pillar of human coexistence - can only exist where the human rights, not only of some but of all, are defended and promoted, starting with the rights of the most marginalized. Only in this way can we progress towards true democracy, where all enjoy equality and participation.

The same justice needs a soul to make it live and this is solidarity: a strong solidarity that is not "a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far" but "determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*; n. 38). Solidarity, in the context of the globalization under way, must be implemented on a global scale. Justice and solidarity must obey the principle of subsidiarity that calls for the operation of the various subjects - persons, groups and initiatives - which make up civil society.

Globalization is a mixed blessing

5. The actual process of globalization - especially in the economic, financial and technological spheres - is really a mixed blessing because, while it brings peoples closer, it also generates intolerable forms of marginalization that exclude the poorest people.

Many say rightly that globalization must be "governed". By whom, if not by man himself, called not to suffer the processes of history but to direct them? The human person is called to govern globalization "as human person" and "in the service of the human

person", which means with the criteria of rationality and responsibility. As the Pope has said: "Globalization, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. No system is an end in itself and it is necessary to insist that globalization, like any other system, must be at the service of the human person; it must serve solidarity and the common good" (Address to members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001, n.2; *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 2 May 2001). This is what happens, especially with "government" by politics, law and ethics.

Political leaders need to regulate a process dominated by economics, bending it to the demands of justice

We address political leaders, so that - by their total recreation of instruments and institutional models adaptable to the present urgencies and difficulties - they should realize forms of intervention able to "regulate" a globalization that is dominated by the new economy-finance, beyond ethical reference to justice and solidarity. Governments should be aware of their responsibility to serve the universal common good, doing their utmost in the battle against poverty, starting with the reduction of the poor countries' foreign debt.

Economic leaders need to recover the link between finance, ethics and economics in respect for person in society

We also address economists and financiers, so that they may know how to recover the original link between finance, ethics and economics. It is a link rooted in the status of the human being and recognizable in the "productive economy" in which finance originates and is legitimized. As experience teaches us, respect for ethics is an advantage for economic growth. It may not be an advantage in the short term to which finance of a speculative order would accustom us, but certainly in the long term. Ethics

belong to the human dimension and offers the only legitimate terms by which to judge the quality of economic and business initiatives.

The tragic gap between North and South spawns a new form of apartheid

6. Politicians and economists are responsible for reflecting on the probable outcome of widening further the tragic gap that divides the North from the South. There is a chasm dividing the world and spawning a new kind of apartheid. It thrives on a concentration of the world's riches in the hands of a few individuals or multinational corporations.

When we turn to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, with the present day phenomenon of globalization, the parable should be read in global terms: here are a few rich person "who sit down to a banquet", "clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day", who do not even notice the poverty that surrounds them, there is the immense crowd of "Lazaruses", "lying at his gate, full of sores, desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table" (cf. Lk 16, 19-21).

It is easy to realize the dehumanizing effects of these kinds of injustice. The dignity of man to whom everything is denied, is suffocated and cancelled by poverty. Our humanity shrivels and becomes sterile by regularly turning a deaf ear to the voice of conscience. The path to mature democracy is blocked. The economy suffers a serious loss, deprived of the talents of those who could be working and starting new industries and future markets for products.

Cultural conversion for everyone: change view of poor people as passive and inactive

7. These reflections, however, must include everyone and must make us reflect on where we are. Through an indispensable

journey of "cultural conversion", it is urgent that we overcome the unjust idea of poor people, seen as mere passive subjects or the targets of humiliating almsgiving - like the "crumbs" that fell from the rich man's table - and that we direct our efforts instead, to large-scale programmes to help the poor recover a personal sense of responsibility and learn to take initiatives that bring about their own social and economic self-advancement.

Reason and experience indicate the inadequacy of the analysis of the present phenomenon of globalization and the sterility of protests and dissent, especially if accompanied by acts of violence that are not open to the formulation of valid alternative proposals. But rightful pressure exerted on others - even if they be the so-called "great of the earth" - also lacks credibility and legitimacy when it is not accompanied by the responsible commitment of each one to carry out what he is required to do.

For this, the consciences of all must be awakened and rediscover in themselves the innate voice of the natural solidarity that calls all to sharing; which then calls all of us, inhabitants of the opulent North, to a more sober and austere life, more in keeping with active solidarity with whoever is in need, and more respectful of the social dimension of private property.

It presupposes a strong and urgent educational component, which must see the family and the Christian community as its first and convinced leaders. These, in turn, should be helped by the other "educational agencies", such as school and the media.

In the field of personal dedication, we are grateful to our Christian communities and to all the groups who have welcomed the proposal of the Church in Italy, and responded to her goal of moral sensitization and economic participation on the occasion of the Jubilee, to reduce the foreign debt of two African countries.

Cultivate a twofold gaze: the world and the community in which we live

Along the lines of personal obligation, we invite everyone to cultivate constantly a twofold and holistic view of the world. On the one hand, we must look at the whole world and its problems, taking a truly "catholic" or global stance. On the other hand, we must turn our gaze, sharpened by love, to the community in which we live, to the point that we recognize in it the world which in fact becomes present with problems similar to those of our own cities and countries.

It will then become possible for each of us to devote himself in a responsible and concrete way to humanizing development. It is what happens, for example, when we accept immigrants and the effort to move towards their just integration, with the battle against the old and new forms of poverty that we find within our own walls. The challenge of globalization is an ethical problem for every individual and is taken up first and foremost by working in the many "peripheral" fields where the local challenges that makes up the complex phenomenon of globalization are played out.

Reflections on globalization call us to know the content of the Church's social doctrine

8. We truly hope that for all of us Christians the G8 in the region of Liguria will be a precious opportunity to renew our resolve to know better and study in greater depth the content of the Church's social doctrine. The Holy Father constantly and forcefully calls our attention to the doctrine. Our reflections on globalization and its dangers of deviation from the designs of God and the rights of man are drawn from the Church's social teaching.

In the teaching we find the most timely and complete expression of a thought - and also of a life experience - that

is lovingly attentive to the lot of the poor. We would like to affirm proudly: despite the delays and infidelities of her children, the Church has always felt called daily to follow Jesus' unequivocal example, to be close to the poor and the suffering, and to share in their difficulties and anxious cares.

We wish to renew our commitment to be courageously faithful to the preferential option for the poor, in whose person there is a "special presence" of Jesus Christ, as the Gospel passage on the last judgment recommends to us: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25, 40). The Pope reminds us: "By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 49).

Think of the local missionaries who have gone out to serve in the poorest corners of the globe

We feel the need to thank the Lord, and speak for the many missionaries - priests, religious and lay persons from this area around Genoa - who offer their daily service throughout the world, often in extremely difficult conditions, to the poor populations of the mission countries. The concrete help, which with greater generosity we will be able to assure to missionaries, is also an important way of contributing to the cause of human and dehumanizing globalization.

Above all, we feel the need to invoke God, "rich in mercy" to everyone, he never tires of giving us wisdom and courage to carry out the task entrusted to us to build a world that is more united in justice and solidarity. Let us intensify our prayer, especially during the days of G8, making our own the prayer of the Church in the Mass "for the progress of peoples": "O God, who have given all peoples one common origin, and will gather them as one family in yourself; make all men-recognize one another

as brothers and promote in solidarity the development of every people, so that with the resources you have granted for all humanity, the rights of every person may be affirmed and the human community may experience an era of equality and peace".

Columban Mission in a Globalized World

COLUMBAN MISSIONARY

Assembly in the context of Jubilee

1. Gathered together in the Great Jubilee Year, this Columban Assembly gives thanks to the Father of all Creation for that love expressed in the sending of the Son as Lord and Saviour, the first fruits of a New Creation. For two millennia, in the power of the Holy Spirit the Church has witnessed to and proclaimed the message of Jesus. *"He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor: to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."* (Lk 4:18-19). As missionaries in the Society of St. Columban, we give thanks to God for the gift of discipleship and the call to participate in the mission of Jesus to the whole world until the end of time.
2. We pray that the Holy Spirit will come upon us and give us a renewed vision of God's plan, a world reconciled in Christ. Many voices around us, even that of the planet itself, cry out for reconciliation. In the spirit of this Jubilee Year we recognize our own failures and the ways in which we are part of sinful humanity. We renew our commitment to the work of reconciliation.

3. Effective work for reconciliation requires first of all an accurate understanding of the actual condition of our world. This reveals the forces responsible for the brokenness of the global society and helps us discern our response. Our last three General Assemblies did valuable reflections on this theme. We recognize the achievement of those Assemblies and build on their contribution. We also realize that recent years have brought new developments which oblige us to see ourselves and our world from still newer perspectives. As we explore these, we find both an affirmation of many of the things we already do and a challenge to hear the Spirit urging us to create new and appropriate responses.

The Changing Shape of our World

4. During the early days of our Assembly we asked, *"What emerging trend in the world is most significantly affecting our work as missionaries who try to view the world from the standpoint of the poor?"* The answer was *"The negative effects of globalization."* In the years since *Choosing Life* the centrality of this phenomenon has become much clearer.

Globalization

5. What we, in broad terms, refer to as globalization is the increasingly evident economic integration of the whole world in a manner which refuses to recognize that our planet has physical limits. This process, which operates largely without political control, is destroying the political structures of nation-states. Of the one hundred largest economies in the world today, over half are not nations but corporations. An economic system operating free of political control cannot avoid promoting savage inequalities which tear apart the social fabric of the

human community. Millions of people are turned into insecure economic migrants each year by the speculation of those who move enormous amounts of capital around the world, free of political constraints and without concern for the social effects.

6. The global economic system raises the imperative of constructing a political order capable of matching in scope and structure the new world market. This is urgent because the global system is forcing existing political structures to be at the service of the global economy rather than the real needs of the people they were meant to serve. Today we have an unprecedented economization of cultures. There is an attempt to reduce all values to market values and to privatize and treat as a personal option fundamental values which are neither negotiable nor marketable. This economization of cultures undermines all true value by its insistence that the system of exchange be placed beyond community control. This is a factor which vitally affects matters of belief practice, and identity today.

Contradictions in Globalization

7. Urgent ecological issues forced world leaders to recognize the need for environmental summits. The contradictions of the global economic system are now forcing people to reluctantly recognize its serious, indeed fatal limitations. Some of these can be named:
 - a) The contradiction *within nation-states* themselves, where national governments reorganize their economies in accordance with the norms and demands of the global system. Since all economic development now strengthens the international basis of economic life, this makes the political structure of the merely national state increasingly irrelevant.

- b) The contradiction *within the global system* where those who promote it speak of freedom and personal identity in an open world. The "freedom" is to choose from the limited options offered by the market in a closed system.
- c) The contradiction between the driving principles of *the global system which presumes the possibility of almost endless expansion and the fact that our planet has limits*. Theoretically what is being offered is a First World consumer lifestyle for all. Our planet cannot support ten billion human beings living this kind of life. We have to decide how we are to live together in our limited world — or die separately. Questions about the future development of China and other highly populated countries bring this issue into focus.
- d) The contradiction in *the lives of each of us individually* is between what we as consumers demand and what we as producers must reject. We are conditioned to consider ourselves only as consumers but we are producers more than consumers. While people can see the need to produce in order to be able to consume, they are often unaware of themselves as producers of meaning and life. Our needs as producers differ greatly from our needs as consumers. These needs revolve around long-term interests such as:
 - i) *sustainability* or the question as to whether we are protecting or destroying the possibility of a worthwhile future for later generations.
 - ii) *solidarity* or a concern to act justly towards those with whom we are in economic relationship.
 - iii) the need to *fulfil our obligations* towards the natural world, towards others and towards ourselves.

- e) Our world is a closed system. Within it a particular country may make itself wealthy, but only at the cost of increasing competition and forcing other countries into a poverty which will threaten the cohesion of the whole system. At the extreme, the poor can be expected not simply to laugh at the environmentalism of the rich, but to turn in desperation to arms in the search for a solution.

How Globalization affects us

- 8. We are all involved in this one global economy with its many contradictions. To know ourselves truly, we need to understand the relation between the global and the particular, because it is here that the contradictions within the world-system are being played out. But too much in our cultural world of false consumerist identities is an obstacle to such understanding. Omnipresent market forces tell us incessantly that all our desires can be met. They blind us to our relatedness to other humans in the globalized web of production. Yet that relatedness is what defines our actual identity as historical persons. It defines us as persons whose economic activities now embrace all human beings, but who are unaware of the remoter links in the chain of which our economic decisions are a part. In such a world, the only morally acceptable answer to the question *Who are we?* is *We are future citizens of a world we are being challenged to create.*

The Challenge and the Hope

- 9. A basic principle of our own faith is the conviction that all areas of human life must be reached by the Good News and can be bearers of it. Another basic principle is that things really are what they are seen to be in the light of the Gospel.

We acknowledge that we ourselves belong to the system we have described. Our challenge is to understand it and then accept the obligations which this understanding imposes.

10. Globalization presents new and radical challenges to Christians, who in every age, are asked to give a reason for the hope that is within them. In the post-Vatican II era, when the Church began to embrace more readily the values of modern society, many of these same values were already being questioned and undermined. Communities became more fragmented and religious faith more privatized. A globalized monoculture, at the service of consumer priorities, filled the vacuum left by this monoculture's destruction of other values. While the effects are perhaps more clearly seen in Western cultures, few if any countries or religious traditions have remained untouched.
11. One response has been fundamentalism. Sometimes this is an effort to preserve identity and insist on the links between the religious and the social. More often it reflects a faith unwilling to engage the risks and ambiguities of daily life.
12. While there is much scepticism today about institutions of every kind, including the Church, there is also evidence of a sincere search for meaning and truth. People, particularly those among the followers of the great religions, are re-engaging with their own traditions in search of a creative response to the challenges of globalization. Evidence of this search can be seen among groups and individuals within the Church and in others who have no contact with formal religious institutions. These are signs of the presence of the Spirit.

13. On Mission Sunday 2000, while the General Assembly was in session in Sydney, Pope John Paul II addressed the largest gathering of missionaries ever to congregate in Rome. Speaking about the necessity for missionaries and the context in which they work he said;

"Lawless competition, the desire to dominate others at all costs, discrimination exercised by those who consider themselves superior to others, the uncontrolled quest for wealth are the origin of injustice, violence and wars."

The Pope urged *"We must never lose the hope of contributing to the birth of a more fraternal world."*²

The Columban Response

14. Columbans are challenged to respond as a small prophetic community to the call of mission within the context we have outlined. We are sent to give witness to the truth that liberates and to question the claims to validity of those caricatures of the human good which are moulded by the priorities of consumerism. We see that in this system hundreds of millions of people simply have no place. We are urged to unmask the idolatrous nature of an economic model which tends to reduce all values, even that of human life itself, to market values. Within this system even life forms which have always been seen as a gift in the care of the human race are now being monopolized and patented.

¹ Mission Sunday Address (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 25, 2000, No. 5)

² Mission Sunday Address (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 25, 2000, No. 5)

15. We are called to be disciples, to be missionaries. It is an extraordinary gift. Our mission is to journey with people on the road to freedom and fullness of life, to encourage resistance to whatever hinders this search, and to promote life-giving alternatives. The memory of Jesus, the one who calls us, is one of crucifixion and resurrection. It invites us to make a radical response of resistance to evil, to take the side of the crucified ones of our own day.

Signs of **the Spirit Among Us**

16. As we took for ways to respond in the future we are encouraged by what we see today.
 - a) Among the poor and marginalized, we have built up communities which give authentic witness in the local church to the message of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit.
 - b) We have grown in our commitment to the proclamation of the Good News through the dialogue of life and action, through the building up of trust with other religions and in our sensitivity to the need for inculturation
 - c) We have extensive involvement in issues of justice, peace, ecology and causes favouring the poor.³
 - d) The tapestry of our Columban story is woven from a rich variety of local stories. This has enriched our theologies. New stories coming from the involvement of younger Columbans from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, from our partnership with priest associates and lay missionaries and from our companions in the common Columban project have brought further enrichment.

³ See Chapter 3, "Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation."

- e) In many areas we have encouraged local churches to assume their role in mission. This opens up new horizons for the building up of communion between Churches.
 - f) In all countries where we work, our communal discernment of appropriate priorities and apostolates has resulted in an impressive variety of commitments which in turn give meaning and credibility to what we say we are.
 - g) In the carrying out of our mission we strive to remain open to the Holy Spirit. That is an essential characteristic of our spirituality, of our way of following Jesus.⁴
17. We see how our attempts to be faithful to the Spirit have shaped the direction of Columban mission through the years. It has led us first to identify needs and then to make an appropriate response. Here at General Assembly 2000 we can see how the intuitive validity of our earlier responses proves how profoundly they anticipated the challenges presented by globalization today.
 18. While we discussed the context of our mission at the Assembly, calls were made for clarifications about the Columban project today. We affirmed that a defining element of the Columban contribution to mission was that of missionary experience in a culture and country other than our own. While all Regions and Mission Units are today seen as valid places for Columban mission, we recognized the difference, in terms of missionary response, between countries where the experience of Christianity is relatively new and others where it is long established. Our historical option has been for areas of first evangelization and re-evangelization, the two primary mission tasks outlined in *Redemptoris Missio*. Our basic missionary

⁴ See Chapter 2, "Columban Mission as Journey;

experience is to be acquired in those contexts. We reiterate the guidelines of previous Assemblies concerning Columban work. It is work which is coherent with Society objectives and local plans of action. It is undertaken in dialogue with local Society leadership.

Acknowledging the Difficulties

19. In the Assembly we also talked about other experiences. Alongside those who are enthusiastic about our priorities, there are others who are not. Some think that perhaps the days of missionary societies like our own are coming to an end. There are those who are overwhelmed by the complexity of the task or feel inadequately equipped to face it.
20. Some of the factors affecting morale were mentioned. Among them were doubts about the central relevance of religion in our world and the contemporary critical presentations of the history of mission which emphasizes only its negative aspects. The fact that agencies today do much of the work once done by missionaries, and the consequent loss of the close association that once existed between faith, mission and solidarity has also had an effect. Some spoke too of the ways in which we ourselves often fall short of our stated ideals.
21. We recognized that many dedicated missionaries at times experience unease, a lack of confidence, which can cause them to lose heart. We spoke of those who feel unaffirmed in their mission, sometimes because of not being able to recognize the richness in their own ministry.
22. The fact that our world is one that seems to have fewer and fewer certainties and securities gives rise to tension. We have to live with the ambiguous and the tentative. While we may still long for the definitive answer, we accept that to live is to change.

23. Fear and doubt have been ingredients of our religious tradition for a long time. Doubt plagued the Israelites in their Exodus through barren desert. Despair tempted the Jewish exiles in Babylon. On the cross Jesus cried out "*My God, why have you forsaken me.*" Nevertheless their long journey brought the Israelites to a new land. Exiles returned to build the Temple anew. Jesus was raised from the dead. We must not let our doubts and fears prevent new Columban life from emerging.

The Hope within us

24. The challenge to participate in Columban mission in our moment of history as people of faith is an exciting one. Around us, many voices urge us to continue our involvement in forging a new world. We belong to a Church that has vast networks and grassroots contacts. As a Society, we have invaluable resources. We have enthusiasm for mission among our members and a committed group of lay missionaries, priest associates, companions, and benefactors. We have an international structure and a wide range of language skills. We have a wealth of experience in cross-cultural mission and we are enriched by our multicultural composition. All of these put us in a privileged position. They are our bridge into a new era of mission.
25. We recognize our weakness and our diminished numbers. We trust in God who brought us to the present moment. We are not too old, too few or too tired to engage in mission with enthusiasm and creativity. We draw life from the fidelity of Columbans who went before us, particularly those who lived through difficult times and those who persevered when major shifts in thinking were taking place. Sometimes they were the ones who "when it was all over*" had the eyes to see that something else was only beginning.

26. During his pontificate Pope John Paul II has often urged lifetime missionaries not to be discouraged by doubt, criticism or misunderstanding but to exercise that missionary imagination that will help renew the face of the Earth.

*"The special vocation of missionaries for life' retains all its validity: it is the model of the church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavours."*⁵

See *Redemptorist Missio* 66.

The Need of Value Foimation: An Imperative to Catholic Teachers Commitment

ANTHONY LOBO

Before we talk about our being teachers and what our commitment is, let us examine the meaning of being a Catholic Christian in the light of the Sacred Scripture.

We are told that we are made in the image and likeness of God: *"...in the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:27)

Jesus revealed to us the core and essence of God's life when we prayed: "Father, all that I have is yours. All that you have is mine." (John 17:10) The Father pours out all his wisdom, power, life and love into his Son, who in turn pours it all back into the Father. This mutual self-giving is the Holy Spirit.

Made in God's image and likeness, we are made for self-giving, self-emptying, self-surrender. Here the global, post-modern culture works against us. The culture that is spreading and increasing is characterized as nature without grace, reason without faith, human without the divine, secular without the sacred and freedom without responsibility.

The post-modern scene is firstly fragmented, where life has been broken up with no connections that lead to any unity. Secondly, it rejects all absolutes and holds that all truths and values are relative. Finally, it has no meta-narrative or over-arching synthesis that can give sense or meaning to our life and our world.

A sociologist characterizes our culture today as that "contextlessness", where no one bothers about the past or future but is just restricted to the present. As a popular song said: "Just do it." it does not say what to do, or why to do it or how to do it. This is the "instant" generation that cannot wait: instant coffee, instant photos, and instant pain relief.

The knowledge explosion and the over loading of information thanks to satellite communications, internet, email and computers makes the absence of an email overarching meaningful synthesis and a lack of any personal set of convictions and values, a traumatic situation.

The Catholic teacher must help the student to take his identity, not from society (afflicted by the global, post-modern culture) but from Faith (which must transform society and culture).

Let me give you a striking example. In India, there is the caste-system of four castes. In descending order, there are the priests, soldiers, traders and servants. But beneath these four castes, there are a whole lot of outcastes or untouchables, called by the British "scheduled castes" and by themselves today: "*dalits*." Even among these, there is a hierarchy and the lowest of the low are the carrion-eaters, those who eat the flesh of the dead, stinking, rotting animals.

If one of these carrion-eaters spots a dead animal, he collects his caste-people and they gather round the carcass and sing and dance and then carry it on their shoulders to have a feast.

A missionary spotted a little boy among them who looked promising. His name was Tiago. He put him through school and then college, where he did wonderfully well, both in academics as well as in character. He secured a good job; and decided to stand in the elections as Mayor. What a revolution he caused. Though they knew his origins, nevertheless the high caste Hindus and Christians, and also the Muslims elected him Mayor, and till he died, he continued to be elected unopposed. The Church of South India elected him Moderator.

The only way we could explain this miracle is to realize that Tiago did not take his identity from society, which branded his people as "out-caste", untouchable, third-rate citizen or worse, non-citizen or even non-human.

Instead, he took his identity from the faith, where he realized that he was made in God's image and likeness, and was a child of the Father, a brother of Jesus and a Temple of the Holy Spirit. So he neither felt nor acted as inferior and the so-called "superior" castes accepted him and even elected him Mayor.

The trouble with our education system is that we presume that all the information we give (even in our catechism teaching and in our priestly and religious formation courses) will automatically pass into action. We believe that our doctrinal instruction or lectures will automatically be interiorized and integrated by our students and so they will live according to it.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. As Talcot Parsons, the sociologist says, all our ideology (moral and spiritual instruction) passes through a filter of orientation, into a cultural system (post-modern, global) and then through a social system into the personality system. After meandering through all these, there is finally the filter of motivation through which it comes out, leading to actions which may even contradict the moral/spiritual instruction we started out giving.

So what does the Catholic teacher have to do? According to Victor Frankl, the deepest source of meaning for a human being is Self-Transcendence. Opposing this is the idea of Abraham Maslow that means highest fulfillment comes from Self-Actualization. Few people know that Maslow was a friend of Frankl and they corresponded regularly. But even fewer people know that, before he died, Abraham Maslow admitted that he made a mistake: he admitted that the highest fulfillment for any person is not in Self-Actualization, (as he held all along) but in Self-Transcendence (as Victor Frankl held).

Here we rejoin the Christian anthropology which holds that the core and center of our being, made in God's image and likeness, is in self-giving, self-emptying, and self-surrender.

How does the Catholic teacher inculcate this in the students? Here are some suggestions, which can be added to and worked out in our small discussion groups.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, writes his own commentary on them, in the lives of the Saints. They are living gospels illustrating gospel values like poverty (St. Francis of Assisi), obedience (St. Ignatius of Loyola), chastity (St. Maria Goretti).

Pope Paul VI said that people today believe witnesses rather than teachers, and if at all they believe teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

St. Augustine advocates the need to inculcate the "*delectatio-victrix*", or the Conquering Joy. There is a joy that conquers sinful joys, and lesser joys that are not sinful. One will only give up sinful or lesser joys when he has the taste of a higher joy that conquers it. During a school inspection, a boy celebrated his birthday by distributing two sweets to each of his classmates. One boy, by mistake, got nothing. His companion saw this and gave

him one of his. The higher joy of sharing conquered the lesser joy of eating both his sweets.

Finally, we come to the need for developing with our students something which in the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "aestheteria" (Hebrews 5:11). From this word comes our English word "aesthetics", which concerns the appreciation of beauty.

In Greek literature, it meant sensory perception. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, it refers to moral and spiritual perception. (See also Philippians 1:10)

Arianna Huffington calls for the development of "the fourth instinct" as the most relentless, persistent instinct that man possesses: the instinct for meaning, transcendence, wholeness and truth.

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of a "supernatural instinct" or the "instinct of grace" which he also calls "*potentia obedientialis*". This is the power (*potentia*) we have to conform (*obedientia*) our lives and actions to the divine plan. In one phrase, the role of the Catholic teacher is to actualize what St. Thomas calls our potential, or supernatural instinct, or instinct of grace.

We Catholic teachers find ourselves in the same difficulties today as St. Paul had when dealing with the Philippians. He writes: "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy incomplete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Let us reflect on the literal, and richer meanings of the underlined words. "Encouragement" is really "*paraclesis*", where "para" means close by, side by side, next to, near by. "Clesis", (past tense "cletos"), is one "called-out". Together, this means

someone called out to stand close to us to help, guide, encourage, console and defend us. Jesus called the Holy Spirit "another Paraclete" (John 14:16). St. John calls Jesus (the first) Paraclete (I John 2:1). Every Catholic teacher is called to be the Third Paraclete, who stands close to or accompanies the student by guiding, encouraging, defending and protecting.

The next word is "consolation" which in Greek is "*paramuthion*", meaning someone who stands near to teach. This could be a person but also the "inner Teacher" of Conscience, the voice of God in the heart of man, the Holy Spirit.

"Affection" is in Greek "*splanchnon*" meaning "bowels" or "womb". If goodness and virtue which every Catholic teacher aims should unfortunately die, then our affection can serve as a "womb" for their re-birth.

"Joy" is "*chara*" in Greek, which means calm, joyful delight, the *delectatio victrix* of St. Augustine.

"Complete" is "*plero*" in Greek. Soren Kierkegaard says that in order to listen to anyone, we must empty ourselves, so as to receive the truth of the other. Gabriel Marcel says that if we only want only to give, and never receive, we are denying that the other has any dignity as a creature of God, and refusing to accept his value. By emptying ourselves, we make space to receive the other, including the Other with a capital "O". In this way we can be filled with the joy, the love, the truth which is beyond what we ourselves have.

The final phrase is "united in spirit", which in Greek is "sym+psyche", becoming one with the psyche of the other. This is communication at its best, and every Catholic teacher must be a good communicator, in perpetual communication with his Inner teacher (the Holy Spirit), as with his students. The fruits of this communication will be the awakening of the fourth instinct, the

aesthetherion. It will be the inculcation of the "*delectatio victrix*" or Conquering joy. Our students will take then Identity from their Faith, not from the post-modern, global culture, and they will play their role, which is to transform culture and society and let the Kingdom of God come "not in spoken words, but in power". (I Corinthians 4:20)

DOCUMENTATION

DOCUMENTS ON THE DOMINICAN GENERAL CHAPTER

Letter to the Chapter General* **JOHN PAUL II**

*To the Very Reverend Timothy Radcliffe
Master General of the Order of Preachers*

"Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of "the saints in light" (Col 1:12)," I greet you and the Order of Preachers on the occasion of the Elective General Chapter beginning in Rhode Island on 10 July 2001. As you gather for the first Chapter of the new millennium to elect the eighty-fifth successor of your blessed Founder, Saint Dominic, I invoke upon the members of the Chapter the light of the Holy Spirit, so that everything you think and say and do may bring strength to the Order and peace to the Church, and may thus give glory to God.

Preach against recurring Manichean Heresy

From the outset, one of the first tasks assigned to your Order was the proclamation of the truth of Christ in response to the

* Letter of His Holiness, Pope Paul II last June 28, 2001 on the occasion of the Elective General Chapter.

Albigensian heresy, a new form of the recurrent Manichaeian heresy with which Christianity has had to contend from the beginning. At its core there lay the denial of the Incarnation, a refusal to accept that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). To respond to this new form of the old heresy, the Holy Spirit raised up the Order of Preachers, men who would be pre-eminent for their poverty and mobility in the service of the Gospel, who would unceasingly contemplate the truth of the Incarnate Word in prayer and study, and through their preaching and teaching would pass on to others the fruits of that contemplation. *Contemplata aliis tradere*: the motto of the Order became its great call to action, and it remains such to this day.

In your Chapter, you will reflect upon the intimately related themes "Preaching the Gospel in a globalized world" and "The renewal of the contemplative life". The history of your Order indicates that the Gospel will be preached in fresh and effective ways in a fast-changing world only if Christians follow the path of contemplation which leads to a deeper relationship with Christ, "known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15).

Preaching rooted in contemplation of Christ the word incarnate

It is clear that the ancient afflictions of the human soul and the great untruths never die but lie hidden for a time, to reappear later in other forms. That is why there is always need for a new evangelization of the kind to which the Holy Spirit is now summoning the whole Church. We live in a time marked in its own way by a denial of the Incarnation. For the first time since Christ's birth two thousand years ago, it is as if he no longer had a place in an ever more secularized world. Not that he is always denied explicitly: indeed many claim to admire Jesus and to value elements of his teaching. Yet he remains distant: he is not truly

known, loved and obeyed, but consigned to a distant past or a distant heaven.

Our age denies force and value of the incarnation for human life and progress

Ours is an age which denies the incarnation in a multitude of practical ways, and the consequences of this denial are clear and disturbing. In the first place, the individual's relationship with God is seen as purely personal and private, so that God is removed from the processes that govern social, political and economic activity. This leads in turn to a greatly diminished sense of human possibility, since it is Christ alone who fully reveals the magnificent possibilities of human life, who truly "reveals man to himself" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). When Christ is excluded or denied, our vision of human purpose dwindles; and as we anticipate and aim for less, hope gives way to despair, joy to depression. There also appears a profound distrust of reason and of the human capacity to grasp the truth; indeed the very concept of truth is cast into doubt. To their mutual impoverishment, faith and reason part company, degenerating into fideism on the one hand and rationalism on the other (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 48). Life is not valued and loved; and hence the advance of a certain culture of death, with its dark blooms of abortion and euthanasia. The body and human sexuality are not properly valued and loved; hence the degradation of sex which shows itself in a tide of moral confusion, infidelity and the violence of pornography. Creation itself is not valued and loved; hence the specter of destructive selfishness in the misuse and exploitation of the environment.

Church looks with hope and confidence to Dominicans

In such a situation, the Church and the Successor of the Apostle Peter look to the Order of Preachers with no less hope and confidence than at the time of your foundation. The needs

of the new evangelization are great; and it is certain that your Order, with its many vocations and outstanding heritage, must play a vital part in the Church's mission to overturn the old untruths and proclaim the message of Christ effectively at the dawn of the new millennium.

As he lay dying, Saint Dominic said to his grieving brothers: "Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you beyond my death, and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life". I pray most fervently that the intercession of your Founder will strengthen you for the tasks now at hand, and that the great host of Dominican Saints who have adorned the Order's past will illumine its path into the future. Entrusting the Order of Preachers to the maternal care of Our Lady of the Rosary, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to the members of the Chapter and to all the Friars as a pledge of endless grace and peace in Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15).

Preaching the Gospel in the twenty-first century

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**General Chapter of the Order of Preachers
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One of the tasks of a General Chapter is to set the direction of a religious institute for the coming period of time. In order to do that, some assessment of the situation in which an institute finds itself, both in terms of its internal life and in terms of the environment in which it seeks to work, must be undertaken. To address the latter part of this charge - namely, the larger environment in which your Order finds itself - is a formidable task, one much larger than any one individual can undertake. This General Chapter, coming as it does immediately after the celebration of the Great Jubilee Year in the Church of the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, prompts us to think conjunctively, that is, in terms of fundamental shifts which may be now taking place in our world which will affect what we do for a long period to come.

Every age, of course, likes to think of itself as being at a time of fundamental change. Only history may judge if indeed we do find ourselves at such a place as the turning of the millennium

in the Gregorian calendar tempts us to believe. But however we may be seen a generation or two hence, we do have a responsibility now to probe as deeply as we can into the movements and currents of our own time in order to live out faithfully the commitments to preach the Gospel which are incumbent upon us. This seems especially to weigh upon you as Dominican friars. Your charism, as I understand it, is not only to be an active and positive force for the Gospel in the world, but also to ground your evangelical activity in prayer and study in a community context. That study, it would seem, finds its source and sustenance not only in the great tradition to which you are heir within our Church, but also requires an investigation of the context which that tradition must engage today.

What I will try to offer you here is one such set of probings of that context, limited as it is as one person's reading of what we need to watch and to engage in the immediate years ahead of us. As all of you well know, the world in which you serve is exceedingly complex and increasingly interdependent, and so the necessary simplifications which must be made here to gain some clarity will distort the picture. As a General Chapter, you need to grasp the largest threads which are shaping the weave of the world. And what I try to offer here will, I hope, help you to do that.

This presentation will focus upon three major themes which are shaping our life in the world today. They relate to one another in a variety of complex ways, some of which I hope to sort out here. Again, they can be sketched out here only in the broadest detail. These three themes might be understood as, first, a framework in which to situate our world; second, a hermeneutic with which to read it; and third, a pressing issue which deserves our special attention.

The three themes are: (1) where we are with globalization in its second decade; (2) the uneasy coexistence of the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern in the contemporary world; and (3) the interaction of religion and violence in the world today. Globalization, for better or for worse, is the single most adequate way of describing the context in which we work today. While globalization may describe our context, its emphasis on modernization is not a wholly adequate hermeneutic for the experience of those living in this context. There is a (not always peaceful) confluence of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern currents in our world. And finally, this is exemplified in one of the most challenging issues facing us today, the relation of religion to violence in our conflicted world. Modernity alone cannot explain the resurgence of religion nor its effects. Its connections with violence make us rethink the very essence of religious teaching itself.

To explore each of these three themes is not enough in itself. I would like them to have one step further and suggest something of what the response from the Gospel might be, what the ministry of preaching will be in the coming period of time. This will not be to work out in theological detail such a vision, but to indicate where we will need much prayer and study to be faithful to our commitment to preach the Good News.

Globalization in Its Second Decade

The concept "globalization" has become shorthand for describing the world order which has been emerging since the end of the political alignment of the Cold War in 1989, and the gradual emergence of new relationships in the world. Globalization is marked by the interconnection of four features of that world: (1) advances in communications technologies; (2) the dominance of neo-liberal capitalism; (3) a new alignment in the political order, still finding itself and as yet far from certain; and (4) dramatic

Socio-cultural changes attendant upon the changes in communications, economics, and politics. It must be said immediately that, although all four of these features point to a more interconnected and interdependent world, they are also sharpening and widening the chasm between those included in this new world order, and those excluded from it. The majority of the world's population finds itself on the excluded side of the divide. As a Church and for you as an Order within the Church, a sense of justice demands that this divide be addressed and indeed denounced in the name of the dignity and well-being of humankind. How we will go about addressing and engaging this divide requires an analysis which does not simply repeat the nostrums of the past, but reads the situation in such a way that action might be taken.

The concern here is not to go into a lengthy description of globalization. Such descriptions are now available in abundance. What I would like to do is simply note some salient elements in the communications, economics, politics, and socio-cultural ramifications of globalization, and then move quickly to what might be the contours of globalization which will need to be addressed, now that this period of globalization is in its second decade. For this is not the first time the patterns of globalization have presented themselves in our world. (Most scholars would say that the most recent one previously was from roughly 1870-1914.) Despite the immensity and complexity of globalization currently, it is not inevitable, and can come to a halt, as peoples and nations might suddenly decide to build walls around themselves. The purpose of this presentation, then, in this first part, is to set the stage for what we as agents of the Gospel might be doing within this larger picture.

Globalization is based on connectedness and the speed with "which that connectedness can be utilized. As one observer has put it recently, it is the close connection between distant parts of the

world. Scholars of the previous history of globalization point to advances in transportation (the large sailing ship, the steam engine) and communication (telegraph and the telephone) as the technologies which drove globalization in the past. For the current phase of globalization, it is certainly the electronic technologies which made the new networking of the world possible.

Two things need to be noted here about these technologies. First of all, a significant proportion of the world is excluded from them, although that number of persons continues to shrink. It has been estimated that as much as forty-two percent of the world's population has never used a telephone, the basis for Internet technology, simply because these are not available. While that number continues to go down, thanks to cellular telephone technology and the next generation of computers, it will take a long time to sink further. Exclusion at this fundamental level means that the gap between rich and poor will continue to stalk the well-being and the unity of humankind.

Second, the communications technologies have democratized the flow of information. That means, on the one hand, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep information from people (with all the political and social consequences thereof), but also that people at the grassroots level can organize public opinion against powerful political and transnational combines. As is now well known, the international treaty against personnel landmines was organized on the Internet. And similar organizational efforts have forced transnational companies to become more responsible ecologically. The potential for organizing mass public opinion is a powerful resource for social change in the future.

The economic features of globalization are perhaps the most prominent. They rely on the information technologies, but wield a powerful influence on the rich and poor of the world alike. The relatively unbridled capitalism of the 1990's is likely to be tethered

somewhat in the coming decade, as it becomes clearer that the short-term profit margin can completely undermine the entire system. There is a likelihood that more measures of self-policing, and other forms of regulation will emerge. These will probably not grow out of a larger vision of humanity, but out of more utilitarian reasons and rational choice.

The political realignments coming with globalization still remain uncertain. The nation-state's influence will continue to be reduced, but not to a point of zero. There are important services which cannot be delivered and maintained on an international basis, but must be delivered at more local levels. Economics has, however, eclipsed and now dominates politics. Ideological differences have become increasingly moot points in many countries, as the fundamental criterion for holding and staying in office becomes the building and sustaining of economic prosperity. Hence, transnational regional arrangements will likely continue to spring from economic motives, as we see in things like the European Union and various treaty organizations.

The end of the Cold War seems to have brought to an end the bipolar political arrangement of the world which had prevailed since World War II. What a truly multipolar world will look like still remains to be seen. Whether the dominance of countries like the United States will continue is difficult to say. With regard to the possibility of wars, the interstate wars of the next decade will likely be about access to natural and energy resources, as we have already seen in the Persian Gulf and in Western Africa. Intrastatal wars about cultural identity and sovereignty will continue, but in diminished number.

Socio-cultural movements will continue to reshape our lives together. Migrations of peoples are creating multicultural societies for which, in most places, there is still no social policy about how people of great diversity might live together. Europe struggles with

this perhaps more than any continent today. It also likely will be facing decline because of its greatly diminished birthrate, which will diminish possibilities for innovation so important to neoliberal economy. This demographic diminishment is being only partially counteracted by immigration. And with the absence of coherent social policies for the integration of immigrants, Europe faces greater conflict in the future.

The dominance of the social media (with its preponderance of American programming) will continue to be a create a kind of world hyperculture, with the control of news media in ever fewer hands. At the same time, local forms of cultural resistance will likely also increase in terms of resilience of local languages against the overwhelming presence of English, and protection of local cultural forms.

The negotiation of the great gap between rich and poor will likely become a more prominent issue than it is today, as has already been mentioned. It is not so much inequality as the absolute poverty and destitution into which populations are being thrown which will become politically and socially explosive. Thus, the issues are not just economic, but also social and political. The current paralysis before the situation of the continent of Africa, with the wars fought for its natural resources, the helplessness before the ravages of AIDS, and the profound political instability of much of the region represent the forestage of what may be mirrored later regarding the countries of the former Soviet Union, and the poor regions of Latin America and Asia.

Similarly, the rhetoric about environmental protection will need to be translated into action, as the evidence of physical deterioration and depletion of the environment continues to increase. Decades of rhetoric will have to find action if life is to be sustainable on the planet.

These features of the current phase of globalization, now in its second decade - dependent partially on where technological innovation goes, how economic well-being is negotiated for the poor, whether new political alignments will assure stability, how cultural production will make a genuinely multicultural existence possible in the world, and how the physical environment will be sustained - will be shaping the contexts in which we preach the Gospel in the first part of the twenty-first century. To see how these complex factors translate into strategies for action, I would like to focus on two places where the Gospel will need to be brought. These are the two dominant forms of discourse in the kind of world which I have just tried to describe: the emerging forms of global discourse, and the proliferating forms of local discourse.

Globalization in its current form has much to do with the articulation of the global and local forms of discourse, that is, how each is expressed, and how they relate to each other. What we are seeing in the second decade of globalization is increasing attention to global forms of discourse, i.e., the formulation of ways of living together as a single planet. Concerns, for example, about developing a global ethic have been going on now for over ten years, and the attendant difficulties of articulating an ethic for behavior acceptable worldwide become ever more apparent. The international language of human rights, first codified after the Second World War, became more salient in the 1990's, especially regarding the rights of women, indigenous peoples, and other populations at risk. Most recently, discourse about international justice has been in the forefront of concern, with the establishment of international tribunals for crimes which happened within the borders of nation-states, borders which heretofore were large inviolable, and a growing concern about international crime and terrorism. It seems to me that religious believers- need to be more active in engaging and contributing to these global discourses about

environment, human rights, and international justice. Catholic Social Teaching, a treasure in itself, will need to be extended more consciously into these areas, as is now already being cautiously done. An Order of scholars and preachers such as your own needs to take leadership in contributing from a Catholic and evangelical, point of view, what the Gospel has to offer in these areas which will be essential for the sustainability and peace of the planet.

The other part of globalization has to do with the local. The profound ambivalence of globalization are felt most keenly here. Global contributions to life at the local level - where most people live - can be intoxicating, giving a new sense of cosmopolitanism. But economic globalization especially also takes away local autonomy regarding basic decisions about human well-being. Powerful social media can threaten to overwhelm local language and cultural expression. Issues of identity and autonomy can drive people in local settings to powerful resistance. Such efforts are often necessary for survival. They can also be manipulated by local powers for selfish ends. Whatever the case, they create the fundamental paradox about globalization, namely, that even as the world seems to be becoming more uniform, it deepens its diversity, continues to assert itself. Again, at the grassroots level, where most people live out their lives, the Gospel must speak to concrete and immediate realities. One of the tasks of agents of the Gospel is to help people articulate local identity in light of their faith, and to relate that identity to the larger realities impinging upon it. The relating to global realities involves both situating what is happening at the local level, but also criticizing and resisting it if necessary. Put another way, a task of our ministry is to create the social spaces where people can find themselves and one another, and take hold of their own lives.

The second decade of globalization, therefore, requires that a transnational Order such as your own find ways of contributing

to and linking global and local discourses. Those connections will be entail both being faithful to living out the Gospel in local life, and remaining critical of global (and local) discourses and practices which distort and degrade the dignity of the human person. The agencies you create within the Order will need to reflect both these local and global demands upon your energy and resources.

Put more theologically, the second decade of globalization prompts us to find new forms of solidarity at both the global and the local levels. Solidarity has to be more than a battle cry or a general notion of intellectual agreement; it must translate into concrete forms of action. Both the global and the local must be attended to. Development of the theological concept of solidarity, as it has come into Catholic Social Teaching in the last twenty-five years, will be central to this endeavor.

The Coexistence of the Pre-modern, the Modern, and the Postmodern

Definitions of globalization often equate globalization with the modernization process. Indeed, globalization has many of those features, especially as it enters pre-modern societies. Like modernization, globalization is seen to bring in its wake a differentiation of spheres (such as the religious from the political, the economic from the social); democratization with its attendant concern for human rights, individual conscience and choice, and the rule of the rational over the traditional. All of this has been true in many rural societies now caught up in economic globalization. However, in the second decade of globalization, the reality emerging is more complex. In societies which have not yet experienced modernization on a broad scale, globalization does indeed bring modernization, although the way it is received into the local culture will often be markedly different. In those settings, the pre-modern and the modern will often continue to coexist, side by side. This is seen especially in the urban settings in poor parts of the world,

where rural people take up an existence located socially somewhere between their villages and the megalopolis.

In societies already modernized, globalization is bringing on a postmodern, where the promises of the modern to bring progress, equality, and inclusion are sorely tried. The unity which the rationality of the modern promises seems to fragment on the pressure of so much diversity. The postmodern, where the limits of these promises are experienced, exists alongside the modern.

Because of patterns of immigration to modernized societies, the pre-modern, the modern and the postmodern now often exist together, and people - especially the poor and the immigrant - find themselves exiting and entering these spheres every day.

It pays here to spend a few more moments on the postmodern, the newest of these developments. If the pre-modern is characterized by a primacy of the traditional over the rational, of the collective over the individual, by a religious worldview serving as a "sacred canopy" over the other sectors of society, how might we characterize the postmodern? The postmodern is a response to the shortcomings or the limits of the modern. The postmodern is undergirded by the modern, with its concern for the individual and the individual's rights, but questions the total reliance on the rational and the assumptions about progress. It does not have unitary vision as is found in the modern. Sketching it broadly, it comprises three responses to the modern, each based on a different reading of the limits of the modern.

One reading is to see the modern project of the emancipation of the individual from tradition through reason and progress as one which, at least on the moral level, has failed. Rather than creating a more rational and just society, modernity and its rational approach have perpetrated more violence in the form of world wars, genocides, and the threat of nuclear and ecological destruction. The

response to the modern project and its rationality is to reassert, albeit selectively, features of the pre-modern, traditional world. What should be reasserted or retrieved will vary - from entire institutions to distinctive features of them. We are familiar with this in the Church and in theology, from restorationist movements to postmodern theological strategies such as the "radical orthodoxy" found in the English-speaking world. Fundamentalism, however it might be defined, is yet another form of this retrieval of the pre-modern to counteract the acids of modernity.

A second reading of modernity sees its limitation in its being an unfinished project. That is to say, the problem with the world is that it has not yet really experienced the emancipation which the Western Enlightenment, carrier of the values of modernity, had promised. We have not had enough reason rather than too much of it. Consequently, we must continue to work toward the progressive ideals set forth by modernity, albeit perhaps more critically and with less naivete than may have marked an earlier stage. One sees this kind of approach in the work of the European philosopher Juergen Habermas, or in the discourse of those who wish to continue the Utopian projects of the 1970's and 1980's.

A third reading of modernity concludes that the limitations of modernity do not mean its negation, but rather that we must draw the logical consequences of these limitations, and live in the territory toward which those limitations point. This is perhaps the best known response, articulated by Jean-Francois Lyotard: there is no metanarrative which holds our individual stories together; everything is indeed provisional. There is no single rationality, but a host of competing, internally consistent, but mutually incompatible rationalities. We must cobble together an identity out of the fragments of existence, or retreat into cultural-linguistic communities and there live in them as if they were foundational certainties to guide our lives. But no such sure foundations exist.

Postmodernity, therefore, is a combine of different options, clustering around these three poles. It assumes the modern, but tries to move behind it, ahead with it, or beyond it in selected ways. The coexistence of the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern constitute a hermeneutic lens through which to view the immediate future. I make this point about the coexistence of the three in order to assert three points about preaching the Gospel in our times.

First of all, the age group which is now in leadership was nurtured on the Church's move from the pre-modern to the modern. In the retrospect of thirty-five years, it could be said that the principal purpose of the Second Vatican Council was to bring the Church into the modern world, as *Gaudium et spes* expresses it so eloquently. Although Vatican II was an ecumenical council (and perhaps the most ecumenical to date in the history of the Church), it addressed best the problems of the secularized world of Europe, North America, and Australia. Those who came of age during the period of the Council or in the decade immediately thereafter are likely to read the ecclesiastical world especially as a transition from the pre-modern to the modern situation. At this juncture in time, they may wish to press that transition to its logical conclusion (the second position sketched above), or disillusioned by its promises, recreate some pre-modern option. Much of the leadership struggle in the Church today is between these two options.

Nearly four decades on, however, we find ourselves in a different situation - a situation where the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern are likely to exist together. This will call for a different strategy than simply a struggle between the modern and the postmodern.

Second, the youngest members of our religious institutes have come of age in this postmodern situation, and will probably be more able to negotiate its difficulties than those who came of age

with the Church's then new engagement with the modern world. Their retrieval of the pre-modern is not restorationism, since they did not know the pre-Vatican II period. The same is the case for those who converted to Catholicism in the postconciliar period. To engage and lead the young - which now make up a substantial proportion of the Order of Preachers (I understand that a sixth of your membership is now in formation) - one must be able to navigate these postmodern waters in all their complexity. The leadership which you choose must be able to have this more comprehensive vision.

Third, the issue is not just dealing with the postmodern. The mix of the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern varies in different parts of the world, and even within distinctive regions. Pre-modern cultures are having to deal with a pace of change over which they have no control. Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world have had to deal within one or two generations with change which Europeans had five or six generations to master. The disintegration and outright destruction of indigenous cultures are painfully evident, with the deep and often tragic human consequences which follow upon that. Modern cultures are also confronted with the postmodern in measures which also elude control. The struggles in the former communist countries of Europe are striking examples of this. For a global entity such as the Dominicans, leadership must attempt to encompass the entirety of this reality, for this is the reality of our world and of our Church today. Each facet of it must be dealt with critically, for there are elements in harmony with, but also contrary to, the Gospel in the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern. Migration into cities makes this reality more acute. A global youth culture, afloat (some might say, adrift) in the waters of postmodernism, is the framework out of which the next generation will spring.

What does this coexistence of the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern mean theologically? A kind of pluralism in theology will be necessary to garner the insight that each dimension offers, as well as provide the basis for a critique of each. There must be a greater sense of the *pleroma* or *plenitudo* in which we live. I think that it is not accidental that there has been a nearly unparalleled interest in the theology of the Trinity in the West in recent years. Implicitly, this is a way of critiquing one kind of monism which does not serve us well in an increasingly pluralist world. Returning to imposing a uniformity will perhaps promote a strategy, but in the long run will undermine communion. How the ideological struggles within the Church are interpreted in light of this becomes important. To cast it completely in apocalyptic terms of good versus evil will also not help. Nor, however, can the dynamics of power be excised from the equation. The pursuit of truth and the passion it entails can rarely be insulated from the exercise of human ambition. Our theologies of communion, put forward so consistently in recent years as the way to read the meaning of the Church, must have within them an ample sense of catholicity to help illumine what unity means for us. Being able to assess what is worthwhile in the pre-modern and the postmodern as well as the modern can make an important contribution to having a sense of the fullness of faith and the catholicity of the Church.

Religion and Violence

An issue which will be of great importance in preaching the Gospel in this first part of the century will be dealing with the relationship of religion to violence. As violence increased through the 1990's, how religious claims have legitimated violence between groups has become a matter of grave concern. This has involved violence among Christians (in Europe), and between religious traditions. The intolerance associated with fundamentalism has also been on the upsurge. If secularization and atheism were the

principal concerns seen as facing the world just a few decades ago, today the resurgence of religion and its frequent pairing with social and political violence has become a central concern. The world has become "desecularized" to some extent, that is to say, secularization can no longer be the lens through which the inevitable direction of the world may be perceived.

To be sure, religion has often been paired with violence in the past. One only need think of the apologies made by Pope John Paul II during the Jubilee Year and since to be aware of that. The Crusades, the sixteenth century wars of religion, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism have all marred the face of Christianity. Other religious traditions have similar experiences, both in the past and most recently. But what accounts for so much recent violence associated with religion?

Globalization has sharpened the edges of the world, and raised the stakes regarding modernity. The struggle of the local against the global creates conflict as well. Conflicts of competing identities in the same territories will grasp for clear differences to demarcate the terms of distinctiveness. Others argue too that the normative, indeed absolute commitments entailed in religious beliefs necessarily create the conditions for conflict and intolerance.

No one has yet come up with a satisfying theory of the relation of religion to violence. Each religious tradition can rightly point to a message of peace, harmony, and well-being within its doctrines, but must likewise acknowledge how those same beliefs have been put to work to foment and sustain violence. Are religions so inextricably bound up with violence that our only hope, as some secularists aver, is to abandon them altogether?

However one may think about the relation of religion to violence at the theoretical level, we know that many people are at risk today at the practical level because of violence. This is

especially the case where religious groups find themselves to be in the minority, such as is the case for Christians in different parts of Indonesia or in India, as well as for religionists in other parts of the world. Members of our religious institutes, as leaders and coworkers in those communities, suffer the same risk. A theory of the relation between violence and religion will not end the violence in itself, but can point the way to a possible solution at some point in the future.

At this point in time, three ways of looking at the way religion and violence relate can be seen to be emerging.

First of all, the pretext of difference in religion is used to pursue other agendas. This happens in many of the cases of religion and violence around the world. Hindu communalist violence against Muslims and Christians in India is often really about maintaining Hindu political hegemony where it appears threatened by growing numbers of minority religionists. A similar pattern might be seen in the long-standing civil war of the Muslim north against the traditionalist and Christian south in the Sudan, or in the battle of Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. The pursuit of political ends by religious means is especially suspect in places where different religions had been able to live side by side (albeit sometimes uneasily), but now there are outbreaks of violence. In these and similar settings, deeper motives of actions need to be plumbed in order to see whether the resources of religion are simply being invoked to legitimate other action. Similarly, when religion is the most identifiable difference in populations which are otherwise largely the same or even identical, one needs to suspect that religion is an epiphenomenon in the rise of violence rather than its root cause.

A second way of looking at the relation of religion and violence is seeing the resources of religion as a shield against modernization and globalization. In this way, a religious view of

the world becomes a cosmic stage or battleground for the warring of the forces of good (God and God's cause as construed in a religious tradition) against the forces of evil (secularization/modernization/globalization/the West/etc). Taking up violence for the sake of defending or promoting God's cause against those forces of evil then mobilizes the resources of a religious tradition to war against the forces which would destroy it. While such forces can be mobilized by a provocateur from outside, it can arise also from leaders within a religious tradition. Here religion is more than a badge of identity vis-a-vis others; it articulates deeply felt threats to existence itself. Martyrdom for the sake of religious cause then becomes feasible in the fight against the forces of evil.

A third way of looking at the relation of religion and violence is perhaps the most complicated and ultimately the most important. Here one has to explore the mechanisms which can trigger violence in themselves. These have to do with violence embedded in the tradition itself, despite all its protestations of harmony. For Jews, it may be the cursing psalms which legitimate the destruction of enemies. For Christianity, it is the language of violent death and sacrifice which lie at the heart of the interpretation of the mission of Jesus itself. For others, it may be in the very cosmic order itself (Zoroastrianism, Vedic Hinduism), or the insight that violence is but yet another face of the suffering which arises from illusion (as for Buddhists). It may be possible to explain references to violence away historically as part of clan-based societies which struggle to survive in violent times (in Judaism or early Islam), but how religions negotiate the relation of life and death, how they explain the presence of evil in the world, and what should be done about it inevitably bring one up against this problem. To date, no theory of the presence of evil, or the necessity of sacrifice, has been far-reaching enough to win the assent of large groups within any given religious tradition, let alone among them or even beyond them.

It is from the keen awareness of what seems to have been an upsurge of violence in the last few decades, as well as the embeddedness of violence in social systems through the mechanisms of racism and other forms of social oppression, that the theological theme of reconciliation has come so to the forefront at the beginning of this new century. However reconciliation is construed - from conflict management and reduction* to the healing of memories, to the moral reconstruction of societies - it is incumbent upon all religious traditions which look to some form of transcendence of the present time with all its shortcomings and ills to plumb and bring forth what it can create a better earth in the midst of all the violence which is present. The litany of ills could go on almost endlessly. How are we to honor those who have died, how are we to seek justice for the living, and how are we to create societies where such evils cannot be perpetrated again? For Christians, the Good News of Jesus Christ finds perhaps its most compelling form for our time in the message of God reconciling the world.

Preaching the Gospel Today and Tomorrow

It seems to me that we can summarize, in one kind of way, the challenge of preaching the Gospel in our immediate future under these three headings.

First of all, finding new forms of solidarity with humankind. This has to happen on the global level with the forms of discourse that try to imagine how we can hold our world together, in search of a global ethic, the guarantee of human rights, and the quest of international justice. The global ethic encompasses how we will treat one another and the earth. Human rights touches upon both political rights (so-called first-generation human rights), and economic rights (second-generation human rights). International justice must pursue human rights abuses and international crime and terrorism which threaten to fall beyond the purview of any national or regional authority.

Solidarity must also address local discourses as well, helping them situate themselves within their own and the larger picture so as to prevent ideological distortion, and to challenge those forces, from within and without, which threaten genuine well-being. This represents a second generation of the work of inculturation, at a time when first-generation efforts are being blocked in so many places. Some harmony between a theology of creation and a theology of redemption should require that, pace *Gaudium et spes*, the Gospel is not alien to any culture. Consequently, inculturation is possible everywhere. As the Church has taught, every culture is in need of purification, but that assumes that faith and culture encounter one another in the first place.

The interaction of global and local discourses is not just an issue for the socio-cultural, political, and economic spheres. It has to do also with the conduct of the life of the Church itself, as a communion of churches. Recent efforts to create ever greater centralization seem to disregard a dynamic evident in how the global and the local are beginning to relate in the world today, but also one foreseen already in the theology of the Second Vatican Council.

Concern for the relation of the global and the local flows into the second challenge for preaching the Gospel in the immediate future, namely, how to relate to an irreducible plurality as a legitimate part of our world, without forcing it into monistic categories. Multicultural and multi-religious realities are not going to disappear from our world. We do not want to succumb to a facile kind of post-modernism which is in effect simply another manifestation of indifferentism. Our commitments are real and not to be surrendered. But can we live with otherness and difference in integrity without succumbing to violence? Can we find a way to articulate otherness and difference theologically which can lay the groundwork for Christians living in constructive harmony with

their neighbors? In a concrete way, this is the challenge of Christianity as it looks toward Asia today. Calls for the evangelization of Asia necessarily entail, it seems to me, a profound new evangelization of the West and other non-Asian parts of the world looking toward the world's largest, most populous, and most variegated continent. Here all the transnational religions of our current world were born; here they have had centuries of experience in trying to live together, however tenuously. The offense some Asians have taken at Christian language of evangelization cannot simply be considered the scandal of the cross; it is a profound invitation to examine our own hearts as Christians.

One place to begin that examination is how we ourselves deal with the confluence of the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern in our own midst. Some of us struggle to create the social space whereby pre-modern cultures might be able to maintain some measure of autonomy as the waves of modernization wash over them. Others see the unfinished agenda of modernity as offering the sought - for Utopia which has been derailed by neoliberal capitalist forces. And a whole new generation has been shaped by the variegated forms of postmodernity as their lens upon our future. These pluralities are not something outside ourselves against which we form our identities. They are profoundly within us, in a world-church and in an order which exists in so many cultures and places. Unity has been and must remain a sign of the Church. The articulation of that unity calls us to explore the other three of the traditional marks of the Church as a way of giving that genuine and faithful expression in our time.

Third and finally, the realities of violence in all its forms, and the frequent implication of religion within the emergence and sustaining of violence, calls us to plumb more deeply the resources of peace-making and reconciliation within our faith. Looking at the killing fields of our world, created by neglect or by design,

the immensity of suffering, and the open wounds that cannot be brought to healing prompt us to seek the transcendence promised us in the vision of reconciliation where God reconciles all the world in Christ, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). That we believe that true peace will come through the blood of the cross already says something about how eventually a vision of violence and reconciliation is present at the heart of the Christian mystery. The situation in which we now live at the beginning of the twenty-first century urges us to plumb the meaning of the Paschal Mystery in a way in which we have not had to before.

The challenges which face us and face you as an Order of Friar Preachers will call upon the very best of your traditions. It will require first of all the discipline of contemplative prayer, of union with the God who has walked among us, and has known our sufferings. It has become more and more clear to me that, in dealing with the unspeakable horrors of what we as human beings have done to one another, we can only sustain our strength in the realization that it is God who works reconciliation in the world, not us. The outcome of all of this, what a genuinely new creation will look like, can only be seen from God's perspective. Without union with God in contemplative prayer, we cannot hope to sustain the struggle before us. We will burn out, the forces of evil will insinuate themselves into our lives. We are ambassadors of God's reconciliation, as the Apostle Paul puts it (cf. 2 Cor 5:20), we are not its authors.

The issues which face us need not only a life of contemplative prayer, but the profound study which also so marks the Dominican tradition. The issues I have tried to articulate here - about global and local discourses, about engaging the pluralism of our world, about seeking healing and reconciliation - we but barely understand. They are not new issues, but they also have taken on forms new, strange, and urgent for us. We need the best of minds to

explore them, especially bringing to bear upon them the resources of our faith and our tradition. The concern for study which has always been so much at the heart of what you do, and which has been so inspiring to me, must be engaged here.

Your emphasis on community, too, plays a role in all of this. First of all in mirroring the kind of communion to which we are called, a communion which can encompass and value our differences, yet make them a source of challenge and enrichment rather than one of division and diminishment. A fragmented, postmodern world needs visions of community, as does a world which suffers disruption and dislocation. Without romanticizing its possibilities, community must find today its deepest roots theologically, in a Trinitarian God where difference and unity find their deepest communion.

It is in this combine of prayer, study, and community which a genuine preaching of the Gospel can take shape. It can then be a preaching which can be heard within the tonalities of cultures situated at the crossroads of the local and the global, but also a preaching which takes its hearers to a new place. Where that new place is, and how God is leading us there, can only emerge in our prayer, in our study, and in our life together. May the Lord truly be with you on your journey as an Order of Preachers.

Interview with the new Master of the Order, the Very Reverend Carlos Alfonso Azpiroz Costa, OP

CLAUDE VEZINA, OP

Q. Brother Carlos, can you tell us a bit about your upbringing in Argentina, and about what lead you to the Order of Preachers?

A. Well, I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 30 of 1956. I will turn forty-five this coming October. I am the eighth of a family of fourteen - thirteen boys and one girl. One of my brothers died in 1988, he was young, so now we are thirteen. I could say my father was an agronomic, or agricultural engineer, my grandfather and grandmother on my father's side were from Navarre, Spain. This is why my family name is Azpiroz - it is Basque.

My mother, also, played a key role in my life: she gave me my basic faith values. Raising fourteen children, she did everything with great finesse and wisdom. I would add that with grace and utmost discretion, she was a model of christian life. I found it difficult to identify what social class we belonged to, but we did not lack of the essential. We received a good education, but we had a very simple style of life. I always got my older brothers'

clothes, and we always shared our toys and things, so in a way that was a sort of preparation for common life! My house was like a priory, so to speak. I have wonderful memories of my family life. I studied in Colegio Champagnat, under the direction of the Marist Brothers.

Q. Was there a family ranch in Argentina?

A. My father worked as administrator of the properties of the family in Buenos Aires City, and was also very dedicated in administrating a ranch. This is still today for my brothers and nephews a place where they get together. When I get the opportunities for holidays I go with them there. It was also a place to grow up and work. My father wouldn't have us resting all the time during holidays, however, he would give us work to do. We were there to work and learn things, not just look at the sky.

We also played soccer and sports of all kinds when we were young. We loved horses. When you have a big family, you also have a lot of friends. Small families sometimes close their doors on the others, but my house was very big, and so we had friends over and also, being a friar, Dominican brothers would come over, eating, sharing, playing soccer, discussing - living! We had great time.

Q. How about your education?

A. I was a student in civil law at the Pontifical Catholic University in Buenos Aires, Santa Maria de Buenos Aires, and some of my professors in theology were Dominicans. This was back in 1978, a very exciting year and also a very painful time, because Argentina's political and social situation was uncertain. I was not very conscious of the political situation. I was twenty-two years old, but I was pretty certain I would become a priest. That year was very special. I had had a girlfriend, but we had ended our relationship. We didn't end it because I wanted to be

a priest. There are often unconscious things at work in our hearts. When I was finished with secondary school, I was sure I wanted to be a priest, but I began to study civil law because the study and practice of law was very much part of my background and I also liked it. I enjoyed it very much.

I had two teachers, Dominican teachers, who taught moral theology, and I was very interested. I was a man with many questions in the classroom, every day. I liked to talk a lot. They invited me to the priory and I felt honored! So in 1979 I went to spend a few days at the novitiate, just for a little experience of Dominican life. I didn't have much time since I was in my last year of studies. I was president of the Center of Students of the faculty, which had democratic elections. We were also at this time under a military government, but the Catholic University was allowed to have this student center. So, we represented a group during an election, we won, and we worked one year doing social work - including teaching academic subjects, giving conferences, teaching sports, preparing students for confirmation, and other things. It was important for us because we were amongst the few who were concerned by social issues and worked with the poor.

But I went to the novitiate and when I finished my days of retreat, I felt certain that this was the place for me. I was then twenty-three. I remember celebrating my twenty-fourth birthday in the middle of my novitiate. These days that is considered too young! But in 1980 it was more normal to follow a vocation at an age like that. There were twelve of us in novitiate, and six brothers and priests remain from my class. But anyway, in my case, I truly believe I heard the voice of Jesus calling me to the Order. I tried to finish the course work for my degree, but I failed my very last final exam, just a week before I was due to enter the Order. So I went to the novitiate and completed my exam after taking first vows. So I am a lawyer in the sense of having fulfilled all the academic requirements.

Q. Are there any particular Dominican figures or mentors, either inside or outside your province, who truly inspired you?

A. At the beginning, of course, I must say there were two brothers who inspired me. One of them, a student brother who was in simple vows and an assistant at the Chair of Moral Theology, has since left the Order. He is a very good man. He still works in schools on educational issues with the dominican brothers. The other brother, Father Miguel Cardozo, was at that moment master of students at Santo Domingo de Buenos Aires, and he is still a member of that community. Then, of course, there was my master of novices, Fray Vicente Argumedo.

I admire my brothers, I truly love the brothers. Fray Domingo Basso - I prefer to say "Fray" rather than "Father" - Fray Jose Maria Rossi, to name just a few. But it is unfair to single out only a few when I have such deep affection for so many many of the brothers I know in Argentina and elsewhere in the Order.

Then I was very surprised at Santa Sabina, of course, to find how truly warm and affable both Timothy and Damian Byrne were. It's edifying when the Master of the Order is down-to-earth. Damian I remember as a very impressive man, a simple man, who truly lived poverty, who had a sense of the mission of the Order, and he could do a lot of things. As I said, I truly admire my Dominican brothers.

Q. Among the various ministries that you have been engaged in, which are those that you knew were touching upon the very mission of the Order, and why?

A. I remember years ago, we tried in a provincial assembly to plan a project for the province, and it was very important to arrive at a deep and commonly held understanding of the intellectual life of the Order, and at the same time, of the mission of the Order to the poor - a mission in the traditional sense, a mission to the poor - initial evangelization.

Teaching for me is my favorite work. Teaching a variety of people. I taught many years in the Catholic University: I taught theology to many different students, those studying civil law, economics, engineering and a lot of different careers. I taught them all theology. So the challenge of teaching theology to people who perhaps do not know anything about Jesus Christ is very important. But a mission with lay people and sisters together to people who have never heard a preacher is also very important, especially in poor areas. In Argentina we have a lot of places where there is a lot of pain. And working in these places opened my mind because I didn't really know the reality of my country and the Church until I was a Dominican. It's strange: sometimes people think we know nothing about the world because we are religious, we live in cloisters, and so on. But it was precisely being a Dominican, that opened my eyes, opened my ears, opened my mouth, to understand the reality - the real reality - of the world! This is strange, no? People say "you live in priories, you're outside the world," "you're not in a secular institute - how could you know?" But I know, I understood, the real problems of the world being a Dominican, and that's what we show to the people, whether in a university faculty or in a mission among the poor.

Q. Can you think of a funny situation that you ever found yourself in as a religious?

A. In my life as a religious? Oh, yes! I remember one of the most beautiful experiences was to be coordinator of our provincial assembly during two years. Our province, the Argentinean province, has a beautiful custom: once a year, for three days, all the solemnly vowed brothers gather together to reflect on different issues. Of course, it was a time of joy, to have fun, to sing, and I remember a lot of very joyful moments. I used to try to make my brothers laugh, encourage them to play and have fun and sing. This is the first thing that comes to mind.

But one event stands out for me. It has to do with when Timothy Radcliffe arrived at the curia. You know that corridor at the curia? Well, in that corridor is a beautiful gallery having all the portraits of the Masters of the Order. Timothy's portrait had just been put on the wall a few weeks ago... and it is beautiful. But I wanted to play a little joke on him. I felt confident doing this since I knew him already, since as provincial of England and a member of the Directorium of the Angelicum, he used to come to Santa Sabina. Since I was the bursar of the convent, I obviously got to meet him. And I knew he had a sense of humor. I am Argentinean and he is English, but we understood one another. Anyway, when he came to Santa Sabina as newly-elected Master of the Order, on September 5, 1992, I had a tiny copy of the official photo of Timothy from the Mexico City Chapter, and I had it set in a tiny frame. I then hung it on the wall of the corridor just after the full-sized portrait of Damian Byrne. I only asked permission of the prior, and he thought Timothy would not be angry.

I took his bags, and started leading him to his new quarters. As we passed through the corridor I pointed out to him the portraits of the Masters. At this point the superior of the sisters community walked in - the sisters who take care of the brethren there at Santa Sabina. As we walked down the corridor, Timothy eyed all the portraits slowly, all these enormous, grand portraits, and then finally he arrived at Damian Byrne's, and then looked ahead at this tiny little photo of himself on the wall right after Damian - and he stopped and just stared at it. I was worried at this point that he wasn't taking the joke well. I said to myself, "Oh, mamma mia, please!" He turned to the sister, and said in very bad Italian but in very good humor, "don't worry, I'll get bigger with the help of your pasta in the next nine years!" I still have that tiny photo to this day and will put in my personal office just to have the smile of Timothy every day in front of me:

Q. If you had to address young men or young women trying to make sense of their lives today, or thinking about consecrated life, what would you tell them?

A. For me, consecrated life means having your feet on the ground but no ceiling above your head. Some people think consecrated life is confining. No! No ceiling means that there are no limits above, but one must of course be well grounded, grounded in reality. And I think for this you have to have a gift from God. The temptation today is alienation from the world - because some people don't like the world as it is. But with great horizons, without any ceiling over your head, without confining walls, but walking ahead with Dominic and I think that many youth should know the great challenge to preach as a Dominican. I am not talking about the friars and sisters only, but also about laity. They should have great confidence. This is my personal idea.

Q. Given your knowledge of law and your experience in working as a canon lawyer, how would you describe the genius and the spirit of the Dominican constitutions?

A. I don't want to exaggerate, but I always say that the constitutions of the Dominican Order - the most important bequest to the Order by Saint Dominic himself - is a spiritual book. But it is not a mystical work. Some holy people have left the Church diaries and journals, like Blessed Pope John XXIII. Some, like Saint Ignatius, left us spiritual exercises. But Saint Dominic gave us our constitutions. The constitutions give confidence to the brethren to trust in the others, because the other men speak a word of light and a word of grace for me. The constitutions are a cathedral of constitutional law. And they make us more confident among each other. We don't wait for a word from the abbot, for example - I'm not against abbots, of course - but our priors are not abbots; our provincials are not abbots. So, they provide for real discussion and listen to the words of others, and that is a

real gift of God. And they allow us to lead a merciful life toward others. This is, for me, the constitutions.

Q. In light of the new challenges facing our world today, what are some of the issues you would prioritize? Are there any specific orientations you would like to impart to us Dominicans?

A. Well, we'll have to see what the Chapter says. The Acts of the Chapter themselves should be our guidelines for the next three years. We are not beset by fears. I don't have any personal agenda, because I'm here to hear the brothers and to see how the Acts come out. Of course, the first week, prior to the election, also was a special week just to share together aspects of contemplation and preaching in a globalized world. But, as I told my brothers when they asked me what I thought were two of the most important topics in the Church and the Order today, I told them, first, interreligious dialogue between the major religions, and second - and this could be the background for a lot of discussion for the next millennium - human rights. Because a lot of people do not believe in God, and we must preach through some common background. It is impossible to have dialogue without a common background, as Saint Thomas said.

Q. Which is the most significant Word of the Gospel that speaks to you?

A. For me, my favorite passage of the Gospel is when Jesus encounters Peter by the seaside and asks him three times "do you love me?" This was after the passion and the three denials. Peter says, "you know all things, you know that I love you." This is my favorite, because it takes both, the knowledge of God, since it has Peter saying, "God, you know me, you know that I love you" - love and an intellectual view of God. At the same time it is different from Peter's earlier confession at the miraculous catch

of fish, "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man" - I am a sinner. Earlier on he was too concerned about himself. This second confession he focuses more on Christ: "You know all things."

Q. We often hear the Dominicans should be at the forefront of the apostolic field, at the frontiers of evangelization. What are some of the new apostolic fields in which we should be engaging?

A. I think there are a lot of frontiers that we need to consider. I remember with a special gratitude the Chapter of Avila's Chapter and its frontiers. I think it was a beautiful description linking that Chapter with the priorities enumerated in Quezon City in 1977. It tried to elaborate the priorities of Quezon City in a fresh approach. And I think they express for me in a wide sense the mission of the Order. But, again, I shall wait for the Acts.

Q. Any word of hope you would like to share with the Dominican family?

A. Well, I didn't attend the meeting in Manila, since not everyone could go and I was working in Santa Sabina. The theme was "new voices for the third millennium." This meeting gave us a sense of celebration, to celebrate our common vocation. The Dominican family is like a symphonic orchestra. In a symphonic orchestra, of course, there are all sorts of types. You have everything from bass drummers to flute-players. Some might not like the flute or the drum, but when all the musicians play together, the symphonic orchestra sounds good. And the different parts need each other. Truth is a symphony, truth is our music. And if I could impress on the mind of all the capitulars one recollection of Timothy, it is that he invited us time and again to sing a new song. And through the music of truth we are a symphonic orchestra.

Homily to the General Chapter

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE OP

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me'

The Elective General Chapter of Providence

10th July 2001

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'

We have come to Providence from every part of the world. We represent the brethren who are present in 102 countries. And so, together with our guests from the Dominican Family, we have some idea of who are the poor who wait for the good news. Each of us has witnessed some form of poverty: the poverty of the barrios of Latin America, or of the bums on the streets in Europe. We know the poverty of those whose lives are without hope or meaning, the poverty of those caught in war, the intellectual poverty of so many in the West.

We have also seen the prisons that human beings build for each other, prisons of prejudice and ideology, prisons of impotence, prisons of fear, state penitentiaries here in the States where hundreds await the death penalty. We know the million forms of oppression that weigh upon humanity. Will the Spirit of the Lord be upon us to preach the good news? Will we find a word of grace for the poor? Will we come away from Providence ready to open the eyes of the blind and set people free?

When Jesus has read the text, he sits down. The eyes of all are fixed on him, and he says, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. Today is the day of salvation, if they open their ears to hear. This is the day of grace, if they will but listen.

If this Chapter of Providence is for us a moment of grace, then we shall go from here renewed as preachers, with something to say to the poor and oppressed. We are not just here to make documents, to vote amendments, and to change the Constitutions. We are gathered here so that words of grace may be spoken and heard. Then we will be able to say, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in our hearing'. A General Chapter should be a time of grace.

This almost happened at Nazareth. It started well; they praised the words of grace that Jesus spoke. They marvelled at him. But then it all turned sour. They denounced him as just the son of Joseph, their neighbour. They knew him too well to hear what he had to say. They tried to kill him for his presumption.

That will be the first challenge that we have to face. For a General Chapter is, in a way, the home of the Order. Providence is, for these few weeks, our Nazareth. We may be tempted to think that we know each other too well to receive that word of grace. You may be thinking even now, 'Here is Timothy going on again. It's the same old stuff. At least in four days time, we will rid

of him at last!" And you are right in this case: It is the same old stuff!

But will we be like the inhabitants of Nazareth, and let familiarity breed contempt, and close our ears to each other? When a brother from Latin America stands up to speak, will half the capitulars turn off their headsets and say, 'There is no need to listen. It will be the same old liberation theology, the option for the poor. I have heard it all before'. And if a more conservative brother speaks, will the other half of the chapter turn off their headsets and say, 'I know that he will say before he opens his mouth'. When Jesus begins to preach, they are astonished at his words of grace. I pray that we may be surprised by each other. We must let go our preconceptions and be astonished. Then the Scriptures will be fulfilled in our hearing, and the Chapter will be a moment of grace. Then we will have something to say to the poor and oppressed when we go home.

Each of us comes to this Chapter both rich and poor. We are rich because we each have something to say. When the moderator hands a brother the microphone, then the eyes of the Chapter will be upon him, to listen. It is true that there are always some brethren who are convinced that the Spirit comes upon them with great frequency, as they hold up their hands to speak again and again and again.

But each of us is also poor. Each of us lives in a world that too small for God. Each of us inhabits a prison. And our own brothers and sisters have the key to open the door and let us out. Each of us in some way blind, myopic. And for each of us, there is someone here who has the salve to heal our eyes and give us sight.

I remember eating supper with two brethren at a congress on the mission of the Order in Europe, many years ago. One brother

from Eastern Europe had been imprisoned by the communists. The other, from the West, had been imprisoned for being a communist. Their political views were utterly opposed. But they opened each other's eyes. They lead each other into a larger space, the wide-open pastures of the gospel.

I visited a community in Latin America in which brethren and sisters lived together. And the brethren said to me, 'We never knew what it meant to have confidence in God until the sister taught us. They do not worry where the money will come from.' And the sisters told me, 'The brethren taught us how to open our minds to the Word of God as never before'.

For this mutual liberation to happen, then we need imagination and humility. We need the imagination not only to hear what the capitulars say, but also to guess why they say it. Iris Murdoch, the English philosopher, wrote that when you disagree with anyone, then ask of what they are afraid. What threat do they perceive to their profoundest convictions? Why do they speak so passionately about this? How can one understand that fear?

Above all, this Chapter will be an event of grace if we have the humility to listen. The last written words of Luther were 'We are beggars. That is the truth'. Veritas is our motto, so then let us recognize that we come to this Chapter as beggars, as those who hunger to know more of God. For as St. Augustine said: 'God is always more'.

'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. If we are attentive to the Word of God and to each other, then this Chapter will be a time of grace, a time of gifts. Then we will go back home with something to say to all those who suffer from multiple forms of poverty and oppression. We will be able to open the eyes of the blind and free the prisoners, because we have opened each other's eyes and set each other free here. Then we shall indeed preach an acceptable year of the Lord.

Homily for Sunday, August 5th

PETER LOBO, OP

The Christian Dominican Challenge

"Challenges in English;" "Challenges in French." "Clarifications;" "Amendments," "Please vote;" "Voting is closed." These must be familiar terms by now, perhaps too familiar. Some of us may be looking forward to the end of the Chapter so that we do not have to hear these words again: "challenges," "clarifications," "amendments."

But this morning, a different challenge is put before us in Paul's letter to the Colossians. This is a challenge that is Christian and Pauline, and it admits of no amendments. Paul was faced with a Christian community at Colossae that was not his showpiece, not his pride and joy, because it was caught up in Gnostic speculations and other problems. And so, he puts before them, and us, a very clear challenge that answers the basic question: "Where ought the sights of a Christian be fixed if he or she belongs to Christ and has been raised up with Christ in baptism? He gives a simple and straightforward answer, a direct challenge:

*Seek the things that are above where Christ is.
Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.
Put to death the parts of you that are earthly.*

This is a corollary that follows from the fact that we have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ. Certainly, where your treasure is there will your heart be also. And, if you really believe something, if you are convinced about it, you will live by your convictions; you will be committed to your convictions. In a word, Paul is putting before us the challenge of holiness: our lives must be hidden with Christ in God; not steeped in what is earthly - immorality, passion, evil desire, etc. We need realism in responding to the challenge of being one with Christ; our feet on the ground spirituality, but simultaneously with our head held high.

But what does this mean in actual practice? How are we to live in Christ and for Christ so that we can seek the things above and have our lives hidden with Christ in God? How are we to travel our pilgrim journey to holiness? How can we also become guides and helps to others along this pilgrim way? Jesus is our guide and our lighthouse. He shows us the way: "I am the way." "He who follows me will have the light of life." "Follow me." "Listen to my voice."

One clue that will help us answer our quest is what Jesus gives us in today's Gospel:

*Guard against all greed.
One's life does not consist in possessions.
Do not store up earthly treasure but be rich in what matters to God.*

This is indeed the true New Testament spirituality of poverty, detachment and mendicancy. Without it, our sights will be set on the things of earth, not on what is above, and we will not have

put to death earthly desires for possessions. Dispossess oneself, be detached.

To do these things are not all that easy. But Vincent McNabb gives us two wise principles of life which will help us to do this: "Cut down your wants and cut down your needs." "Do as much as you can with as little as you can." Then you will be able to store up treasure in heaven and will share your goods with the poor.

We need material and financial resources, but let us not be like the foolish rich man of today's Gospel. His riches were snatched away from him in a flash. Our poverty provides us with time and space for God, and it gives us an apostolic mobility that makes us available for the Gospel, something riches will only rob from us.

The spiritual wisdom of Jesus goes far beyond the practical wisdom of the Book of Ecclesiastes where the preacher warns us that possessions are vanity and great misfortune and that, whether we like it or not, we will have to leave our material riches behind for someone else. We cannot take anything (wealth, material possessions) along with us in the last analysis. Unnecessary possessions bring anxiety, and even sorrow and grief at their loss. Poverty and detachment bring freedom and availability. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Dominic saw this early on in his ministry when he and Bishop Diego were in the South of France. He learned from the Apostles and from the Cathar heretics to cherish the freedom for God and for the Gospel that came from poverty and detachment. He gave us mendicancy as the secret weapon that gives authenticity to and assures the success of our preaching mission. We need to retrieve that secret weapon.

Let me share an Indian story with you:

There was a Guru who had a small hermitage on the banks of a river. One of his very fervent disciples who joined him and underwent a long apprenticeship finally became very proficient in the life of the spirit. He became a holy, diligent, poor, ascetic, enthusiastic disciple. One day the Guru came to him and told him that he had to go on a long pilgrimage and that he would like him to look after his hermitage during his absence. The disciple gladly agreed. In the beginning, people flocked to the disciple because he was very much like his Guru, poor and holy, and was able to give them great spiritual advice. However, one day after the disciple had bathed in the river, he hung up his loincloth to dry on the roof of the hermitage. That night, a mouse nibbled at his loincloth and tore it. The disciple had to get another one and the same thing happened again. To get rid of the mouse, he decided to get a cat. But to feed the cat, he needed milk and so he decided to buy a cow. To keep the cow fed, he needed grass, and so he bought a field. To till the field he needed help and so he married a wife. The wife gave him children and to look after his children he needed servants and a bigger house. Finally, he ended up with a mansion like the ones you see in Newport, so that he could house his family and his servants. Many years later, the Master returned. He was dumbfounded by what he saw. He could not believe his eyes. When he finally met the disciple, who now looked very different, he asked him, "What is all this about? What has happened?" The disciple replied, "Master, this is what you have done to me by putting me in charge of the hermitage."

I wonder if Dominic would recognize us as his disciples were he to come back to visit us today. Would Dominic, our Master, have the same experience as the Guru? So, let us retrieve Dominic's spirit and his poverty and mendicancy, and then we will be able to follow Jesus more closely and live the challenge to holiness.

"Christian and Dominican challenge." "No amendments."
"Let us vote." "Voting is closed." "126 affirmative, 0 negative,
0 abstentions."

Homily on Evangelization and Mission of Dominican Order*

ANTONIO-MARIA ROSALES, OFM

May the Lord Give You Peace,

On this feast of St Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, I would like to share with you some reflections on how we can live our commitment to Jesus today. Being called to proclaim Christ to all, we will reflect on this important activity of our Church.

Throughout most of his pontificate and particularly in the last decade or so, our present pope John Paul II has put considerable emphasis on EVANGELIZATION. This is the mission of the Church, the work entrusted to her by the Lord before he returned to the Father. It is an activity that has become more and more complex through the years. It has come to involve not just the strict and immediate works specifically related to evangelization, but now it also has to involve itself in everything that concerns the person; the socio-economic, political and cultural concerns, among others.

* Homily delivered on the Feast of St. Dominic, August 8, 2001, Sto. Domingo Church, Quezon City.

The challenges have become more and more persistent, and we are asked to reflect deeply and seriously about this task. Much has been said and written, but words alone are no longer enough. The Pope and the rest of our leaders, both in civil society and in the Church, as well as our own Christian communities ask us to produce works, actions, deeds. Often we believe that just because we have written or spoken eloquently on any of these issues, that we have already done our part. Quite wrong.

In his recent Apostolic Letter *NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE* at the close of the Great Jubilee 2000, Pope John Paul II offers us some challenges to make our faith relevant for the years ahead.

On our involvement with the poor, the document underlines that the gospel reminds us that there is a special presence of Christ in the poor. Consequently, we are to make a preferential option for them.

"This option is a testimony to the nature of God's love, to his providence and mercy; and in some way history is still filled with the seeds of the Kingdom of God which Jesus himself sowed during his earthly life whenever he responded to those who came to him with their spiritual and material needs" (n. 49).

"The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely, if in addition to its traditional forms we think of its newer patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination. In this context Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness.

"Now is the time for a new "creativity" in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by "getting close" to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout, but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (n. 50)

How can we bring this about? To the one who believes, nothing is impossible; everything is possible with God. And St. Paul puts it nicely: "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me." Yes, Christ. The Christ of Dominic and Francis. The Christ of those who believe.

But precisely this is where the problem lies. Again, the Pope brought this out in his message to the recently concluded Dominican General Chapter in Rhode Island, USA, which elected the 86th successor of St. Dominic, the Very Reverend Fr. Carlos Alfonso Azpiroz Costa, from Argentina, who was previously the Procurator General in Rome.

In his message the Pope said, "Ours is an age which denies the Incarnation in a multitude of ways, and the consequences of this denial are clear and disturbing," as he lamented the growing privatization of belief in God, the "mutual impoverishment" of faith and reason, sexual degradation and "moral confusion."

It is because of this denial of the Incarnation that made us witnesses in our times to the phenomenal violations of human rights, when oppressors refuse to recognize in the oppressed the image of God and the brother or sister of Jesus Christ. It is when we fail to see the face of Jesus in others, particularly the poor and the weak, that we disregard them, if not completely, at least in part, and deny them their rights.

The rediscovery of the Incarnation is the crucial key to the construction today of a better world, as it was in the 13th century.

This cannot be achieved without evangelization. In ECCLESIA IN ASIA, the Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ the Savior and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia, the Pope underlines the importance of inter-religious dialogue between the old Asian religions and cultures and Christianity, specifically the Catholic Church. This dialogue is not just to do away with mutual prejudices and biases about each other, but particularly so that we can know how to present our religion to others, not in an aggressive way, but still in a determined and convincing manner. As a starting point, we are to engage in mutual activities especially concerning human rights, justice and peace, common political concerns, respect for the environment and others, which can bring us together. Our task today and always is: to proclaim the Lord Jesus.

There is a basic philosophical principle: NEMO DAT QUOD NON HABET. One cannot give what he does not have. We cannot preach Christ, give Christ, unless we first have him in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives. This is the big challenge to the evangelizer today, and, indeed, to all Christians. There is the temptation to adapt ourselves to the ways and customs of the world, hoping that in so doing we would be more acceptable. We succeed in becoming popular, but we sell short the Gospel, we compromise the Lord's message and dilute its power.

The Gospel has made it clear there will always be conflict between the Lord and the world. The saints, including Dominic and his friend and contemporary Francis of Assisi, knew this well and lived with this awareness, so that they were ready to be prophetic in their stance vis-a-vis the world.

In the Pope's message to the Dominican General Chapter referred to earlier, it is mentioned that he looks to the Dominicans "to play a vital part in the Church's mission to overturn the old untruths and proclaim the message of Christ effectively at the dawn of the new millennium."

The Order in the Philippines has generally succeeded in being faithful "watchdogs of the Lord," *Domini canes*, and it continues to discover new ways to be relevant. In the first World Congress of the Dominican Family held at UST last October, the then Master General Fr. Timothy Radcliffe expressed his desire that the Dominican Family develop common projects that would be "multicultural and multisectoral," indeed a precise and specific response to the Pope's call for a new creativity. The question is: how to go about this, how to implement it. May this celebration of the holy Founder enlighten the whole Dominican Family.

To conclude, I invite you all to pray with me for the whole Dominican Order, for the new Master General and his Council, for the communities and friars working in this country not only in the field of education where it excels, but also in other areas of the pastoral ministry and apostolate.

May St. Dominic bless all of us present here this evening to honor him. May he also bless us, the followers of his friend Francis of Assisi. May Dominic's example challenge all of us to know and love Jesus more, so that we can bring him and his message to our world and people today. MAY THE LORD GIVE YOU PEACE.

"Globalization of Solidarity"*

JOHN PAUL II

On Thursday, 17 May, the Holy Father addressed the members of the Foundation for "Ethics and Economics" which sponsored a study on globalization, solidarity and free economic initiative based on solid ethical and spiritual values. The main point the Pope made was the need to humanize globalization, keeping the focus on the human being rather than production. The Holy Father keeps offering three fundamental principles to guide ethics in the era of the global village. He always speaks the globalization of human rights. The human person must be an end and not a means, a subject, not an object, nor a commodity of trade. The Pope next stresses solidarity, the preferential option for the poor. The principle of solidarity affirms that the more individuals are defenseless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular, the intervention of government authority. The Holy Father then speaks of the globalization of solidarity. The integration that impels globalization can

* Address of the Holy Father to the Members of The Foundation for "Ethics and Economics", Thursday, 17 May 2001. The Holy Father asks for focus on human being in society.

be useful for the progress of the dignity of the human person cannot do without the quest for social, legal and cultural safeguards which are vitally necessary if individuals and intermediary groups are to keep their central roles. A mindless globalization risks destroying these carefully built groups by forcing the adoption of new styles of working, living and organizing communities. The Holy Father always speaks of the moral absolutes that are the rights of the person.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial greeting to each one of you. Our meeting takes place on account of the initiative you have sponsored that aims at a more detailed study of how to set up an articulated reflection on globalization, solidarity and free economic initiative, on the basis of solid ethical and spiritual values.

I thank Dr. Tullio Chiminazzo for his kind words conveying your common sentiments.

I examined with pleasure the programme of the new Ethics and Economy Foundation, and I encourage you to continue your work to integrate into the world of economics the viewpoint and directions of the Magisterium as expressed in the Church's social teaching.

Your institution gathers people from various parts of the world. With your different cultural sensitivities, you share the common determination to combine freedom, development and equity according to the Gospel principles of solidarity. That is more needed now than before in a period that has been deeply affected by social changes.

2. In fact, modern economic processes tend to be increasingly involved in the system that most observers describe as "global-

ization". There is no doubt that this phenomenon has great possibilities for growth and the production of wealth. But many also admit that it does not in itself guarantee a fair distribution of goods among the citizens of different countries. What happens is that the wealth produced is often concentrated in the hands of a small group of persons, that brings about a further weakening of the sovereignty of national states. Weakened nation-states that are synonymous with the less developed countries, are further undermined by their loss of access to a world system, which is now governed by a few centres run by a small number privately owned businesses. The free market is, of course, a distinctive feature of our time. However, there are indispensable human needs which cannot be left to the mercy of the free market at the risk of their being brushed aside.

The Church's social doctrine holds that economic growth must be integrated with other values, so as to become a qualitative growth. As a result it must be just, stable, respectful of cultural and social individuality, as well as ecologically suitable. It cannot be separated from an investment in people, and in the creative and innovative capacity of the individual, who is the basic resource of any society.

3. If the term "global" is to be understood logically, it must include everyone. Thus it forces the nations to eliminate poverty pockets that result from groups that are socially, economically and politically marginalized. This is also true of the frequently emphasized need to ensure "quality". The concept must not merely concern the product but, in the first place, those who produce it. I refer to the need for "total quality", that is, the overall condition of human beings in the process of production.

Only if people are the leading actors and not the slaves of the processes of production, can a business become a real community of individuals. This is a real challenge to the new

technologies that have already eased a great part of human toil, and to the direct and especially the indirect employer, that is to say, all the forces that set the direction of finance and the economy.

Linked to this is both the human person's ability to dominate his work and the discovery of an effective solution to the problem of unemployment, that universal scourge that could be overcome if those channelling capital were never to lose sight of man as their final goal.

4. A closer scrutiny makes globalization appear as a basically ambivalent phenomenon, which could be considered as both a kind of potential good for humanity and yet also a possible social disaster of staggering proportions. To give positive bearings to developing globalization, a deep commitment to building a "globalization of solidarity" is needed by means of a new culture, new norms and new institutions at national and international levels. In particular, it will be necessary to intensify the collaboration between politics and the economy, to launch specific projects to safeguard those who might become the victims of globalization processes throughout the world. I am thinking for example, of ways to lighten the heavy burden of the foreign debt of the less developed countries and of legislation to protect children from the exploitation that results from child labour.

Dear brothers and sisters, I express my appreciation of the contribution you would like to offer to solve such major problems. I sincerely hope that your contribution will always be enlightened by the Church's traditional teaching, so that economic freedom may never be separated from the duty of the just distribution of riches. I assure you of my prayers and willingly impart my Blessing to you all.

Pope asks G-8 to Hear the Cry of the Poor Nations

JOHN PAUL II

On Sunday, 8 July, the Holy Fathers introduced the prayer of the Angelus with the faithful in St. Peter's Square, speaking about the meeting of Catholic organizations, popularly called the "Papa boys" in Genoa over the weekend. They were mapping out policy to Christianize the world being brought about by globalization. The Holy Father said of the young people, "they wanted to fulfill the task I entrusted to young people at Tor Vergata: 'You will not be resigned', I said, 'to a world where other human beings die of hunger, remain illiterate and have no work. You will defend life at every moment of its development; you will strive with all your strength to make this earth ever more liveable for all people'". Lastly, the Holy Father announced his departure the next day, Monday 9 July, for a ten day vacation in the Aosta valley.

1. Today my thoughts are with those taking part in the national meeting of Catholic associations which is taking place in Genoa, to prepare for the impending meeting of government leaders. In this way they wanted to fulfill the task I entrusted to young people at Tor Vergata: "You will not be resigned", I said, "to a world where other human beings die of hunger, remain

illiterate and have no work. You will defend life at every moment of its development; you will strive with all your strength to make this earth ever more liveable for all people".

I join the Bishops of Liguria [the area around Genoa] who, in a recent letter addressed to the faithful, express the urgent need to reawaken a sense of the urgent need for a new "morality" in everyone, "beginning with those responsible for public administration". The need becomes more urgent when one considers the serious, and even tragic, problems in the economic/financial, health, social, cultural, environmental and political orders.

In fact, faith cannot leave Christians indifferent to such issues of world importance. It incites them to challenge those responsible for politics and economics with a purposeful spirit, asking that the present process of globalization be firmly governed by the motive of the common good of citizens across the world, based on the indispensable requirements of justice and solidarity.

2. For this reason, the richest and technologically most advanced peoples, aware that God the Creator and Father wants to make humanity one family, must hear the cry of so many poor people of the world - they are simply asking for what is their sacrosanct right.

I would like to assure the leaders of government throughout the world and, in particular, those who will be meeting in Genoa, that the Church, along with people of good will, will do her utmost to ensure that the real winner in the process is going to be mankind. In fact, the common destination of earthly goods is a cornerstone of the Church's social teaching.

First of all, I ask Christians to pray particularly for government leaders. I urge leaders to work together to build a world attuned to the demands of justice and solidarity. Christians need a strong moral and spiritual education, an in-depth knowledge of

the Church's social doctrine and great love for Jesus Christ, redeemer of every human being and of the whole human person to be effective.

3. I am confident that on this occasion too, Italy will show her typical and exquisite hospitality to all who arrive in Genoa for the event, in an atmosphere of concord and serenity. Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to pour into the heart of each one sentiments of peace and solidarity, so that the coming meeting may help prepare mature decisions that will foster the good of all humanity.

Liturgical Guidelines on Cremation

EPISCOPAL COMMISSION ON LITURGY AND MINISTRY FOR LITURGICAL AFFAIRS (MANILA)

Circular No. 2001-51
September 18, 2001

In an Instruction dated May 8, 1963 the Holy Office permitted cremation as a legitimate mode of disposing the dead body of the faithful, provided the reason for choosing cremation does not stem from "a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church." The instruction recommends, however, that the practice of reverently burying the faithful departed should be preserved. The 1983 Code of Canon Law (can. 1176 #3) makes the same provision.

Although inhumation is still largely practiced in the Philippines, cremation has been constantly gaining acceptance, especially in urban areas where there are crematoriums. Reasons vary from practically, hygiene, economic conditions of the family, or personal choice of the departed. In recent years certain practices surrounding cremation have arisen that are not in accord with the mind of the Church. For this reason the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, with

the approval of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, lays down the following guidelines.

1. Cremation may take place after or before the funeral Mass.

2. When cremation is held after funeral Mass, the rite of final commendation and committal concludes the Mass. While cremation is taking place the family and friends of the deceased are encouraged to gather in prayer. A liturgy of the Word may be celebrated or devotional prayers like the holy rosary may be said. After cremation the ashes are placed in a worthy urn and carried reverently to the place of burial.

3. When cremation precedes the funeral Mass, the rite of the final commendation and committal may be performed in the crematorium chapel before cremation. After cremation the funeral Mass may be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. If funeral Mass is not celebrated, the funeral liturgy is held in the presence of the remains. The rite of final commendation and committal concludes the Mass or the funeral liturgy, if the rite has not taken place before cremation. Adaptations such as "remains" in place of "body" are made in the liturgical formularies.

4. The cremated remains should be buried in grave, mausoleum, or columbarium. The practice of scattering the ashes in the sea or from the air is not in keeping with the Church's norm regarding the proper disposal of the remains of the dead. Likewise the urn should not be kept permanently at home or family altar. If there is to be a delay in the proper disposal of the ashes, these may be kept temporarily in an appropriate place.

5. For the sake of reverence for the remains of the dead, it is recommended that in churches or chapels a worthy container be provided in which the urn is placed during the liturgical celebration.

6. Columbaria should not be constructed in the main body of the church but in a separate chapel adjacent to the church or in a crypt.

Homilies for January-February 2002

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

January 1, 2002

Mary, Mother of God

(Readings: Num 6:22-27/Gal 4:4-7/Lk 2:16-21)

Many times it may have happened to you that on stepping into a church to hear Mass, you come to know it is the feast of this or that saint because the priest has announced it so. I would not be surprised, therefore, if many people would not have been aware that on this first day of the year Catholics all over the world celebrate the solemn feast of Mary, Mother of God if it were not because they have stepped into the church for Mass and the priest had announced it so. The first day of the year had always been for them New Year's Day with the traditional noise-making, horn-tooting, fire-cracking, kettle-banging. This oversight can easily be excused because the solemn feast of Mary, Mother of God is relatively recent, some 25 years ago only, compared to her other

* The Homilies come from the book of Rev. Msgr. Mario Baltazar, OP entitled *Treasures: Old and New* (Homilies for everyday, 3 vols.)

feasts like Immaculate Conception, Presentation, Nativity, Assumption, Visitation, Annunciation.

Yet the belief, that Mary is the Mother of God, is as old as Christianity itself and its expression could be traced back to some passages in the New Testament like the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, the letter of Paul to the Galatians. But there was no formal, separate, exclusive feast celebrating that belief until the Second Vatican Council authorized it. What is more significant is that the Church set the celebration of this recent feast on the very first day of each year. If the Church can have her way, January 1 will be known and called not New Year's Day but the Day of Mary, Mother of God.

Now, we may ask why all this innovation, a new feast, and its scheduling this feast on the first day of the year? I am directing this question to the older Catholics not to the younger ones who may not have been aware of the changes but have taken them as a given fact. Was it because Mother Church wanted to put an embankment, a dike against the rising flood of disrespect to and violation of motherhood, marriage, conjugal fidelity, children's rights, sacredness of the human body and other related matters? Possibly. The fact-sheet and the bill of complaints are true.

But it will be more appropriate to say that we were given this new feast so that we can have a clearer understanding and appreciation of the person of Mary, her qualities and virtues, her role and participation in God's plan of salvation for mankind. And all this can be summarized in one statement: Mary is the Mother of God. What, how, why is Mary the Mother of God? To answer those questions we need to go back to the eternal counsels of the Blessed Trinity, then secret and impossible to know, but eventually made known to us through revelation in the holy bible and sacred tradition.

Accordingly, the Father had decided in his eternal love to send his Word, his Son to redeem mankind that had gone wayward. But the Son was to fulfill his task by "recapitulating" (Paul's expression), that is, by summarizing all mankind in himself. He needs, therefore, to have a human nature, a human body like us. Where will he get it? How, and who will give it to him? He could have created one right then and there when the time came. But then it would not be "recapitulating" mankind. It would be extrinsic, disconnected from mankind. So, an angel was sent from God to a virgin in the village of Nazareth, whose name is Mary. Would she want to be the Mother of God's Son? Would she consent to give him flesh from her flesh, blood from her blood, body from her body? Having been informed that the power of the Holy Spirit would overshadow and envelope her to produce the miracle of a virgin becoming a mother while remaining always a virgin, Mary gave this reply, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to his word."

And so Mary became, and is, and ever will be the Mother of God. With her motherhood went the duties and privileges of parenting and being parented by God, of educating and being educated by the Lord, of guiding and protecting her Son and being guided and protected by him, of giving and receiving companionship from him in this life's journey all the way through Calvary, the Mount of Ascension, to heaven where they are now still together, Mother and Son.

And because Jesus, to whom Mary gave his human nature, "recapitulates" all mankind in himself, thus Mary became the Mother of all men and women, especially the Christians, you and me. Her universal, spiritual motherhood has transferred to her the former duties she performed on earth for her Son, those of parenting, educating, guiding, protecting, accompanying all of them on their journey from this earth to heaven.

Significantly, the feast was set on the first day of the year January 1, as the "recapitulation" of all the other 364 days in a bid to express that the whole year and even our whole life have been entrusted to the protection and care of the Mother of God who is also our Mother.

January 1, 2002

Mary, Mother of God

Alternative homily

(Readings: Num 6:22-27/Gal 4:4-7/Lk 2:16-21)

Today we mark the first day of another year. It used to be called by various names: Octave of Christmas, feast of the Circumcision, feast of New Year. However, it seemed none of the foregoing names satisfied the modern Catholics. So, with the reform of the Church calendar of feasts, it is called today Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

I believe there is no spectacle more grandiose and more touching than that of a mother and child seen in mutual embrace. No words will be necessary for either of the two to express the intensity of love, the ecstasy of happiness, the union of lives, going on between them as they clutch one another in tight embrace.

This is the spectacle that comes before my eyes as we celebrate the feast of divine motherhood of Mary. I cannot think of Mary without thinking also of Jesus, and I cannot think of Jesus without thinking also of Mary, his mother. By acknowledging Mary's divine motherhood, we admit perforce that God really became man, took on the condition of a slave, and for a time led a life indistinguishable from other slaves, under the discipline of guardians as Paul says in today's second reading (Gal. 4).

He says further that God submitted to this kind of demotion so that he may promote us to the status of freedmen and sons/inheritors of God in such a way that, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we may address God with the sweet name of "Father, Our Father." Luke, in today's third reading (Chap. 2), also notes this self-humiliation of the Son of Mary by informing us that on the 8th day after birth, the child was circumcised to signify his subordination to the laws and traditions of the Hebrew race.

The Son of God, by condescending to become the son of a woman, has elevated Mary to the status of divine motherhood. One feels overwhelmed with the realization that Mary, a mere creature, could be and actually is the Mother of God. Here we have the case of a mother embracing her baby who is God, her God, and of God embracing his mother who is a mere creature. What a spectacle! It defies the imagination. What motherhood! It resists any definition.

God is wonderful in his work. Each motherhood is already a masterpiece in itself. Still God the consummate artist raises the motherhood of Mary into a super masterpiece never more to be equaled much less surpassed by any other motherhood now and forever.

We cannot expect similar care and exquisiteness from the hands of man. On the contrary, man (that includes male and female) seems bent on trivializing, if not denigrating, motherhood by encouraging liaisons without commitment and contraceptive practices along with abortions. Man wants to destroy the masterpieces of God.

Why does Mother Church invite us to look at Mary right at the beginning of a new year? She wants to present Mary as the model for our conduct throughout the year. She also believes that abundant blessings will come our way from Mary's Son. If the

pronouncements of blessing by the Old Testament priests are efficacious, as stated in the first reading (Numbers 6), how much greater blessings may we not expect from him who is the fruit of Mary's womb? Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

January 1, 2002

Mary, Mother of God

Alternative homily

(Readings: Num 6:22-27/Gal 4:4-7/Lk 2:16-21)

There is one custom that is practical around this time of the year, which I approve, but with certain reservations. It is relatively recent for I did not know it in my childhood, and therefore is sophisticated and highbrow. Things were simpler before. But, because it is a human custom it must be subject to critique and judicious assessment.

I am not talking about firecrackers, noise barrage, midnight revelries, party bashing, painting the town red and the like. I am referring to the custom of distributing calendars on or before New Year's Day. Calendars go in various sizes: pocket-calendars, desk-calendars, wall-calendars, and electronic-calendars. They are given away by friends, politicians, government offices, department stores, business companies and the like. They come in with different pictures depending on who the donors are and their purpose and intention in giving.

Some calendars are designed with great taste, and you feel proud to display them. Others, with poor taste or no taste at all, so you just keep them in the shelf or use them as wrappers. But most are done with sophistication. If the donor people are car dealers, expect a calendar with prominent pictures of automobiles,

racecars and state-of-the-art autos. If they are people connected with tourism expect a calendar with exquisite picture of places and buildings in the country or abroad. Other donors may not have any explicit intention expect to catch your attention to their business products, and so they give calendars with photos of beautiful women in various poses and diminishing stages of attire.

Whichever kind of pictures, they have been placed on the calendars with a hidden agenda: they want to make you think on the New Year and throughout about cars, about places to visit, or just about women. As the days pass by, you do not even pay attention to the pictures anymore but to the numbers below.

Mother Church has also a calendar to give away today, New Year's Day. But it is a special and unique one because it has neither numbers nor printed photos on it. It is meant to be of service not only during the year but also for one's lifetime. It is not accompanied by any image or copy or picture, but the reality itself, of the image, copy, picture you might imagine. On this first day of the year, Mother Church invites us to fix the eyes of our mind on Mary, the Mother of God. I deliberately said "to fix" because we should never take away our gaze of faith from her. The Mother of God has her real eyes fixed on us lovingly, concernedly, and permanently from the time it was said to her: "Woman, behold your son," and then to us it was said, "Son, behold your Mother."

In the calendar of our life, let us try to catch our Blessed Mother's gaze upon us (don't we always pray, "turn then most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy upon us"?) and having caught her gaze let us not for a moment remove our eyes from her, so that as banished children of Eve to her do we unceasingly cry, and to her we continuously send up our sighs.

Mary is the Mother of God because she conceived, gave birth, nurtured, protected, educated, accompanied Jesus who possesses divine nature and is Son of God. Although most of those functions are over, Mary continues to be the Mother of God because her love for him as a mother goes on now and forever. Another mother cannot substitute for this role of Mary to love her son as a mother. A mother's love for a son is his mother's love for him and not another woman's. It simply cannot be done by another. Mary is also the Mother of all men, especially the Christians, because we are members of the mystical body of Jesus. As such, Mary, in a spiritual way, continues to conceive, give birth, nurture, protect, educate, accompany and, above all, love each one of us coming into this world. In respect to us, Mary's motherly function of nurturing and caring is never over.

This is the reason why on this first day of the year the Church wants us to celebrate and greet Mary, Mother of God and also our Mother. Calendars are a useful tool to guide us throughout the year. But for myself, I want a calendar with a picture of Mary on it. If I do not get such, I look for one so as to be reminded I have a mother whose face I can contemplate, whose life I can imitate, whose assistance I can rely on, whose love I can always experience every time I want to find out what day of the week and month I am on.

January 6, 2002

Epiphany

(Readings: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3, 5-6/Mt 2:1-12)

In some countries, children await the feast of Three Kings more eagerly than Christmas itself because they get more gifts on that day than on Christmas day. In most countries, however, Three Kings day is the anti-climax, the curtain call, the finis to the

wonderful season of Christmas. The fever of excitement, the pace of activities, the pitch of expectation gradually settle down and announce the resumption of normal life and the daily grind of work and duty.

Of course, all talk about the barometer of the Christmas season, the ups and downs, the heat and the cooling, the intensification and normalization of feelings and activities, pertains to the social, external and temporary aspects of its celebration. We need to go deeper into the meaning of Christmas and the other feasts related to it. We have to listen to its religious message.

For example, what message does the feast of Three Kings convey to us? What is its religious meaning? That's about all anyway that remains to this feast nowadays. Some of us, of the older generation, can still remember when Three Kings was celebrated on the fixed day of January 6 when we had to go to Mass just as on any holy day of obligation. But its joy began even before we went to church, right there at home when on rising from sleep we scampered to the window sill to see what the Three Kings had inserted into our shoes which we left there expectantly the night before.

Today, few people would go to church on January 6 unless it coincided with a Sunday. That is why the liturgy has transferred the celebration of Three Kings to the Sunday next to New Year's Day. The beautiful custom of giving gifts to children on Three Kings has disappeared mercifully for the harried parents especially during these times of financial difficulties. What is left of it is its religious message.

Mother Church brings together three readings that can help us grasp the religious meaning of today's feast. Of these readings, the first and the third are related to each other as prediction and fulfillment. The second reading, meanwhile, gives the theological

explanation for both. Let us then ask ourselves the following questions: What was Isaiah's purpose (first reading) in predicting that Jerusalem, God's city, will experience great joy and satisfaction in beholding an endless stream of visitors coming from far places to bring to it their gifts of homage and goodwill? Why did Matthew (third reading) take care to record in his gospel the particular event of the visit of Three Wise Men to Bethlehem? Was it not to prove that what Isaiah predicted about Christ was in substance fulfilled by this visit?

Above all, what importance has this visit, predicted by Isaiah and fulfilled according to Matthew's gospel, for our lives anyway? In his letter to the Ephesians (second reading), St. Paul clinches for us the answers to all the above questions. He gives, as I hinted earlier, the theological explanation to the feast of Three Kings. He calls it a divine secret, a hidden plan of God, the knowledge of which Paul personally considered as a grace coming his way. Actually, God's secret (whatever it was) is a grace, a gift for all men.

This secret plan of God, now revealed through Paul is that all men, irrespective of race, origin, status and culture, have equal chances and opportunities to share in God's blessings, promises, inheritance and happiness. It is one thing is to be offered equal opportunities, and another thing is to actually avail oneself, to take advantage of those opportunities. We already have the former; let us do the latter.

January 6, 2002

Epiphany

Alternative homily

(Readings: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3, 5-6/ Mt 2:1-12)

The "popular" and the "official" names given to the feast we are celebrating today can increase our understanding of the faith and the role we, as believers, are supposed to play. First, the "popular" names. They are various and originate from the perceptive interpretation of the people, hence the term "popular". Feast of the Three Kings is one, Feast of the Magi is another, Feast of the Three Wise Men is a third.

They are all acceptable titles, and have foundation on the data supplied by Matthew's story in the third reading. Hence, those visitors from the East were at the same time kings, magis and wise men who, guided by a star, came to worship the baby born to be the King of the Jews. The lesson we can draw from these popular designations of the feast is that all dignities, ranks, authorities, wisdom and knowledge must recognize and serve the one and only true King and Messiah - Jesus Christ our Lord.

The popular titles, however attractive and exciting they sound, have the inconvenience that they may carry us too far in paying more attention to the persons of the three kings rather to the person of Jesus; for we ask what their names were, whether they rode on camels or horses, how they were dressed, which was their country, etc. Hence, an "official" title of the feast, originating from the teaching authority of the Church, is needed to create a balance.

The "official" title is Epiphany of the Lord. The word is unexciting and strange to you, but translated, it simply means Revelation of the Lord. The assumption is that the Lord or some aspect of himself is hidden, and it takes a revelation to bring into evidence and knowledge that which is hidden. The official title of today's feast, therefore, focuses our attention upon God. He is hidden or some aspect of him. Our curiosity is aroused, our attention is called. We like to know this hidden thing about God. Fortunately, there is a revelation, an epiphany that makes evident the hidden things about God.

Paul in Eph. 3 (second reading) is particularly helpful. He admits that there existed from the beginning of history, a hidden truth, a secret. It was only in Paul's time or thereabouts that this secret, this hidden truth was to be brought to light. But what overwhelmed Paul was his realization that God has chosen him to reveal and make known this secret. What was this secret?

It was God's plan of salvation, initially promised to the Hebrews but in which Gentiles would equally participate and share. Briefly, no one, whatever his color or background, is excluded from God's plan to save. This truth is corroborated in the third reading by Matthew's story of the magi-kings who were non-Hebrews.

Likewise, Isaiah 60 (first reading) foresaw the epiphany or revelation of this hidden truth. He composed a splendid piece of literature intended to be sung joyously to celebrate the changed fortune of Jerusalem. No longer the accursed city, the desolate mother, Jerusalem recovers her original glory because of the indwelling God, and a multitude of foreigners (i.e. Gentiles) streams towards her, along with her returning children (i.e. Hebrews), bringing gifts and riches to her.

Thus, biblical literature, our three readings today, affirms the universality of salvation by stating that Hebrews and Gentiles (a scriptural distinction comprising all humanity) will be reconciled and saved under the one kingship of Jesus. If that distinction doesn't please you, we have this other one (the poor and the rich) which while also comprising all of humanity today, has a basis on biblical data.

The shepherds of Bethlehem were poor people. The kings from the East were rich people. Both shepherds and kings acknowledged and worshipped the Savior Jesus. So, poor or rich, we are all included in God's plan of salvation. Our role is to share this discovered truth with our poor or rich contemporaries, just as the shepherds and kings had done in their time.

The poor will perhaps seek salvation from their poverty through programs and actions that do not take Jesus into account. The rich will perhaps feel they don't need salvation through anyone since they believe they can take care of themselves. Both attitudes are mistaken. Let us proclaim that everyone needs salvation coming from Jesus. That is what he was sent for into our world; that is why he was called by the name Jesus which means: "God saves"; that's the reason why we are celebrating today the Epiphany of the Lord.

January 6, 2002

Epiphany

Alternative homily

(Readings: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3, 5-6/Mt 2:1-12)

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, the popular and official names given to the feast we are celebrating today, can increase our understanding of the faith and the role we are supposed to play as Christians.

What are the popular names? They are various and they originated from the perceptive interpretation of the people. Hence, the term "popular". Some of the names are: Feast of the Three Kings, Feast of the Magi, and Feast of the three Wise Men.

They are all acceptable titles and leave foundation on the data supplied by Matthew's story you have listened to in the third reading. Therefore, those visitors from the East are at the same time kings, Magi and Wise Men who, guided by a star, came to worship the baby born to be the King of the Jews.

The lesson we can draw from these popular designations of today's feast is that all dignities, ranks, authorities, wisdom and knowledge, in whatever place and degree we exercise them, should acknowledge and serve the only true King and Messiah, which is Jesus Christ.

The popular titles, however attractive and exciting they may sound, have the inconvenience that they may carry us too far in paying more attention to the personalities of the Three Kings rather than to the person of Jesus. We ask what their names were, whether they rode in camels or horses, how they were dressed, which was their country and so forth.

Hence, an official title of the feast, originating from the teaching authority of the Church, is needed to create a balance. And the official title is the Epiphany of the Lord.

The word is unexciting and strange to many of you, but translated, it simply means the Revelation of the Lord. The assumption is that the Lord or some aspect of Himself is hidden from us and it takes a revelation to bring to evidence that which is hidden.

So, thanks to its official title, today's feast focuses our attention upon God. He is hidden or some aspects of Him. Our curiosity is aroused. Our attention is called. Fortunately, there is a revelation, an epiphany that brings to evidence the hidden thing about God.

Mother Church facilitates the revelation by bringing to our consideration the three bible readings of today's feast. Paul, in Ephesians 3 (the second reading) is particularly instructive.

He admits that there existed a secret, a hidden truth from the beginning of human history, in fact, from all eternity, and it was only in Paul's time or thereabouts that the secret, the hidden truth, was brought to light. What really overwhelmed Paul was the realization that God chose him to reveal and make known this secret.

What was this secret, this hidden truth? It was God's plan of salvation, initially promised to the Hebrew race, but which Jews

and Gentiles equally are to participate and share in. In other words, no one, whatever is her color, race, status and background, is excluded from God's plan to save all human beings.

Today's three readings affirm the universality of salvation from God by stating that Jews and Gentiles (an old distinction that comprises all humanity) will be reconciled and saved under the one kingship of Jesus. If that distinction does not suffice, we have another (the poor and the rich) which while comprising all of humanity, has also a basis on biblical data.

The shepherds of Bethlehem were poor people. The kings from the East were rich people. Both shepherds and kings acknowledge and worshipped Jesus. So, whether poor or rich, we all are included in God's plan of salvation. Our role is to share this discovered truth with our poor and rich brethren, just as the shepherds and the Three Kings had done in their time.

But above all, we must assure ourselves that we, too, participate and share in God's salvation by surrendering, in spirit and in truth, all that we are and have, to his Son, the Messiah and the Christ. That was the very thing that the Three Wise Men did when they offered their gifts, and adored Jesus after finding him.

January 6, 2002

Epiphany

Alternative homily

(Readings: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3, 5-6/Mt 2:1-12)

If you tell your child that we are celebrating today the feast of Epiphany, he/she might give you a strange look. But if you tell him that today is feast of the Three Kings or the Magi from the East, then his/her eyes will shine with glee and perhaps also

with expectation that you have not forgotten to put some gifts in their stockings or shoes, a custom that existed a generation or two ago. You and I are all familiar with the story of the Three Kings or Magi, and we love to hear it re-told at this time of the year.

There is no story of the Magi without the mention of a star, if only to say that their profession is precisely to study the stars. Star-gazing, as well as astrology and astronomy, are not hobbies or professions of modern times. They are as old as our Magi in the story, and even older. Stars have always attracted the attention and wonder of peoples, young and old, modern and ancient. When you were all children, were you not taught to learn and sing the song, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are"? A star is not only like a diamond in the sky, as the song beautifully says, but also like a window through which, from this vast but dark world below, we can peep into the bright, happy, eternal kingdom of God beyond.

Unfortunately, we can't reach a star to look through it into the enchanted kingdom hidden beyond. Should we then give up? Would there be another way open to us? Could it be by hitching our wagon to a star, as one favorite expression goes? But it has to be a special star if one desires to get far. In the inspired book of Numbers 24:17, it was predicted, "A star will come out of Jacob." Then in Revelation, the last book of the Bible, it is written, "I, Jesus, ... am the Root and the Offspring of David, and (I am) the bright morning star." In that Twinkle, Twinkle song you have asked, "Little star, how I wonder what you are." The books of Numbers and Revelation have given you the reply; Jesus, the Messiah, is the star that came out of Jacob, the bright morning star descended from King David.

We now have the necessary backgrounder to talk more seriously and theologically about the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. Let us accept the name, although it sounds intimidating

coming from Greek for it explains why only Matthew recorded in his gospel the story of the Magi or Kings from the East. They studied the vast heavens for signs and meanings. On discovering a special star, they knew it signified and meant for them the birth of a new King of the Jews who will offer both Jews and Gentiles eternal salvation. It was, therefore, through a star that God manifested himself to the Gentiles. Such manifestation, through meaningful signs, is called epiphany.

In one of his letters, John says God will manifest himself to us when we see him face to face. That will be the clearest and greatest manifestation or epiphany of himself. But that is reserved for the next life, not for this life. No one can see God and continue to live on this earth. Still, God can manifest himself otherwise by means of signs such as through this created universe, through his powerful works of miracles, through the sacraments especially the Eucharist but above all in the person of Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God, the very imprint of divinity (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

So it was that through a star, through this created jewel, a diamond placed in the sky, God manifested himself to the Magi. It kept on guiding them until they reached finally Bethlehem, and there they saw the infant Jesus, the living star, that bright Morning Star that came out from Jacob and Offspring of David. It was the greatest Manifestation or Epiphany of God possible for them and for us mortals walking on earth. It is an initial reward that is offered to each and all those who study and look for signs of God's epiphanies, as the Magi had been doing, and to those who keep those signs in their hearts to ponder over them, like Mary and Joseph did. The definitive reward will be given them in the next life when we will see God face to face in his clearest manifestation.

Isaiah, in today's first reading, keeps alive in our hearts the desire to see God with words like these, "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you... Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow."

January 13, 2002

Baptism of the Lord

Cycle A

(Readings: Is 42:1-4, 6-7/Acts 10:34-38/Mt 3:13-17)

It is connatural, I believe, that today's feast of the Lord's Baptism would pull in its train reflection on the sacrament of baptism. Surely, when Jesus sought to be baptized, it was not because he felt a need for it or expected to receive an advantage from it. That was why John the Baptizer was the most surprised person in the world when Jesus went to him to receive baptism. "It is I who need more to be baptized by you; yet you come to me!" he said in perplexity.

Rather, the Lord's Baptism serves to invite us to contemplate the author and origin of our individual baptisms, and to throw light upon the significance and value of the sacrament of baptism for Christians. Today's bible readings help us achieve the purpose and objective of today's feast. However, I would like to share with you my humble understanding of this matter.

I am not about to say anything earth-shaking or revolutionary about baptism. But I wish it will shake your senses and revolutionize your attitude towards one of the commonest teachings of our Catholic faith. I refer to the seed of vocation to the priesthood implanted by God in every Christian soul at the moment of baptism.

Vocation is a very biblical term. We find it frequently used in several books of the Old Testament. Thus, for example, God called the universe into existence; God called Abraham into Palestine; God called Moses from the burning bush; God called Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the rest of the prophets to be his servants and spokesmen; God called David from pasturing sheep to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. And so many other instances that can be recalled.

But the use of the term "vocation" is more completely developed in the New Testament, especially in a passage of 1 Peter 2: 4-10. Briefly "vocation" means a call, by means of a word (mentally or verbally), and someone is called for a definite purpose, is he not?

We have it from Peter, cited above, that God called all of us to serve as holy priests to offer spiritual sacrifices to him. We have it also from the Second Vatican Council that this vocation, this call is uttered to every Christian soul at the moment of his/her baptism. Isaiah, in today's first reading, assures us that the word of God, by means of which he calls a soul, is by itself powerful and efficacious. On the other hand, in his speech to Cornelius and his household, as we heard in the second reading, St. Peter assumes that the soul must cooperate and create conditions to make the word fruitful in his/her particular case.

Not everyone is expected to become priests, and start celebrating Masses and hear confessions. Vatican II distinguishes two kinds of priesthood, different not only in degree but in nature: the common or general priesthood, which has its basis in the sacrament of baptism, and the ministerial priesthood grounded in the sacrament of holy orders. One may be called to the holy orders, another to the religious or consecrated life of celibacy. But all of us, by virtue of baptism, possess the general priesthood, and is the ground and basis for all those other callings.

Whichever Christian lifestyle we may be called, whether to that of the holy orders or to the consecrated life of celibacy or to that of holy matrimony, we all have the duty to cooperate and promote the grace of baptism, to develop it and bring it to its flowering and crown which is none other than holiness. Thus, we can say that we have lived worthily according to our calling.

Abraham's call is the first biblically attested call made by God. Why do you think God called him out of Mesopotamia to come over to the land of Canaan when he was already seventy-five years old? Was it to let Abraham see the land he would promise to give to him and his descendants in perpetuity? In chapter 17, verse 1 of the book of Genesis, it says that God appeared to Abraham and told him, "Walk in my presence, and be perfect." It is because God wants men/women to become perfect and holy, just as he is perfect and holy, that he issues his call. The grace of baptism given and received by us is a call to a life of perfection and holiness.

January 20, 2002

Feast of Santo Nino

Cycle A

(Readings: Is 9:1-6/Eph 1:3-6, 15-18/Mt 18:1-5, 10)

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, today the Catholic Church in the Philippines celebrates the feast of the Sto. Nino. Around the time of Christmas, the holy childhood of Jesus our Lord has already been marked joyously by all countries including ours.

A brief explanation seems in good order, to justify the apparent repetition. Christianity's introduction into the Philippines is associated with an image of the Sto. Nino which Ferdinand Magellan gave as gift to Cebu's chieftain Humabon and his wife,

Joanna, on the occasion of their baptism. This took place in the month of January 1521.

Wherefore, the Philippine bishops decided to commemorate on every third Sunday of January, the Feast of the Sto. Nino to highlight the religious significance of that event. From Cebu, the devotion to the Sto. Nino spread rapidly to the farthest corners of the country.

It is the religious significance of childhood, however, that we would like to emphasize now. Let us start by stating the obvious. There is nothing so lovable in all creation than a little child. There is nothing so irresistibly attractive than the smile and laughter of a child. Looking at a child, any child, one is convinced of the existence of the unseen God, more sweepingly than all the rational arguments one can put together.

By holding the hand or fingers of a child, one can feel the providence of the invisible God who rules the forces of the universe and guides the destinies of men and women.

Hence, it is some kind of sacrilege to subject children to starvation, prostitution, exploitation, manipulation and corruption presently being done in massive scale, according to reports from the four corners of the globe. Such practices are a violence of the image of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus sounds a warning not to despise children nor cause them to lose faith in him. Their guardian angels are always in the presence of the heavenly Father. Jesus himself felt attracted towards the children, embraced and blessed them, and proclaimed that children are the rightful citizens of the kingdom of God.

Little boys and little girls, listen to this. Jesus has made heaven for your inheritance. You are its rightful owners. If you

ask why, it is because Jesus loves you. And he would not permit anyone else to enter it unless they are like you, humble, trusting, simple and obedient.

Little children, you hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Tell your elders, your parents, all the grown-ups, and all the important peoples, tell the whole world to imitate your humility, your trustfulness, your simplicity and obedience so that you can open the gates of heaven for them. Pray for them so that they may have the courage to change and become like you.

To the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, we say this. We do not exaggerate when I speak like this to the children. We are just repeating the teaching of Christ in today's gospel and similar passages. When his ambitious disciples asked him to arbitrate who would be the greatest among them in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus took a child and set it in front of them and solemnly stated. "You quarrel among yourselves as to who would become the greatest in my Father's kingdom. I tell you, you cannot even enter into heaven unless you change and become like this little child (Mt 18:1-5). For the kingdom of heaven belongs, I repeat, the kingdom of heaven belongs only to such as this little one (Mt 19:13-15).

Dear brethren, we have arrived at this conclusion because I invited you to reflect on the religious significance of childhood, of any childhood, of the face, the smile, the laughter, the hand or fingers of a child. What if we contemplate the face, the smile, the hand of the very Holy Child itself? Today's feast of the Sto. Nino invites us to do just that.

Today's two other bible readings summarize for us all the good things that have come our way because God the Father had decreed to give us his Son in the form of a man, nay, a child.

Isaiah 9 (first reading) celebrates with us the fact that "a child is born to us; a son is given to us! And Paul (Eph. 1, second reading) ecstatically bids us" to praise and give thanks to God for giving us every spiritual blessing (there is to give) in the heavenly world through Christ and in union with Christ.

Lord Jesus, help all of us to imitate the virtues of your holy childhood so that we too can inherit your kingdom and share in your happiness.

January 27, 2002

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Is 8:23-9:3/1 Cor 1:10-13, 17/Mt 4:12-23)

The three bible readings that Holy Mother Church has offered to us today for reflection and meditation is somehow a study of human nature with all the strength and weakness that it possesses. Since each of us carries not angelic, not animal but the human nature, we should find the three bible readings interesting and profitable.

For they point out to us the source of our strengths and the remedy to our weaknesses, namely Jesus Christ our Lord. The conclusion we should draw from reflecting and meditating on the readings would be as follows: standing in need of strength for any activity or purpose in mind, and aware of the many weaknesses we have to overcome, we must resolve to be with Jesus and go along with him all the time.

Our situation is not much different from that of the gentiles that Isaiah described long ago in the first reading, nor that of the early Christians which Paul reported many ages back in the second reading. Although a good number of centuries separate us from them, it is the human nature they and we possess in common that created the situations.

Isaiah spoke of human situation where darkness and oppression were prevailing. Paul reported a human situation where quarrels, partisanship, and disunity were abounding. Certainly, these conditions enumerated by Isaiah and Paul were not something one can be proud of. Now, tell me if these conditions do not exist also in our present societies, communities, associations, families?

Then, has humankind not progressed over the centuries? In science and technology, yes. In human values and character building, much is to be desired. We have been stubbornly remiss to apply the remedy to our human weaknesses, and we have been miserly to summon necessary courage to seek and remain by the source that can sustain and add to our strong points along the lines of the three bible readings.

Jesus Christ is the paramount cure and inexhaustible source of strength for individuals and peoples. Whoever does not remain with him, that individual or people will fall hostage to human weaknesses and become beggars in strength of character.

Not all accept Jesus. But those who welcome and receive him will see a great light and will experience a great joy, as Matthew and Isaiah stated in their writings. After being enlightened and strengthened by him, we are then called to join him in the task of spreading the good news of God's kingdom and bringing comfort and healing to the needy.

Christ told his disciples that they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. He is telling the same thing to us, his disciples of the present time. No matter what our occupations are (farmers, fishermen, artisans, government employees, traders, professionals, legislators), we are all called to join Christ in spreading his message of repentance and salvation. That was how and why Jesus called for himself Simon Peter, Andrew, James and

John, Matthew and Paul and the rest of the apostles, who came from different backgrounds.

In other words, we must become what is currently said in church circles: an evangelized and evangelizing community, family and society - one that has received the Good News and is able to spread it around. To count oneself out from this task, on the ground that one does not have the ability, can only mean that he/she has not understood the Good News of God's Kingdom nor taken sufficient care to be evangelized.

Spreading the Good News can take different forms according to the talent and inclination of each individual, family, group or community. A very simple way of doing it is what Paul recommends in today's second reading (something that our present society is much in great need of); it is for a community to observe unity in mind and heart, avoiding quarrels, dissension and partisanship. A united and caring community is an eloquent sermon, better than what a priest can deliver, to convince men/women to repent of their wrongdoing and to accept God's rule in their lives.

February 3, 2002

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13/1 Cor 1:26-31/Mt 5:1-12)

Beloved brethren in Jesus Christ, here's a question for you to answer. To whom does the Kingdom of God belong? Of course, it belongs to God, you will reply. But aside from him, to whom else does God reserve his kingdom? We got an answer to this last Sunday, when we heard Jesus say that His Father's kingdom belongs to little children and to others who have similar attitude and qualities.

The same question also is being posed to us on this Sunday. And substantially, the same answer is being given by today's three bible readings. However, there is a slight difference in that the answers are so worded that they jolt and surprise our accustomed way of thinking and acting in the pursuit of happiness.

The prophet Zephaniah, in the first reading, says that God reserves his Kingdom for the poor and lowly. This teaching has the concurrence of other prophets and writers of the Old Testament. If we move on to the books of the New Testament, we meet the same teaching.

St. Paul, in the second reading of today's Mass, pointedly says that God chooses with deliberation those whom the world considers ignorant, weak, small fry to be the inheritors of His kingdom.

Surprising as these affirmations of Zephaniah and Paul are by themselves, the statements of Jesus in the third reading puzzle our minds and startle our hearts even more. Should we take Jesus' statements seriously and to the letter? Is there happiness in being poor? Are they happy who are shedding bitter tears? Are they blessed who depend on meager income and fragile livelihood? Is there happiness in being slandered, insulted, persecuted?

Is it not the other way round? If you are rich and feel secure, respected and envied for your money, if you are powerful with a large following, do you not feel more happy? If this is not true, then why do most people strive to get rich, to store up for the future, to become popular, influential and powerful?

Yet, the words of Jesus are there for your hearing. Words hard as rock, ineradicable, perpetual. Happy are the poor in truth and in spirit, he says. Happy are those who are full of sorrows. Happy are the lowly and poor in regards to holdings. Happy are those who are despised by others. When Jesus says all these, He

speaks from personal experience. For He too led a poor, lowly, humble and persecuted life.

Today's biblical teaching is not a condemnation of wealth, prosperity, development and progress as such. They are condemnable if they are sought as the ultimate good of human beings wherein they can repose their final happiness, especially if and when those are gained through unjust means. That would aggravate the matter more.

Hence, such is the choice left to Christians that if one is, for example, a Makati businessman or a Forbes Park resident, one should live with as much freedom from material attachment as would lahar evacuees or squatter families. For Jesus never had declared happy and blessed the rich or those who are successful and famous.

Happiness is gained by possessing God's kingdom, in hope or in fact. That is according to the bible. God is offering and giving His Kingdom to the poor, the lowly and the humble. We have to appropriate for ourselves the simple attitude, feelings and experiences of the poor, the lowly and the humble.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus is proposing to all men/women whether rich or poor to seek the Kingdom of God, over and above what the world is offering in terms of wealth, fame and power. These, at best, are temporal but slippery; at worst they bring anxiety and spiritual ruin. They cannot be relied upon with absolute security.

The case is different with the kingdom of God, which however requires lively faith and proper dispositions to attain it. Jesus refers to them when he says, happy are the poor, the lowly, the humble, the meek, the single-hearted and so forth. Such people as these are the ones who place their reliance on God above all. And on his part, God will not fail them. What is more, God loves them dearly.

This is the Good News that God brings to all: that God loves and cares for those who put their reliance on Him. For this reason, Jesus declares them happy and blessed.

Lord Jesus, you who are meek and humble of heart. Teach us to be like you so that we may attain the true and eternal happiness, which you promised to the poor, the lowly, and the humble of heart. Amen.

February 3, 2002

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cyck A

Alternative homily

(Readings: Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13/1 Cor 1:26-31/Mt 5:1-12)

Through the bible readings of last Sunday, God called for repentance and acceptance of the Good News of his kingdom. The prophet Isaiah and St. Paul gave ample information concerning it by describing what happens to men when they do not accept God's kingdom. They will be under the tyranny of darkness and oppression, under the sway of quarrels, dissensions and factionalism. By contrast, in God's kingdom there is light and liberty, there prevail unity, consensus and the common good.

Through the bible readings of this Sunday, God goes beyond urging people to accept his Kingdom. He tells who he has chosen to give it as their reward. Who then? If you did not bother to find the answer to that question while listening to the readings, then prepare yourselves for surprises as God gives his reply.

The prophet Zephaniah, in today's first reading, says that God has reserved his kingdom for the poor and the lowly. This teaching has the concurrence of other prophets and writers in the Old Testament. When we move on to the books of the New Testament, we find the same teaching. In today's second reading, St. Paul

affirms pointedly that God has chosen with full deliberation as the inheritors of his kingdom those whom the world considers ignorant, weak, small fries.

Surprising as these affirmations of Zephaniah and St. Paul are by themselves, the statements of Jesus, in the third reading, are even more puzzling and scary, to say the least. Should we take his statements seriously and to the letter? Is there happiness in being poor? Are they happy who are shedding bitter tears? Are they blessed who depend on meager and fragile livelihood? Is there happiness in being persecuted, insulted and slandered?

Is it not the other way round? If you are rich, feel secure, if you are respected and envied by others, if you have a large following and are adulated, idolized, don't you feel more happy? If this is not true, why then do most people strive to get rich, the poor to become wealthy, the rich to become richer?

Yet, the words of Jesus are there! Hard as rock, undeniable as fact, brilliant as truth. Happy are the poor in spirit and in truth. Happy are those who are burdened with sorrows. Happy are the lowly and with small holdings. Happy are those who are despised by others. When Jesus says this, he speaks from experience. For he, too, led a poor, humble and persecuted life. Yet he was a happy person.

Today's biblical teaching is not a condemnation of wealth, prosperity and progress as such. They deserve to be condemned if they are sought as the ultimate good of men wherein to repose their final happiness. More condemnable they would be if they have been gained through unjust means. On the other hand, neither is the biblical teaching a canonization of a life of squalor, laziness and abject dependency. Jesus had friends who were rich and also who were of modest means.

Perhaps to remove some of the sting from his statements, if that were necessary, it might be contended that such people as the poor, the meek, the sorrowing, the persecuted are happy in the sense that they will receive a future reward in heaven. That sounds like offering a pie in the sky, as goes a saying critical of religion. Admittedly, Jesus uses the future tense six times in this passage. For sure, the full compensation of a loyal but disadvantaged follower of Jesus is reserved in heaven. But we should mark that the first and the last statements of Jesus have the present tense: blessed are the poor for God's kingdom is theirs; blessed are the persecuted for God's kingdom is theirs. They possess now, not tomorrow or in the future, God's kingdom. How happy they are. They can cry for joy.

We all recall what Jesus declared to his townmates of Nazareth. Reading from the book of Isaiah on one Sabbath in their synagogue, he claimed he was sent for the sake of the poor, the lowly, the broken-hearted, the captives, the prisoners, the deeply indebted - in short, the needy among the people. He not only broke the bread of doctrine but also the real bread to feed the hungry; he healed souls and bodies; cured the lepers, the sick, the deaf, the blind. All the needy, in whatever form or manner, who put their trust in the Lord are blessed, are happy because they know God cares for them. They are already tasting in advance God's kingdom. What Jesus did for them during his earthly life, he expects his church, his followers to emulate and to continue according to their means.

February 10, 2002

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Is 58:7-10/1 Cor 2:1-5/Mt 5:13-16)

God offers his kingdom to the poor. That was the teaching of last Sunday's three bible readings. I would like to believe that all of us have welcomed his offer seriously and gratefully. Besides, coming generally from modest or really poor background, we enjoy an advantage over others in qualifying for God's kingdom. Those who dream of getting rich by all means, and the rich who crave to still be richer, certainly have other agenda in mind than that of working to gain God's kingdom.

This Sunday's three bible readings, in turn, show us God's expectations from those who have accepted his offer. They are supposed to become the salt of the earth, the light of the world (third reading, gospel of Matthew). Hence, instead of retreating from the world's affairs, the children of the kingdom should be present where the action is, as the saying goes. Their presence is as necessary and pervasive to human affairs, as salt and light are necessary household items of general use.

However, the intervention of Christians in world affairs should not result in their getting entangled and messed up. But they are those in the midst of the world as salt and light: to add flavor to life if this is turning insipid; to light up the way, if darkness threatens to take over. This is the role in the world of the children of God's kingdom.

There is then no question of two separate planes or floor levels: one up there, and the other down here. One to be attended to on Sundays, and the other, on the rest of the week. Let us not create an artificial barrier between the concerns of God's kingdom and the affairs of men in the world, as if God would be pleased if we leave the affairs of this world in the hands of worldly men.

The message of the first reading (book of Isaiah) assures us of winning God's favor, if we pay attention precisely to such

mundane things like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and giving shelter to the homeless. Hence, those who work towards the improvement of food production, of domestic incomes, of housing projects and the like, so that the beneficiaries may give glory to God, are really spreading the good news of his kingdom.

Similarly, again according to the first reading, it is a furtherance of God's kingdom to work for the removal of the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice that are weighing heavily on others. I am not thinking particularly of oppressions and injustices being committed in big scale and shameless manner in some parts of the world, although a sizeable quota of these things do happen in our own, supposedly Christian country. God spare us from kidnappers, swindlers, rapists, sex-ploiters, landgrabbers, drug-pushers, extortionists, profiteers, robbers and other criminals who make life miserable to many of our countrymen.

But I am thinking also of the petty oppressions and injustices occurring in the private confines of the home, in the tiny neighborhood, in the relationships turned sour between husbands and wives, parents and children, relatives and in-laws. Is it lesser oppression to be boxed or beaten by your husband than by a gangster? Is it lesser injustice to be cheated by a relative than by a professional swindler?

How do we become effective announcers of God's kingdom, inasmuch as God has assigned us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Paul shows us the way in the second reading (first letter to the Corinthians). While staying and working with his fellowmen he claims to have no other knowledge except Jesus the crucified Messiah or Christ. Not that Paul was an ignoramus, uneducated, unschooled. His writings attest to his deep learning and broad culture. But there comes a time in one's life when one likes to forget everything except Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for our salvation.

When one reaches that stage, he/she opens up to receive God's kingdom without obstruction or distraction. But before one can try convincing others successfully of the desirability of God's kingdom, one must first convince himself/herself to possess it under God's own terms and conditions. This can be summed up in what Paul forced himself to do: to have no other knowledge, to forget everything except Jesus Christ. This in essence, is what is meant by being poor in spirit whom God declares happy, for to him belongs the kingdom of heaven.

February 17, 2002

First Sunday of Lent

Cycle A

(Readings: Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7/Rom 5:12-19/Mt 4:1-11)

The three bible readings that Mother Church gives us today to reflect on are a study of human nature and of the history of mankind. Knowledge of human nature explains why the history of mankind developed the way it did. And understanding of the history of mankind sheds light on the mystery of human nature.

Thus, we are being nourished with a solid fare that befits mature Christians, especially during this season of Lent which invites all of us to give more time and thought on the important issues that affect our eternal destiny.

To be sure, the study of human nature and history of humankind, as facilitated to us by Genesis (first reading) produces an initial reaction of dismay and pessimism upon the listeners, including myself. One cannot help but tell with a heavy sigh how such a promising start enjoyed by Adam and Eve, our first parents, was spoiled and wasted with disastrous effects on all succeeding generations of mankind.

Disappointed with the narrative related by the first reading, one is tempted to ask many questions. Example, why did God

make the destiny of an entire humanity dependent on the act of just one man? Should not each man answer for his own actions only? Why involve the rest of mankind, still inexistent for that matter, in the sin of disobedience of the first couple?

Here are more objections. Why put man to a test by planting, first, a tree of the knowledge of good and bad, then, putting it on the center of the Garden of Paradise for all to see, finally, forbidding our first parents from eating of its fruits? Was not that a positive inducement to committing sin, and not only a passive kind of temptation? Why were Adam and Eve not left alone to care for the garden and to eat whatever they like without having to worry about keeping a certain commandment concerning a certain tree which could have been planted in the outskirts of Paradise?

Certainly, these are all speculative questions which can never change the fact that our first parents committed a sin and brought us all under the curse of that sin. Besides, in asking this kind of questions, are we not sounding like the devil himself who told the woman with satanic malice, "Oh no, you certainly will not die if you eat of that fruit. God knows that if you do eat, you will become like him knowing what is good and what is bad. He is just being selfish, not wanting anybody to be like him."

Right after the fall, the woman, the man, the devil began putting all the blame on God. Nothing new ever happened after the "celebrated" affair of Paradise. Since then, men and women tend to blame God if something goes wrong in the world he created, as if the goodness and love he showed when creating mankind were the very reason for its downfall. If there is anything very unfair that we can think of, it is this: that a creature should lecture to its creator for having loved it so much.

In the third reading (gospel of Matthew), Mother Church presents us with a "study in contrast" by bringing up another temptation story. It is the same devil who tries to trick another man into setting himself over against God. The devil uses the same strategy as with the first man: to instill a feeling of independence and equality with God. This time, however, the strategy did not work, for Jesus re-affirmed man's dependence and subordination to God. In Jesus, we find man lecturing to Satan and his minions that God's Word is real food aside from bread; that reverence for God is real protection than human presumption; that worship of God is much more of infinite value than all the riches and kingdoms of this world.

If the Genesis story of the temptation and fall of the first man, Adam, had unwittingly caused in us a feeling of dismay and pessimism, not so is Paul's doctrinal presentation (in the second reading) of the obedience and gift of grace of the other man, Jesus. Here, there is absolutely no pessimism, no dismay, but positive thinking and infectious optimism.

Paul's reasoning is as follows. Death has spread to the whole human race because of one man's disobedience. But God's free gift of grace is offered to all without exception through the obedience of another man. God's gift of grace through Jesus is much greater than Adam's sin. So then, as the one sin condemned all mankind to death, in the same way the one righteous act sets all men free and gives them life.

The overall conclusion we should draw from the foregoing is this: although descended from Adam, let us not imitate Adam. Instead, let us imitate Jesus so that we truly become children of God and inheritors of our Father's kingdom.

February 24, 2002

Second Sunday of Lent

Cycle A

(Readings: Gen 12:1-4/2 Tim 1:8-10/Mt 17:1-9)

The three bible readings of today's Mass are comparatively shorter than those of most previous Sundays we have been listening to. The first reading has only four verses, the second only three, and the third, double that number. Those of you who have good and retentive memories can actually memorize them without much effort.

Notwithstanding their brevity, the three bible readings, each respectively, could summarize the life-story of an individual Christian or the Christian people as a whole, if and when that story unfolds according to God's plan. We all have our own plans for our life, have we not? Sometimes, however, those plans are against God's plan, and we know what the consequences will be.

But it is really exciting to view your life-story summarized in four verses or three, is it not? Especially if your life's story is evolving according to God's plan. Let us take the first reading (Genesis 12) and see how Abraham's story can serve as a projection of our own life-story.

Accordingly, Abraham struck it very good in the country of Haran. He had reached the age of seventy-five and was enjoying his immense wealth, his connections, acquaintances and properties. Was there anything more for him to desire and to work for? Apparently, nothing more. He just may relax and continue to enjoy the fruits of his seventy-five long years of toil and labor.

That was Abraham's plan, his vision of life. But God had another plan and another vision of life for Abraham, who at this ripe old age still had no knowledge of dealings with the true God.

He was a pagan, plain and simple. The Lord, accordingly, appeared to Abraham and invited him to leave his country, his relatives and friends, his properties, and to come to an unknown country (i.e. Canaan) where he is promised a blessedness of life many times over. On this basis, Abraham obeyed God's call, despite his years, the strangeness of the land he was going to enter, the hostility of the inhabitants he could run against. Humanly speaking, the odds were all against relocation, yet Abraham heeded God's voice.

Now we go to Paul (second reading). He, too, was an old man by then. Life has not been kind to him, especially after his conversion to Christianity. As a matter of fact, he wrote this letter from a prison, and gave hints that a violent death awaited him. But Paul was not afraid nor felt despondent. On the contrary, he was proud of his chains and the suffering he endured for Christ. More even, he exhorted Timothy and all Christians with him to take part in suffering for the Gospel and not to be ashamed of witnessing for the Lord.

Abraham and Paul learned by experience that life in this world cannot be a bed of roses once you heed the call of God and conform to his plan. Yet, they obeyed the voice of God and exchanged their stable, tranquil and comfortable lifestyle for one that is filled with uncertainties, worries and strife. Why? What impelled them to do so?

Life for most of us in this big metropolis is neither a bed of roses. It is that hard, not precisely for having heeded God's call. Were this the case, it would be a ground for feeling happy like Paul with his chains and prison bars. Whatever the reasons, the hardships of life in Metro Manila should be counted as golden occasions to witness to the Lord and to deserve his blessings. To be sure, we got a call from God of another nature, which came to us during infancy through baptism. His was a plan of salvation and freedom for us, a plan arranged by him even before

the world's creation. However, the call may have grown weaker during the years when we lived forgetting God and indulging in wrong conduct. Now is the time to sharpen our hearing and listen to his voice.

The gospel of Matthew (third reading) shows how to trust firmly on God and his promises even to the point of supreme sacrifice, if need be, in exchange for his blessings. About to make the supreme sacrifice of his life in Jerusalem, Jesus gave his apostles a preview of the glory and blessedness that would follow his death.

Abraham and Paul must certainly have enjoyed a foretaste, a preview of the blessedness of heaven to explain their courage, strength and decision of choosing a life of hardships. Even lesser mortals endure willingly sacrifices and hardships for lower motives like wealth, power and influence. For higher motives, such as God's promises of salvation and blessedness, we surely will find strength and courage to listen to his call for renunciation, sacrifice, and conversion at this time of Lent and throughout our life.

At his death, Abraham to whom God had promised the entire land of Canaan, possessed a small plot of earth he bought to be buried in. Paul, to whom God had promised the crown of righteousness, was beheaded in Rome. Both, however, never doubted for an instance that God would fulfill his promises. Thus, they remained faithful to his call to the end. Let us imitate their courage, their confidence, and their consistency. Perhaps, God will also let us enjoy a foretaste, a preview of the blessedness of heaven on earth even momentarily.

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