

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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MESSAGE FOR WORLD
MISSION SUNDAY, 2002

John Paul II

IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN

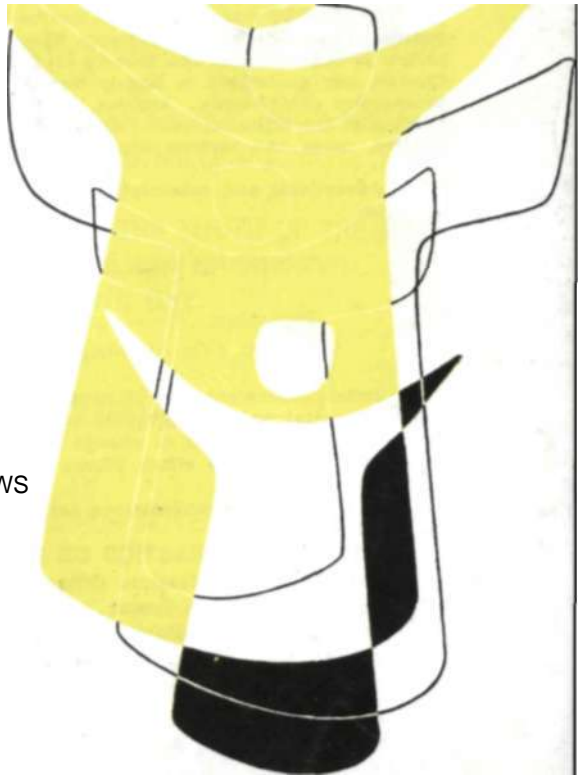
Socrates Villages, DD

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: GOOD NEWS
FOR THE THIRD **MILLENNIUM**

*Pontifical Council for the **Family***

EXCLAUSTRATION

Javier Gonzalez, OP



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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Contextualized Theology Applied to Formation

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* (# 43) writes: To serve the Church as Christ intends, Bishops and Priests need a solid and continuing formation which would provide opportunities for human, spiritual and pastoral renewal as this is the reason why FABC as early as January 2000 during the 7th Plenary assembly called for the holding of a program for Asian Formators. So the Institute for Asian Seminary Formators was envisioned with these objectives: 1) To realize an on-going program for those in-charge of Formation; 2) To train Formators how to form priest as a man of communion; 3) To strengthen linkages among Asian countries and; 4) To learn particular skills of community building in seminary context.

Seven countries have been represented in the project "Institute for Asian Seminary Formators" held in Mariapolis Center, on July 15-26, 2002. Both diocesan and religious sectors were represented. There were 20 delegates coming from Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand.

The theme chosen was "Priest as Man of Communion". Among the speakers five were Bishops, four Priests and one layperson. They all made a powerful sharing.

The whole input was a combination of powerful experiences, in personal and pastoral levels, with substantial teaching from the documents of the Church and updated ecclesiology. The grounding point has been the understanding of Church as communion. The type of theology is one applied to situation. For communion should not only be a teaching to be grasped, but a reality to be lived, which starts from the Trinity and concretized in basic ecclesial community and family situation. The home as a domestic church is to be reckoned a lot. Theology applied to formation should have a deep spiritual orientation. The natural result will be spirituality of unity founded in home, nourished in the house of formation, and eventually concretized in small community.

Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics

JOHN PAUL II

We are gathered here today in the spirit of peace for the good of all human beings and for the care of creation. At this moment in history, at the beginning of the third millennium, we are saddened to see the daily suffering of a great number of people from violence, starvation, poverty and disease. We are also concerned about the negative consequences for humanity and for all creation resulting from the degradation of some basic natural resources such as water, air and land, brought about by an economic and technological progress which does not recognize and take into account its limits.

Almighty God envisioned a world of beauty and harmony, and He created it, making every part an expression of His freedom, wisdom and love (cf. *Gen* 1:1-25).

At the centre of the whole of creation, He placed us, human beings, with our inalienable human dignity. Although we share many features with the rest of the living beings, Almighty God went further with us and gave us an immortal soul, the source of self-awareness and freedom, endowments that make us in His image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26-31;2:7). Marked with that

resemblance, we have been placed by God in the world in order to cooperate with Him in realizing more and more fully the divine purpose for creation.

At the beginning of history, man and woman sinned by disobeying God and rejecting His design for creation. Among the results of this first sin was the destruction of the original harmony of creation. If we examine carefully the social and environmental crisis which the world community is facing, we must conclude that we are still betraying the mandate God has given us: to be stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom.

God has not abandoned the world. It is His will that His design and our hope for it will be realized through our co-operation in restoring its original harmony. In our own time we are witnessing a growth of an *ecological awareness* which needs to be encouraged, so that it will lead to practical programmes and initiatives. An awareness of the relationship between God and humankind brings a fuller sense of the importance of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, which is God's creation and which God entrusted to us to guard with wisdom and love (cf. *Gen* 1:28).

Respect for creation stems from respect for human life and dignity. It is on the basis of our recognition that the world is created by God that we can discern an objective moral order within which to articulate a code of environmental ethics. In this perspective, Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in *ecological awareness*, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world

around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine *conversion* in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act.

First, we must regain humility and recognize the limits of our powers, and most importantly, the limits of our knowledge and judgment. We have been making decisions, taking actions and assigning values that are leading us away from the world as it should be, away from the design of God for creation, away from all that is essential for a healthy planet and a healthy commonwealth of people. A new approach and a new culture are needed, based on the centrality of the human person within creation and inspired by environmentally ethical behavior stemming from our triple relationship to God, to self and to creation. Such an ethics fosters interdependence and stresses the principles of universal solidarity, social justice and responsibility, in order to promote a true culture of life.

Secondly, we must frankly admit that humankind is entitled to something better than what we see around us. We and, much more, our children and future generations are entitled to a better world, a world free from degradation, violence and bloodshed, a world of generosity and love.

Thirdly, aware of the value of prayer, we must implore God the Creator to enlighten people everywhere regarding the duty to respect and carefully guard creation.

We therefore invite all men and women of good will to ponder the importance of the following ethical goals:

1. To think of the world's children when we reflect on and evaluate our options for action.

2. To be open to study the true values based on the natural law that sustain every human culture.

3. To use science and technology in a full and constructive way, while recognizing that the findings of science have always to be evaluated in the light of the centrality of the human person, of the common good and of the inner purpose of creation. Science may help us to correct the mistakes of the past, in order to enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the present and future generations. It is love for our children that will show us the path that we must follow into the future.

4. To be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity. Our mortality and our weakness of judgment together warn us not to take irreversible actions with what we choose to regard as our property during our brief stay on this earth. We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation, we are only stewards of the common heritage.

5. To acknowledge the diversity of situations and responsibilities in the work for a better world environment. We do not expect every person and every institution to assume the same burden. Everyone has a part to play, but for the demands of justice and charity to be respected the most affluent societies must carry the greater burden, and from them is demanded a sacrifice greater than can be offered by the poor. Religions, governments and institutions are faced by many different situations; but on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity all of them can take on some tasks, some part of the shared effort.

6. To promote a peaceful approach to disagreement about how to live on this earth, about how to share it and use it, about what to change and what to leave unchanged. It is not our desire to

evade controversy about the environment, for we trust in the capacity of human reason and the path of dialogue to reach agreement. We commit ourselves to respect the views of all who disagree with us, seeking solutions through open exchange, without resorting to oppression and domination.

It is not too late. God's world has incredible healing powers. Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future. Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing.

Rome, Venice, 10 June 2002.

Message for World Mission Sunday, 2002

JOHN PAUL II

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The evangelizing mission of the Church is essentially the announcement of God's love, mercy and forgiveness revealed to mankind through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the proclamation of the good news that God loves us and wants all people united in his loving mercy, he forgives us and asks us to forgive others even for the greatest offences. This is the Word of reconciliation entrusted to us because, as St Paul says *"God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself not counting men's transgressions against them and he entrusted the message of reconciliation to us"* (2 Cor 5,19). These words are the echo and a reminder of the supreme cry from the heart of Christ on the cross *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23,34).

This, in synthesis, is the fundamental contents of Mission Sunday which we will celebrate on Sunday 20 October, with the stimulating theme: *"Mission is Proclamation of Forgiveness."* Although this event is repeated every year with the passing of time

it loses none of its special significance and importance, because mission is our response to Jesus' supreme command: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28,19).

2. At the beginning of the third Christian millennium the missionary duty is ever more urgent, because as I said in the *Redemptoris missio* Encyclical "The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church's mission is obvious" (n. 3).

With the great apostle and evangelizer St Paul, we wish to repeat: *"Yet preaching the Gospel is not the subject of a boast: I am under the compulsion I have no choice. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel ... it is a charge entrusted to me"* (1 Cor 9,16.17). Only God's love, able to make brothers and sisters of people of all races and cultures, can heal the painful divisions, ideological conflict, economic unbalance and violence which still oppresses humanity.

We are all aware of the horrible wars and revolutions which bloodied the last century and the conflicts which, unfortunately, still afflict the world almost endemically. However undeniable also is a longing of men and women who, despite dire spiritual and material poverty, have a deep thirst for God and for his loving mercy. The Lord's call to proclaim the Good News is still valid today: indeed it is ever more urgent.

3. In the apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I underlined the importance of contemplating the face of Christ suffering and glorious. The heart of the Christian message is the proclamation of the paschal mystery of Christ, crucified and risen. Contemplating

the face of the Crucified one in agony "we confront the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery, as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross" (n. 25). In the Cross God revealed to us all his love. The Cross is the key that gives free access to *"wisdom which is not of this world, nor of the rulers of this age ... God's wisdom, mysterious and hidden"* (1 Cor 2,6.7).

The Cross, in which the glorious face of the Risen Christ already shines, introduces us to the fullness of Christian life and perfect love, because it reveals God's longing to share with mankind his very life, his love, his holiness. In the light of this mystery of the Church, remembering the words of the Lord: *"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (cf. Mt 5,48), understands ever more clearly that her mission would be senseless if it did not lead to fullness of Christian life, that is to perfect love and holiness. Contemplating the Cross we learn to live with humility and forgiveness, peace and communion. This was the experience of St Paul who writes to the Ephesians: *"I plead with you, then, as a prisoner for the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force"* (Eph 4,1-3). And to the Colossians he adds: *"Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace"* (Col 3,12.15).

On the Cross, Christ's total forgiveness, even of his executioners, establishes the new justice

4. Dearest Brothers and Sisters, the cry of Jesus on the cross (cf. Mt 27,46) is not the anguish of a desperate man, it is the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father for the salvation of all mankind. From the cross Jesus shows the conditions which enable us to forgive. To the hatred with which his persecutors nailed him to the Cross, he responds with a prayer for them. He not only forgives them, he continues to love them, to want their good and to intercede for them. His death becomes the full realization of Love.

Faced with the great mystery of the Cross we can only kneel in adoration. "In order to bring man back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the 'face' of sin. 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5,21)" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 25). The total forgiveness of Christ, also for his persecutors, is the beginning of the new justice of the Kingdom of God for everyone.

During the Last Supper, the Redeemer said to his Apostles: *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you too love one another. This is how all will know you for my disciples, your love for one another"* (Jn 13,34,35).

5. The Risen Christ gives peace to his disciples. The Church, faithful to the Lord's command, continues to proclaim and spread his peace. Through evangelization believers help people to realize that we are all brothers and sisters and, as pilgrims on this earth, although on different paths, we are all on our way to the common Homeland which God, through ways known only to him, does not cease to indicate to us. The main road of mission is sincere dialogue (cf. *Ad gentes*, n. 7; *Nostra aetate*, n. 2), "dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns of self-interest" (*Redemptoris*

missio, n. 56) nor is it an end in itself. Dialogue, instead, speaks to others with respect and understanding, stating the principles in which we believe and proclaiming with love the most profound truths of the faith which are joy, hope and meaning of life. In fact dialogue is the realization of a spiritual impulse leading "to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful" (*ibid.*, n. 56). Commitment for attentive and respectful dialogue is a *conditio sine qua non* for authentic witness of God's saving love.

This dialogue is linked closely with readiness to forgive, because a person who forgives opens the hearts of others and learns to love and understand others entering into harmony with them. Because the act of pardoning, after the example of Jesus, challenges and opens hearts, heals the wounds of sin and division and creates real communion.

6. The celebration of Mission Sunday offers everyone an opportunity for self-examination on the demands of God's infinite love. Love which calls for faith; love which tells us to put all our trust in Him. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists, and he rewards those who seek him"* (Heb 11,6).

On this annual recurrence we are called to pray assiduously for the missions and to cooperate with every means in the Church's activity all over the world to build up the Kingdom of God, "an eternal and universal Kingdom: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (*Preface for the Feast of Christ the King*). We are called to bear witness first of all with our life to our total adhesion to Christ and to his Gospel.

Yes, we must never be ashamed of the Gospel and never be afraid of proclaiming that we are Christians, hiding our faith.

Instead we must continue to speak to extend the spaces for proclaiming salvation, because Jesus has promised to be with us for ever and he is always in the midst of his disciples.

Mission Sunday, the feast day of Mission, helps us discover the value of our personal and community vocation. It stimulates us to reach out to "my least brothers" (cf. Mt 25,40) through missionaries in every part of the world. This is the task of the Pontifical Mission Societies which have always been at the service of the Church's mission, ensuring that the least ones are not lacking those who break with them the bread of the Word and continue to bring them the gift of inexhaustible love that gushes from the heart of the Saviour.

Dearest Brothers and Sisters, let us entrust this commitment to proclaim the Gospel and indeed the whole evangelizing activity of the Church to Most Holy Mary, Queen of Missions. May she accompany us on our journey of discovering, proclaiming and witnessing to the love of God who forgives and gives peace to mankind.

With these sentiments, to all missionaries throughout the world, to those who accompany them with prayers and fraternal help, to Christian communities of ancient and new foundation, I gladly send my Apostolic Blessing, invoking upon you all the unfailing protection of the Lord.

From the Vatican, 19 May 2002, Solemnity of Pentecost.

Catechism on Freemasonry: Sanctions

LEONARDO MEDROSO, DD

The Commission on Canon Law is tasked by the CBCP Plenary Council last January 2002 to undertake a deeper study on the penalties and proper sanctions for those who affiliate themselves to Freemasonry.

Sanctions against Freemasonry is contained in Canon 1374: "A person who joins an association which plots against the Church is to be punished with a just penalty; one who promotes or takes office in such an association is to be punished with an interdict." Although Freemasonry is not explicitly mentioned in this particular provision of the Code, it is implicitly included among those associations which plot against the Church.

Sanctions, however, have the nature of curtailing the freedom of those concerned and therefore have to be strictly interpreted. To do this the Superior has to cautiously look into each individual case and consider especially these three elements: 1) the assessment of the offense itself; 2) the penalty to be imposed; and 3) proper procedure.

A. Offense committed for Affiliation to Freemasonry

Canon 1374 establishes two (2) kinds of offenses:

- 1) the mere act of joining Freemasonry ("*nomen dare*" can mean to enrol/enlist, to affiliate, to take part, etc.);
- 2) promoting or taking an office.

It goes without saying that the second mentioned offense is more serious than the first. Objectively, the offense presupposes the taking up of means and other activities to go against the Church. Subjectively, it implies more intense responsibility in the promoter or the one taking the office. It is therefore consistent that the penalty to be imposed on the second has to be heavier than the first.

B. Sanctions/Penalties

Sanctions/penalties must be proportionate to the offense committed. Hence, each of the two offenses mentioned earlier has distinct penalties:

- 1) For the offense in the act of joining Freemasonry: a) the penalty is not automatic but to be imposed (*ferendae sententiae*); b) it is indeterminate ("just penalty").

Since the penalty is indeterminate, each bishop/superior in his territory is on his own to determine the just penalty in each case.

- 2) For the offense in promoting or taking office in the masonic association: a) the penalty is not automatic but to be imposed (*ferendae sententiae*); b) it is determinate, namely, interdiction. Canon 1332 deals with the penalty on interdiction. It states: "One who is under interdict is obliged by the prohibition of can. 1331 §1, nn. 1 and 2; if the interdict was imposed or declared, the provision of can. 1331 §2, n. 1 is to be observed."

Canon 1331 §1, "An excommunicated person is forbidden:

n. 1: to have any ministerial part in the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist or in any other ceremonies of public worship;

n. 2: "to celebrate the sacraments or sacramentals and to receive the sacraments.

Canon 1331, §2, n. 1: If the excommunication has been imposed or declared, the offender proposing to act in defiance of the provision of §1, n. 1 is to be removed, or else the liturgical action is to be suspended, unless there is a grave reason to the contrary..."

From what is said, we can say that the penalties mentioned on the proposed document, "A Catechism on Freemasonry", n. 16, are penalties to be imposed on those who are actively promoting Freemasonry or accepting an office in the same. Those who are mere members of Freemasonry may be handed the penalty which each bishop deems proportionate to each case.

C. Proper Procedure

In meting out the penalties, the Superior/Bishop has to consider the following canons:

Canon 1344: "Even though the law may use obligatory words, the judge may, according to his own conscience and prudence: 1. defer the imposition of the penalty to a more opportune time, if it is foreseen that greater evils may arise from a too hasty punishment of the offender; 2. abstain from imposing the penalty or substitute a milder penalty or a penance, if the offender has repented and repaired the scandal, or if the offender has been or foreseeably will be sufficiently punished by the civil authority; 3. may suspend the obligation of observing an expiatory penalty, if

the person is a first-offender after a hitherto blameless life and there is no urgent need to repair the scandal; this is, however, to be done in such a way that if the person again commits an offence within a time laid down by the judge, then that person must pay the penalty for both offences, unless in the meanwhile the time for prescription of a penal action in respect of the former offence has expired." The canon does not need any further commentary.

Canon 1347 §1: "A censure cannot validly be imposed unless the offender has beforehand received at least one warning that he should withdraw from contumacy and be given the suitable time to do so." This Canon demands that the offender has to be heard before any censure is to be imposed. Furthermore, a suitable time to answer the accusations has to be given to him.

Canon 1349: "If a penalty is indeterminate, and if the law does not provide otherwise, the judge is not to impose graver penalties, especially censures, unless the seriousness of the case really demands it. He may not impose penalties which are perpetual."

It was Bound to Happen*

SOCRATES VILLEGAS, DD

Circular no. 2002-36

14 June 2002

What is happening to us priests? What is happening to the priesthood? I have only one answer: all of these events were bound to happen. It was bound to happen from two perspectives

It was bound to happen because we have done wrong. Like the good thief at Calvary, we can only say: "We deserve it after all. We are only suffering for what we have done but this man has done nothing wrong." (Lk. 23:41)

We priests have been hurting and wounding the Church for centuries now. Francis of Assisi saw it and married Sister Poverty. St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Charles Borromeo saw the thieves inside the Church and with great passion launched

* Talk delivered by His Excellency last June 6, 2002 during the communal fasting and vigil for priests.

a campaign for moral and spiritual reform. The thievery and immorality was happening at the time of Rizal and Gomburza. The only difference perhaps is that the media makes it easier for us to know what is happening in any part of the world in an instant. What took years to reach the Philippines from Spain now takes a few seconds.

It was bound to happen. We deserve it after all. But what bothers me and pains me is that the Innocent Man on the cross suffers again because of us, His chosen disciples. We priests must suffer for what we have done. Christ has done nothing wrong, but look at how He suffers because of us, His foot soldiers. With friends like us, who needs enemies?

The innocent Church who called us and ordained us for the ministry is suffering too. There is nothing wrong with the priesthood. There is nothing wrong with the Church, the Bride of Christ. It is the priests that non-Church people cannot understand. It does not really matter whether we are the good thieves or the bad thieves. We are thieves. We are only being punished for what we have done but Jesus and the Church have done nothing wrong. I pity God. I bleed with the Church.

It was bound to happen and the media has made the brokenness of our lifestyle known to the big wide world. We cannot and we must not blame the media. We waltzed and danced with the media to our advantage. We enjoyed the spectacular attention. We sowed media idolatry. We are only reaping the seeds of media worship that we have sown. Let us not fault the media. The crime was there. It has been there. The expose was bound to happen.

We have not been faithful to the Church, to the Lord and to ourselves I summarize our many infidelities in an acronym - MALAS. *Malas*, bad things, misfortunes that we have brought upon ourselves and the innocent Church.

M - Mission without ongoing formation. We are teachers who ignore our own need to be taught. We are sanctifiers who neglect our own need to be sanctified. One priest told me that to be successful as a priest, only two books were necessary - the breviary and the bankbook. From the way he said it, it felt like he really read his bankbook more than his breviary. Msgr. Chito Bernardo's voice has gone hoarse appealing to us to avail of the ongoing formation for the priests. Our shallow excuse is that there is work to do. In effect we are saying that the ministry is more important than the minister when the exact opposite is true. Who cares about annual retreats or monthly recollection or regular confessions or seminary programs for updating? This attitude of mission orientation to the detriment of our ongoing formation is a crime against the Church. It is a slow death for our ministry, our mission.

A - Administration without accountability. When our parishioners ask us for an accounting of parish finds, we excuse ourselves by saying "I submit my report to the Chancery." Quietly, I say "Really?" We preach about stewardship of creation but do we live out our stewardship of the temporal goods of the Church. We denounce taxation without representation but do we practice Mass collection with accountability? The poor ask for money and we say none. Really? No money? If we are truly Church of the poor, how much of our Church budget is spent for the poor? Our budget is the numerical expression of the values we profess to believe in. It is puzzling that the priests of the Church of the poor belong to the A and B elite bracket. How much of our time is spent with the poor and how much of our budget is spent giving plaques and medals and certificates to our parish benefactors? A friend from Bangladesh told me that when you see a beggar in the streets of that county, you must give alms. Having done so, the alms giver says to the beggar "thank you." It is not the beggar who thanks

but the alms giver. The beggar gave the giver an opportunity to serve and love God. What a blessed opportunity! We are only working on the favor of the bishop. We are accountable to him for the ministry that we do. We are not masters, we are co-workers. We are not managers. We are caretakers.

A few years ago, two women for the poor died a few days after each other - Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. The international media wrote articles and columns about their work for the poor. There is one basic difference between the two women. After caring for the poor, the Princess rode her limousine and returned to an air-conditioned room in silk and satin. She could relax by bathing in all the fragrances that money can buy.

Mother Teresa went home to her convent, washed her clothes and slept with her poor, dying and destitute street rejects. Princess Diana was a glamorous woman of the poor. Mother Teresa was a Christ-like witness of the love of Jesus for the poor. Are you Mother Teresa or a glamorous Princess Diana?

L - Liturgy without sacrifice. The sacrifice is on us not to the listener of our boring unprepared long homilies. It is not the fault of the sound system why we cannot be understood. It is our fault. It is not enough that we be cultic leaders who make sure that our rituals are faithfully done - *ex opere operato*. Our celebrations maybe valid but we have made them so boring that our parishioners leave the Church with heads bowed saying "My God, my God, why have You forsaken us and given us this kind of Mass?" Our parishioners are still polite and respectful but they are quietly saying that our valid Masses and long homilies are indeed a great sacrifice week after week.

A - Authority without humility. We wash the feet of our twelve parishioners on Holy Thursday and bend down to kiss those feet. People are touched by our humility. But is that all? Humility

is truth. The truth is we are only stewards. In the Kingdom of God, words like promotion, elevation and going higher are forbidden. In the Kingdom of God, ministry is given not in order to give us better seats or higher positions. Ordination gives us longer arms to embrace more, to love more, to serve more. The greatest is the one who stoops down to serve. Does the servant really need to have brand new cars all the time even if the regular Sunday donors in the Mass collection have to take rusty dusty rickety jeeps and crammed buses to go to Mass? With respect they bow their heads when our brand new cars pass but in their hearts they ask "Is that where our donations go?" The priesthood is for sacrifice, not for career enhancement.

S - Speech without witnessing. St. Francis used to tell his friars as he sent them to the mission areas "Go and preach the Gospel. Talk if necessary." The most important component of preaching is not talking but being. The world does not need eloquent speakers. The world needs witnesses. If speakers are effective in the world today, it is because they have first been witnesses. Our youth are looking for Jesus. They have a very high regard for us. Do we have special regard for them? Majority of our people are poor. It is no wonder that we dream to be Church of the poor. But majority of our people are also young. We are indeed a Church of the young by sheer numbers. Where are our youth? They need witnesses. They need our inspired guidance. They do not go to us anymore. The radio and tv and internet have replaced us as teachers in their lives. I am afraid that when our youth grow up, they will grow up to be computers, incapable of teamwork and concern, because computers and not persons are now teaching our youth and children.

MALAS - Mission without formation, administration without accountability, liturgy without sacrifice, authority without humility speech without witnessing. We have called this *malas* upon

ourselves. We have no one to blame but ourselves. The sex scandals that the media is feasting on are nothing compared to the many other infidelities that we have done or witnessing that we have failed to do.

It was bound to happen.

But there is still another angle why I believe that this pain and humiliation that we are going through was bound to happen. **It was bound to happen not as punishment for the guilty but as part of our mission of victimhood.**

On the day of our ordination to the priesthood, the bishop gave us the chalice with wine and the paten with the host and said: "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to Him. Know what you are doing. Imitate the mystery you celebrate, **model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross.**"

We were admonished to model our life on the mystery of the Lord's Cross. The cross and the priesthood go together. We must make sure that victimhood and priesthood remain as inseparable twins. When we separate the two in praxis, we also oblige God to bring them back together. We have focused too much on the offerings of the people of God. We seem to have forgotten the obligation to model our lives on the mystery of the Lord's cross. This humiliation, this pain, this anguish, this embarrassment was bound to happen. This is all part of the mystery of the Lord's cross. Shame and glory are twins. Our shame is our moment of glory. Our humiliation at Calvary is also our precise moment of exaltation.

It was bound to happen. Crucifixions do not happen on hills anymore. Crucifixions happen on tv, radio, and newspapers. Our period of shame is our moment of weaknesses. In my weakness, I am strong with the strength of God.

A Chinese saying goes "You will know the color of the tea only after putting it in hot water." So it is with us.

The jewelers know the real diamond from the fake by putting the diamond in hot water. The real one glitters even more in hot water. The fake stone loses its luster in hot water.

Chesterton exclaimed, "O I love hot water. It keeps me clean". Remember my brother priests: The pain that cannot kill us can only make us better, purer and more and more like Christ.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was accused of pedophilia too and the international media feasted on it. He refused to file a case against the false accuser and instead visited him in his hospital room and offered to celebrate the Eucharist with the dying man afflicted with AIDS. Later on, Cardinal Bernardin admitted that the pain of his pancreatic cancer was nothing compared to the pain of international humiliation from a false accusation. Of Cardinal Bernardin and other heroic priests like him we say:

"When there is news of a priest not doing what he ought, no one will ask: 'Is it true?' nor inquire about the battles he fought. His fate doomed by rash judges who have never been caught."

Pope John Paul II said in *Salvifici Doloris*: *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has given to us."*

All of these were bound to happen as part of our share in the victimhood of Christ for the life of the world.

Pope John Paul II himself prophesied at the beginning of the preparatory years for the Great Jubilee that the Church needs new martyrs. We are those martyrs that the Church needs for the new

millennium. Christianity flourished in the early centuries not because of Constantine and the designation of Christianity as the religion of the empire. Christianity flourished because of the witnessing of the martyrs for the early Church. The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity.

It is imperative that we suffer. Years from now, we will be able to look back at these years and moments which are real moments of purification and glory. With the disciples of Emmaus, I know we can say of this period, "Were not our hearts burning inside us as our parishioners suspected us and ridiculed us for the sins of a few."

The innocent must suffer with the guilty.

The innocent will suffer instead of the guilty.

The suffering of the innocent will save the guilty.

To the guilty among us, and we all are guilty indeed, let us seek the mercy of God and return to His heart.

To the innocent among us, and we all have that space that only God can occupy, we say, "Lord give us more courage to endure the cross for you. Not that you take away this cross of sacrifice but you just stay with us. We will do Your will."

Pastoral Statement on "Catextism"

JAIME CARD. SIN, DD

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In his recent meeting with the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pope John Paul II urged the elaboration of "a pastoral plan, which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture." In other words, the Holy Father challenges the Church to make room for Christ especially in mass communications. Social Communications play a significant role in the molding of society and so the Church must integrate her evangelization efforts in this field.

In response to this call, the Archdiocese of Manila is launching a service called "catextism". It is without doubt that text messaging is very popular in our country, especially among the youth. It has become a way of life. Almost everybody sends and receives text messages everyday. We are now a "text generation". And so the Church seeks to avail of this potential tool for evangelization and

spiritual nourishment. "Catextism" provides cellular phone users access to spiritual readings and prayer exercises. Another feature is the sending out of random passages from the Bible. It even allows others to share their reflections with other users through text messaging. Thus, "catextism" enables people to reflect on, pray over and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. It will serve as a reminder to us that God is at work at every moment and in every situation of our lives.

To access the service, mobile phone users send the word "*Amen*" and dial 2577 (for Globe subscribers) and 777 (for Smart subscribers). A menu returns from which the text applications are available.

This project has become reality thanks to the generous cooperation of Smart Communications and Globe Telecom. I encourage our clergy, religious and laity to promote this endeavor, especially among our youth - the "gentext".

The Church believes that communication should result in "communion". May "catextism" refresh, inspire and enlighten our people so that they may establish genuine spiritual communion with God and one another.

The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium*

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

In the Christian view of marriage, the relationship between a man and a woman - a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble - is part of God's original plan, obscured throughout history by our "hardness of heart", but which Christ came to restore to its pristine splendour, disclosing what had been God's will "from the beginning" (*Mt* 19:8). Raised to the dignity of a Sacrament, marriage expresses the "great mystery" of Christ's nuptial love for his Church (cf. *Eph* 5:32).

On this point the Church cannot yield to cultural pressures, no matter how widespread and even militant they may be. Instead, it is necessary to ensure that through an ever more complete Gospel formation Christian families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person - of the spouses, and of the children who are more fragile. Families themselves must become increas-

* Themes for Reflection and Dialogue in Preparation for the Fourth World Meeting of the Families in Manila on January 25-26, 2003.

ingly conscious of the care due to children, and play an active role in the Church and in society in safeguarding their rights.

Christians also have the mission of *proclaiming with joy and conviction the Good News* about the family, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and to understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources.

Presentation

As for the previous World Meetings, we are pleased to offer the following material to aid reflection, meditation, dialogue and prayer in preparation for the *Fourth World Meeting of Families*, which will take place in Manila (Philippines) from January 25-26, 2003.

The Fourth World Meeting follows the first in Rome (1994) during the Year of the Family, the second in Rio de Janeiro (1997), and the third in Rome (October 2000) in the framework of the Jubilee of Families.

The inspirational motto, **"The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium"**, was chosen by the Holy Father John Paul II. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* His Holiness states that "the relationship between a man and a woman - a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble - is part of God's original plan", and that as a result "on this point the Church cannot yield to cultural pressures, no matter how widespread and even militant they may be" (No. 47). This mystery of the "beginning", which is revealed to spouses in Christ's love for His Church, is received in the Word and in the Sacrament and makes them witnesses to the Good News in family life.

The twelve units that follow develop the most significant themes regarding the Christian family as good news. In a synthetic and flexible way, the contents re-propose the fundamental themes of the Church's teaching, often using the exact words *taken from the most recent documents*, especially those of the Second Vatican Council and the Papacy of John Paul II.

This material can be used as guidelines for those working in the pastoral care of the family in a process of reflection and dialogue. This process should take place preferably in family gatherings and adapt the themes to the different cultures and local social contexts. Such family gatherings consists in meetings of groups of families, parents and children, during which, with the help of a guide, they reflect on the proposed themes.

The structure of each meeting is very simple: after an opening song and recitation of the "Our Father", a passage from Sacred Scripture is read. Then the theme is read followed by a brief reflection by the priest or the one who leads the participants to dialogue and to make some specific commitments. The meeting ends with the recitation of the "Hail Mary", the Prayer for the Family, and a final song.

The themes for reflection and dialogue are suitable for preparation of the basic themes of the World Meeting of Families, both for those who will go to Manila on January 25-26, 2003, and for the families who will celebrate it in their own dioceses.

I.

THE FAMILY WELCOMES AND ANNOUNCES THE GOOD NEWS

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" (Lk, 2:6-14).

Reflection

The Church as Mother gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family. By proclaiming the Word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family its true identity, what it is and should be according to the Lord's plan; by celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ; by the continuous proclamation of the new commandment of love, the Church encourages and guides the Christian family to the service of love, so that it may imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.

The Family Welcomes and Announces the Word

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church: the Christian

family *welcomes and announces the Word of God*: it thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community.

Christian spouses and parents are required to offer the obedience of faith (cf. *Rom 16:26*). They are called upon to welcome the word of the Lord which reveals to them the marvelous news - the Good News - of their conjugal and family life sanctified and made a source of sanctity by Christ Himself. Only in faith can they discover and admire with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family, making them a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between God and man, between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church.

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state.

In Everyday Life

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the basic moment of the faith of the couple. This sacrament, in essence, is the proclamation in the Church of the Good News concerning married love. It is the Word of God that "reveals" and "fulfills" the wise and loving plan of God for the married couple, giving them a mysterious and real share in the very love with which God Himself loves humanity. The sacramental celebration of marriage is a proclamation of the Word of God, which is made within and with the Church, as a community of believers. This also requires that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and of the family. God, who called the couple "to" marriage, continues to call them "in" marriage. In and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them,

revealing and presenting the concrete "demands" of their sharing in the love of Christ for His Church in the particular family, social and ecclesial situation in which they find themselves.

To the extent in which the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community. The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part.

One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. In fact, the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home. This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan. The future of humanity lies in the hands of the families that are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

Why do we say that the family welcomes the Word of God?

How do we listen to the Word of God, welcome it, live it and proclaim it to the world through our words and life witness?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

II.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: WITNESS TO THE PASCHAL COVENANT

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph 5.28-??;.

Reflection

Particularly today, the Christian family has a special vocation to witness to the paschal covenant of Christ by constantly radiating the joy of love and the certainty of the hope for which it must give an account: the Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come.

A Sign of the Paschal Covenant

The Church professes that Marriage, as the Sacrament of the covenant between husband and wife, is a "great mystery", because it expresses *the spousal love of Christ for his Church*. Saint Paul writes: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (*Eph* 5:25-26). The Apostle is speaking here about Baptism, which he discusses at length in the Letter to the Romans, where he presents it as a sharing in the death of Christ leading to a sharing in his life (cf. *Rom* 6:3-4). In this Sacrament the believer *is born* as a new man, for Baptism has the power to communicate new life, the very life of God. The mystery of the God-man is in some way recapitulated in the event of Baptism. As Saint Irenaeus would later say, along with many other Fathers of the Church of both East and West: "Christ Jesus, our Lord, the Son of God, became the son of man so that man could become a son of God" (cf. *Adversus haereses*, III, 10, 2: PG 7, 873).

Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church

There is unquestionably a new presentation of the eternal truth about marriage and the family in the light of the New Covenant. Christ has revealed this truth in the Gospel by his presence at Cana in Galilee, by the sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacraments of his Church. Husbands and wives thus discover in Christ *the point*

of reference for their spousal love. In speaking of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, Saint Paul uses the analogy of spousal love, referring back to the Book of Genesis: "A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (*Gen 2:24*). This is the "great mystery" of that eternal love already present in creation, revealed in Christ and entrusted to the Church. "This mystery is a profound one", the Apostle repeats, "and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church" (*Eph 5:32*). The Church cannot therefore be understood as the Mystical Body of Christ, as the sign of man's Covenant with God in Christ, or as the universal sacrament of salvation, unless we keep in mind the "great mystery" involved in the creation of man as male and female and the vocation of both to conjugal love, to fatherhood and to motherhood. The "great mystery", which is the Church and humanity in Christ, does not exist apart from the "great mystery" expressed in the "one flesh" (cf. *Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31-32*), that is, in the reality of marriage and the family.

The Family: A Great Mystery

The family itself is the great mystery of God. As the "domestic church", it is the *bride of Christ*. The universal Church, and every particular Church in her, is most immediately revealed as the bride of Christ in the "domestic church" and in its experience of love: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, the love of a community of persons and of generations. Could we even imagine human love without the Bridegroom and the love with which he first loved to the end? Only if husbands and wives share in that love and in that "great mystery" can they love "to the end". Unless they share in it, they do not know "to the end" what love truly is and how radical are its demands.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

Why do the spouses give witness in conjugal life to the mystery of the paschal covenant between Christ and His Church?

How is a loving response to Christ manifested in our family?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

ra.

THE FAMILY: HEART OF EVANGELIZATION

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

*"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was **written**, **"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."" (Lk 4:14-19).

Reflection

Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: the family is placed at the service of building up the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church. The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an *intimate community of life and love*, at the service of the Church and of society.

A Community of Life and Love

Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family's sharing in the Church's mission *should follow a community pattern*: the spouses together *as a couple*, the parents and children *as a family*, must live their service to the Church and to the world. They must be "of one heart and soul" (cf. *Acts* 4:32) in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them, and through their shared commitment to works of service to the ecclesial and civil communities.

The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life. It is thus in the *love between husband and wife and between the members of the family* - a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness-that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of His Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.

The Family: Subject of Evangelization

The Second Vatican Council also recalls this fact when it states that families will share their spiritual riches generously with other families too. Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant will manifest to all people the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together.

Thus by sharing in her life and mission, the family is called to carry out its task of education *in the Church*. She wishes to carry out her educational mission above all *through families* who are made capable of undertaking this task by the Sacrament of Matrimony, through the "grace of state" which follows from it and the specific "charism" proper to the entire family community.

Religious Education

Certainly one area in which the family has an irreplaceable role is that of *religious education*, which enables the family to grow as a "domestic church". Religious education and the catechesis of children make the family a true *subject of evangelization and the apostolate* within the Church. We are speaking of a right intrinsically linked to the *principle of religious liberty*. Families, and more specifically parents, are free to choose for their children a particular kind of religious and moral education consonant with their own convictions. Even when they entrust these responsibilities to ecclesiastical institutions or to schools administered by religious personnel, their educational presence ought to continue to be *constant and active*.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

Why are parents the first and principal educators of their children, and why is this education their right-duty?

Are parents aware of their responsibility to be the first evangelizers of their children and to transmit the Christian faith to them?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

IV.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY: DOMESTIC CHURCH

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Lk 1:26-33).

Reflection

Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than "the family of God." From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers "together with all [their] household" (cf. *Acts* 18:8). When they were converted, they desired that their whole household should also be saved (cf. *Acts* 16:31 and 11:14). These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica* - *Domestic Church* (*LG*, 11; cf. *FC*, 21). It is in the bosom of the family that parents are by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.

The Priesthood of the Baptized and Family Catechesis

It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity. Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment. Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated -

forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

The absolute need for family catechesis emerges with particular force in certain situations that the Church unfortunately experiences in some places. In places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, "the Church of the home" remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis.

Openness to Those Who Are Far Away

The family is the domestic church that is also called to be a luminous sign of the presence of Christ and of His love for those who are "far away," for families who do not yet believe, and for those Christian families who no longer live in accordance with the faith that they once received. The Christian family is called to enlighten by its example and its witness... those who seek the truth. Just like Aquila and Priscilla (cf. *Acts* 18; *Rom* 16:3-4) at the dawn of Christianity, today, too, the Church shows forth her perennial newness and fruitfulness by the presence of Christian couples and families who dedicate at least a part of their lives to working in missionary territories, proclaiming the Gospel and doing service to their fellowman in the love of Jesus Christ.

Many single people remain *without a human family* often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the "domestic churches," and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who "labor and are heavy laden" (*Mt* 11:28).

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

What does it mean in daily life to be a "domestic church" or the "church of home"?

Does our family live openness towards those who are far away and alone? Suggest some concrete ways to help others.

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

V.

THE HOLINESS OF THE FAMILY AT THE SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly

thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:14-18)

Reflection

By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by Him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments, through the offering of one's life, and through prayer.

The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy: this love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity.

Jesus Abides With Them

The gift of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration of the sacrament of marriage, but rather accompanies the married couple throughout their lives. Jesus Christ abides with them so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-dedication.... For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.

Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life. This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound *conjugal and family spirituality* that draws its inspiration from the themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection, and sign.

Witnesses to the "Gospel of the family"

Just as husbands and wives receive from the sacrament the gift and responsibility of translating into daily living the sanctification bestowed on them, so the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a "spiritual sacrifice." What the Council says of the laity applies also to Christian spouses and parents, especially with regard to the earthly and temporal realities that characterize their lives: as worshippers leading holy lives in every place, the laity consecrate the world itself to God.

In our age, as in the past, there is no lack of witnesses to the "gospel of the family", even if they are not well known or have not been proclaimed saints by the Church. In the Church, the treasure of the family has been entrusted first and foremost to witnesses: to those fathers and mothers, sons and daughters who through the family have discovered the path of their human and Christian vocation, the dimension of the "inner man" (*Eph 3:16*) of which the Apostle speaks, and thus have attained holiness. *The Holy Family is the beginning of countless other holy families.* The Council recalled that holiness is the vocation of all the baptized.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

What does it mean for the spouses to be called to holiness?

How can this call be answered in daily life?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

VI.

THE EUCHARIST: SIGN AND NOURISHMENT FOR UNCONDITIONAL CONJUGAL LOVE

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."" (Jn 6:53-58).

Reflection

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the *foundations* of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development,

and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist, the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.

Source and Strength of the Conjugal Covenant

The Sunday Eucharist which every week gathers Christians together as God's family round the table of the Word and the Bread of Life, is also the most natural antidote to dispersion. It is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, *the Lord's Day* also becomes *the Day of the Church*.

The Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected.

The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:34). In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its "communion" and its "mission": by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is "given up" and in His Blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.

Educational Power of the Eucharist

The *Eucharist* is truly a wondrous sacrament. In it Christ has given us himself as food and drink, as a source of saving power. He has left himself to us that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10): the life which is in him and which he has shared with us by the gift of the Spirit in rising from the dead on the third day. The life that comes from Christ is a life for us. *Christ is close to you*. And he is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist. It can happen, as it did at Emmaus, that he is recognized only in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. *Lk* 24:35). It may well be that he has been knocking at the door for a long time, waiting for it to be opened so that he can enter and eat with us (cf. *Rev* 3:20). The Last Supper and the words he spoke there contain all the power and wisdom of the sacrifice of the Cross. No other power and wisdom exist by which we can be saved and through which we can help to save others. There is no other power and no other wisdom by which you, parents, can educate both your children and yourselves. The *educational power of the Eucharist* has been proved down the generations and centuries.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

Why is the Eucharist the source and culmination of Christian life?

What is the place of the Eucharist in family life?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

VII. RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS IN THE FAMILY

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:13-18).

Reflection

An essential and permanent part of the Christian family's sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the "newness" of the Baptism that constitutes them "saints." Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things. The Christian family too is sometimes unfaithful to the law of baptismal grace and holiness proclaimed anew in the sacrament of marriage.

Conflicts and Reconciliation in the Family

Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of "reconciliation," that is, communion re-established, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation and in the banquet of the one Body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: "that they may be one." (Jn 17:21).

The Sacrament of Penance and Peace in the Family

Repentance and mutual pardon within the bosom of the Christian family, so much a part of daily life, receive their specific sacramental expression in Christian Penance. In the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI wrote of married couples: "And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is abundantly poured forth in the sacrament of Penance" (No. 25).

It is necessary to rediscover Christ as the *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is the *ordinary way* of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism.

The celebration of this sacrament acquires special significance for family life. While they discover in faith that sin contradicts not only the covenant with God, but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is "rich in mercy," (*Eph 2:4*) who bestows on them His love which is more powerful than sin, and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion.

This capacity depends on the divine grace of forgiveness and reconciliation, which always ensures the spiritual energy to begin anew. For this very reason family members need to encounter Christ in the Church through the wonderful Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

Have we experienced the benefits of the Sacrament of Penance in family life?

Have we received the gift of forgiveness in the midst of our difficulties and misunderstandings?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

VIII. THE FAMILY: COMMUNITY OF PRAYER

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Mt 7:7-11).

Reflection

Prayer makes the Son of God present among us. The words with which the Lord Jesus promises His presence can be applied to the members of the Christian family in a special way: "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt 18:19-20).

Prayers Opens Us to Love for Our Brothers and Sisters

In effect, the baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis of a mission for the spouses and the family by which their daily lives are transformed into "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to **God** through Jesus Christ." (I Pt 2:5). The Christian communities must become *genuine "schools" of prayer*, where the meeting with Christ, is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving,

praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love". Intense prayer, yes, but it does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan.

Teaching Children to Pray

Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to gradual discovery of the mystery of God and to personal dialogue with Him: it is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and the office of the sacrament of Matrimony, that from the earliest years children should be taught, according to the faith received in Baptism, to have a knowledge of God, to worship Him and to love their neighbor.

Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered *in common*, husband and wife together, parents and children together. Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother - exercising their royal priesthood - penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface.

It is significant that precisely in and through prayer, man comes to discover in a very simple and yet profound way his own unique subjectivity: in prayer the human "I" more easily perceives the depth of what it means to be a person. This is also true of the family, which is not only the basic "cell" of society, but also

possesses a particular subjectivity of its own. This subjectivity finds its first and fundamental confirmation, and is strengthened, precisely when the members of the family meet in the common invocation: "Our Father". Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake of God's own "strength".

Prayer in the Family and Liturgical Prayer

An important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church. Hence the need for gradual participation by all the members of the Christian family in the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays and feast days, and of the other sacraments, particularly the sacraments of Christian initiation of the children.

The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all her power flows. It is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

What advantages are derived from parents praying together with their children?

What is the relationship between prayer in the family and liturgical prayer? Both are necessary.

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

IX.

THE FAMILY: NUCLEUS AND SOURCE OF SOCIAL GOOD

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47).

Reflection

The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on

itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role.

The Family: A Social Subject

The family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum* (communion of persons). Therefore, the family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family; And the communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.

Every child is a gift to its brothers, sisters, parents and entire family. *Its life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of life* and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life and its contribution to their common good and to that of the community of the family. This truth is obvious in its simplicity and profundity, whatever the complexity and even the possible pathology of the psychological make-up of certain persons. *The common good of the whole of society dwells in man*; he is, as we recalled, "the way of the Church".

The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society. The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of "free giving." By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving

takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity.

The First School of Social Living

Thus the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love. The family is thus the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and "values."

Consequently, faced with a society that is running the risk of becoming more and more depersonalized and standardized and therefore inhuman and dehumanizing, with the negative results of many forms of escapism - such as alcoholism, drugs and even terrorism - the family possesses and continues still to release formidable energies capable of taking man out of his anonymity, keeping him conscious of his personal dignity, enriching him with deep humanity and actively placing him, in his uniqueness and unrepeatability, within the fabric of society.

The Rights of the Family and the Right to Life

Solidarity also needs to be practised through *participation in social and political life*. Serving the *Gospel of life* thus means that the family, particularly through its membership in family associations, works to ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it.

The *Charter of the Rights of the Family* is of course also directed to the families themselves: it aims at reinforcing among

families an awareness of the irreplaceable role and position of the family; it wishes to inspire families to unite in the defence and promotion of their rights; it encourages families to fulfill their duties in such a way that the role of the family will become more clearly appreciated and recognized in today's world.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

In what sense is the family a school of social living?

What is the role of families in respecting the rights of the family and protecting life from the first moment of conception?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

X.

THE FAMILY AND LOVE FOR THE WEAKEST

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"And Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain, and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng wondered, when

they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?". And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Mag'adan." (Mt 15:29-39).

Reflection

The social role of the family certainly cannot stop short at procreation and education, even if this constitutes its primary and irreplaceable form of expression. Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor, or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization. The social contribution of the family has an original character of its own, one that should be given greater recognition and more decisive encouragement, especially as the children grow up, and actually involving all its members as much as possible.

Openness with Solidarity to All People as Our Brothers and Sisters

Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God. Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister." In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served. The Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, really bringing about the "human advancement". Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility towards the whole of society.

In particular, note must be taken of the ever greater importance in our society of hospitality in all its forms, from opening the door of one's home and still more of one's heart to the pleas of one's brothers and sisters, to concrete efforts to ensure that every family has its own home, as the natural environment that preserves it and makes it grow. In a special way the Christian family is called upon to listen to the Apostle's recommendation: "Practice hospitality," (*Rom 12:13*) and therefore, imitating Christ's example and sharing in His love, to welcome the brother or sister in need: "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (*Mt 10:42*).

The unjust distribution of wealth between the developed and developing world and between rich and poor in the same country,

the misuse of natural resources consumed by the few, mass-illiteracy, the continuance and re-emergence of racism, burgeoning ethnic conflict, and armed conflicts generally are also having a devastating effect on the family.

Service to the Smallest, the Weakest and the Poorest

The *service to the Gospel of life* is expressed in solidarity. A particularly significant expression of solidarity between families is a willingness to *adopt or take in* children abandoned by their parents or in situations of serious hardship. True parental love is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development.

The Fathers of the Church have spoken of the family as a "domestic church", a "little church". "To be together" as a family, to be for one another, to make room in a community for affirming each person as such, for affirming "this" individual person. At times it is a matter of people with physical or psychological handicaps, of whom the so-called "progressive" society would prefer to be free. Even the family can end up like this kind of society. It does so when 't hastily rids itself of people who are aged, disabled or sick. This happens when there is a loss of faith in that *God for whom "all live"* (cf. *Lk 20:38*) and are called to the fullness of Life.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

In what way does the family's openness contribute to its growth?

In what different ways can real solidarity in charity be achieved?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

XI.
THE FAMILY PREPARES AND FOLLOWS
YOUNG FAMILIES

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"After the two days he departed to Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast. So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Jesus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was living. So he asked them the hour when he began to mend, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him,

"Your son will live"; and he himself believed, and all his household." (Jn 4:43-53).

Reflection

More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life. In some countries it is still the families themselves that, according to ancient customs, ensure the passing on to young people of the values concerning married and family life, and they do this through a gradual process of education or initiation. But the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort.

Children's Preparation for Marriage

The Church has made notable efforts to promote marriage preparation, for example by offering courses for engaged couples. All this is worthwhile and necessary. But it must not be forgotten that preparing for future life as a couple is *above all the task of the family*. To be sure, only spiritually mature families can adequately assume that responsibility. Hence we should point out the need for a special *solidarity among families*. This can be expressed in various practical ways, as for example by associations of families for families. The institution of the family is strengthened by such expressions of solidarity, which bring together not only individuals but also communities, with a commitment to pray together and to seek together the answers to life's essential questions. Is this not an invaluable expression of the *apostolate of families* to one another? It is important that families attempt to build bonds of solidarity among themselves. This allows them to assist each other in the educational enterprise: parents are educated by other parents, and children by other children. Thus a particular tradition of education is created, which draws strength from the character of the "domestic church" proper to the family.

Follow-up for Young Families

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community - the great family made up of Christian families - there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care. Thus young families will not limit themselves merely to receiving, but in their turn, having been helped in this way, will become a source of enrichment for other longer established families, through their witness of life and practical contribution.

In her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service to life. She must likewise help them to harmonize the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society. When children are born and the married couple becomes a family in the full and specific sense, the Church will still remain close to the parents in order that ^{*}they may accept their children and love them as a gift received from the Lord of life, and joyfully accept the task of serving them in their human and Christian growth.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

How can parents prepare their children best for marriage and family life?

The apostolate of Christian families with all families: how can young spouses be helped during the first years of marriage?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

XII.

THE FAMILY: SANCTUARY OF LIFE

Opening song

Recitation of the Our Father

Biblical reading

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." (Jn 10:10-15).

Reflection

The fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator - that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person (cf. *Gen* 5:1-3).

The Family and Life: An Inseparable Pair

The family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and, as it were, interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan. This is the love that becomes selflessness, receptiveness and gift. Within the family each member is accepted, respected and honoured precisely because he or she is a person; and if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly the *sanctuary of life*: the place in which life - the gift of God - can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is *decisive and irreplaceable*.

As the *domestic church*, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life. This is a responsibility which* first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater *awareness of the meaning of procreation* as a unique event which clearly reveals that *human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift*. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, as the fruit of their

mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them.

Educating Children to Respect Life

It is above all in *raising children* that the family fulfills its mission to proclaim the *Gospel of life*. By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift.

Even amid the difficulties of the work of education, difficulties which are often greater today, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that man is more precious for what he is than for what he has.

In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children's faith and help them to fulfill the vocation God has given them. The parents' mission as educators also includes teaching and giving their children an example of the true meaning of suffering and death. They will be able to do this if they are sensitive to all kinds of suffering around them and, even more, if they succeed in fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance and sharing towards sick or elderly members of the family.

Reflections of the priest or leader

Dialogue

How can the meaning and value of life be transmitted to children?

What are the privileged moments for educating children to welcome conceived life and to respect it until its end?

Commitments

Hail Mary

Queen of the Family: pray for us

Prayer for the Family

Final Song

Prayer for the Family

Lord God, from you every family
in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Father, you are Love and Life.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman,
and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity,
grant that every family on earth may become
for each successive generation
a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions
of husbands and wives
for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family
solid support for their human dignity
and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love,
strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage,
may prove mightier than all the weakness and trials
through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out
her worldwide mission in the family
and through the family.

Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life
for ever and ever. Amen.

Message to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the **XVII World Youth Day***

JOHN PAUL II

*"You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14)*

Dear Young People!

I have vivid memories of the wonderful moments we shared in Rome during the Jubilee of the Year 2000, when you came on pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. In long silent lines you passed through the Holy Door and prepared to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation; then the Evening Vigil and Morning Mass at Tor Vergata were moments of intense spirituality and a deep experience of the Church; with renewed faith, you went home to undertake the mission I entrusted to you: to become, at the dawn of the new millennium, fearless witnesses to the Gospel.

* Message of the Holy Father to the Youth of the World, 18-28 July 2002, Toronto, Canada.

By now World Youth Day has become an important part of your life and of the life of the Church. I invite you therefore to get ready for the seventeenth celebration of this great international event, to be held in Toronto, Canada, in the summer of next year. It will be another chance to meet Christ, to bear witness to his presence in today's society, and to become builders of the "civilization of love and truth".

2. *"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world"* (Mt 5:13-14): this is the theme I have chosen for the next World Youth Day. The images of salt and light used by Jesus are rich in meaning and complement each other. In ancient times, salt and light were seen as essential elements of life.

"You are the salt of the earth...". One of the main functions of salt is to season food, to give it taste and flavour. This image reminds us that, through Baptism, our whole being has been profoundly changed, because it has been "seasoned" with the new life which comes from Christ (cf. *Rom* 6:4). The salt which keeps our Christian identity intact even in a very secularized world is the grace of Baptism. Through Baptism we are re-born. We begin to live in Christ and become capable of responding to his call to "offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Rom* 12:1). Writing to the Christians of Rome, Saint Paul urges them to show clearly that their way of living and thinking was different from that of their contemporaries: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (*Rom* 12:2).

For a long time, salt was also used to preserve food. As the salt of the earth, you are called to preserve the faith which you have received and to pass it on intact to others. Your generation is being challenged in a special way to keep safe the deposit of faith (cf. *2 Th* 2:15; / *Tim* 6:20; *2 Tim* 1:14).

Discover your Christian roots, learn about the Church's history, deepen your knowledge of the spiritual heritage which has been passed on to you, follow in the footsteps of the witnesses and teachers who have gone before you! Only by staying faithful to God's commandments, to the Covenant which Christ sealed with his blood poured out on the Cross, will you be the apostles and witnesses of the new millennium.

It is the nature of human beings, and especially youth, to seek the Absolute, the meaning and fullness of life. Dear young people, do not be content with anything less than the highest ideals! Do not let yourselves be dispirited by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of their heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life. If you have an ardent desire for the Lord you will steer clear of the mediocrity and conformism so widespread in our society.

3. *"You are the light of the world..."*. For those who first heard Jesus, as for us, the symbol of light evokes the desire for truth and the thirst for the fullness of knowledge which are imprinted deep within every human being.

When the light fades or vanishes altogether, we no longer see things as they really are. In the heart of the night we can feel frightened and insecure, and we impatiently await the coming of the light of dawn. Dear young people, it is up to you to be the watchmen of the morning (cf. *Is* 21:11-12) who announce the coming of the sun who is the Risen Christ!

The light which Jesus speaks of in the Gospel is the light of faith, God's free gift, which enlightens the heart and clarifies the mind. "It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Christ" (2 *Cor* 4:6). That, is

why the words of Jesus explaining his identity and his mission are so important: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (*Jn* 8:12).

Our personal encounter with Christ bathes life in new light, sets us on the right path, and sends us out to be his witnesses. This new way of looking at the world and at people, which comes to us from him, leads us more deeply into the mystery of faith, which is not just a collection of theoretical assertions to be accepted and approved by the mind, but an experience to be had, a truth to be lived, the salt and light of all reality (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 88).

In this secularized age, when many of our contemporaries think and act as if God did not exist or are attracted to irrational forms of religion, it is you, dear young people, who must show that faith is a personal decision which involves your whole life. Let the Gospel be the measure and guide of life's decisions and plans! Then you will be missionaries in all that you do and say, and wherever you work and live you will be signs of God's love, credible witnesses to the loving presence of Jesus Christ. Never forget: "No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel" (*Mt* 5:15)!

Just as salt gives flavour to food and light illumines the darkness, so too holiness gives full meaning to life and makes it reflect God's glory. How many saints, especially young saints, can we count in the Church's history! In their love for God their heroic virtues shone before the world, and so they became models of life which the Church has held up for imitation by all. Let us remember only a few of them: Agnes of Rome, Andrew of Phu Y6n, Pedro Calungsod, Josephine Bakhita, Therese of Lisieux, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Marcel Callo, Francisco Castello Aleu or again Kateri

Tekakwitha, the young Iroquois called "the Lily of the Mohawks". Through the intercession of this great host of witnesses, may God make you too, dear young people, the saints of the third millennium!

4. Dear friends, it is time to get ready for the Seventeenth World Youth Day. I invite you to read and study the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which I wrote at the beginning of the year to accompany all Christians on this new stage of the life of the Church and humanity: "A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its 'reflection'" (No. 54).

Yes, now is the time for mission! In your Dioceses and parishes, in your movements, associations and communities, Christ is calling you. The Church welcomes you and wishes to be your home and your school of communion and prayer. Study the Word of God and let it enlighten your minds and hearts. Draw strength from the sacramental grace of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Visit the Lord in that "heart to heart" contact that is Eucharistic Adoration. Day after day, you will receive new energy to help you to bring comfort to the suffering and peace to the world. Many people are wounded by life: they are excluded from economic progress, and are without a home, a family, a job; there are people who are lost in a world of false illusions, or have abandoned all hope. By contemplating the light radiant on the face of the Risen Christ, you will learn to live as "children of the light and children of the day" (7 *Th* 5:5), and in this way you will show that "the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true" (*Eph* 5:9).

5. Dear young friends, Toronto is waiting for all of you who can make it! In the heart of a multi-cultural and multi-faith city,

we shall speak of Christ as the one Saviour and proclaim the universal salvation of which the Church is the sacrament. In response to the pressing invitation of the Lord who ardently desires "that all may be one" (*Jn 17:11*), we shall pray for full communion among Christians in truth and charity.

Come, and make the great avenues of Toronto resound with the joyful tidings that Christ loves every person and brings to fulfillment every trace of goodness, beauty and truth found in the city of man. Come, and tell the world of the happiness you have found in meeting Jesus Christ, of your desire to know him better, of how you are committed to proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth!

The young people of Canada, together with their Bishops and the civil authorities, are already preparing to welcome you with great warmth and hospitality. For this I thank them all from my heart. May this first World Youth Day of the new millennium bring to everyone a message of faith, hope and love!

My blessing goes with you. And to Mary Mother of the Church I entrust each one of you, your vocation and your mission.

From Castel Gandolfo, 25 July 2001.

Cases & Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

EXCLAUSTRATION

Is there any difference between "exclausturation" and "secularization"? Is exclausturation only voluntary (granted upon the religious' request) or can also be imposed? Is the religious member allowed to wear the habit of his/her Congregation during the exclausturation period? Is the exclaustreated member still under the authority of his/her Superior? Who pays for his/her expenses while on leave? Can an exclausturation period be unilaterally shortened? Is the exclaustreated religious entitled to enter his/her house during the exclausturation period? What to do if at the end of the exclausturation period the exclaustreated religious member refuses to return to his/her original community?

There are many questions here regarding the nature and implications of exclaustation. Since most of them are canonical, I will try to answer them mainly from the canonical point of view, that is, from what the law of the Church says on this matter. I must admit, however, that not all the answers to the above raised questions can be found in the Code of Canon Law; which means that some particular provisions of the proper law of the institute will have eventually to be taken into account.

1. Is there any Difference between Exclaustation and Secularization?

Yes, there are some differences between exclaustation and secularization since they are two different things. Both of them have in common their reference to the exit or departure of a religious member from his/her own institute. But the first difference between them is that while in the case of exclaustation such departure is *temporary*, in the case of secularization the departure is *definitive*. (By the way the term "secularization" is not commonly used: it appears only once in the Code of Canon Law, which normally use the expression "indult to leave the institute" instead).

Another difference between exclaustation and secularization comes from their effects, which in each case are very different. The secularization, having its definitive character, implies the *full separation* from the Institute; while the exclaustation, being temporary in nature, does not produce such effect, but the religious who has obtained the indult continues being part of his/her Institute and, consequently, remains under the care of his/her Superiors and, particularly in the case of a cleric, of the local Ordinary.

The term 'exclaustation' refers to a religious living outside a house [*"extra claustra"*] of his or her institute. More precisely, exclaustation is the status of a perpetually professed religious who

lives *legitimately* outside his/her institute for a specified period of time. The term "legitimately" indicates that the religious has been granted permission by the legitimate authority to reside outside his/her institute.

Exclaustation is obviously different from that "permission of absence" or permission to live outside a house of the institute that superiors (even local superiors) may give their subjects for a short period of time and for a just cause, such as vacation, sickness, study or apostolate. "Such an absence is not to exceed one year, unless it be for reasons of health, studies or an apostolate to be exercised in the name of the institute" (c. 665 §1). Exclaustation is granted only to perpetually professed members.

2. Exclaustation: Voluntary or Imposed?

To this question on whether the exclaustation is only voluntary, that is, granted upon the request of the religious concerned or may it also be imposed, we answer that it can be either "requested" by the perpetually professed religious or be "imposed" on him/her. In each case the procedure and the implications are different.

a. Voluntary Exclaustation

In regard to the exclaustation requested by a perpetual professed, the law of the Church states, *"With the consent of his or her council, the supreme Moderator can for a grave reason grant an indult of exclaustation to a perpetually professed member for a period not exceeding three years. In the case of a cleric; the indult requires the prior consent of the Ordinary of the place where the clerics must reside. To extend this indult, or to grant one for more than three years, is reserved to the Holy See or, in an institute of diocesan right, to the diocesan Bishop"* (can. 686

§ 1). And adds: *"Only the Apostolic See can grant an indult of exclaustation for cloistered nuns"* (c. 686 § 2).

It is the supreme Moderator with the consent of his or her council the one who grants the indult of exclaustation; he/she may grant it either for one year, two years or three years. But it is incumbent on the Holy See or on the diocesan bishop - depending if the institute is of pontifical or diocesan right— to extend this indult, or to grant permission for a period exceeding three years. (The 'diocesan bishop' is the bishop of the place of the house where the religious is assigned.)

When the religious that requests the exclaustation is a cleric, the supreme Moderator needs the consent of the Ordinary of the place where the religious will reside. This is a logic provision, since the religious-cleric will exercise his ministry in a determinate diocese. There cannot be wandering clerics!

The granting of the indult of exclaustation for enclosed nuns is the sole responsibility of the Apostolic See, i.e. the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. This reservation to the Apostolic See does not affect the authority of the diocesan Bishop to permit nuns to leave the enclosure on occasion (cf. can 667 §2). The canon applies to all nuns, whether wholly or only partly dedicated to contemplation. The indult may have been requested by the religious herself or by her Superiors.

Exclaustation must have always valid reasons; it cannot be whimsically requested by the religious concerned nor granted by the competent Superior without a "grave" cause, the gravity of which will be judged by the Superior who grants the indult. (It would be well to set up periodic meetings with the exclaustated member in order to evaluate the resolution of the grave cause which prompted the request). A religious may make a formal request to live outside the 'cloister' for personal reasons, for instance, to

reflect on his or her vocation, to care for an ailing parent or other wholly dependent close relative, etc.

b. *Exclaustration imposed*

Imposed exclaustration is a practice which was developed as a result of the experience of the Congregation for Religious in dealing with some troublesome individuals. Although it is imposed, it must not be understood to be a penalty. Rather, it is an administrative act, a precept ordering the religious to remain outside a religious house. This action is taken both for the good of the member and of the institute. The precept implies a suspension of the obligation to observe enclosure and a deprivation of the right to a life in common.

"At the request of the supreme Moderator acting with the consent of his or her council, exclaustration can be imposed by the Holy See on a member of an institute of pontifical right, or by a diocesan Bishop on a member of an institute of diocesan right. In either case a grave reason is required, and equity and charity are to be observed" (Can 686 §3).

The initiative to impose exclaustration on a perpetually professed member comes from the supreme Moderator of the institute with the consent of his/her council. However, in this case it is not the supreme Moderator the one who grants the indult of exclaustration, but the Apostolic See for the institutes of pontifical right, and the diocesan Bishop for those of diocesan right. The Superior only "requests" it and presents all the relevant information to the competent authority.

A *grave* reason is likewise needed, this time not just on the part of the religious, but on the part of the institute. It has been said that imposed exclaustration is normally used in order to protect the welfare both of the individual and of the institute, in a case

where the behavior of the individual is seriously disruptive of the life of the institute. The motives then for an imposed exclaustation, while being grave (for instance, continual refusal to obey legitimate requests of superiors in serious matters; a derogatory witness to religious life causing scandal, etc.) they are not such as to prompt dismissal from the institute, for he/she might not be fully accountable for them. That is why in the case of imposed exclaustation "equity and charity are to be observed."

The expression "equity and charity are to be observed" is of high religious relevance. There is no difficulty to understand the meaning of charity; however, the equity has not always been rightly interpreted. Equity, *in reference to justice*, is "justice tempered with mercy." Equity belongs to justice; it is then justice, but a 'qualified' justice, concretely, an intermediate reality between justice and charity. That is why St Thomas reduces equity or *epikeia* to affability or friendship. It is the virtue that transforms human relations into something convenient and joyful. Pope Paul VI defined canonical equity as "justice tempered with mercy."

A factor to be taken into account is that imposed exclaustation is something that goes against the will of the religious concerned. Therefore, although the law does not say it, we believe that the religious must be warned and corrected, and must be given the opportunity to explain his/her conduct and defend him/herself (*CLD*, 9, p. 459). The exclaustated religious must be helped both spiritually and materially: this is a demand of charity and of justice, at least in their aspect of equity. It is not to be forgotten that the exclaustated member continues being a religious, although temporarily living outside the institute.

3. Rights and Obligations of the Exclaustrated member

Those religious members who are exclaustrated still belong to their institute and, therefore, remain in principle subject to the obligations of their religious state, especially those inherent to the vows. However, their rights and obligations are greatly modified by the norms that the Church, guided by her maternal spirit and with great realism, has issued on the matter. The provision reads: *"Members who are exclaustrated are considered as dispensed from those obligations which are incompatible with their new condition of life. They remain dependent on and under the care of their Superiors and, particularly in the case of a cleric, of the local Ordinary. They may wear the religious habit, unless the indult specifies otherwise, but they lack active and passive voice"* (can 687).

Accordingly, the personal condition or status of the exclaustrated religious is characterized by the following elements:

(1) *Freedom from incompatible obligations.* The exclaustrated member is free from those obligations which are incompatible with his/her new condition of life, for instance, life in common, cloister, minor permissions, etc. Other obligations of the religious state "compatible" with the new condition of life remain, such as those inherent to the vows (although the manner of living in poverty and obedience must be adjusted to suit the new situation), to a simple and poor lifestyle, to the recitation of the breviary, to the celebration of mass if they are priests, etc.

(2) *Dependence on Superiors/bishop.* The exclaustrated member remains dependent on and under the care of his/her Superiors, and, particularly in the case of a cleric, of the local Ordinary. In fact, the dependence and the care from one's Superiors do not vanish with the exclausturation. The norm says "Superiors" without making any distinction between Superior General, Provincial' or

Local; henceforth, the exclaustated member is under the dependence and the care of his/her Superiors to all levels. At the same time, independently of whether they are clerics or not, the exclaustated members are under the dependence and care of the local Ordinary (obviously, such dependence would be more radical in the case of clerics). This implies that the local Ordinary where the exclaustated member resides must be informed by the Superior about his/her presence so that the Ordinary may care for him/her. The dependence is real, which means that the Superiors and the local Ordinary can intervene in the life of the exclaustated member if they deem it convenient, as their obligation is to take "care" of his/her life and conduct. "Taking care" (in modern language would be "giving care") of someone is a right but it is also an obligation.

(3) *Wearing of the habit.* The competent Superiors, at the moment of granting or imposing the exclaustation, may forbid the exclaustated member to wear the religious habit of the institute. The old provision that forbade the religious to wear his/her habit during exclaustation has been abrogated. Now the religious member can (furthermore, should) wear the habit of his/her institute "unless the indult specifies otherwise." Thus, if the Superiors or the local Ordinary are not in favor of the exclaustated member wearing his/her religious habit, they must do everything possible for such prohibition to appear expressly in the indult. If nothing about the habit is written there, the Superiors and the local Ordinary do not have the right to prevent the exclaustated member from wearing it.

(4) *Deprivation of active and passive voice.* The exclaustated member lacks active and passive voice. The deprivation of active and passive voice is one of the most important legal effects of exclaustation. Such deprivation, however, is not considered a punishment, but only a logical consequence of the new situation,

since the exclaustated religious lives outside the community and no longer participates fully in the life of the institute. As a matter of fact, the right to active and passive voice, which gives the member responsibility for the internal government of the institute, is suspended; the member is free to concentrate on the grave cause which prompted the petition for exclaustation. One thing to be noticed is that the prohibition is valid only for the period of exclaustation; once the latter is over, the religious regains both voices.

4. Other questions

Brief answers to the other formulated questions concerning the condition of the exclaustated member could be the following:

a. Can the exclaustated religious be admitted in the religious house before the expiration of the exclaustation period?

The answer is "yes." Although the exclaustated religious has no right in principle to enter the house during the period of exclaustation, however, a religious in voluntary exclaustation is free to return at any time to the institute, even before the expiration of the period of time determined in the indult, *but subject to the acceptance of his/her Superiors*. In such a case, the Superior general should require the religious to cancel the indult so as to preclude instability. The member on enforced exclaustation cannot return to the religious institute without a decree of revocation from the authority that issued the decree.

b. Who pays for his/her expenses while on leave?

Well, on this matter, the relationship between exclaustated religious and both their Superiors and the local Ordinary should be defined in the rescript (indult or precept). In this way the authorities can fulfill their responsibilities towards these religious,

and the religious can give an account of themselves on a regular basis. The following rules may serve as guidelines:

(1) The member is in principle obliged to self-support (a simple life-style is required by the vow of poverty);

(2) Whatever the member earns belongs to the institute, but the person on exclaustation must first provide for himself or herself;

(3) If the member cannot provide a decent living, the institute should assist;

(4) The religious institute is obliged to support the member on imposed exclaustation if circumstances so warrant;

(5) A cleric on imposed exclaustation must find a bishop who will accept him into the diocese.

*c. What to do if at the **end of the exclaustation period the exclaustated religious member refuses to return to his/her original community?***

It has been said that when the reasons for the indult cease or the period of exclaustation expires, the member is obliged to return to the institute. Neither the interests of the member nor those of the institute are served in unduly prolonging the period of exclaustation. In cases which exceed the three-year period, the Apostolic See usually indicates a date of termination at which time the petitioner would have to come to a decision. The decision could not be other than either to return to the institute or to petition for an indult of departure.

In spite of it, a good number of exclaustated members do not take any decision. They continue being at large without explicit intention of incorporating themselves to the Institute and at the same time without any intention whatsoever of filing an indult of departure... Major Superiors have been lately challenged by a not

a few of such cases... What they have done varies according to their character and style. Some have kept quiet for years, "hoping against hope" for the member to come back or, in cases the religious is already married, to request for the dispensation papers. Others have sent them repeated invitations to return, giving them even deadlines to do it...

What to do? Definitely there is need to "regularize" canonically the situation of those who *de facto* live separated from their religious community. The principle of canon 665 §2 cannot be overlooked: *"Members who unlawfully absent themselves from a religious house with the intention of withdrawing from the authority of Superiors, are to be carefully sought out and helped to return and to persevere in their vocation."* But if all the attempts are ineffectual, perhaps the best way for Major Superiors to deal with the matter, showing the concerned exclaustated member fatherly concern together also with firmness and some sort of "due process," be sending him/her *a personal written formal warning*, with the invitation to fraternally incorporate himself/herself to the Institute if such is still possible and his/her will, but with the following reminders: (a) that if within a month there is no answer to such invitation, the canonical process for separation from the Institute should be commenced, in accordance with canon 697 (unlawful absence for more a period of six months constitute a ground to start a process of separation); (b) that there is always readiness to help in the process of dispensation from the religious vows and from the obligations of priesthood; and (c) that he/she "always retains the right to communicate with, and send replies directly to, the supreme Moderator" (can 698), defending his/her stand.

Let us add that the Apostolic See in some extreme cases, grants to clerics the so called "qualified exclaustation" by virtue of which an exclaustated religious priest or deacon is forbidden the exercise of the Holy Orders.

Homilies for November-December 2002*

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

November 3, 2002

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Mai 1:14-2:2,8-10/1 Thess 2:7-9,13/Mt 23:1-12)

Offhand we can label today's three bible readings under the common denomination of ecclesiastical readings. What is meant by that? It means that the three readings have a direct bearing and immediate impact for those Christians who, by superior mandate or voluntary act, exercise leadership role in the Church in specified manner.

These particular Christians, to cite a few examples, are the priests, the religious men and women, the parish councilors, the catechists, the faculty of Catholic schools, the lay leaders of Catholic organizations and movements. If we belong to any such groups or organizations, we will do well to pay close attention

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

to the messages of these three readings. They show what, in our leadership positions, we need to avoid or need to do in order to earn God's approval and promote the welfare of our fellow-Christians.

On a second look, however, these three readings that we labeled ecclesiastical, can also be categorized as ecclesial. Now, what is meant by that again? It means that they are applicable to each and every Christian as well by virtue of their baptism. According to the Second Vatican Council, the sacrament of baptism, by its very nature, invests the recipient with the dignity and office in a general manner' of priest, prophet and king. In other words, when you receive the awesome sacrament of baptism God deputizes you, to offer him sacrifices, to teach and share the faith, and to lead in works of mercy and love.

The first reading (Malachil) is a terrible indictment, originally against the Judeans of the 4th/5th century B.C., because of their insulting and scandalous offerings of sacrifices to God. They were literally cheating God by substituting sick and defective animals, spoiled or rotting food, in place of proper and clean gifts.

God really has no need for man's offerings and sacrifices. But he demands them, done for sure in a proper way, so that man may recognize and acknowledge his creaturely condition and his state of subordination and total dependence on God.

In the second instance, the first reading is also a terrible indictment against the priests of Judea for prevaricating and perverting their teaching office, instead of giving correct and sound doctrine.

On the other hand, the third reading (Matthew 23) is a scorching diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' times for availing of their leadership positions to swagger and throw their weight around, to impose intolerable burdens on others, while

dispensing themselves from the requirements of duty, to demand privileges, perks and adulation.

Malachi's indictment and Jesus' denunciation should serve as an alarm bell or pressure gauge to make all of us, present-day Christians, to sit up straight and take stock of ourselves, to monitor *our performance* of divinely assigned duties of offering sacrifices, of teaching the faith, and of leading in works of mercy and love. We must ask ourselves if we are behaving like the Judeans whom Malachi excoriated, or like the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus roundly scolded.

The second reading (1 Thess 2) presents to us the perfect example of an ordained priest and a priestly baptized Christian, of a gospel preacher and a general evangelist, of a church official and a lay leader. The passage refers, on the one hand, to Paul, the ordained minister of God, the preacher of the gospel, the apostle of Christ who carried out his duties with the gentleness and dedicatidn of a mother, spared the Thessalonians of the burden of having to support him, shared them not only the Good News of salvation, but was ready to share even his life, if that was necessary.

On the other hand, the same passage refers to the Christians of Thessaly who accepted the Good News brought by Paul, not as a message from man but as God's message. In consequence of which, they turned from idols to serve the living and true God; they became a model for all the churches in Macedonia, Achaia and in every place; they persevered in the work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope; they exhibited joy in the Holy Spirit despite being in great affliction and trials.

In short, today's second reading offers us the inspiring exemplars and models of Paul and his Thessalonian converts for each and every Christian, whether ordained or just baptized. Let us imitate them, and we will never have to hear Malachi's indictment or Jesus' denunciation being leveled against us.

November 10, 2002

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Wis 6:12:16/1 Thess 4:13-18/Mt 25:1-3)

If we pay careful attention to the three bible readings of today's Mass, we shall find out that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the heart of their content and message. It is his Advent, his Second Coming that they tell us to await with foresight and preparedness, with joy even for then, it marks the time we can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Take for example today's gospel parable. It has been called the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. But we might call it also the parable of the lost and found opportunities, to give a modern touch to this ancient story.

How often do we not talk today of lost opportunities? Of something just within our reach, already on the palm of our hand, then suddenly evaporating and gone forever? Like that job, that promotion, that business deal, that promising harvest, that promising relationship and so on.

Lost opportunities are realities of life. So are the discovered and fully availed of opportunities. And both can occur daily in life just as we live it out day after day. It is such stuff as these things that make life exciting (in the case of availed opportunities) or painful (in the case of lost opportunities).

Today's gospel parable deals about the most important of all opportunities, the possession of the kingdom of heaven. In fact, .his alone deserves strictly the name of opportunity because it is so precious, so easily within our reach, already on the palm of our hand, but just so easily lost by one foolish act.

Is the loss of the kingdom of heaven of lesser importance than the loss of one's life? Life is so precious that we try to do everything we can to preserve and prolong it. Do we do as much to prevent the loss of the kingdom of heaven? The foolish virgins were foolish because they were not prepared, when the bridegroom came to open the door to the wedding feast. How shall we find ourselves or how shall Jesus find us when he comes again?

The ancient people speak of death as nothing more but a slumber, a sleep from which one eventually wakes up for another kind of existence. If pagans can speak this way, how much more the Christians. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (second reading) implies that the death of a Christian is bound up to the death of Christ. And since Christ rose from the dead, so also will the Christian. Hence, our second reading considers death an opportunity also, a slumber, a sleep from which we make up to find ourselves in the kingdom of heaven, thanks to the merits of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the book of Wisdom (first reading) provides us with the language and images to articulate a Christian doctrine. And according to which, Jesus Christ is present and alive in Christians even before his Second Coming. We owe this doctrine to John the Evangelist and Paul the Apostle. So we do not have to wait till his Second Advent because accordingly, we can easily find Jesus Christ for he will be sitting there at our door waiting for us to open it to him, no matter what hour in the morning, during the day or in the evening. So, the first reading is somehow the reverse of the parable of the 10 virgins. There it is, the virgins waiting for Jesus to lead them to the wedding feast, while here it is, Jesus waiting for us to open the doors to our hearts to him. What condescension! What accessibility! What persevering love! This Jesus waiting at our door.

November 17, 2002

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Prov 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31/1 Thess 5:f-6/Mt 25:14-30)

Trade and industry, and the bureaus, offices, divisions behind them, are not inventions or institutions of modern times. Trade and industry have been practiced by man long before historical documents could be put together to give evidence of them.

It is not surprising therefore, that the bible[^] in its oldest books, mentions also this kind of activity. If we take it from the book of Genesis, Tubal Cain was the world's first smith-worker and metal tool-maker; Jubal, the creator of musical instruments; Jabal was the first trader in livestock.

To pursue this thought further, the primeval trade and industry had also their line of support, namely transportation. About land transportation, the bible has many references (from Genesis onwards) to commercial caravans going from one country to another. Similar remark can be made for sea transportation, not to mention the pre-historical first boat ever built to accommodate human, animal, and food cargoes - Noah's ark.

Therefore, we can say that trade and industry are as old as humanity. And modern achievements in this and other areas could not have been possible, if the activities of our ancestors along those lines, had not preceded them. What does all this boil down to? Before you get the impression that you are being given a lecture in business and commerce, let us point out that because of their ancient origins and universal practice, trade and industry plus other, related activities, are in keeping with human nature, and therefore willed by God.

This is equivalent to saying that by engaging in them, we can work out ultimately the salvation of our souls and others. Not that these activities are sacraments leading directly to God and salvation, but that taken and done according to God's plan and viewpoint they are stepping-stones towards that end.

The first reading (book of Proverbs 31) greatly praises the industrious wife, also a trade-practitioner. It singles out her inestimable value for her husband, her children, and her community. It considers her the pillar of her family and society. Chapter 31 of the book of Proverbs is the Magna Carta of the good and capable wife and mother for all women and girls to read and ponder.

What about the men, the husbands? Is there a biblical Magna Carta for them, too? Yes, there is. We find it in the third reading (Matthew 25). It is an encouragement for them to practice trade and industry. Should the men, the husbands also, read chapter 24 of the gospel of St. Matthew? They already have enough incentives to engage in activities of this kind by the mere lure of money and profit.

For how else can we explain such modern phenomena as overseas contract workers, emigrations from rural to urban centers, corporate big mergers of companies and banks, speculative stock-trading, multi-national companies, free-export processing zones, globalization of trade and commerce and the like. It is the lure of money and profit that drives them to engage feverishly in these activities. Still, Matthew 25 will be useful reading for men/women, not in the sense of helping them make more money (making more money for the sake of money has no sense at all), but for making sense out of all men's activities.

This means making sense out of life! What is the purpose of life on earth? What is the purpose of work, of trade and industry, of gainful occupation? To be sure, wealth, gain, abundance are

legitimate values, otherwise the gospel parable today would not talk of putting money to good use. But that is only one side of the coin, so to speak. Who can give the spiritual and Christian dimensions to wealth, profit, and abundance? Certainly not textbooks on management, investments, or business administration. Chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel will do that.

The second reading (1 Thess 5) is a reminder for all practitioners of trade and industry (this would embrace most of mankind) to be ready for the "Day of the Lord," which comes like a thief in the night. We might be saying, "Everything is fine and dandy. My business is thriving well and expanding. I have fat allowances in the bank. My future is secured." Then suddenly destruction hits us. An earthquake of 7.9 in the Richter scale. A revolution. An invasion. A missile strike. The Y2K. Or whatever. Let not, therefore, the "Day of the Lord" take us by surprise. As Paul says, let us stay awake and keep sober, for we do not belong to the night or darkness but to the day and the light.

November 24, 2002

Christ the King

(34th Sunday)

Cycle A

(Readings: Ez 34:11-12, 15-17/1 Cor 15:20-26, 28/Mt 25:31-46)

If numbers mean anything to you, then here are some that Church liturgy and the bible offer to whet your intellectual appetite. The past Sunday was numbered 33rd Sunday of the year by Church liturgy. It marks the end of the liturgical calendar and prepares for the beginning of a new calendar year next Sunday, which is called 1st Sunday of Advent. Incidentally, 33 is considered the number of years that Jesus spent on this earth.

Again, the 25th Chapter of St. Matthew's gospel (third reading) marks the last sermon of Jesus, after which Matthew gives

us in the succeeding chapters the story of the Lord's passion and death that cut off prematurely his life here on earth.

So, in the language of numbers, if numbers do talk, we find ourselves in the borderline between what comes to an end and what begins to start. We are, so to speak, in the twilight zone. Christians have a special name for that, though you may not know, namely eschatology. The word is biblical in origin and biblical in content. To put it simply, eschatology signifies the end of what began because it was never meant to endure and the beginning of what will never end because it was never meant to cease.

If such is eschatology, namely things to come that will be final, or if you wish, things certain and indisputable but still have to appear and happen, then it goes without saying that eschatology is an essential baggage for a Christian travelling on this life's journey. He is a person who believes and hopes for some final and conclusive things to happen for him.

It appears, therefore, that there is logic and timeliness in Mother Church's invitation for us to celebrate the feast of Christ the King of the Universe on this particular Sunday which straddles between the end and the beginning of the Christian liturgical year. It somehow conditions us for the realities that will take place when our temporal life ends and our eternal life begins.

For celebrating this feast, Mother Church has put together three readings that explain briefly the origin, nature, prerogatives, and mission of Christ's kingship. We should have complete and clear notions about these points because the human terms and concepts God uses when speaking to us have inherent limitations and imperfections that need to be refined and developed. This task is specially needed, given the temperament of modern men who, it seems, have no affection for kings and kingdoms but definitely show partiality for presidents, prime ministers, chairmen, chancellors, and even dictators.

Ezekiel 34 (first reading) assures us that the King of the Universe acts more like a shepherd lovingly tending to his sickly, wounded and feeble sheep. But this shepherd-king also segregates the good sheep from the bad, adjudicating to each the corresponding reward or punishment.

Matthew 25 (third reading) states that the King of the Universe will decide our final destiny on the basis of fulfillment or non-fulfillment of those actions which people generally consider as not particularly incumbent upon them. Like feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving the shelterless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. Why these actions, if done or left undone, can decide our eternal happiness or eternal damnation is further explained with this simple statement from Jesus: he has identified himself completely with these unfortunate brothers. Hence, what is done for them is done for the King; what is denied to them is denied to the King.

Finally, 1 Cor 15 (second reading) is the Manual of Operation, so to speak, of how Christ would exercise his kingship in accordance with the over all plan of God for the final Day. First, there will be a resurrection for those who belong to Christ, guaranteed by the fact and power of his own personal resurrection. Death, Christ's mortal enemy, will thus be finally overcome, along with all adversarial powers, authorities, governances of demonic, cosmic or human origins. Christ's rule will be unopposed and absolute. Then he will endorse his kingdom, his people, his own self to the rule of God his Father, who is the origin and final goal of everyone and everything. Let us pray and work for our inclusion into this grandiose plan of God the Father.

December 1, 2002

First Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 63:16-17:19; 64; 2-7/1 Cor 1:3-9/Mk 13:33-37)

Unmistakable signs are upon us of the approach of Christmas: the onset of cold weather, the lengthening of the nights, the familiar carols over the radio, the decorations with fantastic colors and shapes in homes, offices and stores. They all announce the coming of Christmas.

Then, of course, the usual preparations for the event follow, like: the setting aside of some spending money, the judicious choice of gifts to be wrapped and given away, the clothes and shoes to be worn, the persons to be visited or greeted by cards, and many other details that make the occasion an exciting and heartwarming experience.

Thus, the stage is being set for everybody to be in a state of expectation: the children with held breath because of what they expect to receive; the adults with understandable apprehension because of what they are expected to give. Mother Church accompanies us during the preparation stage by the celebration of the four Sundays of Advent. Today is the first of the series.

The pastoral aim of these four Sundays, however, is not so much to intensify our desire for Christmas to arrive, as to keep alive the flames of "expectation" for Christ to return. In these four Sundays, we don't look forward for Christmas to happen because it already has happened. We look forward to his Second Coming, which has not yet taken place.

To us Christians today, the expectation of Christ's Second Coming is as valid and crucial, as was the expectation for his birthday to the believers in ancient times. These two Comings

or Advents are complementary: the first coming would be incomplete without the other; the Second Coming would be unexplainable without the First.

Hence, the concern of Mother Church in that while we traditionally recall with adoring gratitude the First Coming of Jesus at Bethlehem, we should keep on expecting with joyful hope his Second Coming till it really takes place.

Preparedness, composure and intensity should characterize our expectation for the Second Coming of Jesus. He himself (gospel of Mark) enjoins us to be alert, to be on the watch, because we don't know the hour or the day when he will return to demand an accounting of how, we managed the talents he entrusted to us during his absence.

Paul on his part (second reading), counsels us to await the Lord's Coming with serenity and composure because we fully trust that God the Father, after having called us to have fellowship with his Son and having gifted us with every single blessing, will keep us firm and faultless up to the Day when Jesus will appear.

Finally, Isaiah in his inimitable eloquence and soaring imagination (first reading), bids us no less than to force God to appear and make his presence felt, so that his enemies and ours may shake with fear and retreat in confusion. It is the sight of our total helplessness and prostration due to sin that impels Isaiah to speak for us with daring intensity. He asks God to tear open the heavens and come down to save us. After all, God is our Father, he says, and no one else would want to acknowledge us because of the filth of our sins.

Our spokesman Isaiah directs to God these surprising questions: "Why do you make us so stubborn that we turn away from you? Why do you let us stray from your ways? Come back, for the sake of the people who have always been yours, despite

our continuous sinning, despite our having provoked your anger by our filthy actions."

With Isaiah thus prodding us, we not only should not fear the Coming of the Lord but should actually and intensely clamor for his return because it is in the Coming of God that we will experience full salvation.

December 8, 2002

Second Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 40:1-5,9-11/2 Pt 3:8-14/Mk 1:1-8)

We are all familiar with the sound system that magnifies the power of the human voice. There is the sound system that uses one, two or three speakers, which increases a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred-fold the original volume of the human voice. With such enormous strength and amplitude, the message which the human voice wants to impart rings out clear and unstoppable.

Today, the message that Mother Church wants to impart should ring out clear and unstoppable. She is using not one, nor two, but three speakers, so to speak, by presenting to us the three bible readings in this Mass. Isaiah, Peter, and Mark, in all their three readings, one common message blare out with vigor and intensity: CONVERSION! If some people still miss the message, it is either because they are deliberately stopping their ears or they have impaired hearing.

Either of the two cases would not be surprising, considering that conversion is a very difficult task to accomplish. It involves, no less than a turning away from, a giving up of something we have learned to love and got accustomed to. Hence, a kind of reluctance, hesitation or clear opposition creeps into our system when called upon to convert and change.

Nevertheless, conversion is made easier if, to the task of turning away from someone or something that hinders our real good we combine the effort of turning to someone or something that brings about our true welfare. Conversion is like a cassette tape. If you fast-forward one end of the tape you empty the other end. The three bible readings of today do just that. They fast-forward us to God so that we may more easily empty ourselves of dangerous liaisons or vain attachments.

Let us see how the bible readings do that. Let us begin with Isaiah 40 (first reading). He recalls, firstly, his countrymen's state of banishment and wretchedness into which their sins have driven them and for which they have suffered long enough. Then he announces, on God's behalf, that now is the time for pardon, for taking comfort and putting up courage. Because their liberation is at hand, their homecoming is on sight, and the best news of all, God will personally lead them back to their homeland. Who is the Christian today who cannot get the message of the first reading of prophet Isaiah that men/women should return to God and leave behind all their sins and wrongdoing?

The second reading is equally persuasive and heartwarming. However, unlike Isaiah, Peter does not look to what happened in the past but to what will take place in the future. He says this earth, this universe with all its heavenly bodies, will bow up into a huge ball of fire and then disappear completely. In their place, we await a new earth and new heavens. Peter's message is this: our lives should be holy and dedicated to God as we wait for the Day of the Lord, when the heat will melt all these things.

Finally, in Mark 1 (third reading), we have the best reason why we should accept enthusiastically the task of personal conversion despite its difficulty. Countless people, in John the Baptizer's time, picked up his message of repentance enthusias-

tically by having themselves baptized by him and confessing their sins. We Christians of today cannot afford to do less, in terms of enthusiasm and sincerity of personal conversion. While John baptized with water his repenting countrymen, Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit assuring a thorough cleansing of the heart and a transformation of life. But we must give ourselves to Jesus in order that he may work out that change in us.

December 9, 2002

Immaculate Conception

December 8

(Readings: Gen 3:9-15, 20/Eph 1:3-6, 11-12/Lk 1:26-38)

In celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary today, we give joyful recognition to the unique holiness of the Mother of God. It is a holiness that, although given to her in full measure from the very first moment of her conception in St. Anne's womb, it grew progressively every conscious minute of her terrestrial existence. So that at the end of Mary's earthly life, we are presented with an example of utter holiness and perfection that for all times is unheard of, unrepeatable, unparalleled by any other creature of God, whether spirit or flesh, angel or man.

How can the Catholic Church and her children not rejoice and celebrate this stupendous model of holiness, this miraculous exemplar of perfection; i.e. the Blessed Virgin Mary. The three bible readings of today's Mass basically resound with this note of rejoicing.

But one must listen attentively to these readings to catch the joyful notes emanating from their words. We need to fine-tune our ears to their wavelengths because there are great many voices and interferences that also want to draw our attention. The wavelength of today's bible readings is faith.

Without faith or with faith that is inactive and sleepy, one will not see the importance of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Catholics may matter-of-factly concede the uniqueness and perfection of the immaculately conceived Mother of God. But will they relate the holiness of Mary to their personal lives?

Mary is as far removed from sin, as her fullness of grace requires by right and propriety. How far removed from sin do we require ourselves, we who are less full of grace at the moment of our baptism, and even lesser, if not completely devoid of grace during our youth and adulthood?

Mary is the perfect virgin, always and forever. Nowadays, very few people appreciate, much less practice, virginity. If you have been keeping your virginity throughout your teen-age years, your peers or elders will consider you old-fashioned, weird, *promdi*, as they say. Such is today's low-esteem for chastity that the risk of contracting HIV or AIDS can scarcely keep people from illicit affairs.

At the risk of being considered old-fashioned and ultra-conservative, the Catholic Church rejoices greatly on this special day. She is able to present to the world the luminous model of perfection and holiness - Mary the Immaculate Virgin and Mother. Immaculate at her conception and immaculate throughout her earthly life. The Catholic Church invites all her children to imitate joyously the virtues of Mary, especially her closeness to God and her remoteness from sin.

December 15, 2002

Third Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 61:1-2,10-11/1 Thess 5:16-24/Jn 1:6-8.19-28)

We Christians have a special name for this Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent. We call it *LAETARE* Sunday, a Latin word we can translate as Joyful Sunday, or better still, Sunday for Rejoicing. Actually, all Sundays of the year are supposed to be joyful Sundays, or Sundays for rejoicing. And if we take it from Paul (1 Thess 5), all the days of the year should find us in a joyful spirit.

But it is especially on this Laetare Sunday that Mother Church invites us to rejoice. She wraps up in tinsel colors the carefully chosen three readings of today's Mass, and hands them to us like a Christmas gift.

As if from a rich repertoire of Christmas carols, the second reading, brings out recommendations after recommendations for us to prepare and be ready for the Lord's coming. Some of these recommendations are: avoiding idleness; overcoming timidity; helping each other's fragileness; bearing patiently with one another - to cite a few examples. But most important of all, is his recommendation for the Christians to "be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances." I single out this" one for two reasons.

First, it shows that Christianity is not just a set of rules, commandments, points of doctrine to uphold, as some people assume. Christianity is also a special life-style wherein those who embrace it are expected to be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances.

The second reason is because of its seeming impossibility of realization. How can one be always joyful? When, for instance, one is caught in a terrible traffic, when the gasoline price keeps on rising, when bank robberies, kidnappings, murders of innocent people continue to happen, when economic gains do not reach those who are most in need?

The other two readings can give the answer. John 1 (third reading), narrates the Baptizer as giving this profound reply to the Jews and Pharisees who were also asking how, why, who he was. "There is one among you whom you do not recognize." The Baptizer was telling them that they could not be joyful people because they refused to acknowledge Jesus Christ. That is why they kept on criticizing him and others, finding fault in them, picking on them.

We are not like the investigators of the Baptizer. We do acknowledge Jesus Christ as present in our midst and moves among us. We do recognize him for what he is and has done for us. But you ask, "Who is Jesus Christ and what has he done for us so that we should be joyful, prayerful and thankful always?" Isaiah 61 (first reading) will answer that for you with brilliant and poetic flourish.

"The Sovereign Lord has chosen him (the Messiah) and sent him to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to announce liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners." In more ways than one, we can consider ourselves also poor, broken-hearted, captives and in prison. Should we then huddle in a corner to measure our sorrows and lick our wounds? No, says Isaiah 61, because the time has come when the Lord will save his people, will comfort all who mourn.

As surely as the seeds sprout and grow, his people will then rejoice like a bride dressed for her wedding, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem.

Isaiah, Paul, and John the Baptizer do not deny the reality of human sorrow and pain. Much of human history has been written and is being written in ink of blood and tears. Not even the story of the life of Jesus on earth was spared from that. But it is this same Jesus who broke the cycle of despair, sorrow and pain, and by assuring us of ultimate salvation and happiness, he gave us the reason for being joyful always.

Just as Jesus brings joy to our hearts, let us resolve to bring joy also to others, always and ever.

December 22, 2002

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

(Readings: 2 Sam 7:1-5,8-11,16/Rom 16:25-27/Lk 1:26-38)

Today's three bible readings deal about a great mystery. Mysteries have always attracted the interest and curiosity of men/women. But there are mysteries and mysteries. Those that are totally shrouded, fully hidden, completely undetectable, will fail to attract men's attention. But those that are partly hidden and partly seen will entice men's desire to see and comprehend them more fully.

Thus the saying goes that a beautiful child or a beautiful woman is a mystery. There are things you see and understand about them. However, there remain many more things you do not see and understand about them which hold your attention and interest.

The first reading (2 Sam 7) serves to introduce us to the great mystery referred to above. King David, as you might know, was in the zenith of his power, strength and glory. God had helped him reach it. Looking around and happily settled in his palace,

he noticed that God's Ark of the Covenant, symbol of his presence, was kept only in a tent! Feeling embarrassed, he confided to prophet Nathan a plan to build a temple worthy of his God.

For that intention alone, God swore to David that his kingdom will never end and his dynasty will continue forever. David had not even started to build the temple but only announced his plan to do so. Yet God rewarded him already in a manner totally unexpected by David who knew well how kingdoms on earth rise and fall.

The third reading (Luke 1) shows how God's solemn promise to David was fulfilled. It will be Jesus Christ, conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, who would inaugurate the eternal kingdom and exercise a never ending reign. But Luke focuses as much on God's fidelity to his promise to David as on God's disclosure of his mystery to save and give favor to all mankind aside from David and the Hebrew race.

The second reading (Rom 16) further explains the manner of disclosure of the great mystery. It was done gradually involving several centuries. In effect, Paul says that the mystery was hidden for long ages in the past because God kept it secret in his mind and heart. Now, however, the secret has been brought out to the open through the writings of the prophets and evangelists. Above all, it was Christ himself who commanded that the mystery be made known to all the naHcns so that all may believe and be saved.

Though now made publicly known to all and sundry, the mystery of salvation retains much more to be discovered and admired by us. For it is in the nature of mysteries pertaining to God that both clarity and obscurity envelop them simultaneously.

This is another way of saying that it's impossible to put all of God's majesty inside our little heads. Neither Mary understood

fully the mystery as it was being disclosed to her by the angel Gabriel. That is why she was asked many questions. But once enlightened by the angel, her reply was a great act of faith worthy of our imitation.

We all love to contemplate the beautiful face of a child or a woman because of the mystery they enclose within themselves. On Christmas Day, we shall have the opportunity to contemplate the face of a virgin-mother and the face of a divine child. Let their "mystery" enfold us in its embrace.

Christmas Mass at Midnight Cycles A, B, C
(Readings: Is 9: 1-6/Titus 2: 11-14/Lk 2: 1-14)

Tonight, we shall attempt to do something special, something far from the ordinary. On attending tonight's Mass, after having listened to the three bible readings about the mystery of Christmas, we shall make every effort to express our thanks and give praises, to God for the gift of his Son. The special thing about our gathering is the intensity and fullness of feelings we shall put into our collective act of praise and thanksgiving, over and above what we have already invested during the nine days of the Aguinaldo Masses.

The quality that dominated all our preparations for Christmas since the start of the *Misa de Gallo* and which should dominate more intensely on their culmination this midnight is that of JOY. It is this joy that the Angel of God was tasked to announce to earth, even as he proclaimed the Good News of a Savior. We all really need and seek anxiously for joy - the kind of joy that truly fills our hearts, lights up our minds, renews our strength, and cheers up our lives.

It is true that in our frenzied search for joy on Christmas season we stumble across fake or cheaper ones. Our personal or collective interpretations of what joy should consist could lead to momentary feelings of exultation like gift-shopping and exchange, exploding of fire-crackers, yuletide dancing and partying and some others. But those are pale shadows of the great joy that God wants to give us and our hearts are yearning for ever since.

In the first reading, Isaiah predicts a great joy that God is preparing for his people. They had lived long enough in darkness and oppression. The time will come when they will see a great light and when the instruments and symbols of oppression will be broken away from their backs and shoulders.

The beautiful thing in Isaiah's prediction is that a fragile infant will put an end to the darkness and oppression that have weighed heavily upon God's people. The very improbability of the idea is what makes this promise of joy such an exciting expectation. Imagine, a newborn child will smash the rod of the taskmaster, will break the yoke that burdened the people!

Probable or improbable, Paul in his letter to Titus, states categorically that the Grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all men. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and live temperately, justly, and devoutly on this earth as we await our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ. We missed seeing him when he appeared as an infant, and we still await for his appearing as the Great God and Lord at the end of time. But just the same, we possess this joy that God wanted to give us, and in the present and actual possession of it, we can sing together with the angels in heaven and the saints on earth, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to men of good will."

Christmas

December 25

(Readings: Is 52:7-10/Heb 1:1-6/Jn 1:1-18)

You might wonder why this morning three bible readings do not mention what you and every child traditionally know about the story of Christmas, and today is Christmas day. You miss hearing things like Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem, not finding a place there to rest, so Baby Jesus had to be born in a cave and laid in a manger, and some poor shepherds being told by angels that their Savior was there for them to worship. Actually, this story was mentioned in the gospel that was read in the Midnight Mass.

Had you attended the midnight Mass, its set of three bible readings would have spoken to you about the lovable aspects of the baby Jesus, his silent and unpretentious arrival into this world, his inadequate shelter and poor belongings. The readings of this daytime Mass, on the contrary, carry us to lofty heights as we are allowed to catch a sight of the divinity, majesty, uniqueness and power of Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer.

Hence, last night's set of bible readings and this morning's set of other bible readings present us with two viewpoints or emphases of one and the same mystery of Christmas. As a result, we have a balanced conception of one and the same truth - that Jesus Christ is both and at the same time God and man who came to save us, to be our Redeemer. For if Jesus Christ were only a man as some so-called Christians and unbelievers claim, then he could not be of help to us; we would have remained sinners and lacked in salvation. But if Jesus had been only God, we would not have an exemplar, or model to imitate and follow for gaining eternal life. Last night's bible readings allowed us to contemplate the manhood of Jesus under the soft light of cloudless and starry

December night, so to speak. And this morning's bible readings permit us to peer into his divinity and majesty with the glare and brightness of the noonday sun, also in a manner of speaking.

John, for example, in our third reading this morning, intones in solemn language worthy of angels, that this Jesus born in time and in a particular place, existed before time, and fills the whole universe which he created in fact. Hear how John says it, "In the beginning, before anything was ever created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God."

Paul, also in lofty language (our second reading this morning), joins the evangelist John, in extolling the unreachable dignity inherent in Jesus. He is exceedingly superior to all prophets and angels, all of whom are in fact only messengers and ministers of God. It was only to Jesus God said these words, "You are my Son, today I have become your Father."

Finally, Isaiah, not to be outdone by the above two inspired writers previously mentioned in praising the arrival of the Savior with all the eloquence human language is capable of, has these words, "Break into shouts of joy, you ruins of Jerusalem! The Lord will rescue his city and comfort his people. The Lord will use his holy power; he will save his people, and all the world will see it."

Although lacking in depth, sublimity, eloquence of the above inspired writers Isaiah, Paul and John, let us nevertheless join our voices to their splendid testimony and express our recognition of unfathomable mystery of the incarnation and birth of our Savior and Redeemer with this humble prayer: "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the gift of Christmas. Born of the Father before all ages, you have shared our lowly humanity; you have become a child so that we can share your divinity and become sons and daughters also of the Father. God of God, true light of true light, begotten not

made, by whom all things were made, you showed yourself as a powerless baby, so that we may be empowered to rise up from our sins and go to you to offer our gift of love, worship, and service. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the Christmas."

December 29, 2002

Holy Family Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas

(But if none then December 30) Cycle B

(Readings: Sir 3:3-7,14-17/Col 3:12-21/11 2: 22-40 (or 2: 22, 39-40))

(Alternative readings: Greek 3:2-6,12-14/Gen 15:1-6; 21:1-3/Col 3:12-21/Heb 11:8,11-12,17-19 Lk 2:22-40 (or 2:22.39-40))

Last Christmas, our attention was focused almost exclusively on the Child Jesus. This was understandable. Today, our attention is made to center on the Holy Family of which Christ is a member. The transition of our focus from the Baby Jesus at Christmas to that of the Holy Family this Sunday is made spontaneously and effortlessly. After we look at a baby, it is only natural we turn our eyes to the parents who produced the baby.

So after the feast of Christmas Day, we have now the feast of the Holy Family. Aside from the effortless and spontaneous transition from the one to the other, could there be another reason why we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family? A boy was asked what he wanted to be in the future. He replied, a painter, of course, just like my father! If his father had been a carpenter, or a jeepney driver, or a farmer, the boy would have given the corresponding answer: also a carpenter, a jeepney driver, or a farmer.

We cannot surely assume the boy did not understand all the consequences of his choice. He was not aware that a painter, or a carpenter, or a jeepney driver, or a farmer would have to endure great difficulties and poverty in that kind of life. But what mattered for the boy was that he could follow in the footsteps of his father.

How awesome is the power of example for good, and also for bad! This was my conclusion from the boy's reply.

If today Mother Church honors the Holy Family with a feast, her overriding concern is to set before our eyes an example to follow in the matter of family life. The child Jesus is the example children should follow, the Virgin Mary is the example women and mothers, while St. Joseph for men and fathers. The three bible readings of today's Mass recommend attitudes and ways of behavior indispensable for a happy satisfying family life. Many families are not happy nor get satisfaction in family living because the mental dispositions and ways of behavior endorsed by the three readings are inexistent or in moribund state in those circles.

These unhappy families indulge in practices and life-styles very contrary to precisely what the bible is teaching today. From personal knowledge, I can cite some of these unethical practices: getting pregnant before marriage; indulging in sexual activities outside of marriage; infidelity to marital partners; abortion and contraception; jealousy and unfounded suspicions; intemperate speech and behavior; living beyond financial capability; spirit of domination; inability or unwillingness to discuss rationally and peaceably family problems. We could go on and on. Are these practices not pervasive in Filipino society?

Today's three readings make a general appeal for the conservation of those traditional values like obedience, respect for one another, unity and so on, that have proven effective over the centuries in keeping the family afloat. The readings single out OBEDIENCE as the most important value to cherish and practice. Obedience is a fundamental attitude to be conserved at all cost. Humankind's happiness was promised upon its obedience to God's command. Disobedience to God has wreaked havoc in nations, societies, communities and families. Disobedience to human parents could not be less harmful.

A review and examination by **us of our respective** family lives is the order of today **as we celebrate the** feast of the Holy Family. May we all see the wisdom and have the courage to align our families according to the model and example 'offered by Jesus, Mary and Joseph.