

POSITION PAPER
ON THE PROPOSED HOUSE BILL 4110
Jaime Card. Sin, DD

PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2003
Pontifical Council
for Promoting Christian Unity

APOSTOLIC LETTER
ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE
John Paul II

"THANK YOU" PADRE PIO
Teresita Bucayan

DISMISSAL FROM RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE
Javier Gonzalez, OP



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"Little United Nation"

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

The Lead Paraders: October 24, 2002 saw the local celebration of the United Nation Day in the Balabag Elementary School, Balabag, Malay, Aklan. The lead paraders were the pupils of the school in the satin white and red uniform. They were marching to the tune of the corps of drums played by their dear classmates/schoolmates. They are attentively trying to have a uniform march with left hand on their side waists while the right arm was swaying up and down with their batons.

The Children: The children were arranged according to their grade levels. The grade one precedes all. A well-attired partnered boy and girl led the respective graders. Each pair represent a country like Malaysia, Japan, Canada, Korea, etc. Each class carries a flag of their favorite country. The symbolic parade cannot but impress in the young the diversity of countries trying to be united.

Cooperating Parents: Striking and more visible are the parents of the children. They must have spent a good amount to dress up especially their child that have to be a cute float mounted on a tricycle serving as a Mr. or Ms. of one chosen country. Some of the parents were visibly of Islamic family living around

the Island with legitimate business. This reflects a reality of social life in the barrio of Balabag.

The Prayer and Message: The wife of the Barangay Captain delivered a welcoming speech address to the officials of the school, parents, guest speaker, children and other visitors some of whom came from other countries. The wish of the welcome address is that the Island would be free from terroristic attack and that all were exhorted to pray for this purpose. The guest speaker (he is from London) seconded the wish and bring in the Island who for years loves the school and the children.

More symbolisms were put forward to the public present. Pairs of fish represent Mr. & Ms. Peace, Mr. & Ms. Unity, Friendship, Charity and so forth. The children may not fully understand the meaning of that morning activity to celebrate the United Nation Day, but certainly what they see and hear will for long time strike in their delicate imagination.

"The Little United Nation": This very simple event in an Island far from America reverberates the dream of the founders of United Nation, one of whom was Carlos P. Romulo - a great Filipino patriot. If only the perpetrators of terrorism of September 11 and of other later times could read the aspiration of the little kids in Balabag School and the rest of the world, many human spirits from around the world will be put into the predicament of peace. But this wish should also be put before any other government - like America and England. Any efforts of theirs, seemingly aimed at fighting terrorism in their countries and elsewhere may it be in Iraq or Indonesia, or the Philippines, that will bring suffering to innocent victims, same action of war against evil perpetrators, will be construed terroristic, as well. May the world be saved from this confusion.

The above is our wish as we welcome the new year which craves for unity. The prayer for unity for 2003 hopefully will bring forth results to be enjoyed by all in the world.

Position Paper on the Proposed House Bill 4110*

JAIME CARD. SIN, DD

Circular No. 2002-47

All indicators, and taking into account previous House Bill proposals and other documents, especially those of the UN Conferences, lead one to think that the proposed House Bill will allow abortion, including through the so-called Morning-After Pill.

We hereby register our objection to the proposed House Bill for the following reasons:

ABORTION IS ANTI-SAFE MOTHERHOOD: presented as a way to avoid dangers of childbirth, abortion is much more dangerous for the mother than childbearing and childbirth!

ABORTION IS ANTI-HEALTH: for example, there is a higher incidence of breast cancer among women who abort.

ABORTION IS ANTI-MENTAL HEALTH: among others, a great percentage of women who abort suffer Post-Abortion

* An Act Establishing a Reproductive Health Care Act, Strengthening its Implementing Structures, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes.

Syndrome (e.g., serious depression from two weeks before till two weeks after the anniversary of her abortion, even if it took place decades ago).

ABORTION IS ANTI-MATERNAL HEALTH: many women who abort suffer infections, trauma and death.

ABORTION IS ANTI-WOMAN: abortion degrades the woman and turns her into a victim.

ABORTION IS ANTI-CHILDREN: it is the unborn children who suffer most in abortion.

ABORTION IS ANTI-FAMILY: in abortion parents kill their own children.

ABORTION IS ANTI-ECOLOGY: it destroys the first human habitat, the mother's womb.

ABORTION IS ANTI-FILIPINO: abortion is pushed by foreign-funded lobbyists in Congress and Senate. How can they be pro-Filipino?

ABORTION IS ANTI-POOR: the first target of population control programs are the poor.

ABORTION IS ANTI-ECONOMY: population collapse will produce economic strains. As a management guru states, "The most important single new certainty - if only because there is no precedent for it all in history - is the collapsing birthrate in the developed world" (Peter Drucker, in *Management Challenges of the 21st Century*).

ABORTION IS ANTI-SOCIETY: the harmless, helpless, defenseless baby is killed by those supposed to care for him or her most (the mother, father, doctors, nurses). As Mother Theresa said, if we allow a mother to kill her child, what will prevent us from killing each other?

ABORTION IS ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS: abortion denies the child its first right, the right to live.

ABORTION IS ANTI-CONSTITUTIONAL: According to the Philippine Constitution, the state "shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception". Conception, according to the Records of the Constitutional Commission, takes place during fertilization, not implantation (implantation takes place around five days later).

ABORTION IS ANTI-REASON: how can rational creatures like the human being kill the unborn? Is there no other way to manage poverty, such as by eradicating graft and corruption?

ABORTION IS ANTI-NATURAL: what is more natural than to love one's child? Killing is an ultimate expression of hatred.

ABORTION IS ANTI-LIFE: Life begins at fertilization, wherein the baby is formed, is distinct from the father and the mother, has its own genetic make-up, nourishes itself, begins to divide and implants. The three-to five-day old baby can be killed by the Morning-After Pill, contraceptive pills and IUD's.

ABORTION IS ANTI-GOD: God is the author of life. God gave life, God takes it away.

ABORTION IS ANTI-CONGRESSMEN AND ANTI-SENATORS: How can you expect people to vote for candidates who are anti-safe motherhood, anti-health, anti-mental health, anti-maternal health, anti-woman, anti-children, anti-family, anti-ecology, anti-Filipino, anti-poor, anti-society, anti-economy, anti-civil rights, anti-constitutional, anti-reason, anti-natural, anti-life and anti-God?

For further details, we hereby refer you the Ministry on Family and Life of the Archdiocese of Manila. Furthermore, we pray that the Honorable Lawmakers, through the Chairman of the Committee on Health of the Congress of the Philippines, pass instead Bills that would truly fulfill the constitutional mandate, which states that "the state recognizes the sanctity of family life and shall protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution".

Prayer For Christian Unity 2003

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

Biblical Text for 2003

We have this treasure in clay jars
(2 Corinthians 4: 4-18)

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

For 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 in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture - "I believed, and so I spoke" - we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

(New Revised Standard Version)

To Those Organizing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Adapting the text

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use at the local level. In doing this, account must be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should normally take place ecumenically.

In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material. In other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

Using the Week of Prayer material for churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.

Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service and the "eight days" can be used as appropriate in their own setting.

Communities which observe the week of prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days."

Those wishing to do Bible studies on the week of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the "eight days." Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.

Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's church.

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional date for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Watson to cover the days between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic meaning. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (which was suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.

But the search for Christian unity is not limited to one week each year. We encourage you therefore not only to be flexible concerning the date but also to understand the material presented here as an invitation to find opportunities throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already received, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

Introduction to the Theme for the Year 2003

*"We have this treasure **in** clay jars"*
(2 Corinthians 4: 7)

Migration, a complex issue, is having a growing impact on the lives of many people, countries and churches around the world. Argentina is one of the countries where there have been many

waves of immigration that have affected not only the national context but also the lives of the churches. The initial project for this year's prayer for unity comes from an ecumenical group in Argentina that chose the biblical text and theme that arises out of a reflection on the fact that Argentina is a nation built by native peoples and immigrants.

Several reasons for immigration might be identified such as famine, wars, and religious persecutions. Two stories from Argentina's recent past illustrate these situations and show the need for the churches to work together to seek unity in order to respond in common witness.

1. A family fleeing from violence emigrates and finds a home in Argentina.

There they find security but have to face a new culture which they do not understand, a language that is not their own, and a history with which they cannot identify. Sometimes the local population does not appreciate their presence. This family feels happiness and at the same time sadness. They leave behind fear but now they discover discrimination. In some cases they have to accept being economically exploited; this is the price that they have to pay to protect their lives and raise their children. The new country takes them in and rejects them at the same time. They have faith and they wait for the light that will guide them in the darkness.

2. A young woman comes to the big city looking for a job.

She grew up in the northern countryside and leaves it for a better future. She leaves her family, her friends and now she faces a different kind of society. Her skin and her accent reveal that her origins are in the country; probably she also has native blood. For this too she has to pay a high price. She experiences

the bright lights of the big city but also the sadness of loneliness. She is a foreigner in her own country. She often feels she is treated as if she has no right to enjoy the good life. She has no one in whom to confide but she still has hope that she will find her place.

Such situations led the local group to reflect on how the word of God gives us strength in difficult circumstances and even reminds us that all of God's people are pilgrims on the way to the kingdom. The Bible presents us with many examples of peoples who migrate from place to place for many of the same reasons as the populations of today. Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Amos, and Joseph, Mary and Jesus are biblical examples of immigrants.

The experience of immigration reveals a world that is divided. The unity of Christians needs to be the paradigm for the unity of humankind. Christians possess a "treasure in clay jars" (2 Cor 4:7) which is the glory of Jesus Christ the Lord, namely his victory over sin, death, persecution and hatred. His treasure is, as Paul says in 2 Cor 4:5-6, the knowledge of God's glory that burns brightly in Jesus as he has revealed the depths of God's love and mercy for all creation, especially the poor.

The text of 2 Cor 4:5-18 calls us to recognize that we carry a treasure that does not belong to us but which has been given to us as a gift from God to strengthen us when we are suffering and encourage us when we are sad. We carry this treasure within the fragility of our human existence so that it becomes clear that this gift has its origin in God and is not of our own making. God invites us to witness to him through our human weakness.

The body of Christ is undivided and for this reason we must overcome the divisions among Christians that are a counter-witness to this truth. We recognize that the barriers are great and that our own intellectual and physical force is not enough to heal our sins of division. The unity of the church must be brought about by

the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, so that each step toward unity is seen as God drawing us nearer to his kingdom.

We need to accept the challenge of the apostle Paul who said that "we believe so we speak" (2 Cor 4:13). Not to speak is to hide the visible reality of Christ at work in us, which is the basis of the church's action in the world. So with the strength that is given to us, we have to go toward our neighbour to share the light of Christ and to recognize that together we are in debt to God who gave the life of his Son for the salvation of humankind. These themes are illustrated in the worship service and the eight days, which are planned as follows:

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul encourages his Christian brothers and sisters with the message of hope represented in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's message, revealing God's glory and the light that continues to shine in a world of darkness (2 Cor 4:5-6). This is the hope born in the hearts of men and women who are aware that its source is in God and not in ourselves. It is this treasure that sustains the pilgrims and the migrants in their fragile human condition (*Day 1 - 2 Cor 4:7*).

Common faith in Christ is our hope and our treasure. In our world, many men, women and children experience the weight of persecution, affliction and abandonment as they are forced to leave their homes and live on the streets, constantly separated from their familiar surroundings. Paul reflects on the experience of persecution, offering the consolation of Christian faith; since Jesus assumed our human condition that it might be lifted up, the strength of God is revealed in our weakness. Hence we are neither crushed nor driven to despair, we are not forsaken or struck down because we have faith (*Day 2 - 2 Cor 4:8*).

The mystery of redemption is revealed in situations where, through God's grace, the human spirit makes visible the image

of Christ in the fragility of our bodies. In this fragility we see the death of Christ carried in the body but through God's mercy the image of Christ is also revealed. Too often the sinfulness of discrimination reveals a culture of death, that is nothing more than a desire to eliminate difference, which is the other. The mission of the churches is to find ways to affirm together the image of Christ in the other as a source of riches, a valuable gift. The presence of Christ manifested in our bodies renews us so that we make visible the image of God, a dignity that cannot be erased. It is only when we appreciate this treasure that all bear in their human nature that we can welcome others, recognizing their resemblance to God (*Day 3 - 2 Cor 4:10*).

It seems like a contradiction but as long as there is life in us, we must learn to be given over to death, to die to self that Christ might live in us. In doing so, we open our minds to the very importance of life itself - a life that has been entrusted to Christ that his life might be visible in us. All Christians are called to witness to the fact that sin no longer has power over us. This is where the churches must witness together in the world to the dignity of life, new life in Christ (*Day 4 - 2 Cor 4:11*).

In the precarious conditions in which both pilgrims and immigrants find themselves, Christian churches united "in the same spirit of faith" offer their voices to foreigners and the dispossessed. It is because we confess this same faith that we are able to find words to speak out.

The theme of *Day 5 (2 Cor 4:14)* encourages Christians to reflect on the necessity to speak out courageously against the desperate situations of the homeless, the refugee, the immigrant, the street person, migrant populations and indeed, all who are in distress. We believe in the renewing power of God in Jesus Christ and so together we speak out with courage against all that destroys the dignity of the human person.

It is the mission of the church in society to be a sign of God's grace. The values of this passing world are not necessarily those of the kingdom of the blessed. Jesus has entrusted to each Christian and the churches together, the mission of living out the integrity of the kingdom of God as a new force, renewing human society. The justification that we have been freely given through God's grace obliges us to live as justified in the world (*Day 6 - 2 Cor 4:15*).

In spite of many difficulties and persecutions, we must not lose heart. Saint Paul encourages us to remain strong because we not only bear the death of Christ in our body but also his life. The church is called to show forth the victory of Christ over death by being a community of courage. The perseverance of those seeking Christian unity is an important reality for the faint hearted and those tempted to give up the struggle, for it illustrates the strength of God's grace in spite of many difficulties. Jesus prayed for the unity of all those who bear his name precisely so that the world might come to believe. In spite of obstacles on the path to Christian unity, in the face of adversity the churches must act together with courage and perseverance to offer this divided world a paradigm of unity and to be a sign of the power of the death of Christ over all the forces of sin and darkness (*Day 7 - 2 Cor 4:16*).

On *Day 8*, we reflect on how the suffering that we endure prepares us for "glory beyond all measure" (2 Cor 4:17). This is not a Utopian vision of how all human struggle will end since Paul calls us to reflect on how, if we are united by faith to the sufferings of Christ, we will be transformed by the grace of his resurrection. We bear both his suffering and resurrection in our body. This is why Paul exhorts us to look beyond what we see with mortal eyes to the eternal truth that is revealed in the glory of Christ. The unity of all those who believe in Christ is made

visible when Christians truly take up their task in the world through which they are passing.

Each of the eight days proposes a prayer for the unity of all those who believe in Christ. The value of prayer for unity cannot be stressed enough since it is the place where all Christians, through the power of the Holy Spirit, humbly recognize that the unity that God wills for the church is itself a gift. Let us then pray continually that we may be ready to receive this gift and carry it in the clay jar of our human frailty.

Preparation of the Material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2003

The initial draft of this text was produced by an ecumenical group of biblical scholars, theologians, priests, pastors and lay persons in Argentina. Sincere thanks go to this local group for its suggestion of the theme, and its careful work over a ten-month period. Members of the group were related to the Comision Ecumenica de Iglesias Cristianas de la Argentina (CEICA/The Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches in Argentina). They were: Fr Rafael Magul (Orthodox), Ms Maria Luisa Cardenas (Roman Catholic), Fr Fernando Gianetti (Roman Catholic), Rev. Carlos Halperin (Anglican), Rev. Margarita Tourn (Waldensian Church) and Rev. Pablo Andinach (Methodist).

The text was brought to its present form by an international team appointed by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church. This team - which included a representative of the Argentinian group) met near Malaga, Spain at the ecumenical centre "Los Rubios" of the

Iglesia Evangelica Espafiola (Spanish Reformed Church). The team thanks the director, Mrs Pilar Agraz Aguilar, and the staff of the ecumenical centre for their warm and generous welcome.

The participants in the group were privileged to hear the Rev. Father Carlos de Francisco Vega of the Secretariat for Interconfessional Relations of the Spanish Episcopal Conference speak on the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Spain, and Mrs Agraz on the origins and development of the Los Rubios ecumenical centre, in particular its work with immigrants. In the course of one Sunday participants attended worship at both the Reformed church in Los Rubios and the Roman Catholic parish "Nuestra Senora de la Victoria" in Rincon de la Victoria, and the team also expresses its thanks to them for their friendly welcome.

Ecumenical Worship Service

Introduction

This worship service celebrates the flame lit by God our Father in the hearts of believers and of their communities though they come from many different cultures, peoples and nations spread throughout the earth, in a state of perpetual migration and fresh settlement.

Jesus Christ shares the light of faith with us. This faith is "knowledge of the glory of God which shines on the face of Christ." It is the treasure which Paul evokes in 2 Cor 4: 5-18. Every believer and community of believers shares this treasure and bears witness to it in all its richness and from the frailty of the human condition.

From an ecumenical point of view it is most important that we can joyfully celebrate the risen Christ but it is no less important to raise to God our Father through Jesus our only mediator, our prayers for the many men and women, young people and children traumatized by displacement. This will be the theme of the intercessions which, together with our confession of Christ, the light of our lives, is the most important aspect of this worship. Communities of believers have experienced and still experience division, joys yet tribulations, yearnings and hopes that make them painfully aware of the sufferings of people who know the ordeal of emigration. This is why our prayer of intercession for the unity of the churches and our prayer for migrant communities are one and the same.

For this celebration, based upon the original proposal of an ecumenical group in Argentina, it is particularly recommended:

§ To issue invitations beyond the normal circle of Christians who are usually to be found in ecumenical meetings, so as to form a united but diverse assembly of prayer, especially with the immigrant Christian communities which are to be found within our towns and regions. In meeting and preparing worship together we shall celebrate the risen Christ, Light of Light, as our only salvation within the communion of the one faith with all its diversity of expression. Our celebration will pay tribute to this diversity.

§ To use the symbol of light contained in clay jars; or even better, one clay jar. This could be passed from one group to another in full view of the assembly, at the moment of intercession, allowing the symbolism of this precious treasure to be understood in the unity of the one Lord, one faith, one baptism and common hope in Christ - the Christ who is in solidarity with the poor, with migrants, the wounded of this life. At the beginning of

worship this jar, containing the light, will already emphasize the unity of Christians gathered to proclaim faith in Christ, light of our lives, and of our hope for the growth of fellowship.

§ The sign of peace sets the seal on this fellowship in the intercessions. The unity that is demonstrated by this act corresponds to the renewed commissioning by Christ at the end of the worship. He expects all his disciples to witness to their unity by committing themselves to face up to the hard realities of migration.

§ To highlight not only the dramatic nature of migrations and their sinful causes, but the fact that, as disciples of Christ on earth, we are also migrants. Avoiding condescension or insincerity, we will welcome each other during this worship as sisters and brothers in the faith. We have so much to share of that which gives us hope during times of trial and our wonderment at that treasure which is God-given faith. Where would our ecumenical pilgrimage be without the exchanges and dialogues provoked by contemporary migrations? We will allow ourselves to be welcomed by Christ, himself a nomad on this earth. Our earthly journey also becomes a pilgrimage with our brothers and sisters towards the house of God. But we have to make sure to be like him and not to exclude anyone from the banquet which the Holy Spirit has set within the heart of the baptized. And that is why we have to hear, and hear all over again, his call to become witnesses of the gospel while becoming itinerant bearers of the good news, as Ruth, for example, anticipated in her own way

It is to be hoped that within the liturgy of the word the person of Ruth can be honoured. At the beginning of the liturgy, the story of Ruth's journey to Bethlehem in Judah with Naomi, her mother in law (whose homeland it was) could introduce other stories of present-day migration told either at the opening of the worship or before each intercession. Those present, whether migrants or

persons needing to better understand the life of migrants, could discover how - in the life of Ruth as in their own - a new confidence in God came into being and in the all embracing spirit of biblical revelation, the call to imitate God's special love for the stranger and the poor.

The gospel can be chosen from amongst the texts suggested, but the story of the sending forth in mission (Matt 28: 16-20) is recommended. In highlighting universal mission in the presence of the Lord Christ, within the framework of this ecumenical worship particularly sensitive to migrants, this gospel story offers the opportunity within the sermon to underline the power which the gospel has to overturn cultural, social, psychological and religious barriers. The sermon should emphasize that we are sent together by Christ and should encourage the churches to undertake common activities with "the stranger in our midst". Doctrinal, spiritual and practical ecumenism today is impossible without taking account of the migration of peoples in our own times. Our advance towards unity is stimulated by it.

Is it not also true that in faithfulness to the double demands of mission and ecumenism, we discover our neighbour in the sisters and brothers of different traditions with whom we work to further God's reign? We are called upon to love different people whether they are migrants or whether the difference comes from an unfamiliar way of confessing the Christian faith, founded upon traditions and practices other than ours. The unity of the church must also be at the service of unity among peoples. From this perspective the liturgy for the 'sending forth' underlines the link between missionary and ecumenical commitment.

The ordering of the six parts of the service can be changed:

§ *The opening - celebration of the light of Christ*

§ *The confession of sins and proclamation of God's forgiveness*

§ *Reading of the word of God*

§ *Confession of faith*

§ *Intercessions*: movement towards the front of the church of representatives of different ethnic groups and churches present for the telling of their migration stories, presentation of their symbols, transmission of the clay jar containing the light, their prayers of intercession and those of the other Christian communities present, the story of their beginnings, development, establishment, maybe even their exclusion. Alternatively, these stories can be related at the beginning of the worship service as a prelude to the liturgy.

§ *Sending forth*: procession of the assembly towards the outside, a sign of the call of Christ to witness, preceded by the benediction.

It is recommended that the hymn to Christ - the *Phos Hilaron* - is sung in the opening part of the service, either after having invoked the Holy Spirit, the illuminator, before the confession of faith (Nicene creed or another text).

The worship service can be enlivened with songs, and symbols of the peoples represented. To take the example of Argentina, the sign of peace could be given in Spanish, the readers or other participants in the service clothed in ponchos, songs accompanied with a guitar, etc.

The service should be prepared by an ecumenical team and its preparation will have given opportunities to meet together and to pray. It would be a pity if the service were but an interlude. Rather, it should be a springboard for a desire to deepen relations between immigrant Christians and those of long-established communities in each region.

Order of Service

L. Worship leader C. Congregation R. Reader

1. Opening

It is recommended that the service take place in the evening.

Invitation to pray

L. Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord!

C. Glory be to God.

L. Alleluia, Christ is risen!

C. Truly the Lord is risen.

A clay jar containing a lighted candle is placed on the communion table/altar or in some other visible place in front of the congregation while the text 2 Corinthians 4: 5-6, is read. Some members of the congregation come forward to light other candles at the flame and pass the light around to all.

Hymn

The hymn accompanies the sharing of the light. Argentinian sanctus or a hymn on the theme of light known to the immigrant community represented in the service or another one known to the congregation.

C. Be our light in the darkness, Lord, and in your great mercy, protect us from all danger throughout our journey on this earth. Revive in us and in our communities the light of faith shining in our hearts: the knowledge of your glory in the face of Christ, he who reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn *Phos hilaron* (this hymn could be sung elsewhere in the service as explained in the introduction).

O joyful Light of the holy glory of the Father immortal: heavenly, holy blessed Jesus Christ.

Since we come to the setting of the sun and have seen the evening light, we praise God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is proper for you to be praised at all times by fitting melodies.

O Son of God, giver of life. Wherefore the world glorifies you.

2. Proclamation of God's mercy and confession of sins

L. Let us confess our sins towards God and towards each other.

(Congregation or several readers in succession)

C. Merciful Lord, We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, deed and through omission.

Pardon our sins of disunity through pride, our sins against our brothers and sisters of other faiths, cultures, peoples, those whom we have oppressed and excluded.

Pardon our apathy and our blindness to the distress of the immigrants among us. Christians of different denominations, we must ask ourselves if we have diligently sought ways of common witness "for Jesus' sake" to struggle against the suffering and injustices suffered by our immigrant brothers and sisters in our homeland?

Forgive our superficiality and laziness, ignoring or even denying the riches offered by the other, rather than seeking a true sharing of values and faith.

C. We have not loved you with our whole heart We have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. We sincerely regret and humbly repent of our sins. For the love of your Son, Jesus Christ Have pity on us and forgive us. That we may joyfully follow your will, walk in your ways and lead a life which shows forth your mercy to the glory of your name. Amen.

L. Our almighty God is merciful. He pardons your/our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, he strengthens you/us in all goodness and by the power of his Holy Spirit gives you/us eternal life. Amen.

3. Proclamation of the word of God

Old Testament: Lev 25: 35-43 or Ruth 1: 1-18 (cf. introduction to the service)

Ps 43 (read antiphonally)

New Testament: 2 Cor 4: 5-18 (cf. introduction to the service)

C. Alleluia!

Gospel reading : Matt 28: 16-20 or Matt 8: 5-13, or 4: 3-15 or Mark 7: 1-9

(As a sign that the good news of Christ is destined to be proclaimed in every tongue and received in every culture, the gospel could be read in the language of one of the guest communities present.)

C. Alleluia!

Sermon (see introduction to worship service)

4. Confession of faith

L. O God, who through Jesus Christ The Lord of all the world and of the church calls us to be one single body. And to express your love, in the confession of the same faith. We pray to you in all humility.

R. Grant us light and strength of faith to overcome the shadows of evil which harm our communion of faith.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit (as desired)

R. Pour out your love in our hearts. That we may know you and discern your creative and reconciling presence in the lives of those around us.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

R. Renew in us the gift of your Holy Spirit so that by that same Spirit we may now proclaim together Jesus Christ as Lord; And that each human heart be touched in such a way that the barriers which divide us fall down; That rumours fade away that hatred cease and the wounds of disunion are healed; So that we may live in justice and in peace, Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

(The *Phos Hilaron* could be sung here.)

Nicene creed (or another confession of faith)

5. Intercessions

Representatives of immigrant communities come forward and present their intercessions. Each intercession is preceded by a brief recital of their experiences. The lights are lowered while their voices rise to ask for better understanding of their situation, and to express their faith and their hope in God's deeds.

Before praying for Christian unity, each church can also briefly recount its birth and development, perhaps its exclusion or suppression (e.g. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France) and the stages of its history on a local or national level.

The great clay jar containing the candle will be passed from one reader to another as a sign of faith and solidarity before being placed on the altar/communion table.

The refrain *Ven Espiritu Santo Ven, Ven a illuminar* (Come Holy Spirit, come enlighten us) - or another similar refrain - could be sung in the original Spanish after each prayer.

We offer the treasure of our faith in the frailty of our personal witness, our communities and our ecumenical achievements. May the Lord renew in us his gifts of light, strength and communion.

C. Ven Espiritu Santo Ven, Ven a illuminar

Confronted by so much suffering and evil we are submerged by despair, and we are aware of our weakness even to the point of doubting whether it is worth reacting in favour of justice. May the Lord help us to hear the witness of people and communities who, under pressure from all sides, have continued to hope and to act in the midst of distress.

C. Ven Espiritu Santo Ven, Ven a illuminar

Faced with the demands of mission in the world and conscious of the importance of the gospel which is entrusted to us, we can feel quite overwhelmed. May the Lord give us confidence to confess our faith.

C. Ven Espiritu Santo Ven, Ven a illuminar

The ecumenical movement, like migration, is a part of the "globalization" with which the world is seeking to cope today. Through the coming together of our churches may the Lord inspire this search for oneness.

C. Ven Espiritu Santo Ven, Ven a illuminar

Prayer of St John Chrysostom

L. Lord, you have given us grace to offer these common prayers with one heart. You have promised to grant the requests of two or three gathered in your name. Fulfil now the petitions of your servants for our benefit, giving us the knowledge of your truth in this world, and granting us eternal life in the world to come. Amen

Sign of Peace

C. Our Father...

C. Hymn

Collection

The collection can take place during the hymn. It is a liturgical gesture expressing communion in faith, charity and solidarity and its significance can be recalled when its intended use is indicated.

6. Sending forth and benediction (Num 6: 24-26)

L. May God bless you/us and keep you/us.

C. Amen

L. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you/us and grant you/us his grace.

C. Amen

L. May the Lord turn his countenance towards you/us and give you/us his peace.

C. Amen

L. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you/us now and for evermore.

C. Amen.

Reading of Matt 28: 18-20 and a call to common witness in the name of Christ

L. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Sending forth

C. Hymn

Suggestions: Argentinian hymn of blessing (*La benedicion de Dios*, by Lois Wilson); a song from one of the immigrant communities present, or another known to the congregation.

To signify the pilgrimage that is our life in the light of Christ and our willingness to respond together to Christ's sending us forth in mission, the congregation leaves the church in procession behind a person bearing the clay jar with the lighted candle.

Summary of Daily Themes and Readings

Day 1

We have this treasure in clay jars
(2 Cor 4:7)

Hope

Gen 15:1-7 - Ps 16

Heb 9:8-12 - Lk 24:13-35

Day 2

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed more

(2 Cor 4:8)

Faith

Ex 5:6-17 - Ps 128

Heb 11:13-27 - Mt 2:14-15

Day 3

So that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies

(1 Cor 4:10)

In the image of Christ

Gen 1:26-27 - Ps 45

1 Tim 6:11-16 - Mt 5:14-15

Day 4

That the life of Jesus may be made visible glory in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:11)

Dignity of human life

Ezra 1:1-4 - Ps 50

Rm 6:6-14 - Mk 9:33-37

Day 5

I believed and so I spoke

(2 Cor 4:13)

Courage

Josh 1:1-9 - Ps 113

Eph 2:11-22 - Mk 7:24-30

Day 6

So that grace as it extends to more and people
(2 Cor 4:15)

The justice of God's grace

Deut 10:17-22 - Ps 103:1-13

Rom 3:21-31 - Mt. 5:1-12

Day 7

So we do not lose heart
(2 Cor 4:16)

Perseverance

Neh 7:73-8:3,9-10 - Ps 118:5-9, 19-24

Acts 7:54-8:5 - Mk 10:28-30

Day 8

Preparing for us an eternal weight of
(2 Cor 4:17)

Called to unity on the path to Glory

Is 33:17-22 - Ps 42

Eph 4:1-6 - Jn 17:20-26

Biblical Reflections and Prayers for the Eight Days

Day one

Gen 15:1-7 Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great

Ps 16 You are my Lord, I have no good apart from you

Heb 9: 8-12 Jesus Christ, high priest of good things to come

Lk 24: 13-35 We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel

Commentary

Abraham puts his trust in God's pledge. He leaves a comfortable existence to travel to the promised land. With his family he becomes a foreigner, an immigrant called to make a painful but certainly fruitful and liberating change in the land of Canaan.

The pilgrims of Emmaus are forced to return to their old dwelling place in order to find again that initial impulse which had led them to follow Jesus, even to the foot of the cross. As they hear again from Jesus the stories of "Moses and all the prophets", the confidence and love which is the sign of the divine treasure within them - the foundation of their hope - is restored in their anxious hearts. Every Christian shares this hope: it does not protect them from the struggles of life but empowers their lives with a serene and confident force.

To leave one's homeland, to reach out towards the other, towards the stranger, can lead to reaching out and growing together with the other so that one offers to God a "big heart" capable

of holding the treasure which God wishes to place in each and every one of us. This big heart is the clay jar of our humanity which itself remains of dust. It seems weak and pathetic in the presence of that treasure which on the contrary, grows ever larger within it.

Christians must make known together this treasure shining in glory on the face of the resurrected one. They demonstrate their common heritage when they show themselves to be a reconciled community.

Prayer

Our Father, Despite our weakness, you have made us witnesses to hope, faithful disciples of your Son, who desires to show evidence of his victory in a skeptical and troubled world. We carry this treasure in clay jars and we fear that we shall bend in the face of suffering and evil. Sometimes we even doubt the power of Jesus' word when he says "that all may be one". Restore in us the knowledge of that glory which shines on the face of Christ so that by our actions, our commitment and our whole lives we proclaim to the world that he is alive and that he is working among us. Amen.

Day two

Ex 5: 6-17 Let heavier work be laid upon them

Ps 128 You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands

Heb 11: 13-27 They desire a better country

Mt 2: 14-15 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt

Commentary

The century which has just come to an end was marked by many different forms of political, social, cultural and economic oppression. In some ways migration is still affected by certain of these ongoing realities. Emigrants quit their homelands in search of a better life, far from persecutions and famines. They seek opportunities which are refused them in their own situation or seek refuge from political or economic systems which chase them from their homes. When they arrive they very often suffer exploitation similar to that suffered by the Jews in Egypt.

The immigrant is a person in distress. That person has had to abandon his home and his relations to confront life in different cultural and social conditions, with all the problems that involves. The immigrant meets uncaring people and cruel situations in which can be seen the distinguishing marks of sin and thus the principal causes of emigration.

Emigration can also be experienced as an act of faith, as Abraham left the home of his ancestors for the promised land, or Moses led his people away from slavery. In the same way Jesus, Mary and Joseph escape from Egypt to save their lives in danger from powerful Herod. Today, as yesterday, in the midst of all dangers, God shows us the way leading to life.

Persecuted but not discouraged, millions of people draw from their faith in God the strength to stand firm in the face of discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, gender, culture, language or purchasing power.

Migration often has consequences for ecumenical life. It brings members of different churches together and leads them to make a fresh start in the search for unity. We are all, in one way or another, migrants upon this earth. We are all pilgrims on the

way towards the house of the Father. The churches, too, are invited to advance together along the path towards unity, that path which our Lord has opened up for us.

Prayer

God our Father, whose Son knew exile in Egypt. We ask you to accompany the migrants of our times. May the Holy Spirit touch each human heart; May the barriers that separate us fall, suspicion founder, hatred cease. May your Spirit breathe new life into your churches in their pilgrimage towards unity and help them to overcome their divisions and go forward in justice and in peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day three

Gen 1: 26-27 In the image of God he created them, male and female

Ps 45 Your God has anointed you

1 Tim 6: 11-16 Keep the commandment without spot or blame

Mt 5: 14-15 You are the light of the world

Commentary

The human person carries in him - or her - self the image of and resemblance to God. It is the sign of an integrity which nothing - neither weakness, sin nor oppression - can destroy. This mysterious truth constitutes a lasting call to spiritual growth in order to reach the measure of Christ.

Christ himself lives within the Christian, within the Christian's very body, mind and soul. The Christian, woman and man must make plain, in real-life situations, the life of Christ which is within

them. They are called to stand firm in obedience to the demands of the gospel until the Lord's coming again.

This witness involves the believer's whole being, including the body. Over the ages members of different churches have suffered (and still suffer) martyrdom, giving faithful witness in making the supreme act of obedience to Christ. Often the cause of martyrdom is to be found in the origins of exile. The Christian is thus called to be transformed in likeness to Christ, revealing Christ's life within his own.

"I am the light of the world"; "You are the light of the world." This light must shine forth through works of justice, charity, compassion, in such a way that it becomes a revelation of the saving grace of God. Men and women are thus enabled to glorify the Father who desires salvation for us all.

As the church, we are called upon to change cultural practices which prevent a great part of the world's population from being accorded human dignity, above all in the case of migrants. For those same elements which divide people and nations are to be found in the sin which divides churches and prevents their true witness. Moreover, unity between believers cannot be separated from the struggle to overcome the barriers dividing society.

Prayer

God of love Powerful creator of all life Encourage us to discern in ourselves and in each of our brothers and sisters Your image and resemblance. Give us the strength necessary to obey the imperative of your all-embracing love.

God of love, We pray that our witness will lead to the unity of the churches; and that with one voice we may call upon all humanity to be responsible for creation and for our neighbour. Amen.

Day four

*Ezra 1: 1-4 Any of those among you who are of his people
- may their God go with them!*

Ps 50 The heavens declare his righteousness

Rm 6: 6-14 Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus

*Mk 9: 33-37 Whoever wants to be first must be last of all
and servant of all*

Commentary

Many aspects of life are hard. The most degrading conditions are imposed on people. For many, their very existence is something rather to be endured, and they are sunk in despair and terror.

Christ invites us to take up the challenge of living in a way that meets the demands of his kingdom. His presence among his people marks each one of us. The power of his resurrection delivers us from all death-dealing temptation. If we are aware of his presence among us - risen, but bearing the traces of the despised, rejected or excluded - we can understand the importance of the least among us. If we had believed that simple fishermen were less capable of teaching than the doctors of religion, we would never have heard the message of the apostles, nor that of a carpenter from Nazareth.

That is why we must encourage each other to question the kind of society which excludes people and neglects their material and spiritual needs.

In this struggle at the heart of the societies in which we live, we may be tempted to give up, believing that we are all alone. But we must not lose courage, for others among God's children are also working to maintain the dignity of human life and are thus making visible the life of Jesus within our mortal existence.

The church is called to reveal this light shining in the darkness. Confronted with a divided world our quest for unity is vital. It is our common calling to show the power of the resurrection in order that the world might believe. Faced with war and with distress of all kinds, surrounded by struggles for temporal power and by discord, we must not attempt to escape together but, guided by Christ, commit ourselves to help the world change course.

Prayer

O God, we commit ourselves to you as we have confidence only in your strength. Quieten our bodies and our minds. Come into our hearts, And in our daily tasks help us to appreciate the power of renewal which you offer us.

O God, open up for us the road to unity. Lead us by the hand along the way of your kingdom to be witnesses of hope. May we not succumb to despair for through his own resurrection Christ has overcome death.

O God in whom we hope, give us your Spirit of truth, courage and strength. That we may go forward together towards the full, visible unity of the church. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Day five

Josh 1: 1-9 Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed

Ps 113 He raises the poor from the dust

Eph 2: 11-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens

Mk 7: 24-30 For saying that, you may go

Commentary

At a time of uncertainty and fear after the death of Moses, Joshua spoke out boldly in God's name and urged the people of Israel to cross the Jordan and occupy the land which God had promised to their ancestors: land which they had left in search of food. He urged them to be strong and brave and act in accordance with God's law.

Many generations later there were still Canaanites living in part of the land and it was a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus and courageously asked him to heal her daughter. When Jesus answered, rather harshly, that it was not right to take the children's bread, she argued back that even the dogs under the table eat the children's bread. A Gentile and a woman, her care for her daughter caused her to break down barriers of culture, tradition and gender with courage and audacity. Jesus had a plan of action and urgency in carrying it out. He believed that he must go first to the house of Israel. Nevertheless he was moved by the courage and the response of the woman. On his side also he reached out across these same barriers and said "for saying that you may go - the demon has left your daughter."

In the letter to the Ephesians, the Gentile Christians are reminded that they were once "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise." But now in Christ Jesus those who were once far off have been brought near. He has broken down the dividing wall and the hostility between Gentile and Jew and reconciled both groups to God in one body through the cross. Today Christians are compelled by the law of Christ to reach out across barriers of culture and race to welcome refugees and strangers and to minister to their needs. We can also learn much from the deep Christian faith of immigrants amongst us who have crossed boundaries to come to our land and who are equally part of the body of Christ.

As individual Christians and churches we are challenged to testify with courage to the truth of the gospel. As we do so, we must seek to live out and to show to the world the unity which Jesus desires for his children for divided churches are weakened in their mission. To be the Church of Christ is a gift which brings the enormous responsibility of helping those without faith to discover that the love of God is the only answer to their need. We should ask God to heal us from our lack of unity and enable us to speak out with faith and courage.

Prayer

O God you inspired your servant Joshua to speak out with courage in a time of need and lead your people to the promised land. Your Son, Jesus Christ, reached out across barriers of culture, class and gender giving healing and hope to those in need. He is **our** peace and in his flesh he has broken down dividing walls and created in himself one, new humanity. We pray with faith for Christ's body, the church in the world today.

You have entrusted us with the task of advancing your kingdom here on earth, help us to do so united and not divided. Allow us to hear your voice and not insist on our own priorities. Move us to overcome our divisions and live according to your law of love. Strengthen us to reaffirm our commitment to you. Allow us to share your love. Lead us to meet all those in need of your blessing especially the refugee and the stranger in our midst. Together we form the body of Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Day six

Deut 10:17-22 Who executes justice for the orphan and the widow

Ps 103:1-13 The Lord is merciful and gracious

Rom 3:21-31 They are now justified by his grace as a gift

Mt 5:1-12 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Commentary

Sin is the source of all forms of injustice in the world. By rejecting God's righteousness we deprive people of their dignity and of their existential rights. Unjust structures and abuse of human rights are the result of this situation. We believe- that God has justified us in Christ, out of his deep love for us. God's righteousness is expressed through his reconciling and outpouring grace. Through the death and resurrection of Christ he makes us all worthy of being his daughters and sons destined to eternal communion with him.

As Christians we are sent to proclaim together the righteousness of God and the power of his grace. Our mandate is to spread the justice of God by our witness. We are called to become instruments of God's kingdom, as just men and women who live for God and seek to reveal his love and justice to all. In as much as we have our homeland in heaven, we also look for a more just society and renewed life on earth, making more visible what God desires for his sons and daughters.

In the experience of migrant peoples, we see one of the many faces of injustice in our times. Societies which are economically unjust expel their members by driving them into hunger and poverty, denying them human living conditions, and blocking their access to health and education. Others must emigrate because of war, or the impossibility of practicing their faith freely. Such is the world in which we must cry out for a long-awaited justice.

God identifies himself with the poor, the weak, the sick, the foreigner, the child, the elderly, the widow. That is why in the Beatitudes we are invited to be promoters of that justice, which goes beyond worldly justice. This includes a search for ways to overcome those structures which discriminate against people, transforming them into means of peace and justice for all.

Our unity and vital mission is a sign of our hope. Our communion in Christ is a visible expression of the new human-kind. A spiritual vision of the life we have in Christ is the essence of all justice and the basis of human rights. Our active solidarity with powerless people makes the power of God's righteousness visible.

Prayer

God, thank you for your grace, which makes us your daughters and sons in Christ. You call us as your children to be advocates of your grace-filled justice in the world. Grant us grace to work, without fear, for the justice which is the only way to a real peace and a human society. Loving God, strengthen the bonds which unite us, and call us to a life where the unity of believers is reflected in the actions of every community of faith. Powerful God, steer us once again to come nearer to each other, so **that** your will and not ours be put to work. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Day seven

Neh 7:73-8:3, 9-10 Do not mourn or weep

Ps 118:5-9, 19-24 Open to me the gates of righteousness

Acts 7:54-8:5 Those who were scattered... went proclaiming the word

Mk 10:28-30 A hundredfold now in this age... with persecutions

Commentary

Life takes its toll on us. We have all experienced pain and struggle. Life particularly leaves its scars on the bodies of refugees, displaced peoples, the homeless, on the bodies of all those who continuously face more obstacles than solutions. Days come and go, each bringing their troubles: suddenly a woman must abandon her land; little children find themselves in a strange country; a man must leave aside the trade he learnt from his father, which is of no use to him any longer; a family is forced to exchange its native language for another, its native customs for foreign ones. These are people who have fled from death, hunger, exclusion. In our time there are thousands who silently make their way to unknown lands, lands which do not always receive them with love and understanding.

The first Christians also knew about hardship and struggle, and their way of responding to and understanding their situation offers future generations of Christians insights into the faith foundations of perseverance and solidarity. At the critical moment when Stephen was put to death and the church of Jerusalem was beset by a severe persecution, its scattered members found the inner resources and strength to continue to proclaim the word, instead of being paralysed by fear. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, encouraged them not to lose heart despite being afflicted and struck down, but to understand these experiences as a way of carrying in their bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus could be made visible. This clear connection between their own struggles and the death and resurrection of Jesus reflects how the power of the resurrection had changed their understanding of suffering and death.

Today we ask ourselves how we can bear witness to the renewing power of resurrection, when we face the hurting bodies of the refugee and the poor, when we encounter their profound suffering and their battered lives. Again and again we open our eyes and stumble across the hard truth that there is much within our world which destroys, rather than encourages, life. At the same time, we know it is still possible to both see and witness to the renewing and restoring action of God in our midst. Christians responding together in these privileged contexts have a special opportunity to be bearers of light and hope, even through the smallest acts of kindness and hospitality. Voices rise and hands reach out in solidarity with our struggling sister, our discouraged brother. We come to learn that in every act of mercy toward a crucified people we encounter Christ himself, and we are reminded that the mission which all Christians are invited to share in is God's own. Moreover, those who suffer often reveal to us, in their tired bodies, that gratitude is still possible, that there is still hope, that not all is lost if we trust in the One who makes all things new. Paradoxically, in the context of suffering and hurt, the gospel is shown to restore what is broken.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are united in our belief that you are present alongside all who suffer and are oppressed, united in the call to be instruments of hope and compassion to all in need: Direct our hands towards those of the downtrodden, the poor, the refugee. When we are inclined to ignore our neighbour in need, open our eyes and hearts yet again to their pain. Encourage the faith and hope of those struggling with discouragement or despair, those whose lives have been bruised by hardship. Lead them with tenderness to find you even in the midst of their darkest experience. Amen.

Day eight

Is 33:17-22 The Lord is our King, he will save us

Ps 42 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him

Eph 4:1-6 One Lord, one faith, one baptism

Jn 17:20-26 To see my glory

Commentary

At a time Jerusalem was threatened with invasion, the prophet Isaiah looked forward to the day when God would reign and Jerusalem would be "a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up and none of whose ropes will be broken". Refugees on the move in our world today, seeking political freedom or economic stability must often long for the time when they will no longer have to move from place to place, living in rough tents or hiding in lorries. They look for a place where they can live permanently in security and peace and well being.

The church understands itself as sharing this pilgrim state. We are a pilgrim people, strangers in this world, journeying in faith towards the heavenly Jerusalem, yearning to see the face of God. Often the pilgrim people of God share something of the longing of refugees for stability and peace and the coming of God's kingdom in this world.

While Christianity understands all human existence as marked by the insecurity of the pilgrim state, it sees the church as having the prophetic vocation of setting forth a vision of what God is preparing for us, an "eternal weight of glory" which casts our present struggles into a larger framework of hope and promise. This future which God is fashioning is characterized by a unity

in which the human race is caught up, through the Holy Spirit, in the oneness which Jesus shares with the Father. This unity is already given to us as a gift in the Spirit here and now: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all." The church is to live as a sign in the present of that unity which in its fullness we hold only as the promise of God.

Instead, we have presented ourselves to the world with disagreements which have created confusion where we are called to shed only light. Our ecumenical calling is to rediscover and make visible the unity which always comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes Christians seem to give up on this task. As a pilgrim people we must lay hold of the hope and certainty that we shall be made one in Christ as we shall see the glory which God gave to Christ "before the foundation of the world."

Prayer

Lord, show us your mercy and by the power of your Spirit remove the divisions amongst Christians so that your church may appear more clearly as a visible sign in the midst of all nations.

Lord, grant us renewed love, a true wisdom, and a new impulse for that unity so that the eternal message of your Son may be received as good news for all.

Lord, rekindle our faith and our hope, that we may journey with joy towards your heavenly kingdom, trusting in your promise of eternal glory. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.

Ecumenical Situation in Argentina

Argentina is a young country, with shores on the Atlantic Ocean in the south of the American continent. Its population descends mainly from European and Middle Eastern immigrants, who inhabit this country together with the children of the Spanish conquerors and the ancient indigenous nations. During recent decades, Latin American immigrants from bordering countries and people from Asia, mainly Korea and Taiwan, have also become part of the population. The official language is Spanish and the main religion is Christianity, though there are well-established Jewish and Islamic communities in Argentina.

Argentina is a cultural product of these immigrations. It is not surprising to find in this territory Roman Catholics, Protestants from different churches and denominations and members of Orthodox and Pre-Chalcedonian churches. They, have come as immigrants, some looking for the chance of a better life, others fleeing from political persecution or religious intolerance in their homeland. Immigrants have brought not only their national origins but also the religious faith that identified them. A number of Protestant churches have developed as a result of missionary work with the local population. Christianity in Argentina has multiple facets and possibilities.

The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church came with the Spanish conquerors and accompanied the colonization process and the European settlement in America. Today it is the largest church in the country. It has very old parishes and an important number of social services, church buildings and schools all over the country. The history of Argentina cannot be separated from the role that the Roman Catholic Church has played in it, contributing to culture, thinking

and political destiny. Many of the main national leaders were active and sincere Catholic believers.

The Roman Catholic presence can be seen in us magnificent church buildings, like the La Plata Cathedral, one of the biggest in the world, or the Basilica of Lujan, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This basilica has become one of the most important pilgrimage centres in the country, with thousands of visitors every year. But there are also hundreds of small churches where local communities celebrate mass and contribute to the social development of their neighbourhood with solidarity, charity and community projects. Priests and nuns from different religious orders work in many centres assisting the poor and marginalized in matters such as health and education, and they commit themselves in the struggle for the human right to dignity and well-being.

The Protestant Churches

The first Protestant churches came to Argentina at the beginning of the 19th century, when independence from the Spanish opened frontiers and allowed a diverse and pluralistic immigration. The first to be organized was the Anglican Church, which started its regular meetings in 1821 and inaugurated its temple in Buenos Aires, the first one in Latin America. English tradesmen, businessmen and employees were its first members. After that Scottish Presbyterian immigrants came to the rural areas and established their churches. The Methodist mission started its work in Buenos Aires in 1836. By the mid-19th century, the first Protestant churches were developing their work through social services, schools and evangelization programmes directed towards immigrants and to the local inhabitants.

At the end of the 19th century, the Reformed and the Lutherans immigrants also brought their faith to Argentina. The

Reformed Church came mainly with Dutch immigrants, and Lutherans with German immigrants. At that time Baptist and free denominations arrived in Argentina, too. From Italy, the Waldensians came to rural areas and together with the Methodists, they started a seminar to promote theological education for local leadership. Some decades later, the Pentecostal churches started their work, which was characterized by strong evangelization and rapid expansion. It could be said that at the beginning of the 20th century almost all expressions of Protestantism were present in Argentina, accompanying the communities of European immigrants, taking root in the local population and with missions in the few indigenous communities that survived the conquest of their territories. Today even in the small inland towns one can find at least one church of Protestant tradition.

The Eastern Churches in Argentina

The first of the Eastern Churches to have an organized presence (from 1888) was the Russian Orthodox Church. Orthodox faithful from several nationalities arranged this through the Russian diplomatic mission in Buenos Aires. Thanks to the contribution of Greek, Serb, Bulgarian, Syrian, Lebanese and Russian immigrants and of the Russian imperial family, the church of the Sacred Trinity was built in Buenos Aires in 1901. A bit later, in 1905, the Greek Orthodox Church brought a priest to serve their community. This church grew in different parts of the country and in 1928 they built the Cathedral of Dormition. The Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate, was set up in 1938 and since 1951, Buenos Aires has been the seat of the bishop dependant on jurisdiction of the North and South American Archdioceses.

Among the Orthodox churches, the one depending on the Patriarchate of Antioch has the largest membership. Most members are from Syria and Lebanon. In Argentina, their organization

started in 1921 and the diocese was established in 1949, though the headquarters were only built in 1955. The cathedral was inaugurated towards the end of 1956 and the first mass was celebrated in Christmas that year.

The Armenian Apostolic Church was formed by the first Armenian immigrants who arrived in Argentina between 1909 and 1911, fleeing from the massacres of Adana under Turkish rule. Between 1915 and 1920, survivors of the great genocide arrived; from 1925 to 1936 came the Armenians from Cilicia who escaped from Turkey, and lastly, between 1947 and 1954 many Armenians came to Argentina as a consequence of the Second World War.

The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch was established with families that came from Iraq, Syria and Turkey, as a result of the religious intolerance in the latter and the great wave of immigration that took place at the beginning of the 20th century. This church is led by a vicar patriarch, and its headquarters are in the city of La Plata. There are several places of worship and social centres in the inland to care for the faithful. This church is in full communion with the Catholic Apostolic Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch, with which it has signed a document for faith unity.

The Orthodox churches have contributed to cultural and educational institutions, services to the needy, radio programmes and other activities that enrich the mosaic of Argentinean culture. Their members are fully involved in social and political life.

Steps to unity

Dialogue for unity has not been easy in Argentina. Until the 1960s ecumenical relations were mainly between Protestant and Evangelical churches, but did not involve either the Roman Catholic or the Orthodox churches. There have always been

fraternal relations among the different church authorities, but there was distrust in local communities, due to proselytizing and the growth of Protestant churches. Churches were not involved in any formal dialogue. At that time, Protestant and Evangelical churches worked together in organizations such as the Bible Society, the Federation of Churches and the local branches of the YMCA and YWCA. They also celebrated together Reformation Day and the World Day of Prayer.

After some years, dialogue and fellowship among believers of different traditions bore fruits. It was thanks to the new currents flowing from the II Vatican Council, and to openness in the Protestant churches due to the influence of the European ecumenical movement, that a new and fruitful period for encounter and cooperation began. Local congregations began to meet together and there is dialogue among ministers and priests. Bilateral commissions also begin to meet. In some places, there is co-operation in social services, in human rights organizations, and in the distribution of scriptures. The positive results of activities such as the seminary for theological training, the Inter-Parochial Service for Mutual Care and the encounter of volunteers in organizations such as Caritas, Caref, Ceas and others are remarkable.

Several years of ecumenical growth resulted in the setting up 1988 of the Ecumenical Commission of Christian Churches in Argentina (CEICA), a place for dialogue and cooperation where Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants meet. Its members hold regular meetings to discuss issues of common interest, exchange information about their churches, talk about advancements or difficulties in ecumenical work, local and global, and organize encounters to pray together for church unity and the needs of our time. Bishops, ministers, priests and lay people, both men and women, take part in these meetings.

During its short existence, CEICA has faced the difficulties and the challenges of any ecumenical effort: to harmonize different traditions and ways of being Christian; to overcome misunderstandings and to take decisions that express and satisfy everybody's point of view. But it has also achieved enormous progress in mutual knowledge and appreciation; in discovering all that the different churches have in common, including the challenge for pastoral mission in our society. This commission is in charge of organizing the Argentinean Week of Prayer for Christian Unity every year.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Themes 1968-2002

In 1968, materials officially prepared jointly by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity began to be used:

1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1: 14) *Pour la louange de sa gloire*

1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5: 13) *Appelés a la liberte* (Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3: 9) *Nous sommes les coopérateurs de Dieu* (Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)

1971 ... and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13: 13) *... et la communion du Saint-Esprit* (Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13: 34) *Je vous donne un commandement nouveau* (Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1) *Seigneur, apprends-nous a prier* (Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)

1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2: 1-13) *Que tous confessent: Jesus-Christ est Seigneur* (Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

(In April 1974 a letter was sent to member churches and other interested parties concerning the setting up of local groups to be involved in the preparation of the Week of Prayer brochure. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft of the Week of Prayer.)

1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3-10) *La volonte du Pere: Tout reunir sous un seul chef, le Christ* (Material from an Australian group. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1976 We shall be like him (1 John 3: 2) or Called to become what we are. *Appeles a devenir ce que nous sommes* (Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches. Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5: 1-5) *L'esperance ne decoit pas* (Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva.)

1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2: 13-22) *Vous n'etes plus desetrangers* (Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)

1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4: 7-11) *Soyez au service les uns des autres pour la gloire de Dieu* (Material from Argentina. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6: 10) *Que ton regne vienne!* (Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic. Preparatory meeting held in Milan)

1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13) *Un seul esprit - des dons divers - un seul corps* (Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA. Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84) *Que tous trouvent leur demeure en Toi, Seigneur* (Material from Kenya. Preparatory meeting held in Milan. Italy)

1983 Jesus Christ - the Life of the World (1 John 1: 1-4) *Jesus Christ - La Vie du Monde* (Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland. Preparatory meeting held in Celigny (Bossey), Switzerland)

1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Cor 2: 2 and Col 1: 20). *Appelés a Vunite par la croix de notre Seigneur* (Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)

1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2: 4-7) *De la mort a la vie avec le Christ* (Material from Jamaica. Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)

1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1: 6-8) *Vous serez mes temoins* (Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia). Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)

1987 United in Christ - a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-6: 4a) *Unis.dans le Christ - une nouvelle creation* (Material from England. Preparatory meeting held in Taize. France)

1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4: 18) *L'amour de Dieu bannit la crainte* (Material from Italy - Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)

1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12: 5-6a) *Bdtir la communaute: Un seul corps en Christ* (Material from Canada. Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)

1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17) *Que tous soient un... Afin que le monde croie* (Material from Spain. Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)

1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15: 5-13) *Nations, louez toutes le Seigneur* (Material from Germany. Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)

1992 I am with you always ... Go, therefore (Matthew 28: 16-20) *Je suis avec vous... allez done* (Material from Belgium. Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)

1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5: 22-23) *Pour l'unité: laisser murir en nous les fruits de l'Esprit* (Material from Zaire. Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)

1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4: 23-37) *La maison de Dieu: Appelés a etre un dans le coeur et dans l'esprit* (Material from Ireland. Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)

1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15: 1-17) *La koinonia: communion en Dieu et les uns avec les autres* (Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)

1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Rev. 3: 14-22) *Je me tiens a la porte et je frappe* (Material from Portugal. Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)

1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5: 20) *Au nom du Christ, laissez-vous reconcilier avec Dieu* (Material from Scandinavia. Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)

1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8: 14-27) *L'Esprit aussi vient en aide a notre faiblesse* (Material from France. Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)

1999 He will dwell with them as their God. they will be his peoples (Rev. 21: 1-7) *Dieu demeurera avec eux. lis seront ses peuples et lui sera le Dieu qui est avec eux* (Material from Malaysia. Preparatory meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)

2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Eph 1: 3-14) *Benis soit Dieu, qui nous a benis en Christ* (Preparatory material from the Middle East Council of Churches. Preparatory meeting held at La Verna, Italy)

2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14: 1-6) *Je suis le chemin, et la verite et la vie* (Preparatory material from Romania and meeting held in Vulcan, Romania)

2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Ps 36:[35] 5-9) *Car chez toi est la fontaine de la vie* (Material CEEC and CEC. Preparatory meeting Ottmaring, D)

Key Dates in the History of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

ca. 1740 In Scotland we find a Pentecostal movement with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.

1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes "Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit".

1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a "Union of Prayer for Unity".

1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.

1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.

1908 The observance of the "Church Unity Octave" initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.

1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing "Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity".

1935 Abbe Paul Couturier of France advocates the "Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" on the inclusive basis of prayer for "the unity Christ wills by the means he wills".

1958 Unite Chretienne (Lyon, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.

1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17).

1964 The "Decree on Ecumenism" of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.

1966 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer text.

1994 Text for 1996 prepared in collaboration with YMCA and YWCA.

Apostolic Letter

Rosarium Virginis Mariae

JOHN PAUL II

INTRODUCTION

1. The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to "set out into the deep" (*due in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, "the way, and the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), "the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn."¹

¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the *depth of the Gospel message in its entirety*, of which it can be said to be a compendium.² It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial *Magnificat* for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people *sits at the school of Mary* and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

The Popes and the Rosary

2. Numerous predecessors of mine attributed great importance to this prayer. Worthy of special note in this regard is Pope Leo XIII who on 1 September 1883 promulgated the Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus Officio*,³ a document of great worth, the first of his many statements about this prayer, in which he proposed the Rosary as an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society. Among the more recent Popes who, from the time of the Second Vatican Council, have distinguished themselves in promoting the Rosary I would mention Blessed John XXIII⁴ and above all Pope Paul VI, who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* emphasized, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the Rosary's evangelical character and its Christocentric inspiration. I myself have often encouraged the frequent recitation of the Rosary. From my youthful years this prayer has held an

² Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 42: AAS 66 (1974), 153.

³ Cf. *Acta Leonis XIII*, 3 (1884), 280-289.

⁴ Particularly worthy of note is his Apostolic Epistle on the Rosary // *religioso convegno* (29 September 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 641-647.

important place in my spiritual life. I was powerfully reminded of this during my recent visit to Poland, and in particular at the Shrine of Kalwaria. The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort. Twenty-four years ago, on 29 October 1978, scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I frankly admitted: "The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvellous in its simplicity and its depth. [...]. It can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Gentium*⁵ a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Against the background of the words *Ave Maria* the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through - we might say - the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life."⁵

With these words, dear brothers and sisters, I set *the first year of my Pontificate* within the daily rhythm of the Rosary. Today, *as I begin the twenty-fifth year of my service as the Successor of Peter*, I wish to do the same. How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* I wish to lift up my

⁵ Angelus: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, I (1978): 75-76.

thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus!*

October 2002 - October 2003: The Year of the Rosary

3. Therefore, in continuity with my reflection in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which, after the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the people of God to "start afresh from Christ,"⁶ I have felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary, as a kind of Marian complement to that Letter and an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother. To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to *contemplate with Mary the face of Christ*. As a way of highlighting this invitation, prompted by the forthcoming 120th anniversary of the aforementioned Encyclical of Leo XIII, I desire that during the course of this year the Rosary should be especially emphasized and promoted in the various Christian communities. I therefore proclaim the year from October 2002 to October 2003 *the Year of the Rosary*.

I leave this pastoral proposal to the initiative of each ecclesial community. It is not my intention to encumber but rather to complete and consolidate pastoral programmes of the Particular Churches. I am confident that the proposal will find a ready and generous reception. The Rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the very heart of Christian life; it offers a familiar yet fruitful spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the new evangelization. I am pleased to reaffirm this also in the joyful remembrance of another anniversary: the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on October 11, 1962, the

⁶ AAS 93 (2001), 285.

"great grace" disposed by the Spirit of God for the Church in our time.⁷

Objections to the Rosary

4. The timeliness of this proposal is evident from a number of considerations. First, the urgent need to counter a certain crisis of the Rosary, which in the present historical and theological context can risk being wrongly devalued, and therefore no longer taught to the younger generation. There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, *it sustains it*, since it serves as an excellent introduction and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives.

Perhaps too, there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that "when the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified."⁸ If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!

⁷ During the years of preparation for the Council, Pope John XXIII did not fail to encourage the Christian community to recite the Rosary for the success of this ecclesial event: cf. Letter to the Cardinal Vicar (28 September 1960): AAS 52 (1960), 814-816.

⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 66.

A path of contemplation

5. But the most important reason for strongly encouraging the practice of the Rosary is that it represents a most effective means of fostering among the faithful that *commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery* which I have proposed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* as a genuine "training in holiness": "What is needed is a Christian life distinguished above all in the *art of prayer*."⁹ Inasmuch as contemporary culture, even amid so many indications to the contrary, has witnessed the flowering of a new call for spirituality, due also to the influence of other religions, it is more urgent than ever that our Christian communities should become "genuine schools of prayer."¹⁰

The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation. Developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the "prayer of the heart" or "Jesus prayer" which took root in the soil of the Christian East.

Prayer for peace and for the family

6. A number of historical circumstances also make a revival of the Rosary quite timely. First of all, the need to implore from God *the gift of peace*. The Rosary has many times been proposed by my predecessors and myself as a prayer for peace. At the start of a millennium which began with the terrifying attacks of 11 September 2001, a millennium which witnesses every day innumerable parts of the world fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence, to rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ who "is our peace", since he made "the two of us one, and broke down the dividing wall of hostility"

⁹ No. 32: AAS 93 (2001), 288.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33: loc. cit., 289.

(*Eph 2:14*). Consequently, one cannot recite the Rosary without feeling caught up in a clear commitment to advancing peace, especially in the land of Jesus, still so sorely afflicted and so close to the heart of every Christian.

A similar need for commitment and prayer arises in relation to another critical contemporary issue: *the family*, the primary cell of society, increasingly menaced by forces of disintegration on both the ideological and practical planes, so as to make us fear for the future of this fundamental and indispensable institution and, with it, for the future of society as a whole. The revival of the Rosary in Christian families* within the context of a broader pastoral ministry to the family, will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age.

"Behold, your Mother!" (Jn 19:27)

7. Many signs indicate that still today the Blessed Virgin desires to exercise through this same prayer that maternal concern to which the dying Redeemer entrusted, in the person of the beloved disciple, all the sons and daughters of the Church: "Woman, behold your son!" (*Jn 19:26*). Well-known are the occasions in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries on which the Mother of Christ made her presence felt and her voice heard, in order to exhort the People of God to this form of contemplative prayer. I would mention in particular, on account of their great influence on the lives of Christians and the authoritative recognition they have received from the Church, the apparitions of Lourdes and of Fatima;" these shrines continue to be visited by great numbers of pilgrims seeking comfort and hope.

¹¹ It is well-known and bears repeating that private revelations are not the same as public revelation, which is binding on the whole Church. It is the task of the Magisterium to discern and recognize the authenticity and value of private revelations for the piety of the faithful.

Following the witnesses

8. It would be impossible to name all the many Saints who discovered in the Rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness. We need but mention Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, the author of an excellent work on the Rosary,¹² and, closer to ourselves, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, whom I recently had the joy of canonizing. As a true apostle of the Rosary, Blessed Bartolo Longo had a special charism. His path to holiness rested on an inspiration heard in the depths of his heart: "Whoever spreads the Rosary is saved!"¹³ As a result, he felt called to build a Church dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Pompei, against the background of the ruins of the ancient city, which scarcely heard the proclamation of Christ before being buried in 79 A.D. during an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, only to emerge centuries later from its ashes as a witness to the lights and shadows of classical civilization. By his whole life's work and especially by the practice of the "Fifteen Saturdays", Bartolo Longo promoted the Christocentric and contemplative heart of the Rosary, and received great encouragement and support from Leo XIII, the "Pope of the Rosary".

CHAPTER I

CONTEMPLATING CHRIST WITH MARY

A face radiant as the sun

9. "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun" {Mt 17:2). The Gospel scene of Christ's transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear

¹² *The Secret of the Rosary*.

¹³ Blessed Bartolo Longo, *Storia del Santuario di Pompei*, Pompei, 1990, 59.

entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as *an icon of Christian contemplation*. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us. In contemplating Christ's face we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul's words can then be applied to us: "Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2Cor 3:18).

Mary, model of contemplation

10. The contemplation of Christ has an *incomparable model* in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary. The eyes of her heart already turned to him at the Annunciation, when she conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the months that followed she began to sense his presence and to picture his features. When at last she gave birth to him in Bethlehem, her eyes were able to gaze tenderly on the face of her Son, as she "wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger" (Lk 2:7).

Thereafter Mary's gaze, ever filled with adoration and wonder, would never leave him. At times it would be a *questioning look*, as in the episode of the finding in the Temple: "Son, why have you treated us so?" (Lk 2:48); it would always be a *penetrating gaze*, one capable of deeply understanding Jesus, even

to the point of perceiving his hidden feelings and anticipating his decisions, as at Cana (cf. *Jn* 2:5). At other times it would be *a look of sorrow*, especially beneath the Cross, where her vision would still be that of a mother giving birth, for Mary not only shared the passion and death of her Son, she also received the new son given to her in the beloved disciple (cf. *Jn* 19:26-27). On the morning of Easter hers would be *a gaze radiant with the joy of the Resurrection*, and finally, on the day of Pentecost, *a gaze afire* with the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14).

Mary's memories

11. Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his every word: "She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (*Lk* 2:19; cf. 2:51). The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son's side. In a way those memories were to be the "rosary" which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.

Even now, amid the joyful songs of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reasons for her thanksgiving and praise remain unchanged. They inspire her maternal concern for the pilgrim Church, in which she continues to relate her personal account of the Gospel. *Mary constantly sets before the faithful the "mysteries" of her Son*, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.

The Rosary, a contemplative prayer

12. The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, is *an exquisitely contemplative prayer*. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning, as Pope Paul

VI clearly pointed out: "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: 'In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words' (*Mt* 6:7). By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are disclosed."¹⁴

It is worth pausing to consider this profound insight of Paul VI, in order to bring out certain aspects of the Rosary which show that it is really a form of Christocentric contemplation.

Remembering Christ with Mary

13. Mary's contemplation is above all *a remembering*. We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to "yesterday"; *they are also part of the "today" of salvation*. This making present comes about above all in the Liturgy: what God accomplished centuries ago did not only affect the direct witnesses of those events; it continues to affect people in every age with its gift of grace. To some extent this is also true of every other devout approach to those events: to "remember" them in a spirit of faith and love is to be open to the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection.

¹⁴Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 47: AAS (1974), 156.

Consequently, while it must be reaffirmed with the Second Vatican Council that the Liturgy, as the exercise of the priestly office of Christ and an act of public worship, is "the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all its power flows,"¹⁵ it is also necessary to recall that the spiritual life "is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (cf. *Mt* 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (cf. *1Thes* 5:17)."¹⁶ The Rosary, in its own particular way, is part of this varied panorama of "ceaseless" prayer. If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, is a *saving action par excellence*, the Rosary too, as a "meditation" with Mary on Christ, is a *salutary contemplation*. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer's life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence.

Learning Christ from Mary

14. Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of "*learning him*". In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures we owe, to Christ, more than to Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother.

The first of the "signs" worked by Jesus - the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana - clearly presents Mary

¹⁵ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

in the guise of a teacher, as she urges the servants to do what Jesus commands (cf. *Jn* 2:5). We can imagine that she would have done likewise for the disciples after Jesus' Ascension, when she joined them in awaiting the Holy Spirit and supported them in their first mission. Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to "read" Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message.

This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own "pilgrimage of faith."¹⁷ As we contemplate each mystery of her Son's life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38).

Being conformed to Christ with Mary

15. Christian spirituality is distinguished by the disciple's commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master (cf. *Rom* 8:29; *Phil* 3:10,12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism grafts the believer like a branch onto the vine which is Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:5) and makes him a member of Christ's mystical Body (cf. *ICor* 12:12; *Rom* 12:5). This initial unity, however, calls for a growing assimilation which will increasingly shape the conduct of the disciple in accordance with the "mind" of Christ: "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus" (*Phil* 2:5). In the words of the Apostle, we are called "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. *Rom* 13:14; *Gal* 3:27).

¹⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.

In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation - in Mary's company - of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ's life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: "Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection."¹⁸

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her -"pre-eminent and altogether singular member,"¹⁹ is at the same time the "Mother of the Church". As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is *the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church*.

The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is "fully formed" in us (cf. *Gal* 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, "in no way obscures or diminishes the unique

¹⁸ / *Quindici Sabati del Santissimo Rosario*, 27th ed., Pompei, 1916, 27.

¹⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power."²⁰ This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*.²¹ The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary's role in the process of our configuration to Christ: "*Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ*. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ."²² Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!

Praying to Christ with Mary

16. Jesus invited us to turn to God with insistence and the confidence that we will be heard: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (*Mt* 7:7). The basis for this power of prayer is the goodness of the Father, but also the mediation of Christ himself (cf. *Un* 2:1) and the working of the Holy Spirit who "intercedes for us" according to the will of God (cf. *Rom* 8:26-27). For "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (*Rom* 8:26), and at times we are not heard "because we ask wrongly" (cf. *Jas* 4:2-3).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ Cf. First Radio Address *Urbi et Orbi* (17 October 1978): AAS 70 (1978), 927.

²² *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.

In support of the prayer which Christ and the Spirit cause to rise in our hearts, Mary intervenes with her maternal intercession. "The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary."²³ If Jesus, the one Mediator, is the Way of our prayer, then Mary, his purest and most transparent reflection, shows us the Way. "Beginning with Mary's unique cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit, the Churches developed their prayer to the Holy Mother of God, centering it on the person of Christ manifested in his mysteries."²⁴ At the wedding of Cana the Gospel clearly shows the power of Mary's intercession as she makes known to Jesus the needs of others: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3).

The Rosary is both meditation and supplication. Insistent prayer to the Mother of God is based on confidence that her maternal intercession can obtain all things from the heart of her Son. She is "all-powerful by grace", to use the bold expression, which needs to be properly understood, of Blessed Bartolo Longo in his *Supplication to Our Lady*.²⁵ This is a conviction which, beginning with the Gospel, has grown ever more firm in the experience of the Christian people. The supreme poet Dante expresses it marvellously in the lines sung by Saint Bernard: "Lady, thou art so great and so powerful, that whoever desires grace yet does not turn to thee, would have his desire fly without wings."²⁶ When in the Rosary we plead with Mary, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk* 1:35), she intercedes for us before the

²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2679.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2675.

²⁵ The *Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary* was composed by Blessed Bartolo Longo in 1883 in response to the appeal of Pope Leo XIII, made in his first Encyclical on the Rosary, for the spiritual commitment of all Catholics in combating social ills. It is solemnly recited twice yearly, in May and October.

²⁶ *Divina Commedia*, Paradiso XXXIII, 13-15.

Father who filled her with grace and before the Son born of her womb, praying with us and for us.

Proclaiming Christ with Mary

17. The Rosary is also *a path of proclamation and increasing knowledge*, in which the mystery of Christ is presented again and again at different levels of the Christian experience. Its form is that of a prayerful and contemplative presentation, capable of forming Christians according to the heart of Christ. When the recitation of the Rosary combines all the elements needed for an effective meditation, especially in its communal celebration in parishes and shrines, it can present *a significant catechetical opportunity* which pastors should use to advantage. In this way too Our Lady of the Rosary continues her work of proclaiming Christ. The history of the Rosary shows how this prayer was used in particular by the Dominicans at a difficult time for the Church due to the spread of heresy. Today we are facing new challenges. Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us? The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIES OF CHRIST - MYSTERIES OF HIS MOTHER

The Rosary, "a compendium of the Gospel"

18. The only way to approach the contemplation of Christ's face is by listening in the Spirit to the Father's voice, since "no one knows the Son except the Father" (*Mt* 11:27). In the region

of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus responded to Peter's confession of faith by indicating the source of that clear intuition of his identity: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (*Mt* 16:17). What is needed, then, is a revelation from above. In order to receive that revelation, attentive listening is indispensable: "Only *the experience of silence and prayer* offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery."²⁷

The Rosary is one of the traditional paths of Christian prayer directed to the contemplation of Christ's face. Pope Paul VI described it in these words: "As a Gospel prayer, centred on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation. Its most characteristic element, in fact, the litany - like succession of *Hail Marys*, becomes in itself an unceasing praise of Christ, who is the ultimate object both of the Angel's announcement and of the greeting of the Mother of John the Baptist: 'Blessed is the fruit of your womb' (*Lk* 1:42). We would go further and say that the succession of *Hail Marys* constitutes the warp on which is woven the contemplation of the mysteries. The Jesus that each *Hail Mary* recalls is the same Jesus whom the succession of mysteries proposes to us now as the Son of God, now as the Son of the Virgin."²⁸

A proposed addition to the traditional pattern

19. Of the many mysteries of Christ's life, only a few are indicated by the Rosary in the form that has become generally established with the seal of the Church's approval. The selection

²⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 20: AAS 93 (2001), 279.

²⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), 46: AAS 6 (1974), 155.

was determined by the origin of the prayer, which was based on the number 150, the number of the Psalms in the Psalter.

I believe, however, that to bring out fully the Christological depth of the Rosary it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include *the mysteries of Christ's public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion*. In the course of those mysteries we contemplate important aspects of the person of Christ as the definitive revelation of God. Declared the beloved Son of the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan, Christ is the one who announces the coming of the Kingdom, bears witness to it in his works and proclaims its demands. It is during the years of his public ministry that *the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light*: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (*Jn* 9:5).

Consequently, for the Rosary to become more fully a "compendium of the Gospel", it is fitting to add, following reflection on the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ (*the joyful mysteries*) and before focusing on the sufferings of his Passion (*the sorrowful mysteries*) and the triumph of his Resurrection (*the glorious mysteries*), a meditation on certain particularly significant moments in his public ministry (*the mysteries of light*). This addition of these new mysteries, without prejudice to any essential aspect of the prayer's traditional format, is meant to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary's place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory.

The Joyful Mysteries

20. The first five decades, the "joyful mysteries", are marked by *the joy radiating from the event of the Incarnation*. This is clear from the very first mystery, the Annunciation, where Gabriel's

greeting to the Virgin of Nazareth is linked to an invitation to messianic joy: "Rejoice, Mary." The whole of salvation history, in some sense the entire history of the world, has led up to this greeting. If it is the Father's plan to unite all things in Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:10), then the whole of the universe is in some way touched by the divine favour with which the Father looks upon Mary and makes her the Mother of his Son. The whole of humanity, in turn, is embraced by the *fiat* with which she readily agrees to the will of God.

Exultation is the keynote of the encounter with Elizabeth, where the sound of Mary's voice and the presence of Christ in her womb cause John to "leap for joy" (cf. *Lk* 1:44). Gladness also fills the scene in Bethlehem, when the birth of the divine Child, the Saviour of the world, is announced by the song of the angels and proclaimed to the shepherds as "news of great joy" (*Lk* 2:10).

The final two mysteries, while preserving this climate of joy, already point to the drama yet to come. The Presentation in the Temple not only expresses the joy of the Child's consecration and the ecstasy of the aged Simeon; it also records the prophecy that Christ will be a "sign of contradiction" for Israel and that a sword will pierce his mother's heart (cf. *Lk* 2:34-35). Joy mixed with drama marks the fifth mystery, the finding of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. Here he appears in his divine wisdom as he listens and raises questions, already in effect one who "teaches." The revelation of his mystery as the Son wholly dedicated to his Father's affairs proclaims the radical nature of the Gospel, in which even the closest of human relationships are challenged by the absolute demands of the Kingdom. Mary and Joseph, fearful and anxious, "did not understand" his words (*Lk* 2:50).

To meditate upon the "joyful" mysteries, then, is to enter into the ultimate causes and the deepest meaning of Christian joy. It is to focus on the realism of the mystery of the Incarnation and on the obscure foreshadowing of the mystery of the saving Passion. Mary leads us to discover the secret of Christian joy, reminding us that Christianity is, first and foremost, *euangelion*, "good news", which has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Saviour of the world.

The Mysteries of Light

21. Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way "mysteries of light". Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the "light of the world" (*Jn* 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments - "luminous" mysteries - during this phase of Christ's life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: (1) his Baptism in the Jordan, (2) his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion, (4) his Transfiguration, and finally, (5) his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.

Each of these mysteries is *a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*. The Baptism in the Jordan is first of all a mystery of light. Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became "sin" for our sake (cf. *2Cor* 5:21), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. *Mt* 3:17 and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out. Another mystery of light is the first of the signs,

given at Cana (cf. *Jn* 2:1- 12), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. *Mk* 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. *Mk* 2:3-13; *Lk* 7:47- 48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. *Jn* 20:22-23). The mystery of light *par excellence* is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to "listen to him" (cf. *Lk* 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit. A final mystery of light is the institution of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies "to the end" his love for humanity (*Jn* 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.

In these mysteries, apart from the miracle at Cana, *the presence of Mary remains in the background*. The Gospels make only the briefest reference to her occasional presence at one moment or other during the preaching of Jesus (cf. *Mk* 3:31-5; *Jn* 2:12), and they give no indication that she was present at the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Yet the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his ministry. The revelation made directly by the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan and echoed by John the Baptist is placed upon Mary's lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: "Do whatever he tells

you" (*Jn* 2:5). This counsel is a fitting introduction to the words and signs of Christ's public ministry and it forms the Marian foundation of all the "mysteries of light."

The Sorrowful Mysteries

22. The Gospels give great prominence to the sorrowful mysteries of Christ. From the beginning Christian piety, especially during the Lenten devotion of the *Way of the Cross*, has focused on the individual moments of the Passion, realizing that here is found *the culmination of the revelation of God's love* and the source of our salvation. The Rosary selects certain moments from the Passion, inviting the faithful to contemplate them in their hearts and to relive them. The sequence of meditations begins with Gethsemane, where Christ experiences a moment of great anguish before the will of the Father, against which the weakness of the flesh would be tempted to rebel. There Jesus encounters all the temptations and confronts all the sins of humanity, in order to say to the Father: "Not my will but yours be done" (*Lk* 22:42 and parallels). This "Yes" of Christ reverses the "No" of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. And the cost of this faithfulness to the Father's will is made clear in the following mysteries; by his scourging, his crowning with thorns, his carrying the Cross and his death on the Cross, the Lord is cast into the most abject suffering: *Ecce homo!*

This abject suffering reveals not only the love of God but also the meaning of man himself.

Ecce homo: the meaning, origin and fulfillment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles himself out of love "even unto death, death on a cross" (*Phil* 2:8). The sorrowful mysteries help the believer to relive the death of Jesus, to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary, to enter with her into the depths of God's love for man and to experience all its life-giving power.

The Glorious Mysteries

23. "The contemplation of Christ's face cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One!"²⁹ The Rosary has always expressed this knowledge born of faith and invited the believer to pass beyond the darkness of the Passion in order to gaze upon Christ's glory in the Resurrection and Ascension. Contemplating the Risen One, Christians *rediscover the reasons for their own faith* (cf. *ICor* 15:14) and relive the joy not only of those to whom Christ appeared - the Apostles, Mary Magdalene and the disciples on the road to Emmaus - but also *the joy of Mary*, who must have had an equally intense experience of the new life of her glorified Son. In the Ascension, Christ was raised in glory to the right hand of the Father, while Mary herself would be raised to that same glory in the Assumption, enjoying beforehand, by a unique privilege, the destiny reserved for all the just at the resurrection of the dead. Crowned in glory - as she appears in the last glorious mystery - Mary shines forth as Queen of the Angels and Saints, the anticipation and the supreme realization of the eschatological state of the Church.

At the centre of this unfolding sequence of the glory of the Son and the Mother, the Rosary sets before us the third glorious mystery, Pentecost, which reveals the face of the Church as a family gathered together with Mary, enlivened by the powerful outpouring of the Spirit and ready for the mission of evangelization. The contemplation of this scene, like that of the other glorious mysteries, ought to lead the faithful to an ever greater appreciation of their new life in Christ, lived in the heart of the Church, a life of which the scene of Pentecost itself is the great

²⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 28: AAS 93 (2001), 284.

"icon." The glorious mysteries thus lead the faithful to *greater hope for the eschatological goal* towards which they journey as members of the pilgrim People of God in history. This can only impel them to bear courageous witness to that "good news" which gives meaning to their entire existence.

From "mysteries" to the "Mystery": Mary's way

24. The cycles of meditation proposed by the Holy Rosary are by no means exhaustive, but they do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for a knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel. Every individual event in the life of Christ, as narrated by the Evangelists, is resplendent with the Mystery that surpasses all understanding (cf. *Eph 3:19*): the Mystery of the Word made flesh, in whom "all the fullness of God dwells bodily" (*Col 2:9*). For this reason the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places great emphasis on the mysteries of Christ, pointing out that "everything in the life of Jesus is a sign of his Mystery."³⁰ The "*due in ahum*" of the Church of the third millennium will be determined by the ability of Christians to enter into the "perfect knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (*Col 2:2-3*). The Letter to the Ephesians makes this heartfelt prayer for all the baptized: "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (3:17-19).

The Rosary is at the service of this ideal; it offers the "secret" which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it *Mary's way*. It is the way of the example of the

³⁰ No. 515.

Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. It is also the way of a Marian devotion inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother: *the mysteries of Christ* are also in some sense *the mysteries of his Mother*, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth contained in the *Hail Mary*, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the "blessed fruit of her womb" (cf *Lk* 1:42).

Mystery of Christ, mystery of man

25. In my testimony of 1978 mentioned above, where I described the Rosary as my favourite prayer, I used an idea to which I would like to return. I said then that "the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life."³¹

In the light of what has been said so far on the mysteries of Christ, it is not difficult to go deeper into this *anthropological significance* of the Rosary, which is far deeper than may appear at first sight. Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man*. This is the great affirmation of the Second Vatican Council which I have so often discussed in my own teaching since the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light."³² The Rosary helps to open up the way to this light. Following in the path of Christ, in whom man's path is "recapitulated,"³³ revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face

³¹ Angelus Message of 29 October 1978 : *Insegnamenti*, I (1978), 76.

³² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

³³ Cf. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, 111, 18, 1: PG 7, 932.

with the image of the true man. Contemplating Christ's birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. It could be said that each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man.

At the same time, it becomes natural to bring to this encounter with the sacred humanity of the Redeemer all the problems, anxieties, labours and endeavours which go to make up our lives. "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you" (*Ps 55:23*). To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother. Twenty-five years later, thinking back over the difficulties which have also been part of my exercise of the Petrine ministry, I feel the need to say once more, as a warm invitation to everyone to experience it personally: the Rosary does indeed "mark the rhythm of human life", bringing it into harmony with the "rhythm" of God's own life, in the joyful communion of the Holy Trinity, our life's destiny and deepest longing.

CHAPTER III

"FOR ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST"

The Rosary, a way of assimilating the mystery

26. Meditation on the mysteries of Christ is proposed in the Rosary by means of a method designed to assist in their

assimilation. It is a method *based on repetition*. This applies above all to the *Hail Mary*, repeated ten times in each mystery. If this repetition is considered superficially, there could be a temptation to see the Rosary as a dry and boring exercise. It is quite another thing, however, when the Rosary is thought of as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them.

In Christ, God has truly assumed a "heart of flesh". Not only does God have a divine heart, rich in mercy and in forgiveness, but also a human heart, capable of all the stirrings of affection. If we needed evidence for this from the Gospel, we could easily find it in the touching dialogue between Christ and Peter after the Resurrection: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Three times this question is put to Peter, and three times he gives the reply: "Lord, you know that I love you" (cf. *Jn* 21:15-17). Over and above the specific meaning of this passage, so important for Peter's mission, none can fail to recognize the beauty of this triple repetition, in which the insistent request and the corresponding reply are expressed in terms familiar from the universal experience of human love. To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love.

One thing is clear: although the repeated *Hail Mary* is addressed directly to Mary, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed, with her and through her. The repetition is nourished by the desire to be conformed ever more completely to Christ, the true programme of the Christian life. Saint Paul expressed this project with words of fire: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (*Phil* 1:21). And again: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20). The Rosary helps us to be conformed ever more closely to Christ until we attain true holiness.

A valid method...

27. We should not be surprised that our relationship with Christ makes use of a method. God communicates himself to us respecting our human nature and its vital rhythms. Hence, while Christian spirituality is familiar with the most sublime forms of mystical silence in which images, words and gestures are all, so to speak, superseded by an intense and ineffable union with God, it normally engages the whole person in all his complex psychological, physical and relational reality.

This becomes apparent *in the Liturgy*. Sacraments and sacramentals are structured as a series of rites which bring into play all the dimensions of the person. The same applies to non-liturgical prayer. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the East, the most characteristic prayer of Christological meditation, centred on the words "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"³⁴ is traditionally linked to the rhythm of breathing; while this practice favours perseverance in the prayer, it also in some way embodies the desire for Christ to become the breath, the soul and the "all" of one's life.

... which can nevertheless be improved

28. I mentioned in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that the West is now experiencing *a renewed demand for meditation*, which at times leads to a keen interest in aspects of other religions.³⁵ Some Christians, limited in their knowledge of the Christian contemplative tradition, are attracted by those forms of prayer. While the latter contain many elements which are positive and at times compatible with Christian experience, they

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2616.

³⁵ Cf. No. 33: AAS 93 (2001), 289.

are often based on ultimately unacceptable premises. Much in vogue among these approaches are methods aimed at attaining a high level of spiritual concentration by using techniques of a psychophysical, repetitive and symbolic nature. The Rosary is situated within this broad gamut of religious phenomena, but it is distinguished by characteristics of its own which correspond to specifically Christian requirements.

In effect, the Rosary is simply *a method of contemplation*. As a method, it serves as a means to an end and cannot become an end in itself. All the same, as the fruit of centuries of experience, this method should not be undervalued. In its favour one could cite the experience of countless Saints. This is not to say, however, that the method cannot be improved. Such is the intent of the addition of the new series of *mysteria lucis* to the overall cycle of mysteries and of the few suggestions which I am proposing in this Letter regarding its manner of recitation. These suggestions, while respecting the well-established structure of this prayer, are intended to help the faithful to understand it in the richness of its symbolism and in harmony with the demands of daily life. Otherwise there is a risk that the Rosary would not only fail to produce the intended spiritual effects, but even that the beads, with which it is usually said, could come to be regarded as some kind of amulet or magic object, thereby radically distorting their meaning and function.

Announcing each mystery

29. Announcing each mystery, and perhaps even using a suitable icon to portray it, is as it were *to open up a scenario* on which to focus our attention. The words direct the imagination and the mind towards a particular episode or moment in the life of Christ. In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons and the many devotions appealing to the senses, as well

as the method of prayer proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises, make use of visual and imaginative elements (the *compositio loci*), judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind on the particular mystery. This is a methodology, moreover, which *corresponds to the inner logic of the Incarnation*: in Jesus, God wanted to take on human features. It is through his bodily reality that we are led into contact with the mystery of his divinity.

This need for concreteness finds further expression in the announcement of the various mysteries of the Rosary. Obviously these mysteries neither replace the Gospel nor exhaust its content. The Rosary, therefore, is no substitute for *lectio divina*; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it. Yet, even though the mysteries contemplated in the Rosary, even with the addition of the *mysteria lucis*, do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the Rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection.

Listening to the word of God

30. In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with the *proclamation of a related Biblical passage*, long or short, depending on the circumstances. No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken "for me."

If received in this way, the word of God can become part of the Rosary's methodology of repetition without giving rise to the ennui derived from the simple recollection of something already well known. It is not a matter of recalling information but of *allowing God to speak*. In certain solemn communal celebrations, this word can be appropriately illustrated by a brief commentary.

Silence

31. *Listening and meditation are nourished by silence.* After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one's attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery.

The "Our Father"

32. After listening to the word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for *the mind to be lifted up towards the Father*. In each of his mysteries, Jesus always leads us to the Father, for as he rests in the Father's bosom (cf. *Jn* 1:18) he is continually turned towards him. He wants us to share in his intimacy with the Father, so that we can say with him: "Abba, Father" (*Rom* 8:15; *Gal* 4:6). By virtue of his relationship to the Father he makes us brothers and sisters of himself and of one another, communicating to us the Spirit which is both his and the Father's. Acting as a kind of foundation for the Christological and Marian meditation which unfolds in the repetition of the *Hail Mary*, the *Our Father* makes meditation upon the mystery, even when carried out in solitude, an ecclesial experience.

The ten "Hail Marys"

33. This is the most substantial element in the Rosary and also the one which makes it a Marian prayer *par excellence*. Yet

when the *Hail Mary* is properly understood, we come to see clearly that its Marian character is not opposed to its Christological character, but that it actually emphasizes and increases it. The first part of the *Hail Mary*, drawn from the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and by Saint Elizabeth, is a contemplation in adoration of the mystery accomplished in the Virgin of Nazareth. These words express, so to speak, the wonder of heaven and earth; they could be said to give us a glimpse of God's own wonderment as he contemplates his "masterpiece" - the Incarnation of the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If we recall how, in the Book of Genesis, God "saw all that he had made" (*Gen* 1:31), we can find here an echo of that "pathos with which God, at the dawn of creation, looked upon the work of his hands."³⁶ The repetition of the *Hail Mary* in the Rosary gives us a share in God's own wonder and pleasure: in jubilant amazement we acknowledge the greatest miracle of history. Mary's prophecy here finds its fulfillment: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (*Lk* 1:48).

The centre of gravity in the *Hail Mary*, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is *the name of Jesus*. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this centre of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary. Pope Paul VI drew attention, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, to the custom in certain regions of highlighting the name of Christ by the addition of a clause referring to the mystery being contemplated.³⁷ This is a praiseworthy

³⁶ John Paul II, *Utter to Artists* (4 April 1999), 1: AAS 91 (1999), 1155.

³⁷ Cf. No. 46: AAS 66 (1974), 155. This custom has also been recently praised by the Congregation for Divine Worship and for the Discipline of the Sacraments in its *Direttorio su pietà popolare e liturgia. Principi e orientamenti* (17 December 2001), 201, Vatican City, 2002, 165.

custom, especially during public recitation. It gives forceful expression to our faith in Christ, directed to the different moments of the Redeemer's life. It is- at once *a profession of faith* and an aid in concentrating our meditation, since it facilitates the process of assimilation to the mystery of Christ inherent in the repetition of the *Hail Mary*. When we repeat the name of Jesus - the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (cf. *Acts* 4:12) - in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother, almost as if it were done at her suggestion, we set out on a path of assimilation meant to help us enter more deeply into the life of Christ.

From Mary's uniquely privileged relationship with Christ, which makes her the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, derives the forcefulness of the appeal we make to her in the second half of the prayer, as we entrust to her maternal intercession our lives and the hour of our death.

The "Gloria"

34. Trinitarian doxology is the goal of all Christian contemplation. For Christ is the way that leads us to the Father in the Spirit. If we travel this way to the end, we repeatedly encounter the mystery of the three divine Persons, to whom all praise, worship and thanksgiving are due. It is important that the *Gloria*, *the high-point of contemplation*, be given due prominence in the Rosary. In public recitation it could be sung, as a way of giving proper emphasis to the essentially Trinitarian structure of all Christian prayer.

To the extent that meditation on the mystery is attentive and profound, and to the extent that it is enlivened - from one *Hail Mary* to another - by love for Christ and for Mary, the glorification of the Trinity at the end of each decade, far from being a perfunctory conclusion, takes on its proper contemplative tone,

raising the mind as it were to the heights of heaven and enabling us in some way to relive the experience of Tabor, a foretaste of the contemplation yet to come: "It is good for us to be here!" (Lk 9:33).

The concluding short prayer

35. In current practice, the Trinitarian doxology is followed by a brief concluding prayer which varies according to local custom. Without in any way diminishing the value of such invocations, it is worthwhile to note that the contemplation of the mysteries could better express their full spiritual fruitfulness if an effort were made to conclude each mystery with *a prayer for the fruits specific to that particular mystery*. In this way the Rosary would better express its connection with the Christian life. One fine liturgical prayer suggests as much, inviting us to pray that, by meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, we may come to "imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise."³⁸

Such a final prayer could take on a legitimate variety of forms, as indeed it already does. In this way the Rosary can be better adapted to different spiritual traditions and different Christian communities. It is to be hoped, then, that appropriate formulas will be widely circulated, after due pastoral discernment and possibly after experimental use in centres and shrines particularly devoted to the Rosary, so that the People of God may benefit from an abundance of authentic spiritual riches and find nourishment for their personal contemplation.

³⁸ "...concede, quaesumus, ut haec mysteria sacratissimo beatæ Mariae Virginis Rosario recolentes, et imitemur quod continent, et quod promittunt assequamur", Missale Romanum 1960, in festo B.M. Virginis a Rosario.

The Rosary beads

36. The traditional aid used for the recitation of the Rosary is the set of beads. At the most superficial level, the beads often become a simple counting mechanism to mark the succession of *Hail Marys*. Yet they can also take on a symbolism which can give added depth to contemplation.

Here the first thing to note is the way *the beads converge upon the Crucifix*, which both opens and closes the unfolding sequence of prayer. The life and prayer of believers is centred upon Christ. Everything begins from him, everything leads towards him, everything, through him, in the Holy Spirit, attains to the Father.

As a counting mechanism, marking the progress of the prayer, the beads evoke the unending path of contemplation and of Christian perfection. Blessed Bartolo Longo saw them also as a "chain" which links us to God. A chain, yes, but a sweet chain; for sweet indeed is the bond to God who is also our Father. A "filial" chain which puts us in tune with Mary, the "handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:38) and, most of all, with Christ himself, who, though he was in the form of God, made himself a "servant" out of love for us (*Phil* 2:7).

A fine way to expand the symbolism of the beads is to let them remind us of our many relationships, of the bond of communion and fraternity which unites us all in Christ.

The opening and closing

37. At present, in different parts of the Church, there are many ways to introduce the Rosary. In some places, it is customary to begin with the opening words of Psalm 70: "O God, come to my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me", as if to nourish in those who are praying a humble awareness of their own insuf-

ficiency. In other places, the Rosary begins with the recitation of the Creed, as if to make the profession of faith the basis of the contemplative journey about to be undertaken. These and similar customs, to the extent that they prepare the mind for contemplation, are all equally legitimate. The Rosary is then ended with a prayer for the intentions of the Pope, as if to expand the vision of the one praying to embrace all the needs of the Church. It is precisely in order to encourage this ecclesial dimension of the Rosary that the Church has seen fit to grant indulgences to those who recite it with the required dispositions.

If prayed in this way, the Rosary truly becomes a spiritual itinerary in which Mary acts as Mother, Teacher and Guide, sustaining the faithful by her powerful intercession. Is it any wonder, then, that the soul feels the need, after saying this prayer and experiencing so profoundly the motherhood of Mary, to burst forth in praise of the Blessed Virgin, either in that splendid prayer the *Salve Regina* or in the *Litany of Loreto*? This is the crowning moment of an inner journey which has brought the faithful into living contact with the mystery of Christ and his Blessed Mother.

Distribution over time

38. The Rosary can be recited in full every day, and there are those who most laudably do so. In this way it fills with prayer the days of many a contemplative, or keeps company with the sick and the elderly who have abundant time at their disposal. Yet it is clear - and this applies all the more if the new series of *mysteria lucis* is included - that many people will not be able to recite more than a part of the Rosary, according to a certain weekly pattern. This weekly distribution has the effect of giving the different days of the week a certain spiritual "colour", by analogy with the way in which the Liturgy colours the different seasons of the liturgical year.

According to current practice, Monday and Thursday are dedicated to the "joyful mysteries", Tuesday and Friday to the "sorrowful mysteries", and Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday to the "glorious mysteries". Where might the "mysteries of light" be inserted? If we consider that the "glorious mysteries" are said on both Saturday and Sunday, and that Saturday has always had a special Marian flavour, the second weekly meditation on the "joyful mysteries", mysteries in which Mary's presence is especially pronounced, could be moved to Saturday. Thursday would then be free for meditating on the "mysteries of light."

This indication is not intended to limit a rightful freedom in personal and community prayer, where account needs to be taken of spiritual and pastoral needs and of the occurrence of particular liturgical celebrations which might call for suitable adaptations. What is really important is that the Rosary should always be seen and experienced as a path of contemplation. In the Rosary, in a way similar to what takes place in the Liturgy, the Christian week, centred on Sunday, the day of Resurrection, becomes a journey through the mysteries of the life of Christ, and he is revealed in the lives of his disciples as the Lord of time and of history.

CONCLUSION

*"Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet **chain** linking us to God"*

39. What has been said so far makes abundantly clear the richness of this traditional prayer, which has the simplicity of a popular devotion but also the theological depth of a prayer suited to those who feel the need for deeper contemplation.

The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, to its choral recitation and to its

constant practice, the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation.

Today I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer - as I mentioned at the beginning - the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family.

Peace

40. The grave challenges confronting the world at the start of this new Millennium lead us to think that only an intervention from on high, capable of guiding the hearts of those living in situations of conflict and those governing the destinies of nations, can give reason to hope for a brighter future.

The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace, since it consists in the contemplation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is "our peace" (*Eph* 2:14). Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ - and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary - learns the secret of peace and makes it his life's project. Moreover, by virtue of its meditative character, with the tranquil succession of *Hail Marys*, the Rosary has a peaceful effect on those who pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the Risen Lord (cf. *Jn* 14:27; 20:21).

The Rosary is also a prayer for peace because of the fruits of charity which it produces. When prayed well in a truly meditative way, the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted. How could one possibly contemplate the mystery of the Child of Bethlehem, in the joyful mysteries, without experiencing the desire to welcome,

defend and promote life, and to shoulder the burdens of suffering children all over the world? How could one possibly follow in the footsteps of Christ the Revealer, in the mysteries of light, without resolving to bear witness to his "Beatitudes" in daily life? And how could one contemplate Christ carrying the Cross and Christ Crucified, without feeling the need to act as a "Simon of Cyrene" for our brothers and sisters weighed down by grief or crushed by despair? Finally, how could one possibly gaze upon the glory of the Risen Christ or of Mary Queen of Heaven, without yearning to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God's plan?

In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world. By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ's invitation to "pray ceaselessly" (*Lk* 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult "battle" for peace can be won. Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God's help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (*Col* 3:14).

The family: parents...

41. As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, *a prayer of and for the family*. At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I encouraged the celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours* by the lay faithful

in the ordinary life of parish communities and Christian groups;³⁹ I now wish to do the same for the Rosary. These two paths of Christian contemplation are not mutually exclusive; they complement one another. I would therefore ask those who devote themselves to the pastoral care of families to recommend heartily the recitation of the Rosary.

The family that prays together stays together. The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.

Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.

... *and children*

42. It is also beautiful and fruitful to entrust to this prayer *the growth and development of children*. Does the Rosary not

³⁹ Cf. No. 34: AAS 93 (2001), 290.

follow the life of Christ, from his conception to his death, and then to his Resurrection and his glory? Parents are finding it ever more difficult to follow the lives of their children as they grow to maturity. In a society of advanced technology, of mass communications and globalization, everything has become hurried, and the cultural distance between generations is growing ever greater. The most diverse messages and the most unpredictable experiences rapidly make their way into the lives of children and adolescents, and parents can become quite anxious about the dangers their children face. At times parents suffer acute disappointment at the failure of their children to resist the seductions of the drug culture, the lure of an unbridled hedonism, the temptation to violence, and the manifold expressions of meaninglessness and despair.

To pray the Rosary *for children*, and even more, *with children*, training them from their earliest years to experience this daily "pause for prayer" with the family, is admittedly not the solution to every problem, but it is a spiritual aid which should not be underestimated. It could be objected that the Rosary seems hardly suited to the taste of children and young people of today. But perhaps the objection is directed to an impoverished method of praying it. Furthermore, without prejudice to the Rosary's basic structure, there is nothing to stop children and young people from praying it - either within the family or in groups - with appropriate symbolic and practical aids to understanding and appreciation. Why not try it? With God's help, a pastoral approach to youth which is positive, impassioned and creative - as shown by the World Youth Days! - is capable of achieving quite remarkable results. If the Rosary is well presented, I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own and recite it with the enthusiasm typical of their age group.

The Rosary, a treasure to be rediscovered

43. Dear brothers and sisters! A prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community. Let us do so, especially this year, as a means of confirming the direction outlined in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, from which the pastoral plans of so many particular Churches have drawn inspiration as they look to the immediate future.

I turn particularly to you, my dear Brother Bishops, priests and deacons, and to you, pastoral agents in your different ministries: through your own personal experience of the beauty of the Rosary, may you come to promote it with conviction.

I also place my trust in you, theologians: by your sage and rigorous reflection, rooted in the word of God and sensitive to the lived experience of the Christian people, may you help them to discover the Biblical foundations, the spiritual riches and the pastoral value of this traditional prayer.

I count on you, consecrated men and women, called in a particular way to contemplate the face of Christ at the school of Mary.

I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you, the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: *confidently take up the Rosary once again*. Rediscover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of your daily lives.

May this appeal of mine not go unheard! At the start of the twenty-fifth year of my Pontificate, I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the loving hands of the Virgin Mary, *prostrating myself in spirit before her image in the splendid Shrine built for her by Blessed Bartolo Longo*, the apostle of the Rosary. I willingly make my own the touching words with which he concluded his well-known

Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary: "O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain which unites us to God, bond of love which unites us to the angels, tower of salvation against the assaults of Hell, safe port in our universal shipwreck, we will never abandon you. You will be our comfort in the hour of death: yours our final kiss as life ebbs away. And the last word from our lips will be your sweet name, O Queen of the Rosary of Pompei, O dearest Mother, O Refuge of Sinners, O Sovereign Consoler of the Afflicted. May you be everywhere blessed, today and always, on earth and in heaven."

From the Vatican, on the 16th day of October in the year 2002, the beginning of the twenty- fifth year of my Pontificate.

"Thank You" Padre Pio

TERESITA BUCAYAN

I wrote this to inspire people who may find our case applicable to their lives.

My name is Teresita "Tess" Bucayan, married to Julianito Bucayan with 2 children, both girls. I am Roman Catholic, but considered not so spiritual until an incident in our lives touched us and brought us closer to GOD.

My eldest daughter was diagnosed with leukemia April 2001 and her case was classified as "poor risk." She was subjected to rigid chemotherapy sessions and in the process experienced various complications.

We sought the powerful intercession of St. Therese whom we believe gave us a sign as we received roses last year, May 17, the date that coincided with her canonization as a saint. The roses were color yellow wrapped in blue which is the color of healing. The following week, my child had a bone marrow test and from a 94% leukemia cell, it went into full recovery. I read about a priest who asked St. Therese for a white rose and received

one. Inspired by this, I asked St. Therese for a second sign which is similar to what the priest asked. After 2 weeks, my husband knocked at my room where my sick child and I sleep, handing me a white rose, and even saying "a rose from St. Therese." In my disbelief, I almost cried and asked him where he got it for he did not know of my wish. It was a corsage from being a sponsor in a wedding.

I was never familiar with PADRE PIO but a lot of friends have been telling us to also pray to him as he is powerful. During a phone conversation with a friend, I told her that I am looking for a prayer book and an article about PADRE PIO, that friend told me that her boss who is also an acquaintance sent her driver to my house that very moment with prayer book and articles of PADRE PIO. And so I waited and thought of it as a coincidence.

The very words of Padre Pio about prayer being an effusion of our heart into God's and if well done, moves the Divine Heart to grant our requests, moved me so well and served as my hope that even if my child's case is classified as poor risk, her fate depends on GOD and prayer is our only weapon. We started seeking also the intercession of the good PADRE PIO who somehow, just like St. Therese inspired us to follow and struggle hard in spirituality. I read several books on PADRE PIO.

When my daughter acquired viral meningitis, which is a complication she acquired while having her rigid chemo, I was giving up already. I thought all those signs were just coincidence. But she recovered. A week after, I had a vivid dream of standing in front of PADRE PIO, with PADRE PIO beside someone without a face in my dream. That someone and PADRE PIO divided the Eucharistic food and both of them gave it to me. I have a strong feeling that that dream is a vision for I was so peaceful inside but I wondered who was that someone without a face beside

PADRE PIO. As if God has planned to make me understand my dream, my friends helped me and gave their own opinion that the one beside PADRE PIO is our Lord since the food came from him. Isn't it the healing grace I'm asking for my daughter will come from GOD? But my question was why do they have to divide the host into two. One of my friends said maybe I am going to get two graces, so there is another one aside from the healing of my child. That friend does not know that I had been asking God for another request and I alone knew about it. And truly from my heart and my faith dictates that the other half being given to me directly by the one without a face is again an answer to my request.

As if PADRE PIO knew that I was very skeptical about that dream being his way of communicating to me, after two weeks my daughter suddenly prayed to PADRE PIO one night, asking him to tell the LORD JESUS to heal her. Although she knows that we pray to PADRE PIO, it was never her practice to pray to him and we got surprised that night, she included him in her prayer. Right after, I entered her room's comfort room, the smell of incense was so strong, it was the first time it happened. I read a book on Padre Pio that you can smell incense, violets, lilies and even carbolic acid to signify Padre Pio's answer. My husband and the rest of the household did not smell anything which gave me a room to doubt. I thought it could have been the smell of powdered soap used to clean the comfort room but the helpers said they did not clean the comfort room that day. And besides. I had been entering the comfort room since the afternoon we arrived from her chemo but it was only that night after she prayed that I smelled it. The following day, someone from the province, a brother-in-law who does not know PADRE PIO, called us up saying when he slept that afternoon, he had a dream that my child got healed thru the intercession of a certain priest who in his dream

is called **PADRE PIO**. That relative is not aware that we are praying to **PADRE PIO**. He said in his dream, he saw my child kneeling in front of a priest and in his dream the priest's name is **PADRE PIO**. After my child's prayer, that priest went to our **LORD JESUS**, whispered something in his ears and **JESUS** nodded. After that, he saw my child in his dream full of life, jumping and dancing which he interpreted as a sign of healing. After that, I never doubted anymore that **PADRE PIO** truly helped us and he was communicating to us the message. This time, it is really far from coincidence. Truly, even in heaven saints are working for the citizens of earth.

Another encounter which we believe is a sign from **PADRE PIO** was early in February this year, when I went to the hospital where my child is having her chemotherapy. By the way, we have finished the rigid part of her chemotherapy and we are already on maintenance phase which is once a month. My child's nose suddenly bled which made me nervous again and I rushed her to the hospital. The nose bleeding has nothing to do with her illness. It was from a wound or an irritation from constantly touching the inside of her nose. Unexpectedly, somebody from the hospital whom I met only during our frequent visit for my child's chemotherapy, handed to me a present from one of their volunteers. Amazingly, it was a statue of **PADRE PIO** and a novena prayer for his beatification with a picture and a third class relic. It was an answer as I have lost my novena prayer and has been looking around in various religious bookstore for one but there is no available stock. I called her up and asked her why she gave me the statue and prayer of **PADRE PIO**. All she said is she knew it was for me because whenever she has a religious article to give, she prays first and ask for guidance to whom she could give it, and after praying, it was me who came across her mind. That night, I woke up at around midnight, went to the comfort room for a

call of nature but did not smell anything. Then I prayed hard to the LORD, giving him thanks for how he changed our thinking about how we should live our lives, about how our earthly pilgrimage should be. I was crying and told him to forgive me for still being skeptical at times about the grace of healing he has already given to my child. I told the LORD, "after all, you will not allow your saints to give me signs." After my prayer, I went to the comfort room, and all of a sudden, I strongly smelled incense again. It was past midnight. I rushed immediately to the room where my husband and little child sleep and asked him to go with me to the comfort room. This time, he smelled it too, strongly that he had goose bumps. He embraced me and told me it's real.

Now I have the peace and strong faith that my daughter will be healed. Her sickness was GOD'S way of calling us back to him as he loves us so much. It may not be an instant miracle but she will get cured. In fact, there are good risks cases who died during the rigid chemotherapy phase. Also the bone marrow of my child which was 94% leukemic cell upon diagnosis went into full remission.

Padre Pio continuously guide us being his spiritual children. When I wrote his Postulation at San Giovanni Rotonda about the incident, they replied to me and sent me a postcard of Padre Pio. The date stamped on the envelop was my birthday, which I believe is not a coincidence but Padre Pio's birthday gift to me.

One day, I was also wondering and again skeptical. I asked my husband WHY? Why we have so many signs from Padre Pio and yet there was no miracle cure. In fact we still follow the protocol of once a month chemo for 28 months and we are on the 11th month. All of sudden I found myself gazing at a book of Padre Pio which I never read yet, as if a strong force is telling

me to open it. So I got it and all of a sudden, I saw myself reading the page where it was opened. It says "Padre Pio said to one of his spiritual daughter 'I will not cease to pester the good lord for your health to get back. If he does not give it right away, its because he wants to subject you like an iron being subjected to a crucible until it reaches its perfection. That's because he loves you and he wants you to enter the eternal Jerusalem.'" Again, I believe that was his answer to my confusion.

On another occasion this September, someone also texted me that the glove of Padre Pio was exposed that day at St. Francis Church so I went to see and was able to kiss it. I had a wonderful chance to meet two lady healers from the Center for Padre Pio in the Philippines and they promised to go to the house to see my child and will bring the glove to kiss it too. I gave them my name, telephone and address but never really expected that they would come so soon. That time I was having problems with my relationship with my child for she changed a lot. The very sweet and adorable Patricia became like a vixen. She fights with me a lot, boxing, hitting, throwing little things at me and even biting my hands when angry and I could not control my anger most of the time as well. There are lots of verbal abuses towards each other and in some cases physical hurt.

The two ladies visited after three days and while praying for Patricia, with Patricia embracing the glove, they asked her if she's scared of something because they can see something from the forehead. They just said I should pray hard for when a person is sick, that's where the devil would really try to penetrate. After all the ceremonies, everyone including all our visitors smelled a wonderful fragrance coming from a flower and we were all smiling and praising for the two of them and all of us knew that Padre Pio was there. That night I talked to my daughter, pouring out all feeling of love, trying to break the wall that unconsciously has

penetrated us. Then she began crying and telling me it's me she's scared off for I am so rigid and cold in everything. That night, I explained to her that maybe I am doing it the wrong way but all I want was for her to get well because I love her so much. I promised I would try to change and giving her the assurance that she is very much loved. There was so much crying and embracing as if all the hurt and pain just disappeared. PADRE PIO is so good that even our relationship, which subconsciously is being destroyed by Satan, has been healed. Everything has changed. I began to have great patience for Patricia and she became a tamed child again. Sometimes she would shout when she could not have her way but I knew now how to handle her. When I start extending my hands, she will suddenly be so good. We would sleep holding and hugging each other.

In the past, my friends who have turned away from their catholic faith have somehow convinced me that we should pray directly to GOD. No need for intercession. Although I pray to MAMA MARY, I don't pray to Saints. Now I believe that the LORD listens to his Saints. Now I believe in their intercession and how their lives would touch and inspire those who struggle in spirituality.

Also, I believe that even if God has answered our prayers, we should not be lax in anything for in our indolence, SATAN is looking for every opportunity to penetrate. He knew he could not destroy my relationship with my Lord anymore, so he started destroying my relationship with my child which brought her stress and can cause her healing to stop.

HOLD ON and PRAY MORE. PRAYER should be a part of our daily activity. I try to go to mass everyday, pray the rosary with my husband everyday and visit the adoration chapel. I was also able to put meaning to the Sacrament of Communion and

Confession which in the past has been taken for granted. I remember those old days when going to mass at Sunday is just an obligation. Our life is not that smooth as trials are still present, but the peace of knowing that we are resting in God's embraces make it easier to hurdle the difficulties of this life.

We have also learned to lift even the most simplest of needs such as getting a parking space, whether to buy something or not... as we have acknowledged our great nothingness. Its only thru God's grace that we can do everything and only thru him that our plans will succeed.

CONSULTATIVE WORDS

Cases & Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

DISMISSAL FROM A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

Can a professed member be dismissed from his or her religious institute? What would be the cause(s) for it and the procedure to be followed? What are the effects of the decree of dismissal and the personal condition of the dismissed member? What would be the implications of an eventual recourse and to whom should it be addressed?

* *

The dismissal of a professed member from a religious institute affects the very core of the religious state, that is, the complete self-giving and personal consecration. If a religious has to be dismissed it is because he or she has become unworthy of what one day, with God's help, joyfully embraced. The total self-giving to God demands enthusiasm and perpetuity.

Dismissal from a religious institute is a serious action taken by the competent ecclesiastical authority through which permanent departure from his or her institute is imposed on a member. Dismissal carries with itself the dispensation from the vows and from all the rights and obligations arising from profession. It is an extraordinary sanction intended for the protection of the institute itself against the actions of members whose behavior is directly and publicly contrary to the nature of consecrated life.

The present canonical procedures for the dismissal of a religious member have been extraordinarily simplified, if compared with those of the past. It can be said that dismissing a religious today is not difficult, provided obviously, that all the requirements prescribed by law are observed. They are ordered to safeguard not only the rights of the institute and of the Church (mainly through reparation of scandal), but also the religious' rights.

In order to answer to the above formulated questions, I will first analyze the different types of dismissal, namely,

- *automatic* ('*ipso facto*') dismissal;
- *required* dismissal;
- *possible* (optional) dismissal; and
- *extraordinary* dismissal from the house in urgent cases.

Each of them requires different causes and procedures. A word has to be added regarding the effects of the dismissal and the personal condition of the dismissed member.

1. Automatic or *ipso facto* Dismissal

a) *The Causes:*

A member is to be held *ipso facto* dismissed from the institute who:

- i. has notoriously defected from the Catholic faith;
- ii. has contracted marriage or attempted to do so, even civilly (c. 694 §1).

The norm does not speak of defecting from the Catholic *Church* but from the Catholic *faith*. In practice it is not easy to differentiate both defections. But at least, theoretically, one could defect from the faith without defecting from the Church. Such would be the case of the "dead faith" of someone who still belongs to the Church.

Neither is this "defection" identified with *heresy*, defined as "the obstinate denial or doubt, after baptism, of a truth which must be believed by divine and catholic faith" (can. 751). The defection could simply be compared to "obstinate denial," although defection from the catholic faith seems graver than obstinately denying a truth which must be believed by divine and catholic faith.

On the other hand, the defection from the faith must be "notorious," which means at least public; a defection unknown to others is not enough.

The wording of the canonical provision with respect to marriage distinguishes "contracted" and "attempted" marriages. The law of the Church renders invalid any marriage by those bound by a public perpetual vow of chastity in a religious institute (cf c. 1088). If they get married, they simply "attempt" it invalidly. By the same rule, however, temporally professed religious members can validly contract canonical marriage. Hence, the use of both terms "contracted" and "attempted," since both possibilities are included in this *ipso facto* dismissal.

b) *The Procedure:*

"In these cases the major Superior with his or her council must, after collecting the evidence, without delay make a dec-

laration of the fact, so that the dismissal is juridically established" (c. 694 §2).

Accordingly, the procedure is the following: First, the collection of evidence; then, once the proofs have been collected, the major Superior, with his or her council, is to promptly declare the existence of the sanctioned fact. Thus the dismissal is juridically established.

It is important to note that the dismissal does not depend on this declaration: even if the declaration is not made, the religious is and remains dismissed from the institute. (Cf. *Ccom. Rep* 30.VII.1934: CLD 2 175). In other words, what the major Superior and his or her council do is not to issue a decree of dismissal, but the declaration of the fact. The dismissal takes place without the intervention of the Superior or of the Holy See, by virtue of the universal law of the Church.

2. Required Dismissal

a) *The Causes:*

A member *must* be dismissed for the commission of the following offenses, which apart from being serious violations against human life and liberty they normally bring infamy to the religious institute:

- i. Murder (c. 1397).
- ii. Abducting a person by force or by fraud,
- iii. Imprisoning, mutilating or gravely wounding a person (c. 1397).
- iv. Abortion (c. 1398).
- v. Concubinage (c. 1395 §1).
- vi. Some other external sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue which causes scandal and in which one continues (c. 1395 §1).

The law *obliges* the competent authority of a religious institute to dismiss any member found guilty of these offenses. In canon law it is not possible to speak of "crimes" unless the following circumstances occur: *external violation* of a law or precept that carries with it a *penal sanction*, and is *gravely imputable* by reason of guilt.

The interpretation of the law which establishes the offense has to be strict (c. 18). This means that if the law speaks of "concubinage," for instance, it cannot be applied to isolated acts of fornication or adultery. The same regarding abortion: it has to have taken place, which is different from "attempted" abortion.

b) *The Procedure:*

In the above cases, the procedural steps are the following:

1° *Investigation*. The major Superior (personally or through a delegate) is to gather the evidence concerning the facts and the imputability of the offense.

2° *Communication to the accused*. The accusation and the evidence are then to be presented to the member (either in writing or in the presence of two witnesses), who shall be given the opportunity for defense.

3° *Sending the acts to the supreme Moderator*. All the documents, signed by the major Superior and an appointed notary, are to be forwarded, together with the written and signed replies of the member (if any), to the supreme Moderator.

4° *Issuing the decree of dismissal*. The supreme Moderator and his or her council, which for the validity of this particular act must comprise at least four members (without counting the supreme Moderator), are to proceed in collegial fashion to accurately weighing the evidence, the arguments, and the defense. If by a secret vote it is decided to dismiss the religious member,

a decree of dismissal is to be drawn up. [The decree must indicate -at least in summary form- the reasons in law and in fact for the dismissal, as well as the right the dismissed member has to have recourse to the competent authority within the ten days after having received the notification.]

5° *Confirmation*. The supreme Moderator must send the decree of dismissal and all the acts to the competent ecclesiastical authority, i.e. to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the case of an institute of pontifical right, or to the diocesan Bishop of the house to which religious belongs in the case of an institute of diocesan right. If, after careful examination of the merits of the case and the procedures followed the decree is confirmed, it is made effective.

6° *Notification*. Finally, the decree is notified formally to the religious. In making this notification, attention should be drawn to that part of the decree indicating the right of the religious to have recourse within ten days. [The recourse has suspensive effect, that is, the member still belongs to the institute in the meantime.]

It should be noted that the accused member retains at any time of the process the right to communicate with and send replies directly to, the supreme Moderator.

3. Possible Dismissal

a) *The Causes*:

"A member can also be dismissed for other causes, provided that they are grave, external, imputable and juridically proven" (c. 696 §1).

Unlike the causes for dismissal considered before, where the norm established the *obligation* to dismiss the transgressor ("*must* be dismissed") once the facts and their imputability have been proven, in the present case the religious member *can* also be

dismissed, but not necessarily, when other causes exist, provided they are "grave, external, imputable and juridically proven."

What are those "other causes"? The following are listed down in the Code of canon law:

- i. *Habitual neglect of the obligations of consecrated life.* (The casual neglect of these obligations is not enough; the law refers to "neglect" and besides "habitual.")
- ii. *Repeated violations of the vows.*" (The violations of the vows attempt directly against religious life.)
- iii. *Obstinate disobedience to the lawful orders of Superiors in grave matters.* (The disobedience to the Superiors - not to the Rule or Constitutions- has to be "obstinate" and besides "in grave matters.")
- iv. *Grave scandal arising from the culpable behavior of the member.* (Scandal may be caused without willing it; by negligence, for instance. It has to be "grave" and besides caused by "culpable" behavior.)
- v. *Obstinate attachment to, or diffusion of, teachings condemned by the magisterium of the Church.*" (It is not enough that the teachings be of vanguard or heterodox; they have to be positively "condemned" by the magisterium of the Church.)
- vi. *Public adherence to materialistic or atheistic ideologies.*" (Adherence may take place in the internal forum; here the stress is placed on the terms "adherence" and "public")
- vii. *The unlawful absence for more than a semester, from the religious house, with the intention of withdrawing from the authority of Superiors.*" (The three mentioned

elements, namely, fact, duration and purpose have to exist together.)

- viii. *Other causes of similar seriousness which may be determined by the proper law of the institute.* (The level of seriousness of the causes is clear, but they have to be determined in the proper law.)
- ix. *An offense against the sixth commandments of the Decalogue with force or threats or publicly or with a minor below the age of sixteen.* (The norm refers to non-habitual clerical sexual offenses, initially not viewed as serious as the habitual ones since only "just penalties" -including dismissal from the clerical state- are prescribed for them (cf. c. 1395 §2).

These reasons or offenses, which either indicate a neglect of the more serious obligations of consecrated life and a lack of the spirit of religious vocation, or show a disdain for the Church and for Christian values, are not "absolute" causes for dismissal, but rather "relative" causes for it, since the member "*can be dismissed*" because of them, as we already said. They may constitute sufficient grounds for dismissal "... unless the Superior judges that dismissal is not absolutely necessary and that the correction of the member and restitution of justice and reparation of scandal can be sufficiently assured in some other way" (c. 695).

b) *The Procedure:*

In the above cases, if the major Superior, after consulting his or her council, judges that the process of dismissal should be commenced, the following steps will have to be followed:

1° *Collection of evidence.* The major Superior is to collect or complete the evidence. (Civily recognized documents as well as sworn statements attested to by witnesses suffice in these matters).

2° *First canonical warning.* The major Superior is to warn the member in writing or before two witnesses explicitly cautioning him or her that dismissal will follow unless he or she reforms. The reasons for dismissal must be clearly indicated and give the member full freedom to self-defense.

3° *Second canonical warning.* If the warning has no effect, another warning is to be given after an interval of at least fifteen days.

4° *Forwarding the acts to the supreme Moderator.* If this latter warning is also ineffectual, and the major Superior with his or her council judges that there is sufficient proof of incorrigibility, and that the defense by the member is insufficient, after fifteen days from the last warning have passed in vain, the next step should be taken, namely, all the acts, signed by the major Superior and the notary, are to be forwarded, together with the signed replies of the member, to the supreme Moderator (cf 697 §1, 3°).

5° *Issuing the decree of dismissal.* Like in the case of required dismissal, the supreme Moderator and his or her council, which for validity must comprise at least *four* members in addition to the supreme Moderator, are to proceed in *collegial* fashion to accurately weighing the evidence, the arguments, and the defense. If by a secret vote it is decided to dismiss the religious, a decree of dismissal is to be drawn up, indicating -at least in summary form- the reasons in law and in fact for the dismissal, as well as the right the dismissed member has to have recourse to the competent authority, within the ten days after having received the notification.

6° *Confirmation by the higher authority.* The supreme Moderator sends the decree of dismissal and all the acts to the competent ecclesiastical authority, i.e. to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in

the case of an institute of pontifical right, or to the diocesan Bishop of the house to which religious belongs in the case of an institute of diocesan right, for confirmation. If, after careful examination of the merits of the case and the procedures followed the decree is confirmed, it is made effective.

7° *Notification to the member.* Finally, the decree is notified formally to the religious. As it was already said, in making this notification, attention should be drawn to that part of the decree indicating the right of the religious to have recourse within ten days.

The acts to be forwarded to the Holy See or to the Bishop should contain the following (cf. *Circular Letter of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, in Review for Religious* 37 [1978] 82-83):

- a) A brief description of the life of the religious;
- b) A statement and the pertinent documentation of the repeated faults;
- c) A declaration of the attempts made by the Superiors to aid the member to correct his or her conduct;
- d) A copy of the two canonical admonitions charging the religious with the grave faults because of which dismissal was threatened, with the corresponding receipt when the admonitions were sent by letter;
- e) Documents proving the possibility of defense offered to the member; his or her personal defense and its evaluation by the general council;
- f) The minutes of the session in which the general council gave its decision on the incorrigibility of the religious;
- g) Other incidental documents of evident pertinence.

If the religious has not made any defense or if the religious has renounced his or her defense, it must be mentioned in the acts and also the reasons for it.

[One hypothetical question: *What if the member refuses to receive the required warnings by returning unopened letters, or not appearing when summoned?* Since legally one who has never been properly warned cannot be dismissed, these "tricks" might be used to avoid such action. Should any of them be the case, attempts might be made to contact the member through other means such as relatives or friends. After repeated and documented attempts to contact and warn the member, the acts of the case reflecting it are to be referred to the Apostolic See.]

4. Extraordinary Dismissal from the House in urgent cases (can. 703)

a) *The Causes:*

"In a case of grave external scandal, or of extremely grave and imminent harm to the institute, a member can be expelled forthwith from the house by the major Superior. If there is danger in delay, this can be done by the local superior with the consent of his or her council. The major Superior, if need be, is to introduce process of dismissal in accordance with the norm of law, or refer the matter to the Apostolic See" (c. 703)

This is an expulsion *from the house, not from the institute*, which means that the expelled member continues being a religious until the supreme Moderator, after due process, issues the sentence of expulsion, in accordance with the norms of law, or the Apostolic See decides what is to be done.

There may be cases of *grave external* scandal that damage both the institute and the faithful; for instance, unlawful or inappropriate activity by the religious which is objectively serious and publicly known. At first sight it may seem that scandals are always external; however, the legislator means that the scandal regards not only the members of the community, but that has been

divulged outside the community sphere and made negative impact on other people, e.g., in the employees, in the faithful who frequent the community, in the town people, etc.).

On the other hand, there may be cases of extremely grave and imminent harm to the institute; for instance, where very serious damage to the institute is foreseen as a result of the activity of one of its members. The harm must be "extremely grave" and "imminent": both characteristics have to take place together. (In good philosophy, the harm is not "extremely grave" as long as it is not "imminent.")

In both instances, the dismissal is not imposed. The text simply says that the member "may be dismissed." Surely, the possibility that the religious may repent, perhaps after having being sanctioned with a penalty or a remedial penance, is taken into account.

b) *The Procedure:*

In the circumstances described, the major Superior -or, in an emergency, the local Superior with the consent of his or her council- can expel the member concerned from the religious house where he or she is living.

The course of action is, at best, an interim measure, for it is unprecedented in law: without gathering proofs before a notary; without beginning a process before the dismissal from the house; without giving him or her the opportunity to defend himself or herself; and without issuing a sentence! The religious may be expelled immediately from the religious house.

If the scandal or harm is averted by the expulsion, the Superior need do no more than find an alternative house for the religious. However, if scandal or the risk of harm persists, the major Superior is given two options: either, to initiate dismissal

proceedings, in accordance with canon 697 (see "Possible Dismissal"), or to refer the matter to the Holy See for her to decide what should be done.

In any case, the religious *has already been expelled from the house*, although in the meantime he or she continues being a member of the institute. In fact, the expulsion by the Superior has precedence over the instruction of the process, the decree of expulsion and the referral of the matter to the Apostolic See.

5. Personal Condition of the Dismissed Member

With the exception of the extraordinary dismissal from the house in urgent cases, which is an expulsion just from the house not from the institute (and therefore the member continues being a religious), the lawful dismissal of a religious results in the *definitive separation of that person from the institute*. The effects of such dismissal are four, namely,

- The vows, the rights and the duties deriving from profession automatically cease;
- If the member is a cleric, he may not exercise sacred orders until he finds a benevolent Bishop who will incardinate him into the diocese, receive him on probation or at least permit him to exercise sacred ministry in his diocese while he searches for a Bishop who will receive him definitively;
- They are not entitled to demand anything for any work whatsoever carried out in the institute;
- The institute must observe equity and evangelical charity with the member separated from it.

The provision that "whoever lawfully leaves a religious institute or is lawfully dismissed from one, cannot claim anything from the institute for any work done in it" (c. 702 §1) is in

accordance with the canonical principle that "whatever a religious acquires through personal work or by reason of the institute is acquired for the institute" (c. 668 §3). For this reason those who are legitimately separated from the institute by lawful dismissal, have no claim in justice to seek remuneration for work done while in the institute.

However, unfortunately, there have been former religious members who have vindicated their "rights" before civil courts and the latter have sided with them. Obviously, they are tribunals that do not recognize the law of the Church. On the part of the former religious we may note that either they have lost their faith and consequently may start such civil case without contradicting the judgment of their conscience, or they still keep a minimum faith and repute, in which case what has been done against the institute and the Church should be seriously thought.

On the part of the institute, nevertheless, there is always the obligation to help them *with equity and evangelical charity*. The terms "equity" and "evangelical charity" are not defined here by the canon and obviously admit of different degrees of assessment and application in particular cases, depending on the individual's age, health, qualifications, ability to take care of himself or herself, and the like. What seems to be clear is that they are not exclusively restricted to monetary matters. A decree issued by the Sacred Congregation for Religious Institutes (*Deserunt praebeendo*, on January 25, 1974) noted that institutes should provide for the *spiritual, moral, social and economic welfare of former members* and that institutes should likewise investigate programs whereby these provisions can be made available.

6. Recourse Against the Decree of Dismissal

The religious member may lodge a recourse with the authority which confirmed the decree of dismissal. Should he or she do it,

the implications of such recourse would be the following: At the personal level, the legitimate recourse has suspensive effect, that is, the member still belongs to the institute until the decree is further confirmed. On the process itself, by the recourse the Case is reinvestigated and this may result in the presentation of new information, the discovery of an injustice, the perception of biased or subjective judgments at various stages of the process, or even a procedural formality that might warrant reversal of the original decree.

What is the competent authority to which recourse should be made?

The recourse against the confirmation of a decree by a diocesan bishop (for an institute of diocesan right) is made to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Such Congregation could either reverse the confirmed decree, after careful investigation of the case and consultation with those involved, or reconfirm it.

The recourse against the confirmation or reconfirmation of a decree by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life would have to be made to the Apostolic Signature, which has competence only if violation of procedure, and not the merit of the case itself, is being questioned.

GOD'S WORD FOR TOMORROW

Homilies for March-April 2003*

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

March 2, 2003

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Hos 2:16-17, 21-22/2 Cor 3:1-6/Mk 2:18-22)

This Sunday, we have three bible readings which will greatly help us to appreciate and love the bible and make it our spiritual guide in life. One reason why more people take their guidance from crystal-gazing or cards-reading, from books of purely human origin and orientations like Feng Shui, Horoscopes, Self-help manuals, New Age materials, contemporary philosophical works, etc. is because they believe that the bible is about the past while the above-mentioned techniques and written works are about the present or the future and therefore more relevant, useful and advantageous to them.

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

Those people got the bible all wrong. Our three readings today prove that God's written word, the bible, is for all seasons and ages, has a permanent value, and is as relevant today and in the future as it was relevant in the past when it was produced for the readers in those times. Why is this so? Because the bible addresses in a way that is reliable, unerring, satisfying the essential needs of men/women which are common to any age, culture and place. What are these needs? They are love, life and newness. Stagnation leads to death, so newness (regeneration) is necessary for life. Cadavers cannot love; it is life and the living that give wings to love. The absence of love or the inability to love makes this world a hell. It is love that makes it an anticipation of heaven. So love, life, newness are the essential needs of mankind. Our three readings today address those needs superabundantly, each in their respective manner.

Man needs love and must love in order to exist and live as a human. Hosea, in the first reading, presents God as speaking in a language of love to unfaithful Israel, here standing for sinful mankind. "I will espouse you in love and mercy," God says to her; "I will espouse you to make you righteous and just and faithful." Nowhere in the bible, except in the book of the prophet Hosea, can we find the most daring, surprising, unbelievable revelation about God's "reckless" love in taking as his bride Israel who is described as a wanton, shameless woman, a prostitute and a harlot. But it will be God's love that will ultimately change her into a new person, a loving and faithful and righteous bride.

In the second reading (2 Cor 3) Paul's concluding affirmation held in prominence the life given by the Spirit not by any written law because as he said, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." So even when the Corinthians, influenced (exaggeratedly) by the speeches of intruding preachers who supposedly carried impressive credentials, wanted Paul, their founder, to be equipped with similar

documentation. The apostle gave this reply, "You are my letter of recommendation, a letter written not with ink but by the spirit of the living God, a letter written not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of flesh in the heart, a living letter that can be known and read by all men." This was a gentle rebuke to the Christian faithful reminding them that they belong to a covenant of the Spirit which gives life and not anymore to that of the written law which kills. Paul was a preacher of life, of eternal life that all men and women, consciously or unconsciously, are seeking for.

Finally, our third reading (Mark 2), despite its mention about homey topics like how to patch a tear in an old cloak and where to keep new wine and what not to do during a wedding feast, is really a call to aim at newness and renewal. Many people get old before their time, just as many old people stay young for a longer time. The secret here is whether one has the capacity and the will to adapt to new situations and discard old habits that do not serve anymore to bring freshness into his world. Love that does not offer fresh and renewed expressions tends to dry up and die. Katabolism and eventually death occur when the body cells fail to renovate anymore. Newness is the quality of God. He is ever new in his eternity. In Isaiah (65:17) and in Revelation (21:5) he vowed to create new heavens and a new earth and to make all things new. To assure the survival of his weary people, he announced through his prophet Ezekiel (37:26) that he will put a new spirit and a new heart in them. Truly, newness is an essential need of mankind, and the bible addresses properly that need by directing our eyes to God who alone can make us always new.

March 9, 2003

First Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

(Readings: Gen 9: 8-15/1 Pt 3: 18-22/Mk 1: 12-15)

We will attempt to point out for you the connecting tie among the three bible readings of today's Mass. It will help us discover more easily the message that God is sending us through them. What then is the connecting tie? I think it is the mention of water, this precious and indispensable resource of nature, that we Filipinos in the metropolis in Greater Manila, seem to mismanage and mistreat.

Water it was that renovated the world in Noah's time by destroying the wicked and sparing the innocent (first reading, Gen 9). Water it was that signaled the inauguration of Christ's public life and apostolate after John the Baptizer ministered to him (third reading, Mark 1). Finally, it is to the water of baptism that Peter attributes the salvation of Christians (second reading, 1 Peter 3).

Water may not be an effective tying material but, it surely is in our case. It binds together the three bible readings to bring out God's powerful message, even as each of the readings has highly instructive value.

Take for example the Genesis story of Noah's ark. It may satisfy one's curiosity to know that Noah's ark or box (for by all appearances it looked like one) measured 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was a huge boat by standards of that time. Not surprisingly though, considering it would have to shelter a pair of all animal species then existing, plus their provisions.

Well, it occurred to me, in line with Peter's symbolic interpretation of this Genesis story that most church buildings in

the country look like Noah's ark in more than one sense. Apart from their rectangular shapes, church buildings shelter during liturgical celebrations all kinds of Christians, from different racial, social, economic, educational, spiritual backgrounds and standing. Christian churches can be aptly compared to Noah's ark except that instead of animals they shelter persons who carry within themselves the seed and potentials of a renovated, regenerated, renewed humanity.

Noah's ark saved the passengers that remained in it. Christians are saved by remaining in their church membership, by virtue of the sacrament of baptism through the power of Christ's resurrection, according to Peter. Any passenger or animal leaving Noah's ark, before it could settle on safe and dry ground, risks perishing for such act of temerity. Similarly, any Christian abandoning his/her church before it could lead him/her to the doors of heaven also risks perishing.

We could point out more analogies between Noah's ark and Christ's Church. But the ones already mentioned suffice to prove that Peter was correct in affirming that Noah's ark is a symbol of the baptism that now saves a Christian and makes him a member of the Church.

Let us now go to the third reading (Mark 1) which supposes the baptism of Christ himself, that inaugurated his public life and activity. The first word ever by Jesus in Mark's gospel is a call for repentance and acceptance of the Good News from God.

Noah's building the ark was in effect a call for repentance addressed to his fellowmen. But they jeered at him for what they thought was a crazy idea. Why build that boat? Because a flood was coming that would wipe out all mortals from the earth? That man is nuts, so they concluded unrepentant... until the flood, the deluge really came!

What message is God sending us through these three bible readings? What Good News is waiting to be announced to us? Considering that these three readings have been selected for the start of Lenten season, they send a threefold message: (1) repentance, or turning away from one's sins is the best preparation for the fruitful receiving of God's goodwill and favor. It is like building an ark, an otherwise tedious and laborious task, as an insurance against the misadventures of the soul. (2) The Good News is that we have been saved, for all purposes and intent, by the sacrament of baptism and the power of the resurrection. We are traveling towards heaven, not in Noah's ark but in Peter's bark, which is the Church, and we are safe as long as we remain in Peter's boat and abide by the rules of our captain. (3) We carry within ourselves the seed and potentials of a renewed humanity in justice, unity and love, with the God-given mission, as in Noah's case, to go forth and fill the earth with the Good News of God's love and care for mankind.

March 16, 2003

Second Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

(Readings Gen 22: 1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18/Rom 8: 31-34/Mk 9: 2-10)

There are few of us who ignore the beautiful story of Abraham and Isaac, his son. Their story in today's first reading can serve to remove the ignorance, but more so to challenge us into imitating their heroic faith. At the time of his Genesis story, Abraham must have passed the age of 100 while Isaac must have been only 12 years old. I focus on their ages to show that heroism is not the monopoly of the strong adult age, but is also found in the very old and the very young.

Now this is how the story of Abraham's and Isaac's story of heroism goes. God wanted to test Abraham's faith by

commanding him to sacrifice his only begotten and much-loved son Isaac as a holocaust. According to the customs of the time, this meant slaying first the victim, spilling its blood and burning it totally. The process requires a knife, a bundle of wood, a fire, and, of course, a victim, whichever it was.

God's command must have seemed to Abraham like a giant boulder crashing down on him from a mountain. Of course, we all know that God will not allow a human sacrifice to happen. But Abraham and Isaac did not have the advantage of our hindsight. They were ready to carry out God's command even though they felt that their hearts were going to break. It is a wonder that both of them did not die of broken heart on the way to the place of sacrifice, considering that Abraham was already burdened with age and Isaac was so tender in years.

God was so much pleased with this heroic proof of obedience and faith that he swore Abraham will be the father of many nations and peoples, a father not of Isaac alone, but of descendants whose number will be countless as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea. He will be the father, not by physical generation but by the force of example of such amazing faith. Thus, Paul writes in Romans 4:16 that all believers are descendants of Abraham, and the blessings that God had given him were also to pass to them as the inheritors in similar faith.

Now, let us go to another mountain top where another FATHER and another most beloved SON are the heroes of yet another amazing story. Mark narrates to us in chapter 9 of his gospel (our third reading) the luminous transformation of Jesus. Adding to this spectacle is the voice of the Father who declares, "This is my beloved Son." There, Abraham is told but not allowed to sacrifice his son. Here, the Father offers the Son and sees it through. There, Isaac is returned to his father safe and sound.

Here, Jesus communes with his Father in the anticipated glory of his resurrection.

Abraham, acting on superior orders and not of his own initiative, was prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac for the good of many nations and peoples. God the Father, acting on his own initiative and not on superior orders for he has no superior, offered and willed that his beloved Son Jesus actually give his life for the salvation of all mankind.

We are the spectators of this unique drama unfolding on the mountain top. What shall we say, how shall we react? Mark, while reporting the ecstatic comment of Peter, "How good it is that we are here! We will make three tents...", remarked however that Peter with his companions was so overawed that he did not really know what he was saying.

I think, as our reaction, we should make our own what Paul has written in the second reading (Romans 8) "In view of all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! Who will condemn us? Not Christ Jesus, who died and was raised to life and is at the right side of God, pleading with him for us!"

March 23, 2003

Third Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

(Readings: Ex 20:1-17/1 Cor 1:22-25/Jn 2:13-15)

In many passages of the four gospels, we read and hear fighting words from the mouth of Jesus. In today's gospel (John 2) not only do we hear fighting words but also we see fighting actions. Jesus, who once described himself as meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29), must have been so provoked to flare up like

this. Even his own disciples seemingly were taken aback for they got to thinking there must be a scriptural motive to explain their Master's passionate outburst.

They were right! Actually, verse 9 of Psalm 69, quoted here by the evangelist John, says the following, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire." Jesus was very angry at the temple authorities for permitting his Father's house (the Jerusalem temple) into becoming a marketplace. The latter, however, resented his intervention in what they thought was their exclusive domain, which moreover was richly lining up their pockets.

So, the temple authorities shot back at him the question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?" Uppermost in their mind, they wanted Jesus to show his hand by a demonstration of power that he indeed was the Messiah, the Christ. For sure, they had already witnessed several miracles by Jesus. Yet, they refused to acknowledge him. What can one more miracle do for them? Miracles are for those who believe not for unbelievers. You ask why concretely the Jews could not believe in Jesus. Paul answers that in the second reading of today's Mass (1 Cor 1). And he will tell you also why the Jews and Gentiles (practically, therefore, most people) found it hard, if not impossible, to believe in Jesus and in the Gospel he stood for.

The reason was because they had placed their trust, their security and happiness in things other than what Jesus kept pointing out. The Jews wanted political independence from their occupying masters, an independence to be acquired by personal efforts and through machiavellian methods designed to force God's hand into supporting their earthly dreams and ambition.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, spent most of their time in discussing philosophies, ideologies, curiosities and other novelties. That which is not accessible through reason and logic, is not considered by them worthy of their attention. So, when Paul preached a crucified Messiah and a resurrected Savior, the Jews opposed the idea as scandalous and humiliating, and the Gentiles dismissed it as pure nonsense. Paul consequently remarked that the Gospel of the Cross and the Resurrection is a scandal and foolishness only for those who are perishing. But it is God's power and wisdom for those whom God has called to himself, whether Jew or Gentile.

Thus, it is your response to God's call that will determine whether you will consider the Gospel of the Cross and the Resurrection as scandal and nonsense or, on the contrary, God's power and wisdom. One may place his/her security and happiness on things attainable and understandable exclusively in the human level, but one will be disappointed and frustrated again and again. Yet most people do this. Because they see only the beginning (presumably attractive and gratifying) but do not see the end. Or if they see the end, it is too late for them to reverse engine.

This is not to say that the Gospel has all the concrete answers for every problem. We have to use our heads, our hands, our intuitions and the like. But over and above human efforts, especially when dealing with intractable problems, the power and wisdom of God should be implored for help and guidance.

It will be a great pity if, in our search for security and happiness, we disregard the gospel teaching and God's Ten Commandments that were called to our remembrance in today's first reading (Ex 20). You recall, of course, the gospel story about that rich young man who ran up to Jesus to ask, "Teacher, what must I do to gain eternal life?" And the answer he received was

this, "If you would enter into life, keep the commandments." The young man further inquired, "Which ones, Teacher?" And Jesus started to recite what we call the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments. So, it is clear when one violates any of these Commandments, he/she cannot enter into life. But by observing all, he/she will gain eternal life. There is also wisdom and power in keeping the Ten Commandments. For they enable you to enter into life. They guide you in finding the way to it.

March 30, 2003

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

(Readings: 2 Chron 36:14-16, 19-23/Eph 2: 4-10/Jn 3:14-21)

Was holy Mother Church wise and discerning in bringing together these three readings for today's Mass? They seem so disparate, unconnected. They come from three different authors with different theological viewpoints, writing in different ages to different audiences. With such differences, how do you handle these three readings in one homily, or should we not concentrate on just one reading?

Appearances to the contrary, there is more connection among these three than in others we met before. Theirs is a unity both material and spiritual, in the sense there is a common catchword in all three and a common theme overarching all three. Like the unity among different members of a family, who aside from carrying one common surname also reflect one common distinctive trait of that family.

What is the catchword in the three readings? It is the word "raise up" or its equivalent "lift up." It is used in the first reading (2 Chron 36) to describe what the Persian king Cyrus the Great, on orders from God although he was a pagan, was about to do.

On account of the sins of the people of Judah, their land, their city Jerusalem and its temple were reduced to ruin and most of the people were carried off to captivity. Now, however, after fifty years, King Cyrus would restore the captives, i.e. their descendants to their homes and would "raise up" the temple and the city from their ruins.

The same catchword appear once more in the second reading (Eph 2). It is used to describe what God has done to us whom, in Paul's judgment, have died or are dead because of our sins. God has "raised us up" with Christ to life, has enthroned us to rule with Christ in the heavenly world. St. Paul says that God has done this to us even when we were sinners, i.e. spiritually dead, hence completely helpless and hopeless by our own selves.

Finally, the catchword "raise us up", "lifted up" appears for the third time in the third reading (gospel of John 3). It is used to describe how God would save mankind from the deadly bite of sin. In the desert, the mortally bitten Israelites had only to look at the bronze serpent "lifted up" by Moses, and they were saved from sure death. In the same way, Jesus would be "lifted up" (on the wood of the cross and also from the tomb of death) so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

Enough then of the material catchword "raise up". What is the spiritual theme that overarches the three readings and connects them? It is this: God's love, which looks for ways and means on how to reclaim sinful humankind and put it on the road to eternal happiness. So, the three readings celebrates God's love for mankind. They praise God's enduring love for men despite their repeated betrayals and alienation.

So we go back to the question at the beginning. Was holy Mother Church wise and discerning in bringing together the three readings for today's Mass? Our answer is a resounding YES.

Let us see through and beyond the dark and seamy side of life, which all three readings mirror candidly, and discern the serene glow of hope and fulfillment that God's love radiates in the distance.

Our daily experiences show conclusively that life is marked by sin and haunted by death. At the same time, however, our daily experiences unveil the hidden God whose unwearying love for men seeks to straighten the crooked, raise the fallen, heal the wounded and forgive the sinner. Nowadays, the word "culture" has become a currency of wide acceptance. People talk and pontificate about creating culture, preserving culture, restoring culture. That's all fine. From time immemorial, men who relied solely on their reason and instincts, have created and followed cultures of violence, of selfishness and gratification, of money and power, of deceit, demon worship, oppression and death. Let us change all that. With the wisdom coming from above, and the encouragement of today's three readings, let us pursue our efforts to create a civilization or culture of love, of devoted service to others, of genuine concern for our fellow beings, of fear of God and respect for his commandments.

April 6, 2003

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Cycle B

(Readings: Jer 31:31-34/Heb 5:7-9/Jn 12:20-33)

The three bible readings of today's Mass give us the chance to deepen our knowledge of the meaning and implications of COVENANT. We take this for granted but it does not influence our religious and spiritual life as it should, because of our scant knowledge of it, or little attention we give to it. Hence, we welcome this opportunity to talk about it so that the covenant ideal may become a reality for us and constitute our second nature.

However, we should overcome first our preconception that COVENANT is something that belongs to the past and should be buried with it. Even if we add to it a qualifying adjective and come up with the word NEW COVENANT, in contrast to the OLD TESTAMENT, still it doesn't quite excite in us those reactions we feel when we are introduced to things really NEW. Why? Because of that pre-conception.

If it will help to surmount our pre-conception by adopting instead the word PARTNERSHIP, that will be distinct. This word sounds more modern and suited to our temper. COVENANT, or **PARTNERSHIP** as you wish, plays a much greater role and has a broader influence in our life than you can imagine. We enter into myriad forms of partnership in the belief that that is how we can overcome our limitations and constraints which are also myriad in number and kind.

The first reading (Jeremiah 31) speaks of a divine partnership with man in the singular and with men in the plural. Obviously, it is not a partnership between equals but between the creator and his creatures, between the Lord and his servants. The initiative of concluding formally such partnership can come from God alone since he gains no further advantage therefrom than what He already is or has. An agreement entered upon by unequal partners presupposes a resulting obligation of granting favors and protection by the superior partner and of loyalty and obedience by the inferior.

Usually, partnership agreements are formalized by means of written contracts properly signed, attested to and notarized. But biblical agreements or covenants included the use of BLOOD to signalize the import and gravity of the agreements themselves and the obligations arising therefrom. Thus, the OLD COVENANT was formalized with the use of blood of slaughtered animals; while the NEW COVENANT was concluded with the blood of Jesus.

Was all this necessary? Could not the NEW COVENANT be formalized by simply affixing signatures to it, even if that would require writing on tablets of stone with a fiery finger, just like when God wrote the Ten Commandments? Why was it necessary for Jesus to shed his blood by dying on the cross so that the NEW COVENANT could start its effectivity and replace all other previous covenants.

The third reading (John 12) gives one among the many answers Jesus himself offered on different occasions regarding the necessity of his passion and death. Here, he explains that a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it dies, then it produces many grains.

The second reading (Hebrews 5) lifts the veil further on why Jesus accepted to suffer and die. The fact that he accepted did not diminish the horrendous quality of his suffering and death for he prayed and requested his Father to save him from that ordeal if possible. The fact, moreover, that Jesus obeyed the Father and accepted death, drove the Father to resurrect him, and declare him a high priest, and make him the source of eternal salvation for all those who imitate his obedience.

It was to this Jesus event that Jeremiah (first reading Chapter 33) was referring when he predicted God would make another partnership, a NEW COVENANT whose stipulations and duties will be written, not on tablets of stone, but in men's hearts. It will be a partnership between God and those redeemed by the blood of Jesus. A partnership so close and intimate because all will know God personally, from the greatest to the least, and because all their sins will be canceled and remembered no longer.

Brothers and sisters, we belong to the NEW COVENANT. We are partners with God in this NEW COVENANT established with the blood of Jesus. Our obligations arising from this partnership are those of loyalty, obedience, gratitude and love.

April 13, 2003

Passion Sunday

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 50:4-7/Phil 2:6-11/Mk 14:1, 15:47)

Today, Holy Mother Church presents us with bible readings that can rightly be considered the jewels of holy scriptures. She has carefully chosen from her treasure chest three stones of immense beauty. Beholding such we are led to exclaim like the army officer who saw the manner Jesus accepted his death, "Truly, this man is the Son of God."

Mark's narration of the crucifixion of Jesus gives the impression of an eyewitness account. His plain reporting of the facts, without any attempt at elaboration, shows an interest for objectivity and simple truth. But Mark was not an eyewitness to the crucifixion. However, he carefully selected from his sources, those details which, given the proper arrangement, would lead an honest reader to exclaim, "Truly this man is the Son of God!" In fact, that is the whole purpose of Mark's gospel in reporting to us the happenings and actions of Jesus so that we may come to that conclusion.

Reflecting further, we cannot help ask ourselves, "How come not all who saw and heard about the crucifixion arrived at the same conclusion by people who should have known better?" Here is a pagan officer of the Roman army who saw it and acknowledged Jesus for what he really is. But here are the religious leaders and their followers, who insulted Jesus to the very end. With cruel sarcasm they taunted Jesus that if he got down from the cross to save himself they would believe in him.

The reason why some people cannot believe in Jesus is because they themselves set the conditions for believing and do

not leave that to God alone. They want to act like gods and to bend God to their wishes. Hence, they place themselves outside the pale of salvation.

God has pre-set, pre-determined since eternity, the conditions for mankind's salvation. Not only men/women must accept these conditions to avail of salvation but even the man Jesus, who was to implement God's plan of salvation. Thus, Isaiah 50 (first reading) had predicted that the Lord's Servant or implementor (meaning Jesus) would obey to the fullest and not deviate in the slightest what God has determined for him to do, even when insults would be heaped upon him, or people spit in his face, or enemies pull out the hairs from his beard.

Then there is this incomparable ancient Christian hymn that Paul integrated into his letter (Phil 2, second reading). It recalls in song how the man Jesus utterly submitted himself to God's plan of salvation. This plan calls for two stages of action: first, of complete divestment of rights and privileges attendant to his being the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, through increasing degrees of humiliation, i.e. taking the nature of servant and appearing as a humble and obedient man; walking all the way to death - his death on the cross. And second, of complete exaltation in power and honor through ascending degrees of resurrection, assigning to him of the highest place and the greatest name, and his proclamation as the Lord of all creation.

This ancient hymn, now forever preserved in Paul's letter, brings to mind what Jesus himself told on one occasion, "Unless the wheat grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain. But if it dies, it produces many grains." Or that other statement of Jesus, "He who humbles himself will be exalted." In both statements, we find the two stages of action or the two movements: the downward of humiliation, then the upward of exaltation.

If such was the attitude and destiny of our Lord and Master, could there be a different attitude and destiny open for a disciple and servant? Paul denies such possibility and he tells us to have the same mind that Jesus had.

On this feast of Palm Sunday, we Christians recall and mark the triumphant and joyous entrance of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. However, we are made to listen to the sober message of today's most beautiful of bible readings, a message that points to: "acceptance of the cross as the only road to ultimate victory and happiness."

April 20, 2003

Easter Sunday (Morning Mass)

(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37,43/Col 3:1-4/Jn 20:1-9)

A Happy Easter to all of you. Surely, there are many good reasons why Easter or Resurrection Sunday can bring happiness to us to be able to wish one another a Happy Easter. Let us, however, not forget that Easter Sunday, and all the happiness associated to it, has been preceded by a Good Friday, as necessarily as any Sunday is always preceded by a Friday.

This reminds us of the truth, otherwise susceptible of being forgotten, that the glory of the Resurrection is the fruit of the pains of the Passion and Death. The relationship between the two is that of effect and cause. Just as any effect calls for its cause, so Resurrection calls for Passion and Death. Besides, we cannot truly speak of a resurrection if there was no previous passion and death.

We can also look at it this other way: Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday, as necessarily as any Friday leads to a Sunday. This reminds us, once more, of the truth that all sacrifices accepted

or done in God's name and for God's sake merit their rewards. What went by with Jesus, that is, his sacrifices being rewarded by the Father with glorification, will also go by with each of us. Our sacrifices will never be in vain.

Thus, pain and happiness, in the present condition of createdness, are related to one another according to the necessary relation of cause and effect, of principle and consequence. In his glorious risen body, Jesus Christ retained the marks caused by the nails and the spear in an obvious reference to the truth that he gained the glory of his resurrection and exaltation through the painful process of suffering and dying.

This takes us to the next question, quite sensitive as it is inescapable, given our human bias. Crucifixion is the most cruel, humiliating, violent death-producing punishment ever invented by the human mind. Could not all this suffering, avoidable and preventable for Jesus? Was he not the Son of God, the only begotten, beloved Son of the Father? Could not the Father have thought of other ways, more human, more civilized and just as effective, of redeeming and saving mankind?

To all these questions, and similar others you may raise, the answer is yes and yes. Yet, the actual fact is that, contrary to human expectations and sensibilities, Jesus died a violent death by crucifixion because it was his Father's will. Did that mean that God takes pleasure in carnage and gory process which crucifixion is in reality? Was sin more powerful that it could strike death even to the sinless One, the Son of God? Has death a greater say than God's mercy? Were the enemies of Jesus guiltless because he had to die anyway? To all these questions, the answer is no and no. Then why did God allow Jesus to be crucified?

John, who before could not understand that Jesus needed to die first before entering into his glory would write later on, God

showed his love for us was revealed by sending his only Son into the world to be the means by which our sins are forgiven."

Paul, who exhorts us to start living a heavenly life because in principle, we have resurrected along with Jesus, also writes, "God did not even keep back his own Son but offered him for us all."

Ask for sin and death (its natural consequence) they have overstepped their bounds by daring to harm the sinless One, the spotless Lamb of God.

In punishment for their audacity and arrogance, God the Father destroyed the power of sin and death by resurrecting and exalting his beloved Son Jesus Christ. He also made him source of resurrection and salvation for all who would believe in him. Hence, the Good News that Peter brought to the household of Cornelius is also meant for us. Peter assures us that he was eyewitness to the risen Christ, having eaten and drunk with him three days after his death, and that he was commanded to preach the gospel to everyone so that those who would believe will find salvation in Jesus' name.

April 20, 2003

Easter Sunday (Afternoon Mass)

(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43/Col 3:1-4/Lk 24:13-35)

Our three bible readings today affirm repeatedly and emphatically the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion, death and burial. We welcome this repetitiousness and emphasis because by it, Mother Church wants to drive home to our consciousness that belief in the Risen Christ should become the environment in which we live, the air we breathe, the light we move around with, the food we draw life and strength from.

This reminder is particularly good for Filipino Christians who by idiosyncrasy or by circumstance of life, are more drawn to the sorrow of Good Friday than to the felicity of Easter Sunday. We Filipinos feel sympathy for the underdog of society, for the oppressed, the innocent victims because we think, we too, are the underdogs, the oppressed, the whipping boys of nations.

Hence, the figure of a Jesus betrayed, falsely accused, unjustly sentenced, tortured and vilified, nailed to a tree, pierced with a lance, forgotten by men and seemingly by God also - strikes a more responsive cord in the heart of a Filipino Christian than does the portrait of a resurrected Christ. In our popular religiosity, we have created a pious culture complete with crucifixions around the theme of Good Friday which has become an object of curiosity and admiration for tourists and foreign visitors.

Why is it that while we carry in our person no symbol of the resurrection, the cross is an ubiquitous pendant adorning the neck or earlobes of saints and sinners, even of criminals and villains as you oftentimes see in movies or TV. Is it because the Resurrection is too abstract a truth for representing it graphically and turning it into a handy little ornament that we can carry about in our body? Is it because the Filipino Christian has a bias towards the gloomier side of life, of guilt-feelings and remorse so that not only the Abels but also the Cains among us wear a cross as a talisman against dangers and catastrophes?

Good Friday is not the end-all of the Holy Week. Good Friday should lead to Easter Sunday. You certainly know of many Christians who seldom or never go to Mass on Sundays, including Easter Sunday. But they do not fail to go to Church on Good Friday, even if, as you well know, there is no Mass on that day. There is a need of correcting such attitudes and biases. There is a need for a balanced appreciation of the mysteries of me passion, death and resurrection.

For all the attraction that Good Friday has on the Filipino people, he should not fill the calendar of his life with many Good Fridays that he practically leaves no space for Easter Sundays. Death is not the end of everything. It should not paralyze us with fear and bind us with inertia. Christ has conquered death, and in his power, we shall also conquer death. Death is a transition to life, to a transformed life. Good Friday is a transition to Easter Sunday.

Mother Church repetitiously and emphatically sounds a call to us today to awake to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. It is the culmination, the crowning point of all that preceded it, the fulfillment of the divine promises in the Old and New Testaments, the scriptures and predictions about Jesus. His resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is God, is Savior of mankind, is Source of our own resurrection and life, even as he declared, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

The inevitability of death should not cause us to raise our hands in surrender. Death for us is the gate opening to a new and perduring life. Even before death closes the lids of our eyes, we should struggle to transform our world according to the spirit of the Gospel. But the transformation should start from us, so that its rippling effects become wider and continuously touching the shores of other souls. Let us not allow our potentials for becoming good and doing good to others remain in the tomb of fear and inaction. In the power of Christ, who broke the fetters of death and emerged victorious from his tomb, let us also arise from our prison of sin and vices and together walk in freedom and joy towards the kingdom of God that Jesus has won for us.

April 27, 2003

Second Sunday of Easter

Cycle B

(Readings: Acts 4: 32-35/1 Jn 5: 1-6/Jn 20: 19-31)

Mother Church brings us the story of the apostle Thomas in today's third reading (John 20). She has a historical reason for doing this today because the story really took place on the Sunday after the Resurrection Sunday. But she also has a pedagogical reason, that is, she wants to teach us an important lesson. Let me explain.

Has the Resurrection of Christ a great impact in our lives, just as it had in the lives of the first Christians? The first reading (Acts 4) shows how the belief in the Resurrection wrought a powerful influence on the early Christians. Accordingly, the apostles and early disciples believed in the Lord because they had seen him, touched him, and ate with him after he rose from death. The succeeding generations of Christians also believed in the risen Lord on the sole testimony and word of the apostles, though they had not seen or heard him.

The belief in the resurrection had a powerful transforming effect in them. As the first reading says they were such of one heart and mind that they shared with one another everything they had, and no one in their group was in need. Besides, God was pouring rich blessings on them all.

Can we say the same thing with regards to ourselves? Has the resurrection of Christ a powerful transforming effect in our lives? Do we really believe, that is, not only in theory but also in practice, in the resurrection of Jesus, that he rose from death? Thomas was absent when Christ appeared to the apostles late in the afternoon of that Easter Sunday. So when he arrived belatedly,

they told him, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas refused to take their word for it, and demanded he must see for himself the marks of the nails and spear otherwise he would not believe.

Today, through holy Scriptures and sacred liturgy, the apostles continue to proclaim the resurrection of Christ. They tell us that they had seen the Christ. Do we take their word for it, or like Thomas, do we demand to see for ourselves the risen Christ and touch him with our hands⁹

"Stop your doubting," Jesus told Thomas, "and believe!" Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God." Jesus is also calling out to us, "Stop dilly-dallying; begin to act decisively. Cease to be leaning towers that could collapse anytime, and straighten up now!" What answer do we give to Jesus?

My little missal which I used as a boy for attending Mass, had this brief instruction for the consecration part: when the priest elevates the host and the chalice, say these words: My Lord and my God. I realized much later in life that those were the very words of the doubting apostle. They are the most explicit confession in the entire New Testament of the divine nature of Jesus.

Our faith in the risen Christ is not based on physical experience, nor historical evidence, nor even on miracles but simply on the testimony of Mother Church through her apostles. **But** there is reasonableness in this belief, and we fully accept it **through** our reason. In fact, we feel happy, fortunate, and blessed to have believed in the risen Lord although we have not seen **him**. Did not Jesus himself say, "Blest are they who have not seen and yet have believed?"

It is not surprising therefore that we hear in the second reading (1 John 5), "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ

(that is, whom the Father raised from death; recall Peter's sermon on Pentecost day) has been begotten by God. Everyone begotten by God conquers the world, and the power that conquers the world is this faith of ours."

What lesson can we bring home after reflecting on this Sunday's readings? I suggest we choose the entrance antiphon which says, "Rejoice to the full in the glory that is yours, and give thanks to God who called you to his kingdom through the resurrection of his Son our Lord Jesus Christ."