

ECCLESIA DE EUCHARISTIA

John Paul II

MESSAGE FOR THE 40TH WORLD DAY
OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

John Paul II

PRIEST AS PASTOR AND PROPHET

Ruperto Santos

THE VIRGIN MARY: A COMMON
DENOMINATOR BETWEEN ISLAM
AND CHRISTIANITY

John Samaha, SM

MATRIMONIAL SEPARATION

Javier Gonzalez, OP



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

Vol. LXXIX, No. 838

September-October 2003

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published bi-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at UST Publishing House, Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 21, 1946 and Re-entered at the UST Post Office on October 23, 1996.

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

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

Subscription Rates (Effective January 2003)

	<i>One Year</i>	<i>Per Copy</i>
Philippines	P600.00	P100.00
Foreign: (via Air Mail)	US\$50.00	\$15.00

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

Address all communications to:

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

Ecclesiastical Publications Office

University of Santo Tomas

Espana Blvd., Manila 1008 Philippines

Tel. No.: (63-2) 731-3101 local 8251 • Telefax: (63-2) 740-9710

E-mail: eccpubli@ustcc.ust.edu.ph

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The Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines (ACUP) in February of the present year made its maiden step towards a communal exposure to the Buddhist culture in Thailand. Seventeen delegates from seven various universities from Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon met Buddhist believers in a monastery in Bangkok proper. If summarized, the focus of what was learned in that unique meeting is the dream to make meditation/contemplation a path to unity among peoples. The lay and the clergy from ACUP in fact constitute as part of a bigger group which included students and professionals from different countries during an afternoon of meditative soiree.

What came out of a Symposium on Ecumenical Implications of Interreligious Relations in the University of Santo Tomas Research Center on August 27 is something to reckon. No less than the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue talked: Archbishop Michael Louis Fitzgerald, DD, and Member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The meeting was made more interesting by the invited panelists from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Commissioner of UNESCO and National Commission on Education. In the line of action, the main areas of work recommended by the main specifics were: dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of discourse, and dialogue of religious experience.

All activities by educational groups goes back to this conviction: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions." So must all in Catholic institutions do. What a task for OIEC, ASEACCU, ACUP, and other forming institutions! They have to appreciate "the reality of truths which enlighten all men."

DOCUMENTATION

Ecclesia de Eucharistia

JOHN PAUL II

Introduction

1. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*. **In** a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope.

The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is "the source and summit of the Christian life."¹ "For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church's

¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men."² Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the Sacrament of the Altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of his boundless love.

2. During the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 I had an opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in the Cenacle of Jerusalem where, according to tradition, it was first celebrated by Jesus himself. *The Upper Room was where this most holy Sacrament was instituted.* It is there that Christ took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you" (cf. *Mk* 26:26; *Lk* 22:19; *1 Cor* 11:24). Then he took the cup of wine and said to them: "Take this, all of you and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven" (cf. *Mt* 14:24; *Lk* 22:20; *1 Cor* 11:25). I am grateful to the Lord Jesus for allowing me to repeat in that same place, in obedience to his command: "Do this in memory of me" (*Lk* 22:19), the words which he spoke two thousand years ago.

Did the Apostles who took part in the Last Supper understand the meaning of the words spoken by Christ? Perhaps not. Those words would only be fully clear at the end of the *Triduum sacrum*, the time from Thursday evening to Sunday morning. Those days embrace the *mysterium paschale*; they also embrace the *mysterium eucharisticum*.

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

3. The Church was born of the paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way the sacrament of the paschal mystery, *stands at the centre of the Church's life*. This is already clear from the earliest images of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles: "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42). The "breaking of the bread" refers to the Eucharist. Two thousand years later, we continue to relive that primordial image of the Church. At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal Triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and to what followed it. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place, beginning with the agony in Gethsemane. Once again we see Jesus as he leaves the Upper Room, descends with his disciples to the Kidron valley and goes to the Garden of Olives. Even today that Garden shelters some very ancient olive trees. Perhaps they witnessed what happened beneath their shade that evening, when Christ in prayer was filled with anguish "and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (cf. *Lk* 22:44). The blood which shortly before he had given to the Church as the drink of salvation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, *began to be shed*; its outpouring would then be completed on Golgotha to become the means of our redemption: "Christ... as high priest of the good things to come..., entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (*Heb* 9:11-12).

4. *The hour of our redemption*. Although deeply troubled, Jesus does not flee before his "hour". "And what shall I say?

'Father, save me from this hour?' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour" (*Jn* 12:27). He wanted his disciples to keep him company, yet he had to experience loneliness and abandonment: "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (*Mt* 26:40-41). Only John would remain at the foot of the Cross, at the side of Mary and the faithful women. The agony in Gethsemane was the introduction to the agony of the Cross on Good Friday. *The holy hour*, the hour of the redemption of the world. Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated at the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, there is an almost tangible return to his "hour", the hour of his Cross and glorification. Every priest who celebrates Holy Mass, together with the Christian community which takes part in it, is led back in spirit to that place and that hour.

"He was crucified, he suffered death and was buried; he descended to the dead; on the third day he rose again". The words of the profession of faith are echoed by the words of contemplation and proclamation: *"This is the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world. Come, let us worship"*. This is the invitation which the Church extends to all in the afternoon hours of Good Friday. She then takes up her song during the Easter season in order to proclaim: *"The Lord is risen from the tomb; for our sake he hung on the Cross, Alleluia"*.

5. *"Mysterium fidei! - The Mystery of Faith!"*. When the priest recites or chants these words, all present acclaim: "We announce your death, O Lord, and we proclaim your resurrection, until you come in glory".'

In these or similar words the Church, while pointing to Christ in the mystery of his passion, *also reveals her own mystery: Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole *Triduum paschale*, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and "concentrated" for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this gift Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church the perennial making present of the paschal mystery. With it he brought about a mysterious "oneness in time" between that *Triduum* and the passage of the centuries.

The thought of this leads us to profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous "capacity" which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But in a special way it should fill the minister of the Eucharist. For it is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: "This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...". The priest says these words, or rather *he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room* and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood.

6. I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic "amazement" by the present Encyclical Letter, in continuity with the Jubilee heritage which I have left to the Church in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and its Marian crowning, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the "programme" which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. *The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist*; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a "mystery of light".³ Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (*Lk* 24:31).

7. From the time I began my ministry as the Successor of Peter, I have always marked Holy Thursday, the day of the Eucharist and of the priesthood, by sending a letter to all the priests of the world. This year, the twenty-fifth of my Pontificate, I wish to involve the whole Church more fully in this Eucharistic reflection, also as a way of thanking the Lord for the gift of the Eucharist and the priesthood: "Gift and Mystery".⁴ By proclaiming the Year of the Rosary, I wish to put this, my

³ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), 21: AAS 95 (2003), 19.

⁴ This is the title which I gave to an autobiographical testimony issued for my fiftieth anniversary of priestly ordination.

twenty-fifth anniversary, *under the aegis of the contemplation of Christ at the school of Mary*. Consequently, I cannot let this Holy Thursday 2003 pass without halting before the "Eucharistic face" of Christ and pointing out with new force to the Church the centrality of the Eucharist.

From it the Church draws her life. From this "living bread" she draws her nourishment. How could I not feel the need to urge everyone to experience it ever anew?

8. When I think of the Eucharist, and look at my life as a priest, as a Bishop and as the Successor of Peter, I naturally recall the many times and places in which I was able to celebrate it. I remember the parish church of Niegowic, where I had my first pastoral assignment, the collegiate church of Saint Florian in Krakow, Wawel Cathedral, Saint Peter's Basilica and so many basilicas and churches in Rome and throughout the world. I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and in city squares... This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated *on the altar of the world*. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the

glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the *mysterium fidei* which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.

9. The Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history. This explains the *lively concern* which she has always shown for the Eucharistic mystery, a concern which finds authoritative expression in the work of the Councils and the Popes. How can we not admire the doctrinal expositions of the Decrees on the Most Holy Eucharist and on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass promulgated by the Council of Trent? For centuries those Decrees guided theology and catechesis, and they are still a dogmatic reference-point for the continual renewal and growth of God's People in faith and in love for the Eucharist. In times closer to our own, three Encyclical Letters should be mentioned: the Encyclical *Mirae Caritatis* of Leo XIII (28 May 1902),⁵ the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII (20 November 1947)⁶ and the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* of Paul VI (3 September 1965).⁷

The Second Vatican Council, while not issuing a specific document on the Eucharistic mystery, considered its various aspects throughout its documents, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

⁵*Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, XXII (1903), 115-136.

⁶AAS 39 (1947), 521-595.

⁷AAS 57 (1965), 753-774.

I myself, in the first years of my apostolic ministry in the Chair of Peter, wrote the Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena*e (24 February 1980),⁸ in which I discussed some aspects of the Eucharistic mystery and its importance for the life of those who are its ministers. Today I take up anew the thread of that argument, with even greater emotion and gratitude in my heart, echoing as it were the word of the Psalmist: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord" (*Ps* 116:12-13).

10. The Magisterium's commitment to proclaiming the Eucharistic mystery has been matched by interior growth within the Christian community. Certainly *the liturgical reform inaugurated by the Council* has greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful. In many places, *adoration of the Blessed Sacrament* is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness. The devout participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic procession on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is a grace from the Lord which yearly brings joy to those who take part in it.

Other positive signs of Eucharistic faith and love might also be mentioned.

Unfortunately, alongside these lights, *there are also shadows*. In some places the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned. In various parts of the

Church abuses have occurred, leading to confusion with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament. At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation. This has led here and there to ecumenical initiatives which, albeit well-intentioned, indulge in Eucharistic practices contrary to the discipline by which the Church expresses her faith. How can we not express profound grief at all this? The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.

It is my hope that the present Encyclical Letter will effectively help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice, so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

11. "The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed" (7 *Cor* 11:23) instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and his blood. The words of the Apostle Paul bring us back to the dramatic setting in which the Eucharist was born. The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord's passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental representation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated

down the ages.⁹ This truth is well expressed by the words with which the assembly in the Latin rite responds to the priest's proclamation of the "Mystery of Faith": "*We announce your death, O Lord*".

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift - however precious - among so many others, but as *the gift par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since "all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all men - participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times."¹⁰

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and "the work of our redemption is carried out."¹¹ This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived. The Church's Magisterium has constantly reaffirmed this faith with joyful gratitude for its inestimable

⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47: "... our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and blood, in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout time, until he should return".

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1085.

¹¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

gift.¹² I wish once more to recall this truth and to join you, my dear brothers and sisters, in adoration before this mystery: a great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes "to the end" (cf. *Jn* 13:1), a love which knows no measure.

12. This aspect of the universal charity of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is based on the words of the Saviour himself. In instituting it, he did not merely say: "This is my body", "this is my blood", but went on to add: "which is given for you", "which is poured out for you" (*Lk* 22:19-20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all. "The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood."¹³

The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today

¹² Cf. Paul VI, *Solemn Profession of Faith*, 30 June 1968, 24: AAS 60 (1968), 442; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenae* (24 February 1980), 12: AAS 72 (1980), 142.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1382.

the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age. "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*."¹⁴ Saint John Chrysostom put it well: "We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and another tomorrow, but always the same one. For this reason the sacrifice is always only one... Even now we offer that victim who was once offered and who will never be consumed."¹⁵

The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it.¹⁶ What is repeated is its *memorial* celebration, its "commemorative representation" (*memoralis demonstratio*))¹⁷ which makes Christ's one, definitive redemptive sacrifice always present in time. The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice of Calvary.

13. By virtue of its close relationship to the sacrifice of Golgotha, the Eucharist is *a sacrifice in the strict sense*, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ's offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food. The gift of his love and obedience to the point of giving his

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1367.

¹⁵ *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homiliae*, Horn. 17,3: PG 63, 131.

¹⁶ Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXII, *Doctrina de ss. Missae Sacrificio*, Chapter 2: DS 1743: "It is one and the same victim here offering himself by the ministry of his priests, who then offered himself on the Cross; it is only the manner of offering that is different."

¹⁷ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947): AAS 39 (1947), 548.

life (cf. *Jn* 10:17-18) is in the first place a gift to his Father. Certainly it is a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity (cf. *Mt* 26:28; *Mk* 14:24; *Lk* 22:20; *Jn* 10:15), yet it is *first and foremost a gift to the Father*: "a sacrifice that the Father accepted, giving, in return for this total self-giving by his Son, who 'became obedient unto death' (*Phil* 2:8), his own paternal gift, that is to say the grant of new immortal life in the resurrection."¹⁸

In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it."¹⁹

14. Christ's passover includes not only his passion and death, but also his resurrection. This is recalled by the assembly's acclamation following the consecration: "*We proclaim your resurrection.*" The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the "bread of life" (*Jn* 6:35, 48), the "living bread" (*Jn* 6:51). Saint Ambrose reminded the newly-initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection

¹⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (15 March 1979), 20: AAS 71 (1979), 310.

¹⁹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

to their lives: "Today Christ is yours, yet each day he rises again for you."²⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria also makes clear that sharing in the sacred mysteries "is a true confession and a remembrance that the Lord died and returned to life for us and on our behalf."²¹

15. The sacramental representation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which - in the words of Paul VI - "is called 'real' not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were 'not real', but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present."²² This sets forth once more the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: "the consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this change transubstantiation."²³ Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith, as is often brought out in the catechesis of the Church Fathers regarding this divine sacrament: "Do not see - Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts - in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly

²⁰ *De Sacramentis*, V, 4, 26: CSEL 73, 70.

²¹ *In Ioannis Evangelium*, XII, 20: PG 74, 726.

²² Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 764.

²³ Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 4: DS 1642.

said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise."²⁴

Adoro te devote, latens Deltas, we shall continue to sing with the Angelic Doctor. Before this mystery of love, human reason fully experiences its limitations. One understands how, down the centuries, this truth has stimulated theology to strive to understand it ever more deeply.

These are praiseworthy efforts, which are all the more helpful and insightful to the extent that they are able to join critical thinking to the "living faith" of the Church, as grasped especially by the Magisterium's "sure charism of truth" and the "intimate sense of spiritual realities"²⁵ which is attained above all by the saints. There remains the boundary indicated by Paul VI: "Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, must firmly maintain that in objective reality, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the consecration, so that the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus from that moment on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine."²⁶

16. The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord's body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we

²⁴ *Mystagogical Catecheses*, IV, 6: SCh 126, 138.

²⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, 8.

²⁶ *Solemn Profession of Faith*, 30 June 1968, 25: AAS 60 (1968), 442-443.

receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mr26:28). We are reminded of his words: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (*Jn* 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. *The Eucharist is a true banquet*, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. When for the first time Jesus spoke of this food, his listeners were astonished and bewildered, which forced the Master to emphasize the objective truth of his words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you" (*Jn* 6:53). This is no metaphorical food: "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (*Jn* 6:55).

17. Through our communion in his body and blood, Christ also grants us his Spirit. Saint Ephrem writes: "He called the bread his living body and he filled it with himself and his Spirit.

He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit... Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life."²⁷ The Church implores this divine Gift, the source of every other gift, in the Eucharistic epiclesis. In the *Divine Liturgy* of Saint John Chrysostom, for example, we find the prayer: "We beseech, implore and beg you: send your Holy Spirit upon us all and upon these gifts... that those who partake of them may

Sermo IV in Hebdomadam Sanctum. CSCO 413/Syr. 182,55.

be purified in soul, receive the forgiveness of their sins, and share in the Holy Spirit."²⁸ And in the *Roman Missal* the celebrant prays: "grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ."²⁹ Thus by the gift of his body and blood Christ increases within us the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in Baptism and bestowed as a "seal" in the sacrament of Confirmation.

18. The acclamation of the assembly following the consecration appropriately ends by expressing the eschatological thrust which marks the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. / *Cor* 11:26): "*until you come in glory*". The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the "pledge of future glory."³⁰ In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting "in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ."³¹ Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him

²⁸ Anaphora.

²⁹ Eucharistic Prayer III.

^{1,0} Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Second Vespers, Antiphon to the *Magnificat*.

• *Missale Romanum*, Embolism following the Lord's Prayer.

up at the last day" (*Jn* 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the "secret" of the resurrection. For this reason Saint Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the Eucharistic Bread as "a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death."³²

19. The eschatological tension kindled by the Eucharist *expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven*. It is not by chance that the Eastern Anaphoras and the Latin Eucharistic Prayers honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly "liturgy" and become part of that great multitude which cries out: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (*Rev* 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.

20. A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens"

Ad Ephesios, 20: PG 5, 661.

and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, *our sense of responsibility for the world today*^ I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan.

Many problems darken the horizon of our time. We need but think of the urgent need to work for peace, to base relationships between peoples on solid premises of justice and solidarity, and to defend human life from conception to its natural end. And what should we say of the thousand inconsistencies of a "globalized" world where the weakest, the most powerless and the poorest appear to have so little hope! It is in this world that Christian hope must shine forth! For this reason too, the Lord wished to remain with us in the Eucharist, making his presence in meal and sacrifice the promise of a humanity renewed by his love. Significantly, in their account of the Last Supper, the Synoptics recount the institution of the Eucharist, while the Gospel of John relates, as a way of bringing out its profound meaning, the account of the "washing of the feet", in which Jesus appears as the teacher of communion and of service (cf. *Jn* 13:1-20). The Apostle Paul, for his part, says that it is "unworthy" of a Christian community to partake of the

³³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

Lord's Supper amid division and indifference towards the poor (cf. / *Cor* 11:17-22, 27-34).³⁴

Proclaiming the death of the Lord "until he comes" (/ *Cor* 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely "Eucharistic". It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (*Rev* 22:20).

CHAPTER TWO

THE EUCHARIST BUILDS THE CHURCH

21. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the celebration of the Eucharist is at the centre of the process of the Church's growth. After stating that "the Church, as the Kingdom of Christ already present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God,"³⁵ then, as if in answer to

³⁴ "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me' ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well": Saint John Chrysostom, *In Evangelium S. Matthaei*, horn. 50:3-4: PG 58, 508-509; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 31: AAS 80 (1988), 553-556.

³⁵ Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

the question: "How does the Church grow?", the Council adds: "as often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed' (7 *Cor* 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out. At the same time in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of the faithful, who form one body in Christ (cf. / *Cor* 10:17), is both expressed and brought about."³⁶

A *causal influence of the Eucharist* is present at the Church's very origins. The Evangelists specify that it was the Twelve, the Apostles, who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. *Mt* 26:20; *Mk* 14:17; *Lk* 22:14). This is a detail of notable importance, for the Apostles "were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy."³⁷ By offering them his body and his blood as food, Christ mysteriously involved them in the sacrifice which would be completed later on Calvary. By analogy with the Covenant of Mount Sinai, sealed by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood,³⁸ the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant.

The Apostles, by accepting in the Upper Room Jesus' invitation: "Take, eat", "Drink of it, all of you" (*Mt* 26:26-27), entered for the first time into sacramental communion with him. From that time forward, until the end of the age, the

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 5.

³⁸ "Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said: 'Behold the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (*Ex* 24:8).

Church is built up through sacramental communion with the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sake: "Do this in remembrance of me... Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (7 *Cor* 11:24-25; cf. *Lk* 22:19).

22. Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that *each of us receives Christ*, but also that *Christ receives each of us*. He enters into friendship with us: "You are my friends" (*Jn* 15:14). Indeed, it is because of him that we have life: "He who eats me will live because of me" (*Jn* 6:57). Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual "abiding" of Christ and each of his followers: "Abide in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 15:4).

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a "sacrament" for humanity,³⁹ a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt* 5:13-16), for the redemption of all.⁴⁰ The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20:21). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and

³⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

23. Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this *unifying power* of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist when he writes to the Corinthians: "The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (/ *Cor* 10:16-17). Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: "For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ - not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ."⁴² The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13, 27).

⁴¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5. The same Decree, in No. 6, says: "No Christian community can be built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist."

⁴² *In Epistolam I ad Corinthios Homiliae*, 24, 2: PG 61, 200; Cf. *Didache*, IX, 4: EX. Funk, I, 22; Saint Cyprian, *Ep.* LXIII, 13: PL 4, 384.

The joint and inseparable activity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is at the origin of the Church, of her consolidation and her continued life, is at work in the Eucharist. This was clearly evident to the author of the *Liturgy of Saint James*: in the epiclesis of the Anaphora, God the Father is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and upon the offerings, so that the body and blood of Christ "may be a help to all those who partake of it ... for the sanctification of their souls and bodies."⁴³ The Church is fortified by the divine Paraclete through the sanctification of the faithful in the Eucharist.

24. The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfills the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more profoundly "in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race."⁴⁴

The seeds of disunity, which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, are countered by *the unifying power* of the body of Christ. The Eucharist, precisely by building up the Church, creates human community.

⁴³ PO 26, 206.

⁴⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

25. The *worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass* is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass - a presence which lasts as long as the species of bread and of wine remain⁴⁵ - derives from the celebration of the sacrifice and is directed towards communion, both sacramental and spiritual.⁴⁶ It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species.⁴⁷

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. *Jn* 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the "art of prayer",⁴⁸ how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!

⁴⁵ Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Canon 4: DS 1654.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Rituale Romanum: De sacra communione et de cultu mysterii eucharistici extra Missam*, 36 (No. 80).

⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 38-39 (Nos. 86-90).

⁴⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 32: AAS 93 (2001), 288.

This practice, repeatedly praised and recommended by the Magisterium,⁴⁹ is supported by the example of many saints. Particularly outstanding in this regard was Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who wrote: "Of all devotions, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest after the sacraments, the one dearest to God and the one most helpful to us."⁵⁰ The Eucharist is a priceless treasure: by not only celebrating it but also by praying before it outside of Mass we are enabled to make contact with the very wellspring of grace. A Christian community desirous of contemplating the face of Christ in the spirit which I proposed in the Apostolic Letters *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* cannot fail also to develop this aspect of Eucharistic worship, which prolongs and increases the fruits of our communion in the body and blood of the Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE EUCHARIST AND OF THE CHURCH

26. If, as I have said, the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist, it follows that there is a pro-

⁴⁹ "In the course of the day the faithful should not omit visiting the Blessed Sacrament, which in accordance with liturgical law must be reserved in churches with great reverence in a prominent place. Such visits are a sign of gratitude, an expression of love and an acknowledgment of the Lord's presence": Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 771.

⁵⁰ *Visite al SS. Sacramento e a Maria Santissima*, Introduction: *Opere Ascetiche*, Avellino, 2000, 295.

found relationship between the two, so much so that we can apply to the Eucharistic mystery the very words with which, in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we profess the Church to be "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." The Eucharist too is one and catholic. It is also holy, indeed, the Most Holy Sacrament. But it is above all its apostolicity that we must now consider.

27. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in explaining how the Church is apostolic - founded on the Apostles - sees *three meanings* in this expression. First, "she was and remains built on 'the foundation of the Apostles' (*Eph* 2:20), the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself."⁵¹ The Eucharist too has its foundation in the Apostles, not in the sense that it did not originate in Christ himself, but because it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors. It is in continuity with the practice of the Apostles, in obedience to the Lord's command, that the Church has celebrated the Eucharist down the centuries.

The second sense in which the Church is apostolic, as the *Catechism* points out, is that "with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching, the 'good deposit', the salutary words she has heard from the Apostles."⁵² Here too the Eucharist is apostolic, for it is celebrated in conformity with the faith of the Apostles. At various times in the two-thousand-year history of the People of the

⁵¹ No. 857.

⁵² *Ibid.*

New Covenant, the Church's Magisterium has more precisely defined her teaching on the Eucharist, including its proper terminology, precisely in order to safeguard the apostolic faith with regard to this sublime mystery. This faith remains unchanged and it is essential for the Church that it remain unchanged.

28. Lastly, the Church is apostolic in the sense that she "continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the Apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of Bishops assisted by priests, in union with the Successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor."⁵³ Succession to the Apostles in the pastoral mission necessarily entails the sacrament of Holy Orders, that is, the uninterrupted sequence, from the very beginning, of valid episcopal ordinations.⁵⁴ This succession is essential for the Church to exist in a proper and full sense.

The Eucharist also expresses this sense of apostolicity. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, "the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood",⁵⁵ yet it is the ordained priest who, "acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people."⁵⁶ For this reason, the Roman Missal prescribes that only the priest should recite the

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Sacerdotium Ministeriale* (6 August 1983), III.2: AAS 75 (1983), 1005.

⁵⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Eucharistic Prayer, while the people participate in faith and in silence.⁵⁷

29. The expression repeatedly employed by the Second Vatican Council, according to which "the ministerial priest, acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice",⁵⁸ was already firmly rooted in papal teaching.⁵⁹ As I have pointed out on other occasions, the phrase *in persona Christi* "means more than offering 'in the name of or 'in the place of Christ. *In persona* means in specific sacramental identification with the eternal High Priest who is the author and principal subject of this sacrifice of his, a sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take his place."⁶⁰ The ministry of priests who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders, in the economy of salvation chosen by Christ, makes clear that the Eucharist which they celebrate is *a gift which radically transcends the power of the assembly* and is in any event essential for validly linking the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper. The assembly gathered together for the celebration of the Eucharist, if it is

⁵⁷ Cf. *Institutio Generalis*: Editio typica tertia, No. 147.

⁵⁸ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10 and 28; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

⁵⁹ "The minister of the altar acts in the person of Christ inasmuch as he is head, making an offering in the name of all the members": Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947): AAS 39 (1947), 556; cf. Pius X, Apostolic Exhortation *Haerent Animo* (4 August 1908): *Acta Pii X*, IV, 16; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* (20 December 1935): AAS 28(1936), 20.

⁶⁰ Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenaе* (24 February 1980), 8: AAS 72 (1980), 128-129.

to be a truly Eucharistic assembly, absolutely requires the presence of an ordained priest as its president. On the other hand, the community is by itself incapable of providing an ordained minister. This minister is a gift which the assembly *receives through episcopal succession going back to the Apostles*. It is the Bishop who, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, makes a new presbyter by conferring upon him the power to consecrate the Eucharist. Consequently, "the Eucharistic mystery cannot be celebrated in any community except by an ordained priest, as the Fourth Lateran Council expressly taught."⁶¹

30. The Catholic Church's teaching on the relationship between priestly ministry and the Eucharist and her teaching on the Eucharistic Sacrifice have both been the subject in recent decades of a fruitful dialogue *in the area of ecumenism*. We must give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the significant progress and convergence achieved in this regard, which lead us to hope one day for a full sharing of faith. Nonetheless, the observations of the Council concerning the Ecclesial Communities which arose in the West from the sixteenth century onwards and are separated from the Catholic Church remain fully pertinent: "The Ecclesial Communities separated from us lack that fullness of unity with us which should flow from Baptism, and we believe that especially because of the lack of the sacrament of Orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery. Neverthe-

⁶¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Sacerdotium Ministerial* (6 August 1983), III.4: AAS 75 (1983), 1006; cf. Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council, Chapter 1, Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Firmiter Credimus*: DS 802.

less, when they commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await his coming in glory."⁶²

The Catholic faithful, therefore, while respecting the religious convictions of these separated brethren, must refrain from receiving the communion distributed in their celebrations, so as not to condone an ambiguity about the nature of the Eucharist and, consequently, to fail in their duty to bear clear witness to the truth. This would result in slowing the progress being made towards full visible unity. Similarly, it is unthinkable to substitute for Sunday Mass ecumenical celebrations of the word or services of common prayer with Christians from the aforementioned Ecclesial Communities, or even participation in their own liturgical services. Such celebrations and services, however praiseworthy in certain situations, prepare for the goal of full communion, including Eucharistic communion, but they cannot replace it.

The fact that the power of consecrating the Eucharist has been entrusted only to Bishops and priests does not represent any kind of belittlement of the rest of the People of God, for in the communion of the one body of Christ which is the Church this gift redounds to the benefit of all.

31. If the Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life, it is likewise the centre and summit of priestly ministry. For this reason, with a heart filled with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, I repeat that the Eucharist "is the prin-

⁶² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.

cial and central *raison d'être* of the sacrament of priesthood, which effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist."⁶³

Priests are engaged in a wide variety of pastoral activities. If we also consider the social and cultural conditions of the modern world it is easy to understand how priests face the very real *risk of losing their focus* amid such a great number of different tasks. The Second Vatican Council saw in pastoral charity the bond which gives unity to the priest's life and work. This, the Council adds, "flows mainly from the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is therefore the centre and root of the whole priestly life."⁶⁴ We can understand, then, how important it is for the spiritual life of the priest, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests follow the Council's recommendation to celebrate the Eucharist daily: "for even if the faithful are unable to be present, it is an act of Christ and the Church."⁶⁵ In this way priests will be able to counteract the daily tensions which lead to a lack of focus and they will find in the Eucharistic Sacrifice - the true centre of their lives and ministry - the spiritual strength needed to deal with their different pastoral responsibilities. Their daily activity will thus become truly Eucharistic.

The centrality of the Eucharist in the life and ministry of priests is the basis of its centrality in the *pastoral promotion*

⁶³ Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cenae* (24 February 1980), 2: AAS 72 (1980), 115.

⁶⁴ Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13; cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 904; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 378.

of priestly vocations. It is in the Eucharist that prayer for vocations is most closely united to the prayer of Christ the Eternal High Priest. At the same time the diligence of priests in carrying out their Eucharistic ministry, together with the conscious, active and fruitful participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God's call. Often it is the example of a priest's fervent pastoral charity which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a young man's heart the seed of a priestly calling.

32. All of this shows how distressing and irregular is the situation of a Christian community which, despite having sufficient numbers and variety of faithful to form a parish, does not have a priest to lead it. Parishes are communities of the baptized who express and affirm their identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. But this requires the presence of a presbyter, who alone is qualified to offer the Eucharist *in persona Christi*. When a community lacks a priest, attempts are rightly made somehow to remedy the situation so that it can continue its Sunday celebrations, and those religious and laity who lead their brothers and sisters in prayer exercise in a praiseworthy way the common priesthood of all the faithful based on the grace of Baptism. But such solutions must be considered merely temporary, while the community awaits a priest.

The sacramental incompleteness of these celebrations should above all inspire the whole community to pray with greater fervour that the Lord will send labourers into his harvest (cf. *Mt* 9:38). It should also be an incentive to mobilize all the resources needed for an adequate pastoral promotion

of vocations, without yielding to the temptation to seek solutions which lower the moral and formative standards demanded of candidates for the priesthood.

33. When, due to the scarcity of priests, non-ordained members of the faithful are entrusted with a share in the pastoral care of a parish, they should bear in mind that - as the Second Vatican Council teaches - "no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist."⁶⁶ They have a responsibility, therefore, to keep alive in the community a genuine "hunger" for the Eucharist, so that no opportunity for the celebration of Mass will ever be missed, also taking advantage of the occasional presence of a priest who is not impeded by Church law from celebrating Mass.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EUCHARIST AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

34. The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an "ecclesiology of communion" the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁷ The Church is called during her earthly pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful. For this purpose she possesses the word and the sacraments,

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.
Cf. Final Report, II.C.1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985, 7.

particularly the Eucharist, by which she "constantly lives and grows"⁶⁸ and in which she expresses her very nature. It is not by chance that the term *communion* has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament.

The Eucharist thus appears as the culmination of all the sacraments in perfecting our communion with God the Father by identification with his only-begotten Son through the working of the Holy Spirit. With discerning faith a distinguished writer of the Byzantine tradition voiced this truth: in the Eucharist "unlike any other sacrament, the mystery [of communion] is so perfect that it brings us to the heights of every good thing: here is the ultimate goal of every human desire, because here we attain God and God joins himself to us in the most perfect union."⁶⁹ Precisely for this reason it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*. This was the origin of the practice of "spiritual communion", which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: "When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you."⁷⁰

35. The celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that com-

⁶⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 26.

⁶⁹ Nicolas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, IV, 10: SCH 355, 270.

⁷⁰ *Camino de Perfection*, Chapter 35.

munion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection. The sacrament is an expression of this bond of communion both in its *invisible* dimension, which, in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit, unites us to the Father and among ourselves, and in its *visible* dimension, which entails communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the Church's hierarchical order. The profound relationship between the invisible and the visible elements of ecclesial communion is constitutive of the Church as the sacrament of salvation.⁷¹ Only in this context can there be a legitimate celebration of the Eucharist and true participation in it. Consequently it is an intrinsic requirement of the Eucharist that it should be celebrated in communion, and specifically maintaining the various bonds of that communion intact.

36. Invisible communion, though by its nature always growing, presupposes the life of grace, by which we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 *Pet* 1:4), and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. Only in this way do we have true communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nor is faith sufficient; we must persevere in sanctifying grace and love, remaining within the Church "bodily" as well as "in our heart";⁷² what is required, in the words of Saint Paul, is "faith working through love" (*Gal* 5:6).

⁷¹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio in Notio* (28 May 1992), 4: AAS 85 (1993), 839-840.

⁷² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

Keeping these invisible bonds intact is a specific moral duty incumbent upon Christians who wish to participate fully in the Eucharist by receiving the body and blood of Christ. The Apostle Paul appeals to this duty when he warns: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (7 *Cor* 11:28). Saint John Chrysostom, with his stirring eloquence, exhorted the faithful: "I too raise my voice, I beseech, beg and implore that no one draw near to this sacred table with a sullied and corrupt conscience. Such an act, in fact, can never be called 'communion', not even were we to touch the Lord's body a thousand times over, but 'condemnation', 'torment' and 'increase of punishment'." ⁷³

Along these same lines, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* rightly stipulates that "anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion."⁷⁴ I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression to the Apostle Paul's stern warning when it affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, "one must, first confess one's sins, when one is aware of mortal sin."⁷⁵

- *Homiliae in Isaia*m, 6, 3: PG 56, 139.

⁷⁴ No. 1385; cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 916; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 711.

⁷⁵ Address to the Members of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary and the Penitentiaries of the Patriarchal Basilicas of Rome (30 January 1981): AAS 73 (1981), 203. Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Sess. XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 7 and Canon 11: DS 1647, 1661.

37. The two sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected. Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 *Cor* 5:20). If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The *Code of Canon Law* refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion.⁷⁶

38. Ecclesial communion, as I have said, is likewise *visible*, and finds expression in the series of "bonds" listed by the Council when it teaches: "They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her whole structure and all the means of salvation established within her, and within her visible framework are united to Christ, who governs her through the Supreme Pontiff

Canon 915; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 712.

and the Bishops, by the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government and communion."⁷⁷

The Eucharist, as the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church, demands to be celebrated in *a context where the outward bonds of communion are also intact*. In a special way, since the Eucharist is "as it were the summit of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments",⁷⁸ it requires that the bonds of communion in the sacraments, particularly in Baptism and in priestly Orders, be real. It is not possible to give communion to a person who is not baptized or to one who rejects the full truth of the faith regarding the Eucharistic mystery. Christ is the truth and he bears witness to the truth (cf. *Jn* 14:6; 18:37); the sacrament of his body and blood does not permit duplicity.

39. Furthermore, given the very nature of ecclesial communion and its relation to the sacrament of the Eucharist, it must be recalled that "the Eucharistic Sacrifice, while always offered in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting visible particular form, that it is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."⁷⁹ From this it follows that a truly

⁷⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁷⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, a. 3c.

⁷⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio Notio* (28 May 1992), 11: AAS 85 (1993), 844.

Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself, as though it were somehow self-sufficient; rather it must persevere in harmony with every other Catholic community.

The ecclesial communion of the Eucharistic assembly is a communion with its own *Bishop* and with the *Roman Pontiff*. The Bishop, in effect, is the *visible* principle and the foundation of unity within his particular Church.⁸⁰ It would therefore be a great contradiction if the sacrament *par excellence* of the Church's unity were celebrated without true communion with the Bishop. As Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote: "That Eucharist which is celebrated under the Bishop, or under one to whom the Bishop has given this charge, may be considered certain."⁸¹ Likewise, since "the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful,"⁸² communion with him is intrinsically required for the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Hence the great truth expressed which the Liturgy expresses in a variety of ways: "Every celebration of the Eucharist is performed in union not only with the proper Bishop, but also with the Pope, with the episcopal order, with all the clergy, and with the entire people. Every valid celebration of the Eucharist expresses this universal communion with Peter and

⁸⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ad Smyrnaeos*, 8: PG 5, 713.

⁸² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

with the whole Church, or objectively calls for it, as in the case of the Christian Churches separated from Rome."⁸³

40. The Eucharist *creates communion* and *fosters communion*. Saint Paul wrote to the faithful of Corinth explaining how their divisions, reflected in their Eucharistic gatherings, contradicted what they were celebrating, the Lord's Supper. The Apostle then urged them to reflect on the true reality of the Eucharist in order to return to the spirit of fraternal communion (cf. 7 *Cor* 11:17-34). Saint Augustine effectively echoed this call when, in recalling the Apostle's words: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (7 *Cor* 12: 27), he went on to say: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery."⁸⁴ And from this observation he concludes: "Christ the Lord... hallowed at his table the mystery of our peace and unity. Whoever receives the mystery of unity without preserving the bonds of peace receives not a mystery for his benefit but evidence against himself."⁸⁵

41. The Eucharist's particular effectiveness in promoting communion is one of the reasons for the importance of Sunday Mass. I have already dwelt on this and on the other reasons which make Sunday Mass fundamental for the life of the Church and of individual believers in my Apostolic Letter on

⁸³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio in Notio* (28 May 1992), 14: AAS 85 (1993), 847.

⁸⁴ *Sermo* 272: PL 38, 1247.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1248.

the sanctification of Sunday *Dies Domini*. There I recalled that the faithful have the obligation to attend Mass, unless they are seriously impeded, and that Pastors have the corresponding duty to see that it is practical and possible for all to fulfill this precept.⁸⁷ More recently, in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in setting forth the pastoral path which the Church must take at the beginning of the third millennium, I drew particular attention to the Sunday Eucharist, emphasizing its effectiveness for building communion. "It is" - I wrote - "the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured. Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, *the Lord's Day* also becomes *the Day of the Church*, when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity."⁸⁸

42. The safeguarding and promotion of ecclesial communion is a task of each member of the faithful, who finds in the Eucharist, as the sacrament of the Church's unity, an area of special concern. More specifically, this task is the particular responsibility of the Church's Pastors, each according to his rank and ecclesiastical office. For this reason the Church has drawn up norms aimed both at fostering the frequent and fruitful access of the faithful to the Eucharistic table and at determining the objective conditions under which communion may not be given. The care shown in promoting the faithful observance of these norms becomes a practical means of showing love for the Eucharist and for the Church.

⁸⁶ Cf. Nos. 31-51: AAS 90 (1998), 731-746.

⁸⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 48-49: AAS 90 (1998), 744.

⁸⁸ No. 36: AAS 93 (2001), 291-292.

43. In considering the Eucharist as the sacrament of ecclesial communion, there is one subject which, due to its importance, must not be overlooked: I am referring to the *relationship of the Eucharist to ecumenical activity*. We should all give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the many members of the faithful throughout the world who in recent decades have felt an ardent desire for unity among all Christians. The Second Vatican Council, at the beginning of its Decree on Ecumenism, sees this as a special gift of God.⁸⁹ It was an efficacious grace which inspired us, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church and our brothers and sisters from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to set forth on the path of ecumenism.

Our longing for the goal of unity prompts us to turn to the Eucharist, which is the supreme sacrament of the unity of the People of God, in as much as it is the apt expression and the unsurpassable source of that unity.⁹⁰ In the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice the Church prays that God, the Father of mercies, will grant his children the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that they may become one body and one spirit in Christ.⁹¹ In raising this prayer to the Father of lights, from whom comes every good endowment and every perfect gift (cf. *Jas* 1:17), the Church believes that she will be heard, for she prays in union with Christ her Head and Spouse, who takes up this plea of his Bride and joins it to that of his own redemptive sacrifice.

⁸⁹ Cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

⁹⁰ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

⁹¹ "Join all of us, who share the one bread and the one cup, to one another in the communion of the one Holy Spirit": *Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil*.

44. Precisely because the Church's unity, which the Eucharist brings about through the Lord's sacrifice and by communion in his body and blood, absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully re-established. Any such concelebration would not be a valid means, and might well prove instead to be *an obstacle, to the attainment of full communion*, by weakening the sense of how far we remain from this goal and by introducing or exacerbating ambiguities with regard to one or another truth of the faith. The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth. In this area, the prohibitions of Church law leave no room for uncertainty,⁹² in fidelity to the moral norm laid down by the Second Vatican Council.⁹³

I would like nonetheless to reaffirm what I said in my Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* after having acknowledged the impossibility of Eucharistic sharing: "And yet we do have a burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord, and this desire itself is already a common prayer of

⁹² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 908; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 702; Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Directory*, 25 March 1993, 122-125, 129-131: AAS 85 (1993), 1086-1089; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Ad Exsequendam*, 18 May 2001: AAS 93 (2001), 786.

⁹³ "Divine law forbids any common worship which would damage the unity of the Church, or involve formal acceptance of falsehood or the danger of deviation in the faith, of scandal, or of indifferentism": Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 26.

praise, a single supplication. Together we speak to the Father and increasingly we do so 'with one heart'."⁹⁴

45. While it is never legitimate to concelebrate in the absence of full communion, the same is not true with respect to the administration of the Eucharist *under special circumstances, to individual persons* belonging to Churches or Ecclesial Communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In this case, in fact, the intention is to meet a grave spiritual need for the eternal salvation of an individual believer, not to bring about an *intercommunion* which remains impossible until the visible bonds of ecclesial communion are fully re-established.

This was the approach taken by the Second Vatican Council when it gave guidelines for responding to Eastern Christians separated in good faith from the Catholic Church, who spontaneously ask to receive the Eucharist from a Catholic minister and are properly disposed.⁹⁵ This approach was then ratified by both Codes, which also consider - with necessary modifications - the case of other non-Eastern Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.⁹⁶

46. In my Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* I expressed my own appreciation of these norms, which make it possible to provide for the salvation of souls with proper discernment: "It is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain

⁹⁴ No. 45: AAS 87 (1995), 948.

⁹⁵ Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 27.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 844 §§3-4; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 671 §§3-4.

particular cases, to administer the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments. Conversely, in specific cases and in particular circumstances, Catholics too can request these same sacraments from ministers of Churches in which these sacraments are valid."⁹⁷

These conditions, from which no dispensation can be given, must be carefully respected, even though they deal with specific individual cases, because the denial, of one or more truths of the faith regarding these sacraments and, among these, the truth regarding the need of the ministerial priesthood for their validity, renders the person asking improperly disposed to legitimately receiving them. And the opposite is also true: Catholics may not receive communion in those communities which lack a valid Sacrament of Orders.⁹⁸

The faithful observance of the body of norms established in this area⁹⁹ is a manifestation and, at the same time, a guarantee of our love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for our brothers and sisters of different Christian confessions - who have a right to our witness to the truth — and for the cause itself of the promotion of unity.

⁹⁷ No. 46: AAS87 (1995), 948.

⁹⁸ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 844; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Canon 671.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DIGNITY OF THE EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

47. Reading the account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Synoptic Gospels, we are struck by the simplicity and the "solemnity" with which Jesus, on the evening of the Last Supper, instituted this great sacrament. There is an episode which in some way serves as its prelude: *the anointing at Bethany*. A woman, whom John identifies as Mary the sister of Lazarus, pours a flask of *costly ointment* over Jesus' head, which provokes from the disciples - and from Judas in particular (cf. *Mt* 26:8; *Mk* 14:4; *Jn* 12:4) - an indignant response, as if this act, in light of the needs of the poor, represented an intolerable "waste". But Jesus' own reaction is completely different. While in no way detracting from the duty of charity towards the needy, for whom the disciples must always show special care - "the poor you will always have with you" (*Mt* 26, 11; *Mk* 14:7; cf. *Jn* 12:8) - he looks towards his imminent death and burial, and sees this act of anointing as an anticipation of the honour which his body will continue to merit even after his death, indissolubly bound as it is to the mystery of his person.

The account continues, in the Synoptic Gospels, with Jesus' charge to the disciples to *prepare carefully the "large upper room"* needed for the Passover meal (cf. *Mk* 14:15; *Lk* 22:12) and with the narration of the institution of the Eucharist. Reflecting at least in part the *Jewish rites* of the Passover meal leading up to the singing of the Hallel (cf. *Mt* 26:30; *Mk* 14:26), the story presents with sobriety and solemnity, even

in the variants of the different traditions, the words spoken by Christ over the bread and wine, which he made into concrete expressions of the handing over of his body and the shedding of his blood. All these details are recorded by the Evangelists in the light of a praxis of the "breaking of the bread" already well-established in the early Church. But certainly from the time of Jesus on, the event of Holy Thursday has shown visible traces of a liturgical "sensitivity" shaped by Old Testament tradition and open to being reshaped in Christian celebrations in a way consonant with the new content of Easter.

48. Like the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany, *the Church has feared no "extravagance"*, devoting the best of her resources to expressing her wonder and adoration before the *unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist*. No less than the first disciples charged with preparing the "large upper room", she has felt the need, down the centuries and in her encounters with different cultures, to celebrate the Eucharist in a setting worthy of so great a mystery. In the wake of Jesus' own words and actions, and building upon the ritual heritage of Judaism, *the Christian liturgy was born*. Could there ever be an adequate means of expressing the acceptance of that self-gift which the divine Bridegroom continually makes to his Bride, the Church, by bringing the Sacrifice offered once and for all on the Cross to successive generations of believers and thus becoming nourishment for all the faithful? Though the idea of a "banquet" naturally suggests familiarity, the Church has never yielded to the temptation to trivialize this "intimacy" with her Spouse by forgetting that he is also her Lord and that the "banquet" always remains a sacrificial banquet marked by the blood shed on Golgotha. *The Eucharistic Banquet is truly*

a "sacred" banquet, in which the simplicity of the signs conceals the unfathomable holiness of God: *O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus sumitur!* The bread which is broken on our altars, offered to us as wayfarers along the paths of the world, is *panis angelorum*, the bread of angels, which cannot be approached except with the humility of the centurion in the Gospel: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (*Mt 8:8; Lk7:6*).

49. With this heightened sense of mystery, we understand how the faith of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist has found historical expression not only in the demand for an interior disposition of devotion, but also *in outward forms* meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event being celebrated. This led progressively to the development of a *particular form of regulating the Eucharistic liturgy*, with due respect for the various legitimately constituted ecclesial traditions. On this foundation a *rich artistic heritage* also developed. Architecture, sculpture, painting and music, moved by the Christian mystery, have found in the Eucharist, both directly and indirectly, a source of great inspiration.

Such was the case, for example, with architecture, which witnessed the transition, once the historical situation made it possible, from the first places of Eucharistic celebration in the *domus* or "homes" of Christian families to the solemn *basilicas* of the early centuries, to the imposing *cathedrals* of the Middle Ages, and to the *churches*, large and small, which gradually sprang up throughout the lands touched by Christianity. The designs of altars and tabernacles within Church interiors were often not simply motivated by artistic inspiration but also by a clear understanding of the mystery. The same could be said

for *sacred music*, if we but think of the inspired Gregorian melodies and the many, often great, composers who sought to do justice to the liturgical texts of the Mass. Similarly, can we overlook the enormous quantity of *artistic production*, ranging from fine craftsmanship to authentic works of art, in the area of Church furnishings and vestments used for the celebration of the Eucharist?

It can be said that the Eucharist, while shaping the Church and her spirituality, has also powerfully affected "culture", and the arts in particular.

50. In this effort to adore the mystery grasped in its ritual and aesthetic dimensions, a certain "competition" has taken place between Christians of the West and the East. How could we not give particular thanks to the Lord for the contributions to Christian art made by the great architectural and artistic works of the Greco-Byzantine tradition and of the whole geographical area marked by Slav culture? In the East, sacred art has preserved a remarkably powerful sense of mystery, which leads artists to see their efforts at creating beauty not simply as an expression of their own talents, but also as *a genuine service to the faith*. Passing well beyond mere technical skill, they have shown themselves docile and open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The architectural and mosaic splendours of the Christian East and West are a patrimony belonging to all believers; they contain a hope, and even a pledge, of the desired fullness of communion in faith and in celebration. This would presuppose and demand, as in Rublev's famous depiction of the Trinity, *a profoundly Eucharistic Church* in which the presence of the

mystery of Christ in the broken bread is as it were immersed in the ineffable unity of the three divine Persons, making of the Church herself an "icon" of the Trinity.

Within this context of an art aimed at expressing, in all its elements, the meaning of the Eucharist in accordance with the Church's teaching, attention needs to be given to the norms regulating *the construction and decor of sacred buildings*. As history shows and as I emphasized in my *Letter to Artists*)®® the Church has always left ample room for the creativity of artists. But sacred art must be outstanding for its ability to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church's faith and in accordance with the pastoral guidelines appropriately laid down by competent Authority. This holds true both for the figurative arts and for sacred music.

51. The development of sacred art and liturgical discipline which took place in lands of ancient Christian heritage is also taking place *on continents where Christianity is younger*. This was precisely the approach supported by the Second Vatican Council on the need for sound and proper "inculturation". In my numerous Pastoral Visits I have seen, throughout the world, the great vitality which the celebration of the Eucharist can have when marked by the forms, styles and sensibilities of different cultures. By adaptation to the changing conditions of time and place, the Eucharist offers sustenance not only to individuals but to entire peoples, and it shapes cultures inspired by Christianity.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. AAS 91 (1999), 1155-1172.

It is necessary, however, that this important work of adaptation be carried out with a constant awareness of the ineffable mystery against which every generation is called to measure itself. The "treasure" is too important and precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through forms of experimentation or practices introduced without a careful review on the part of the competent ecclesiastical authorities. Furthermore, the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery demands that any such review must be undertaken in close association with the Holy See. As I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, "such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church."¹⁰¹

52. AH of this makes clear the great responsibility which belongs to priests in particular for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is their responsibility to preside at the Eucharist *in persona Christi* and to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is a part of every Eucharist. It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation there have been a number of *abuses* which have been a source of suffering for many. A certain reaction against "formalism" has

led some, especially in certain regions, to consider the "forms" chosen by the Church's great liturgical tradition and her Magisterium as non-binding and to introduce unauthorized innovations which are often completely inappropriate.

I consider it my duty, therefore to appeal urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. These norms are a concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist; this is their deepest meaning. Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated. The Apostle Paul had to address fiery words to the community of Corinth because of grave shortcomings in their celebration of the Eucharist resulting in divisions (*schismata*) and the emergence of factions (*haireseis*) (cf. / *Cor* 11:17-34). Our time, too, calls for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist. Priests who faithfully celebrate Mass according to the liturgical norms, and communities which conform to those norms, quietly but eloquently demonstrate their love for the Church. Precisely to bring out more clearly this deeper meaning of liturgical norms, I have asked the competent offices of the Roman Curia to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature, on this very important subject. No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality.

CHAPTER SIX

AT THE SCHOOL OF MARY,
"WOMAN OF THE EUCHARIST"

53. If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church. In my Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, I pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our teacher in contemplating Christ's face, and among the mysteries of light I included *the institution of the Eucharist*/^{®2} Mary can guide us towards this most holy sacrament, because she herself has a profound relationship with it.

At first glance, the Gospel is silent on this subject. The account of the institution of the Eucharist on the night of Holy Thursday makes no mention of Mary. Yet we know that she was present among the Apostles who prayed "with one accord" (cf. *Acts* 1:14) *in the first community which gathered after the Ascension in expectation of Pentecost*. Certainly Mary must have been present at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians, who were devoted to "the breaking of bread" (*Acts* 2:42).

But in addition to her sharing in the Eucharistic banquet, an indirect picture of Mary's relationship with the Eucharist can be had, beginning with her interior disposition. *Mary, is a "woman of the Eucharist" in her whole life*. The Church,

¹⁰² Cf. No. 21: AAS 95 (2003), 20.

which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.

54. *Mysterium fidei!* If the Eucharist is a mystery of faith which so greatly transcends our understanding as to call for sheer abandonment to the word of God, then there can be no one like Mary to act as our support and guide in acquiring this disposition. In repeating what Christ did at the Last Supper in obedience to his command: "Do this in memory of me!", we also accept Mary's invitation to obey him without hesitation: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn* 2:5). With the same maternal concern which she showed at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary seems to say to us: "Do not waver; trust in the words of my Son. If he was able to change water into wine, he can also turn bread and wine into his body and blood, and through this mystery bestow on believers the living memorial of his passover, thus becoming the 'bread of life'."

55. In a certain sense Mary lived her *Eucharistic faith* even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that *she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of God's Word*. The Eucharist, while commemorating the passion and resurrection, is also in continuity with the incarnation. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord's body and blood.

As a result, there is a profound analogy between the *Fiat* which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the *Amen* which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord.

Mary was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived "through the Holy Spirit" was "the Son of God" (*Lk* 1:30-35). In continuity with the Virgin's faith, in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.

"Blessed is she who believed" (*Lk* 1:45). Mary also anticipated, in the mystery of the incarnation, the Church's Eucharistic faith. When, at the Visitation, she bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a "tabernacle" - the first "tabernacle" in history - in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?

56. Mary, throughout her life at Christ's side and not only on Calvary, made her own *the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist*. When she brought the child Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord" (*Lk* 2:22), she heard the aged Simeon announce that the child would be a "sign of contradiction" and that a sword would also pierce her own heart (cf. *Lk* 2:34-35). The tragedy of her Son's crucifixion was thus foretold, and in some sense Mary's *Stabat Mater* at the foot of the Cross was foreshadowed. In her daily preparation for Calvary, Mary experienced a kind of "anticipated Eucharist" - one might say a "spiritual communion" - of desire and of oblation, which would culminate in her union with her

Son in his passion, and then find expression after Easter by her partaking in the Eucharist which the Apostles celebrated as the memorial of that passion.

What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: "This is my body which is given for you" (*Lk 22:19*)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.

57. "Do this in remembrance of me" (*Lk 22:19*). In the "memorial" of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently *all that Christ did with regard to his Mother* for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: "Behold, your Son!". To each of us he also says: "Behold your mother!" (*cf. Jn 19: 26-27*).

Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting - like John - the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the

commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.

58. In the Eucharist the Church is completely united to Christ and his sacrifice, and makes her own the spirit of Mary. This truth can be understood more deeply by *re-reading the Magnificat* in a Eucharistic key. The Eucharist, like the Canticle of Mary, is first and foremost praise and thanksgiving. When Mary exclaims: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour", she already bears Jesus in her womb. She praises God "through" Jesus, but she also praises him "in" Jesus and "with" Jesus. This is itself the true "Eucharistic attitude".

At the same time Mary recalls the wonders worked by God in salvation history in fulfillment of the promise once made to the fathers (cf. *Lk* 1:55), and proclaims the wonder that surpasses them all, the redemptive incarnation. Lastly, the *Magnificat* reflects the eschatological tension of the Eucharist. Every time the Son of God comes again to us in the "poverty" of the sacramental signs of bread and wine, the seeds of that new history wherein the mighty are "put down from their thrones" and "those of low degree are exalted" (cf. *Lk* 1:52), take root in the world. Mary sings of the "new heavens" and the "new earth" which find in the Eucharist their anticipation and in some sense their programme and plan. The *Magnificat* expresses Mary's spirituality, and there is nothing greater than this spirituality for helping us to experience the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist has been given to us so that our life, like that of Mary, may become completely a *Magnificat*!

CONCLUSION

59. *Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine!* Several years ago I celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of my priesthood. Today I have the grace of offering the Church this Encyclical on the Eucharist on the Holy Thursday which falls *during the twenty-fifth year of my Petrine ministry*. As I do so, my heart is filled with gratitude. For over a half century, every day, beginning on 2 November 1946, when I celebrated my first Mass in the Crypt of Saint Leonard in Wawel Cathedral in Krakow, my eyes have gazed in recollection upon the host and the chalice, where time and space in some way "merge" and the drama of Golgotha is represented in a living way, thus revealing its mysterious "contemporaneity". Each day my faith has been able to recognize in the consecrated bread and wine the divine Wayfarer who joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened their eyes to the light and their hearts to new hope (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35).

Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to share with deep emotion, as a means of accompanying and strengthening your faith, my own testimony of faith in the Most Holy Eucharist. *Ave verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine, vere passum, immolatum, in cruce pro homine!* Here is the Church's treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfillment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns. A great and transcendent mystery, indeed, and one that taxes our mind's ability to pass beyond appearances. Here our senses fail us: *visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur*, in the words of the hymn *Adoro Te Devote*; yet faith alone, rooted in the word of Christ handed down to us by the Apostles, is sufficient for us. Allow me, like Peter at the end of the Eucharistic discourse

in John's Gospel, to say once more to Christ, in the name of the whole Church and in the name of each of you: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (*Jn* 6:68).

60. At the dawn of this third millennium, we, the children of the Church, are called to undertake with renewed enthusiasm the journey of Christian living. As I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "it is not a matter of inventing a 'new programme'. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition; it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem."¹⁰³ The implementation of this programme of a renewed impetus in Christian living passes through the Eucharist.

Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?

61. The mystery of the Eucharist - sacrifice, presence, banquet - *does not allow for reduction or exploitation*; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebra-

tion and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass. These are times when the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and family of God; the body and bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion.

The path taken by the Church in these first years of the third millennium is also *a. path of renewed ecumenical commitment*. The final decades of the second millennium, culminating in the Great Jubilee, have spurred us along this path and called for all the baptized to respond to the prayer of Jesus "*ut unum sint*" (Jn 17:11). The path itself is long and strewn with obstacles greater than our human resources alone can overcome, yet we have the Eucharist, and in its presence we can hear in the depths of our hearts, as if they were addressed to us, the same words heard by the Prophet Elijah: "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you" (1 Kg 19:7). The treasure of the Eucharist, which the Lord places before us, impels us towards the goal of full sharing with all our brothers and sisters to whom we are joined by our common Baptism. But if this treasure is not to be squandered, we need to respect the demands which derive from its being the sacrament of communion in faith and in apostolic succession.

By giving the Eucharist the prominence it deserves, and by being careful not to diminish any of its dimensions or demands, we show that we are truly conscious of the greatness of this gift. We are urged to do so by an uninterrupted tradition, which from the first centuries on has found the

Christian community ever vigilant in guarding this "treasure". Inspired by love, the Church is anxious to hand on to future generations of Christians, without loss, her faith and teaching with regard to the mystery of the Eucharist. There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery, for "in this sacrament is recapitulated the whole mystery of our salvation."¹⁰⁴

62. Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, *at the school of the saints*, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendour of a lived reality; it becomes "contagious" and, in a manner of speaking, it "warms our hearts". Above all, let us *listen to Mary Most Holy*, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a *mystery of light*. Gazing upon Mary, we come to know *the transforming power present in the Eucharist*. In her we see the world renewed in love. Contemplating her, assumed body and soul into heaven, we see opening up before us those "new heavens" and that "new earth" which will appear at the second coming of Christ. Here below, the Eucharist represents their pledge, and in a certain way, their anticipation: "*Veni, Domine Iesu!*" (Rev 22:20).

In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope. If, in the presence of this mystery, reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded, and bows low in adoration and unbounded love.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 83, a. 4c.

Let us make our own the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an eminent theologian and an impassioned poet of Christ in the Eucharist, and turn in hope to the contemplation of that goal to which our hearts aspire in their thirst for joy and peace:

*Bone pastor, panis vere,
Iesu, nostri miserere...*

*Come then, good Shepherd, bread divine,
Still show to us thy mercy sign;
Oh, feed us, still keep us thine;
So we may see thy glories shine
in fields of immortality.*

*O thou, the wisest, mightiest, best,
Our present food, our future rest,
Come, make us each thy chosen guest,
Co-heirs of thine, and comrades blest
With saints whose dwelling is with thee.*

PASTORAL WORDS

Message for the 40th World Day of Prayer for Vocations

JOHN PAUL II

Theme: *Vocation to Service*

*Dearest Brothers and Sisters
throughout the whole world!*

1. *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased" (Mt 12:18; cf. Is 42:1-4).*

The theme of this Message for the 40th World Day of Prayer for Vocations invites us to return to the roots of the Christian vocation, to the story of the first person called by the Father, his Son Jesus. He is "the servant" of the Father, foretold by the prophets as the one whom the Father has chosen and formed from his mother's womb (cf. *Is* 49, 1-6), the beloved whom the Father upholds and in whom he is well pleased (cf. *Is* 42, 1-9), in whom he has placed his spirit and to whom he has transmitted his power (cf. *Is* 49, 5), and as the one whom he will exalt (cf. *Is* 52,13-53,12).

The inspired text gives an essentially positive connotation to the term "servant", which is immediately evident. In today's culture, the person who serves is considered inferior; but in sacred history the servant is the one called by God to carry out a particular action of salvation and redemption. The servant knows that he has received all he has and is. As a result, he also feels called to place what he has received at the service of others.

In the Bible, service is always linked to a specific call that comes from God. For this reason, it represents the greatest fulfillment of the dignity of the creature, as well as that which invokes the creature's mysterious, transcendent dimension. This was the case in the life of Jesus, too, the faithful Servant who was called to carry out the universal work of redemption.

2. *"Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter..." (Is 53:7).*

In Sacred Scripture, there is a strong and clear link between service and redemption, as well as between service and suffering, between *Servant* and *Lamb of God*. The Messiah is the Suffering Servant who takes on his shoulders the weight of human sin. He is the lamb "led to the slaughter" (*Is 53:7*) to pay the price of the sins committed by humanity, and thus render to the same humanity the service that it needs most. The Servant is the Lamb who "was oppressed, and was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (*Is 53:7*), thus showing an extraordinary power: the power not to react to evil with evil, but to respond to evil with good.

It is the gentle force of the servant, who finds his strength in God and who, therefore, is made by God to be "light of the nations" and worker of salvation (*Is 49:5-6*). In a myste-

rious manner, the vocation to service is invariably a vocation to take part in a most personal way in the *ministry of salvation* - a partaking that will, among other things, be costly and painful.

3. "... even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve" (*Mt 20:28*).

In truth, Jesus is the perfect model of the "servant" of whom Scripture speaks. He is the one who radically emptied himself to take on "the form of a servant" (*Phil 2:7*) and to dedicate himself totally to the things of the Father (cf. *Lk 2:49*), as the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased (cf. *Mt 17:5*). Jesus did not come to be served, "but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mt 20:28*). He washed the feet of his disciples and obeyed the plan of the Father even unto death, death on a cross (cf. *Phil 2:8*). Therefore, the Father himself has exalted him, giving him a new name and making him Lord of heaven and of earth (cf. *Phil 2:9-11*).

How can one not read in the story of the "servant Jesus" the story of every vocation: the story that the Creator has planned for every human being, the story that inevitably passes through the call to serve and culminates in the discovery of the new name, designed by God for each individual? In these "names", people can grasp their own identity, directing themselves to that self-fulfillment which makes them free and happy. In particular, how can one not read in the parable of the Son, Servant and Lord, the vocational story of the person who is called by Jesus to follow him more closely: that is, to be a servant in the priestly ministry or in religious consecration? In fact, the priestly vocation or the religious vocation are

always, by their very nature, *vocations to the generous service* of God and of neighbour.

Service thus becomes both the path and the valuable means for arriving at a better understanding of one's own vocation. *Diakonia* is a true *vocational pastoral journey* (cf. *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 27c).

4. "Where I am, there shall my servant be also" (Jn 12: 26).

Jesus, Servant and Lord, is also the one who calls. He calls us to be like him, because only in service do human beings discover their own dignity and the dignity of others. He calls to serve as he has served. When interpersonal relationships are inspired to reciprocal service, a new world is created and, in it, an authentic vocational culture is developed.

With this message, I should like, in a way, to give voice to Jesus, so as to propose to young people *the ideal of service*, and to help them to overcome the temptations of individualism and the illusion of obtaining their happiness in that way. Notwithstanding certain contrary forces, present also in the mentality of today, in the hearts of many young people there is a natural disposition to open up to others, especially to the most needy. This makes them generous, capable of empathy, ready to forget themselves in order to put the other person ahead of their own interests.

Dear young people, service is a completely natural vocation, because *human beings are by nature servants*, not being masters of their own lives and being, in their turn, in need of the service of others. Service shows that we are free from the

intrusiveness of our ego. It shows that we have a responsibility to other people. And service is possible for everyone, through gestures that seem small, but which are, in reality, great if they are animated by a sincere love. True servants are humble and know how to be "useless" (cf. *Lk* 17:10). They do not seek egoistic benefits, but expend themselves for others, experiencing in the gift of themselves the joy of working for free.

Dear young people, I hope you can know how to listen to the voice of God calling you to service. This is the road that opens up to so many forms of ministry for the benefit of the community: from the ordained ministry to various other instituted and recognised ministries, such as Catechesis, liturgical animation, education of young people and the various expressions of charity (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 46). At the conclusion of the Great Jubilee, I reminded you that this is "the time for a new 'creativity' in charity" (*Ibidem*, 50). Young people, in a special way it is up to you to ensure that charity finds expression, in all its spiritual and apostolic richness.

5. *"If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all"* (*Mk* 9:35).

This is how Jesus spoke to the Twelve, when he caught them discussing among themselves "who was the greatest" (*Mk* 9:34). This is a constant temptation, which does not spare even the one called to preside at the Eucharist, the sacrament of the supreme love of the "Suffering Servant". Whoever carries out this service is actually called to be a servant in a yet more radical way. He is called, in fact, to act "*in persona Christi*", and so to relive the same condition of Jesus

at the Last Supper, being willing, like Jesus, to love until the end, even to the giving of his life. To preside at the Lord's Supper is, therefore, an urgent invitation to offer oneself in gift, so that the attitude of the Suffering Servant and Lord may continue and grow in the Church.

Dear young men, nurture your attraction to those values and radical choices which will transform your lives into service of others, in the footsteps of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Do not let yourselves be seduced by the call of power and personal ambition. The priestly ideal must be constantly purified from these and other dangerous ambiguities.

The call of the Lord Jesus still resounds today: "If any one serves me, he must follow me" (*Jn* 12:26). Do not be afraid to accept this call. You will surely encounter difficulties and sacrifices, but you will be happy to serve, you will be witnesses of that joy that the world cannot give. You will be living flames of an infinite and eternal love. You will know the spiritual riches of the priesthood, divine gift and mystery.

6. As at other times, on this occasion, too, we turn our gaze to Mary, Mother of the Church and Star of the new evangelization. Let us call upon her with trust, so that in the Church there will be no lack of men and women who are ready to respond generously to the invitation of the Lord, who calls to a more direct service of the Gospel:

*"Mary, humble servant of God Most High,
the Son to whom you gave birth has made
you the servant of humanity.*

Your life was a humble and generous service.

*You were servant of the Word when the angel
announced to you the divine plan of salvation.*

*You were servant of the Son, giving him life
and remaining open to his mystery.*

*You were servant of Redemption,
standing courageously at the foot of the Cross,
close to the Suffering Servant and Lamb,
who was sacrificing himself for love of us.*

*You were servant of the Church on the day of Pentecost
and with your intercession you continue to generate
her in every believer,
even in these our difficult and troubled times.*

*Let the young people of the third millennium look
to you, young daughter of Israel,
who have known the agitation of a young heart
when faced with the plan of the Eternal God.*

*Make them able to accept the invitation of your Son
to give their lives wholly for the glory of God.*

*Make them understand that to serve God satisfies the heart,
and that only in the service of God and of his kingdom
do we realise ourselves in accordance with the divine plan,
and life becomes a hymn of glory to the Most Holy Trinity.*

Amen."

Priest as Pastor and Prophet

RUPERTO SANTOS

Priest as Pastor

1. Pastor

The term "pastor" comes from the Latin *pastor*, -oris which means "shepherd." In the Old Testament, the word "pastor" is used in reference to God, who is considered the Good Shepherd (Ps 23, 1-4) as well as to earthly rulers (Cf. Jer 2, 8; 3, 15). In the 1983 Code of Canon Law, it refers to a priest or a moral person to whom a parish, whose pastoral care is to be exercised under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted (CIC. 515.1). Canon 519 further affirms that *"the parish priest is the proper shepherd of the parish*

* In line with the new project of the Pontificio Collegio Filippino to give conferences on recent papal and curial documents, this talk was delivered by the Collegio's current rector in the community conference of 15 January 2003, which was devoted to the latest instruction from the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy.

entrusted to him. He exercises the pastoral care of that community under the authority of the diocesan bishop with whom he has been called to share in the ministry of Christ so that, in the service of that community, he may discharge the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other priests or deacons and the assistance of the lay members of the faithful and in accordance with the norms of law."

Saint Gregory the Great in his *Regula Pastoralis*, II, 1 pointed out that "*pastors must be pure in thought, exemplary in his actions, discreet in his silence and useful in his works. He should be close to all in his compassion and, above all, dedicated to contemplation. He should be the humble ally of all who do -good. In justice, he should be inflexibly opposed to vice of sinners.*" His actions, as Pope John Paul II said in his Catechesis at the General Audience of 19 May 1993, should "bring the communities entrusted to them to full spiritual and ecclesial development" (*Insegnamenti*, XVI, 1, 1993, p. 1254).

In the exercise of his functions, the pastor is not attached to a particular person. He is not "unmovable" from his particular position. He is not desirous for popularity nor prestige. His main preoccupation is the spiritual well-being of his people. Saint Augustine, in his *Epistula*, 134, 1, defines the authority of the pastor as *non tarn praesse quam prodesse* (that is, "not so much to command but to serve"). He is, in the description of Saint Charles Borromeo, *pater et pastor, non dominus*.

As the Congregation for the Clergy's *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium* puts it, "*Whenever the pastor enjoys a certain prestige among his people or with the government officials, he must act in humility and such*

prestige should be used solely for the promotion of the salus animarum" (III, 3).

2. Parish

According to the Second Vatican Council, a parish *"is a specific community of the 'christifideles,' established on a stable basis within a particular Church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a parish priest as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop"* (*Christus Dominus*, 30; Cf. CIC 515.1). A parish has three fundamental characteristics. *First*, a parish is an Eucharistic community. The building up of the parish community lies in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (Congregation for the Clergy, *The priest, pastor and leader of the parish community*, II, 18). *Second* is the *cura pastoralis* or *cura animarum*. The specific tasks are actualized in the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the pastoral governance of the community (II, 19). Here, the pastor acts *in persona Christi*. He is configured to Jesus. Yet as an administrator of spiritual gifts, *"he has no right to omit or deviate from them or remodel them to his own liking"* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 22; CIC 846).

Third, the parish should give *"an outstanding example of community apostolate, for it gathers into a unity all the human diversity that are found there and inserts them into the universality of the Church"* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10). This is the *communitas Christifidelium*. An active communion and living collaboration between the parish priest and the faithful - the pastor and his flock - is nurtured. The pastor promotes the proper participation of the faithful in the mission of the Church. He sees to it that the faithful cooperate and collaborate in the life and ministry of the Church.

3. *Jesus, our Good Shepherd*

In the gospel of Saint John, Jesus gives us a more detailed description of Himself. This is a very beautiful image of Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my own life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father"* (10, 11-18).

How has Jesus been a Good Shepherd to us? There are three things that we must always remember. *First*, He is the way. He leads us to the Father. He brings us to safety. He gives us the fullness of life. Without Jesus in our life, we are lost in this world. Without Jesus, we could be misdirected, misguided, and misinformed in life. Without Jesus, we are all helpless and even hopeless. Indeed, we need Jesus in our life. *Only in Jesus can we find the true way to the Father, the way to holiness, and finally to heaven. Second*, Jesus has **the right** food for us. We need sustenance to keep us going. We need nourishment to keep us living. We need inspiration to keep

us moving. *Only Jesus can give us food for the sustenance of our body and soul.* We need strength and satisfaction in life. Only Jesus can provide these because He is the source of life. He is the bread of life. *Third*, Jesus has offered His life for us. The sheep are all that matters to the shepherd. They are all important. They are all precious. They are all worth dying for. The shepherd does not want them destroyed, scattered, or perished. He wants them to live. The good shepherd protects, defends, and promotes the well being of the sheep. This is what Jesus has done. *Jesus has given up His own life for us. He has suffered for our redemption.* He has come to save us. He wants us to be restored to the Father and merit eternal life.

Jesus calls others to be like Him. He chooses others to be pastors in His Church. Others remain as sheep.

4. The Priest as Pastor

What do people expect from their pastor?

There are three things. They all begin with the letter "S." A shepherd brings his flock to greener pastures. He leads them to the right path, to the right and safe place. He provides them better sustenance, maintains life, and gives them ways and means to live. As pastor, a priest likewise leads his people to greener pastures - that is, to heaven, in order to be with the Father forever. Thus the *first* "S" stands for *"speaking about Jesus and showing Jesus to them."* A pastor must speak about Jesus, and not about his personal accomplishments or achievements. He must speak the words of Jesus, that is to say, words of hope, not of despair; words of love, not of hurts; words of forgiveness, not of hatred; words of compassion, not of bitterness. He must show Jesus to them, and not his degrees or

honors. The pastor must show them the way that leads to Jesus, not the one that leads to scandal and even, to sins. *A pastor is a spokesman and signpost for Jesus.* Speaking about Jesus and showing Jesus, the pastor is surely leading his people to the fullness of life and preparing them to share in the life of god in heaven.

A shepherd protects his flock from dangers and from predators. He protects them to the point of risking his own life for them. He rescues them when they are trapped and when they are lost. He does not want them to get hurt or to perish. He nurses them when they are wounded. As pastor, a priest must likewise suffer for his people. Thus the *second* "S" is to *serve and save*. A pastor is willing to sacrifice his siesta time, his own comfort and what little he has for his people. *He serves them out of love, and not because of something in return.* He suffers for them, not because of career advancement, promotion or public adulation, but because he is continuing what Jesus did for all. The pastor serves to the extent that he is willing to suffer for his people, giving up even his personal interest and freedom. He serves them by helping them to become liberated from sin or from any inhuman situation. A pastor who is truly a shepherd is really a *servant*.

A shepherd supplies his sheep with all of their needs. He makes them safe and sound. He works for their well-being and welfare, rather than for himself. He does everything that is good, beneficial, and advantageous for the sheep, out of love and out of concern. As pastor, a priest likewise does everything that is good for his people. He acts for their own good. The *third* "S," therefore, is to *sanctify*. A pastor wants his people to be holy, to be strong against temptations and to

be victorious over sins. He wants them to be safe and even more, to be saved. The pastor cultivates harmony among his people, not division. He promotes harmony, not bickering. He works for their entry to heaven, and not for their loyalty. He brings them to Jesus, not to himself. His only desire is their salvation, not enriching himself. Thus, all his works and words must be geared towards the *sanctification* of his people.

What do people want from their pastor?

There are three things. They begin with the letter *P*. The shepherd leads the way for the sheep. He is always with the sheep. He safely leads them out of the fold and brings them back in. In a similar way, the priest, as a pastor, must always be visible and approachable to his people. The first "P," therefore, is *presence*. People always want to share their accomplishments and anniversaries. They need assurance and advice. They always request guidance and counseling. They ask priests to hear their confessions, to baptize their children or to solemnize marriages. When they are in trouble, they go to priests. When they are happy and successful, they will see their priests. When they need something, they run to their priests. How lonely priestly life would be if people avoid their priests! How boring priestly ministry would be if the priest is just confined to his room and sacristy!

The shepherd brings the sheep to verdant pastures. He watches them. He waits on them. As a pastor, the priest must be patient. The second P thus stands for *patience*. People have different mentalities and characters. Some are good and promising. Some are demanding and overbearing. Some are strong and slow. Some like their priests and love them.

Others, however, are critical. Thus, the priest, if he is to be a true pastor, must be patient. He must persevere. In the parish, success is hard to find. The fruitful harvest could be long in coming. Recognition could be long overdue. People could be reluctant to change or collaborate. Yet priest should always be patient. Isn't it better to be slow and sure rather than to be sorry? Isn't it better to wait and be patient rather than to rush and be lost?

The shepherd on his own cannot do everything for the sheep. He cannot protect or contain all his sheep all by himself. He needs the help of others. He needs their assistance. Similarly, a priest must likewise realize that he cannot do his task without the cooperation of his brother-priests. He needs support and strength to fulfill his priestly duties. This is possible only through prayers. Thus, the third P is *prayer*. The priest draws consolation from prayer. Prayer is his assurance in life. Prayer is his comfort and consolation. People always tell their priests, "*Father, please pray for my trips, for my examinations, for my operations.*" They will ask for prayers, to pray for their sons, for their friends, for their superiors. Since people will always ask for prayers, priests must be prayerful. Prayers are what people need most. Thus, *prayer is the best that a priest can give and can offer his people*. In his encyclical *Sacerdoti Nostri Primordia* marking the centenary of the death of the Cure of Ars (10 August 1959), Blessed Pope John XXIII said, "*If you wish the faithful to pray willingly and piously, set an example for them by praying in your churches before them. A priest on his knees before the tabernacle, with a proper disposition and in deep recollection is a model of edification for the people, a reminder of, and an invitation to, prayerful emulation*" (II).

5. Conclusion

A priest, if he is to be a true pastor, must live his life, following the ways of Jesus and according to the will of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. He must configure himself to Jesus. As pastor, he is called to show Jesus to his people, to serve his people, even to the point of suffering like Jesus, and to sanctify his flock entrusted to his care. He must have the patience and caring presence of a shepherd. He must be persevering in his duties toward his flock. He must also be prayerful. In his *Orationes*, Saint Gregory Nazianzus emphasizes the same point, *"Before purifying others, they must purify themselves; to instruct others, they must be instructed; they have to become light in order to illuminate and become close to God in order to sanctify"* (2, 71).

Guide Questions for Sharing

- What kind of shepherds are we? Are we really pastors to them? We must remember that the adjective is "good" - as in, "good shepherd." Not cute shepherd. Not popular shepherd. Not smart shepherd. But good shepherd.
- As priests, do we have the patience and perseverance of the Good Shepherd? Do we give our quality presence? Do we show concern and compassion to an erring sheep? Do we give selfless service and willing sacrifices like Jesus, the Good Shepherd?
- How do we shepherd? Do we just shepherd out of monetary consideration or because of public adulation? Do we shepherd for promotion, for popularity, or for prestige?

Priest as Prophet

1. Prophet

As a biblical term, "prophet" refers to a person who speaks for God and in His name. He proclaims the word of God to all, not only through his words, whether oral or written, but also through his actions, his lifestyle. A good example of a "prophet" is Saint John the Baptist (cfr. Mark 1, 1-8).

2. Jesus, our Great Prophet

Jesus is the fulfillment of prophetic history. Saint John the Baptist proclaimed His coming as the promised Messiah. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, affirmed that *"God has spoken in the past to our ancestors through the prophets, in many different ways, although never completely; but in our times he has spoken definitively to us through His Son"* (1, 1-2). The Second Vatican Council attested that Jesus *"is the great Prophet who proclaimed the Kingdom of his Father by the testimony of his life and the power of his words. Through his Church, and in particular, through his priests, he continues to fulfill his prophetic office until his full glory is revoked"* (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 35).

3. The Priest as Prophet

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples, *"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples from all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to fulfill all that I have commanded you. I am with you always until the end of this*

world" (Matthew 28, 19-20). Priests are called. They are chosen. They are ordained to continue the work of Jesus on earth. By their sacred ordination, priests share in the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Priests represent Jesus. They are *altri Christi*. So they must speak for Jesus. They must speak about Jesus. People expect their priests to tell them about Jesus and to lead them to Him. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* asserts that *"the people of God finds its unity first of all through the Word of the living God, which is quite properly sought from the lips of priests. Since no one can be saved who has not just believed, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel to all"* (4).

In the *Instruction* of the Congregation for the Clergy entitled *"The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community"*, one reads that *"the priest renders Christ, Head of the Church, present through the ministry of the Word which is sharing in his prophetic office. In persona et nomine Christi the priest is minister of the evangelizing word which calls all to conversion and holiness. He is minister of the word of worship which praises God's greatness and gives thanks for his mercy. He is minister of the word of the sacraments which are the effective source of grace. In these multitude ways, the priest, with the power of the Holy Spirit prolongs the teaching of Christ in his Church"* (9).

Preaching through Words

Preaching is the proclamation of God's Word. A priest is called to preach. Preaching is his priestly identity. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"Woe to me if I do not preach the*

Gospel" (1 Cor. 9, 16). A priest is called to proclaim the Good News of the risen Jesus. He imparts words of encouragement and inspiration. He should not castigate people. He must not humiliate them. He should not inform them of his achievements. He does not entertain his listeners with movies or with irrelevant jokes. In preaching, the priest speaks for Jesus and about Jesus. When the priest preaches, he should not delete or distort the divine message. He must not reduce or decrease the value of the words of Jesus. He must manifest the truths of the Gospel. *What should the priest do in order to preach well? First, he must be prepared.* As the priest prepares himself for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, he must also be prepared with his homilies. He should know the scriptural passages beforehand, consult biblical commentaries, spend time for reflective prayers, and take time out to compose homilies even to the point of writing them. The priest must always remember that his people listen. They want to bring home something worthwhile, something that will uplift their spirit and inspire them to go on in their pilgrimage of life. Thus, as prophet, the priest must give the people something spiritual and something substantial, through his preaching. Since his people has already much current events and sports, too much politics and show business, he must share Jesus with them. He must introduce them to the world and the word of Jesus. To do this, the priest must cultivate in himself a personal encounter, a personal experience of Jesus. Hence, he must always meet Jesus in prayer. He must spend his time with Jesus before the Blessed Sacrament.

It is a well known fact here in Rome that the Holy Father has a little desk in his chapel. Before the Holy Sacrament, Pope John Paul II usually writes his homilies.

Second the priest must be *polite*. He must speak only the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus are words full of compassion and concern. His words save. His words soothe our hearts. So must the words of the priest be. In preaching, he should avoid words that will scandalize or hurt his people. The pulpit is not his means to get even with his people. It is not a place to make fun of one's defect or background. Thus, he must be polite and tactful with his spoken words. He must be prudent with his actions.

Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, in his *Instruction* IV, 1, remarked that the priest should "*never appear angry, nor even break out into injurious words which tend more to irritate the mind than to excite piety*" ("Dignity and Duties of the Priest"). As a prophet, the priest preaches to persuade people, but with respect. He moves his listeners, not to praise him or win their admiration, but to contrition.

Third the priest must be *professional*. The priest should continue to update his theology. He must never stop reading, researching and reflecting. He must learn and study. As *Pastores Dabo Vobis* emphasizes, the priest "*is not to teach his own wisdom but the Word of God and to issue an urgent invitation to all men to conversion and to holiness*" (30). Since his primary task is to preach, the priest must train himself well. As Pope John Paul II puts it in his address to the *Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for Clergy*, even if the priest "*may be overshadowed by the eloquence of the non-ordained faithful, this does not erase the fact that he sacramentally represents Christ, Head and Shepherd, and the fact that the effectiveness of his preaching derives from this reality*" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedes*, 94, 2002 page 216). So, the

priest must never let himself substituted by a lay person in preaching during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. He must not also skip preaching just because he is tired, or in a hurry, or there are just few listeners.

In order to fulfill his prophetic office, the priest must properly perform the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. He should not be too simplistic or too lazy as to ignore the liturgical rubrics. With his prophetic role, he prolongs the teaching of Jesus in the Church. With his preaching, he makes Jesus present. He makes His words alive. Thus, he must do his prophetic role with much *professionalism*. His professionalism also calls him not to have people wait for him. He must always be on time. He should never consume much of their time. He must keep his homilies short, but serious, substantial and essential. He must be ready to accept criticism, to be creative. He must not be critical or contradicting others. To be professional is to be mature enough to respect another's opinion. To be professional is to be humble while receiving the appreciation of the people. To be professional is not to be carried away by one's emotion or another's sentiments. When the priest preaches, he does not only say what people want to hear. He preaches what is true, what is moral. He is honest with his words. He only tells the truths of the Gospel and exposes what is contrary to the teachings of Jesus. He expounds the commandments of the Church and corrects errors. When the priest preaches, his words should heal and help. His words should not harm or hurt. His words should not divide people.

The words of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori is a good reminder for priests, that is, that they should "*see all [people]*"

going away with their heads bowed down, weeping over their sins, resolved to change their lives, and to give themselves to God" (Dignity and Duties of Priests, IV, 1).

Preaching through Actions

The lifestyle of the priest is the best proof of his preaching. Good preaching is an outcome of the priest's personal encounter with Jesus. The source of his preaching is Jesus. Thus the priest must have a better knowledge of Jesus. This can only be done by living the very life of Jesus. Priestly imitation of the very life of Jesus is the best form of preaching. Saint Charles Borromeo admonished his clergy, *"If preaching is your job, then prepare diligently and study well. But be sure that you preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you preach one thing, but live otherwise; and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head."*

What should the priest do to make his preaching convincing?

To answer this question, let us reflect on the life of Saint John the Baptist. In the gospel of Saint Mark, one finds that John was clothed in camels' hair and wore a leather garment around his waist. His food was locusts and honey. He preached to the people saying, "After me comes one who is more powerful than I am. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in Holy Spirit. As for me, I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals" (1, 6-8). So *first*, the priest must not use his gift of preaching to *acquire material conveniences and pursue a comfortable lifestyle*. John the Baptist lived a simple and austere life. He set aside sensationalism and

pleasures. He did not give in to the cravings of his body. He was willing to stay simple and to sacrifice comfortable attitudes. A priest must not preach only when he is comfortable or when it is for comfort. He preaches about the cross and for the cross. He speaks about and for the crucified Christ. And when a priest preaches about the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus, he becomes more convincing, if he actually lives the cross and the crucifixion, because his preaching becomes his witnessing.

Second, the priest must not use his gift of preaching for career advancement. Saint John the Evangelist narrated in his gospel the honesty of John the Baptist: "This was the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, 'Who are you?' John recognized the truth and did not deny it. He said, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'Then who are you? Elijah?' He answered, 'I am not.' They said, 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Tell us who you are, so that we can give some answer to those who sent us. How do you see yourself?' And John said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, 'I am the voice crying out in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord' (1, 19-23).

John the Baptist accepted his limitations. For him, Jesus *"must increase and [he] must decrease"* (John 3, 30). John considered himself to be merely a witness. He was to give testimony to Jesus and to point out Jesus as someone greater than him. John did not create a scene. He did not compete with Jesus for the people's attention or affection. He was contented to fulfill his role as precursor to Jesus and to lead people to Jesus.

The priest must not use his gift of preaching to be spectacular, to be admired or to win a great following. He must not use his preaching to control people or to circumvent God's ways. Preaching must not be taken as a stepping stone to power or to bolster one's position. Preaching is not a means for self-glorification, for courting favors at the cost of principles. Rather, preaching is proclaiming gospel values and rendering oneself at the service of God. When a priest preaches and at the same time acknowledges himself to be an unworthy servant of Jesus, he makes his message even more emphatic. When a priest lives a life of humble service, he makes alive what Saint Paul said to the Philippians, *"For me, to live is Christ"* (1,21).

Third, a priest should never compromise Jesus and His Word. John the Baptist lived up to his word. He told the truth even at the expense of his own life. Saint Mark narrated this episode in his gospel: "When Herod was told of this, he thought: 'I had John beheaded, yet he has risen from the dead.' For this is what had happened. Herod had ordered John to be arrested and had him bound and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herod had married her and John had hid told him, 'It is not right for you to live with your brother's wife.' So Herodias held a grudge against him and wanted to kill him" (6, 16-18). Clearly, John was not afraid to confront the powerful. He courageously stood for the truth. He corrected any wrongdoing. He did not compromise his principles.

Similarly, a priest should never be afraid to speak out. He should never stay silent, especially when morality and truth are threatened. He cannot be neutral. He must be straight, and

strong and know what is significant to the lives of his people. He is not there at the pulpit to please everyone. He is there to voice out the ways, the will and the words of Jesus. Like John, the priest who is a prophet must be vocal in condemning evil, criticizing falsehood, and clearing out misconceptions. The priest, if he is to be a prophet, must be open and frank to correct mistakes, to right a wrong, and to heal all hurts. When a priest lives with the honesty and humility of Jesus, his people lead their lives after Jesus, whom he preaches and imitates. When a priest speaks with sincerity and lives a saintly life, his people listen, look up to him and sees Jesus alive in him.

4. Conclusion

The life of the priest is a life of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and a life of sharing the Word of God. The priest presides and nourishes the people both from the Holy Eucharist and from Sacred Scriptures. He shares the Word of God through preaching and through life witnessing. Following Saint Paul reminder to the Romans that the *"faith depends on hearing, and on hearing the Word of Christ"* (10, 17), the priest is not only a herald or transmitter of the Word of God, but furthermore, he is a living and active witness to it. This is what he is called and ordained for, that is, *"to make the Word the object of [his] continual reflection, [to] always believe what [he] read[s], teach what [he] believe[s], carry out [his] life what [he] teach[cs]. In this way, through the doctrine which nourishes the people of God and with life's upright testimony which comforts and sustains them, [he] will become a builder of the temple of God, which is the*

Church" (Pontificate Romanum, De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum, cap. II, n. 151).

Guide Questions for Sharing

- What are the strong and weak points in my preaching? How can I develop more my strong points? How can I overcome my weak points?
- As a priest, how do we preach? Is it with conviction, with commitment, with consistency? In preaching, do we neglect something, hide something, ignore something? Do we tell more about Jesus? Do we share Jesus?
- Do we update ourselves in theology? Do we nourish ourselves with prayers? Do we back up our preaching with good works? Do we practice what we preach?

The Virgin Mary: A Common Denominator between Islam and Christianity

JOHN SAMAHA, S.M.

Recent events aroused new interest in Islam and the *Qur'an*, its sacred book. *Qur'an* means literally a book, a reading, a recitation, and is sometimes less accurately transliterated from Arabic to English as Koran.

Among the queries raised concerning the *Qur'an* is the place Mary the Mother of Jesus occupies in Islam. For the past two millennia people have given many faces to Mary. Some of the most impressive images of her are found in the *Qur'an*. And ample evidence exists to indicate that the sources for the Marian references in the *Qur'an* are found in early Judaic and Christian traditions.

Muslims believe the *Qur'an* has a mysterious origin. It is the word of God that brings deliverance to those who believe in it. It enlightens the soul. It is the "guarded tablet" that no one can imitate. It is the new Revelation "in the Arabic language"

that came to "confirm" previous revelations contained in the Torah and the Gospel. This is the reason Jews and Christians are called "People of the Book."

In the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) the prophets are considered bearers and interpreters of God's Word, God's instruments. They transmit the divine message by human means. Christians, in contrast, regard Jesus as the Eternal Word who did not come "with a book," and remains a living and active Person.

The central idea of the *Qur'an* is that everything comes from God (*Allah* in Arabic), the universal Creator, and everything returns to God. God is the Creator of the universe, angels and demons, and of all persons. Through the prophets God spoke to the people and taught them the laws of human conduct and of worship. For reward or for retribution in the life to come he will raise them up for judgment. The *Qur'an* explains that God wishes to reveal himself to people.

The *Qur'an* mentions the Torah and the Psalms, recognized as books of early revelation, and the Gospels. In the Muslim view the *Qur'an* was given to complete and confirm the truths of these earlier books. It states that the prophets preached the One Only God, and that two of the prophets, Adam and Jesus, were born by direct intervention of the Creator. The *Qur'an* also records other humanly impossible conceptions that were announced by angels: those of Abraham and Sara, of Zachary and Elizabeth, and Mary the Mother of Jesus.

Mary and her son Jesus the prophet holds a privileged place in the *Qur'an*. She is the only female whose name is

cited. While other females are not named at all, Mary's name is repeated frequently. The expression "Jesus son of Mary" appears 13 times, and "Jesus, the Messiah, son of Mary" is found three times. About 45 times we find Mary's name or references to it.

According to the *Qur'an* God made Mary and Jesus a sign, a witness to faith: "And We made the son of Mary and his mother a portent" (S. 23:50; S.21:91).

Three *suras* (chapters) in the *Qur'an* bear titles recalling various aspects of Christian tradition: Sura 3, The Family of 'Imran; Sura 5, The Holy Table, concerning imagery recalling Jesus' miracles; and Sura 19, Mary, giving prominence to Mary and Zachariah.

In general, the *Qur'an* focuses on two particular events in the life of Mary: her birth and her time in the Temple. "The angels said: O Mary! Allah has chosen thee and made thee pure and has preferred the above all women of creation" (S. 3:42).

The same God Who has chosen Adam, Noah, and the families of Abraham and 'Imran also chose Mary. The texts indicate three points clearly: Mary is favored; she is pure; she is chosen over all women of the world. In comparing Marian texts of the *Qur'an* with Christian sources we find some close similarities with the *Protoevangelium* of James and other apocryphal writings.

God chose Mary and prepared her for an important mission, "to adore and pay homage" (S.3:43). Mary was chosen to be a messenger of God and to bear a child through the Word of God rather than normal intercourse.

Like their Christian counterparts did with the Bible, Muslim commentators embellished the *Qur'an*. Muslim stories about Mary are based on the same apocryphal stories believed by Christians in countries where Islam replaced the Gospel.

The important point in Mary's genealogy for Muslim exegetes is that her family is from David's lineage, because Islam places great importance on pure lineal descent from the prophets.

Nothing is said about Joseph in the *Qur'an*, but he has a place in the Muslim tradition.

Mary's Annunciation holds special significance in the *Qur'an*, especially in suras 3 and 19.

Sunni, Shi'ite, and Sufi commentators all express profound reverence and deep appreciation for Mary. Although the vocation and mission of Jesus, and Mary's association with him, are not as clearly stated in Islam as in the Gospels, especially Luke's, these beliefs are found in the *Qur'an* or indicated in commentaries.

Both the *Qur'an* and the entire Muslim tradition consider Mary the most blessed and prominent of women. This belief reaches back to Muhammad as noted in *Musnad* by Ibn Hanbal. The founder of Islam placed Mary above even his daughter Fatimah, who, he said, would have been highest among women were it not for Mary.

The *Qur'an* is clear that Mary was born without sin, and that Jesus son of Mary was born of a woman who had no relations with a man, since the common reference to a man is as son of his father, not of his mother.

Christianity and Islam are both missionary faiths originating among Semitic peoples. They have this in common: belief in one God, who is just, merciful, omnipotent, omniscient and who acts in history. Accepting Jesus as prophet and Messiah, Islam thus elevates his mother, Mary, to a special position and role. Since some Qur'anic statements about Mary do not exist in the New Testament, scholars look for other Christian sources in existence at the birth of Islam. The influence of canonical Christian Scripture on the *Qur'an* and Islam is minimal, but the apocryphal texts seem to have had considerable influence, especially the *Protoevangelium*.

Even though Christianity and Islam grew from the same Near Eastern monotheistic tradition, and even though from its inception Islam recognized the common heritage - acknowledging both the virgin birth and Jesus as prophet - Muslims reject the divinity of Jesus. The strong aversion of the *Qur'an* to Jesus being the Son of God might be attributed to the fact that its sources were removed from the truth of the Gospel. Islamic unfamiliarity with the divinity of Jesus and the Gospel might contribute to its anti-Christian attitude.

While Islam seems unwilling to delve deeper into Qur'anic textual sources, the similarity between the *Qur'an* and Christian Scripture might serve as the springboard of a fruitful journey of dialogue. And mutual understanding of Mary might be a bridge.

CONSULTATIVE WORDS

Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

Matrimonial Separation

My husband and I separated one year ago after 20 years of marriage. We filed a request for divorce, since our situation is irreversible. My question now is: Since the Church does not accept divorce, what to do then in cases like this, when the situation is irreversible?

* * *

Every country has its own legislation on marriage or "Family Code," which contains not only its definition of marriage and competency over it, but also its provisions and mechanisms for separation, declaration of nullity and, in some countries, divorce.

The Church, on her part, has also the Code of Canon Law where marriage is defined and her competency over the marriage of Catholics (even if one of the spouses is Catholic)

is clearly stated. Likewise, the Church's conditions for validity of marriages (legal capacity^ valid consent and canonical form) are meticulously described. The Code contains also the procedures for separation of spouses and for an eventual declaration of nullity of those marriages invalidly contracted. (The Church does not declare invalid marriages validly contracted).

Both legislations, civil and canonical, on marriage are generally different and independent from each other, as different and independent are also the two societies of Church and State/ In principle, each one respects the legislation and competences of the other, without interferences. Thus the Church does not judge on the respective validity of civil marriage; neither the State can judge on the Church's validity of canonical marriage or decide on the nullity of a sacramental marriage.

Every State "grants" matrimonial separations. In some cases, separations in the strict sense of the word, that is, where husband and wife, although excused from maintaining marital community, continue being husband and wife. In other cases, the separation is more radical, carrying with it the declaration of nullity of a marriage which, due to the absence of some required legislated element, was actually invalidly contracted. There are countries that grant divorce, that is, put a legal end to marriages validly contracted.

The Catholic Church considers marriage indissoluble for life and consequently does not accept divorce because she believes that it is against God's will revealed by Jesus Christ in the Gospel. Furthermore, she considers herself incompetent

to invalidate a valid marriage. What she occasionally does, without renouncing her consistent teaching on indissolubility, is to declare null some marriages that, although with appearances of validity, were never valid for reasons contained in the Code of Canon Law. This is done after a meticulous investigation by an ecclesiastical tribunal resulting in the moral certainty that the marriage was originally invalid due to the existence of some defect in the consent of the parties at the moment of getting married. The decision is reviewed and confirmed by an appellate tribunal before the final sentence takes effect.

On your question: *Since the Church does not accept divorce, what to do then when the situation is irreversible?* I would say the following:

1. I understand by "irreversible" the fact that the marriage is already irreparable, having reached a point where reconciliation is no longer possible. This factor, which for the Church is not by itself decisive for the granting of a declaration of nullity, seems to have worked before the civil court in your case. No wonder then that the requested "divorce" (probably you mean "legal separation" or "declaration of nullity of marriage") had been granted.

2. In any case, the fact of having obtained civil annulment (whether legal separation, declaration of nullity or even divorce) does not affect the marriage contracted in the Catholic Church, since the State cannot annul the latter. Therefore, if you married in the Church, said marriage was canonical and as such presumably valid as long as it is not declared invalid by Church (upon presentation of contrary evidence).

3. Now, while a canonical marriage lasts, the Church does not allow the Catholic party to contract a new marriage, since "a person bound by a previous marriage invalidly attempts marriage" (c.1085). What to do then? That is the question. Well, in principle, not to get married again! You may object, "That is asking too much!" Indeed it is; that is why expressions like Christian heroism, sacrifice, etc., are at times used on this regard, expressions that a great number of Catholics are not even ready to understand...

4. But "What if I want to contract a new marriage?" Then the only option from the Christian and ecclesiastical point of view is simply to formally ask the Church to have a close look on your marriage and - if possible.- to declare it invalid. This petition is filed in their own diocese, at the matrimonial tribunal office, headed by a priest known as "judicial vicar" (entrusted by the Bishop to administer justice in his diocese). After a whole process that goes from a preliminary appointment, the filling of the petition, the citation of the parties by the appointed judge, the depositions of the parties and witnesses, testimonies, etc., to an eventual appeal to a higher tribunal, your marriage may be declared null, if there are truly reasons for it. Only then you would be able to marry again in the Church. (The fact of having already obtained civil annulment could facilitate the process, since for practical reasons the Church normally requires it before granting matrimonial declarations of nullity).

Homilies for November- December 2003*

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

November 2, 2003

All Souls

(Readings: Jn 14:1-6/Wis 3:1-9 (or 3:1-6, 9)/Rom 6:3-9 (or 6:3-4, 8-9))

Today's celebration of All Souls Day affords us the occasion to think about our dead fellow creatures, especially our dead brethren in the faith, who lie buried in cemeteries, memorial parks, under lahar cover or mud flows, or drowned in rivers and seas, or lost in vastness of mountains and hills.

We also remember the victims of natural and man-made calamities, of unforeseen and preventable accidents, of honest mistakes and inexcusable blunders. We remember also the innocent or unwilling victims of abortion, foul play, murder and mayhem.

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

In remembering those who have departed peacefully or otherwise from this life, we are forced to reflect on death itself, a universal law that accepts no exemption, a grim master that has prevailed upon the dead and will prevail upon the living.

The topic of death is unpleasant for some people. This is understandable inasmuch as it goes against our natural instincts and basic inclinations. But it is a topic we cannot avoid talking or thinking about. Certainly not on a day like this, or yesterday when we went visiting cemeteries and memorial parks.

' Speaking about cemeteries, with the few that I saw here and abroad, I was stunned by what I saw in one cemetery here in Metro Manila. I discovered that the living and the dead were sharing a common ground for shelter. It is said that many Filipinos are afraid of ghosts. But these cemetery dwellers appeared relaxed staying with the dead.

The fact that some of our living brethren are forced to seek roof and shelter among the dead is a stinging indictment against a society that permits such things to happen.

On the other hand, this living together by both the dead and those unfortunate families emerges as a symbol of enduring solidarity, such as it should be, among members made up of the same human stuff.

It is those living derelicts of society, who must seek survival in cemeteries, that are teaching us, to our embarrassment, eloquent lessons of humaneness and solidarity with the dead.

For, not infrequently, it is from the poor, the outcasts, the lowly, the scum of society, we can get words of wisdom, principles of human solidarity, examples of genuine acts of

compassion. They are the ones who can stare at death in the face, who believe that dying is a part of living. In fact, it opens the door to a better life - the life that Jesus talks about in today's Gospel.

Though it has been said that dying is a part of living, yet we tend to accept such statement. It goes so much against our basic instinct to go on and live forever. No wonder that even Martha, in today's gospel shows resistance that death could claim her beloved brother Lazarus. "Lord," she says, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She was suggesting that death cannot have the last word on Lazarus, and for that matter, on the rest of mankind.

In this, Jesus agrees completely with Martha. For he states solemnly, "I am the resurrection and the life: whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life."

But there is more to this affirmation of Jesus Christ. For he continues to say, enigmatically it seems, "Whoever is alive and believes in me will never die." This part seems to fly against the facts. For everybody dies, whether he/she believes in Jesus or not. What does Jesus mean in saying this? Can we add, mentally at least, the adverb "permanently" so as to mean "will never die permanently"?

That would not be necessary if we take into account what is said in the 1st reading (Book of Wisdom). Namely, "the souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in view of the foolish, to be dead. But they are in peace."

So the just, the believers in God, really never die. For them, because they are firmly and securely in the hands of

God, the living God, to whom a thousand years is but a day or a night, death is only a restful sleep, a temporary slumber. And when they awake, they rise up fresher, full of life, love and happiness forever.

November 9, 2003

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B

(Readings: 1 Kgs 17: 10-16/Heb 9: 24-28/Mk 12: 38-44)

The three bible readings of today's Mass offer to us ways to improve our relations with God. We need to attend to this matter, if only to prove that we have not given up on making ourselves better each time.

The improving of relations with others is a task that progressive-minded individuals and modern nations have imposed on themselves, investing on it much time, much money, and much effort, in the conviction that "projecting a good image" (which is another name for it) is the secret of success, acceptance and continual progress.

I think Christians should not lag behind their fellowmen in the popular search for good public relations and good image. It is a good thing in itself, provided the solid bases are there on which to build the superstructure. Otherwise, the image becomes illusory and deceiving, the relationships shaky and unreliable.

It has been said that the religion of a Catholic can be summed up in three words: he prays, he obeys, he pays. I find this characterization both amusing and painful because it is somehow accurate. At least, for those who have created such an image/caricature of themselves, wittingly or unwittingly.

Surely the Catholic is much, much more than simply a person who prays, obeys and pays. Especially if you mistakenly think you already prayed by merely reciting some prayers; you already obeyed by avoiding the burden of making decisions; you already paid by giving 0.001% of your net income.

You can find the true image of a Catholic in the person of the widow from Sarephat, who surprisingly was not even a Hebrew but a pagan (1 Kings 17). She was gathering a few sticks of wood to cook a last meal for herself and her son, from a last handful of flour and last drops of oil. A devastating famine at the time had driven her to this extreme condition.

Now came this prophet Elijah, a complete stranger, whose religion was not shared by her, asking to have that last piece of bread because, like her, he was famished. Because of his assurance that her bowl will never run out of flour and her jar will never run out of oil, she allowed her life and that of her son to hang by a thread in giving the prophet of God the last morsel of food she had intended for their own survival.

How do you term this act of the widow of Sarephat? If you can find no word for it, perhaps can you for the act of another widow, whose story is narrated in Mark 12 (our third reading)? She was one of those entering the Temple of Jerusalem and depositing their personal contributions to the sacred treasury.

Jesus happened to be there watching all those entering "to pray, to obey, and to pay" if we may use once more the characterization of a Catholic. When her turn came, the widow put in two little copper coins, equivalent more or less

to our five centavos today. Many of the rich people were putting in large amount of money. But Jesus gave this startling assessment: the poor widow contributed more than all the money of the rich people put together.

Why? Jesus tells why. All those rich people gave from the excess of their incomes without placing in jeopardy their economic status. But this widow, poor as she was, gave all that she had, on which her life depended. In other words, she put her life "on the line", as they say.

How do you term the act of this second widow? Have you a noun, an adjective to characterize it? If you have none, have you perhaps, any for the act of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, as narrated by the second reading (Hebrews 9)? It says that Jesus entered the heavenly temple itself, not made by human hands and is not a part of this created world. There, he appeared on our behalf on the presence of God to remove our sins, to atone for them through the sacrifice of himself. In other words, Jesus put his life "on the line" to save us from our sins.

The individual acts of Jesus, of the widow from Sarephat, of the widow in Jerusalem have this common trait: by those acts they all put their lives, so to speak, hanging by a thread in wanting to maintain a good relationship with God. They left the final ending of their life-story to his divine will and love. They entrusted to him the unraveling of their future. It is like leaping in the dark. You do not know where you will crash-land. You are not sure whether you will come out alive. Just the same, you take the leap in the dark because Someone tells you to trust him. That is the leap of faith of the Catholic, the putting of one's life on the line.

November 16, 2003

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Dan 12:1-3/Heb 10:11-14, 18/Mk 13:24-32)

By following the liturgy of the Church, we, Christians are brought up, trained and accustomed to live according to the "New Life" we have received from God the Father through the merits of Jesus Christ and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Roughly, the liturgy is made up of Scripture readings and holy actions by means of which the whole man, body and soul, mind, will and spirit, is taken up into the life of God. This is why we speak of a "new life" of the Christian.

In view of our native ability to absorb things only by stages, the liturgy follows a course, a program, a cycle according to which it progressively puts us into contact with the manifold mysteries of God's life which is simple and in itself indivisible, as he unravels and discloses himself to his creatures. That course, that program, that cycle is about to end. Accordingly, today's liturgy presents us with scripture readings that deal about the consummation of things and the end of time.

Man, it seems, instinctively recoils at the mere mention of consummation or ending, especially if this happens abruptly. It means for him an unfinished business, a broken dream, a nip of the bud, an aborted life. On the other hand, he gladly accepts a story that "ends happily ever after," a profession of love that claims to last forever. Why is this so? It is because man was created to be immortal, at least, he wants to be so.

If the gospel reading (Mark 13) deals about the time when the sun will grow dark, the moon shining no longer, the stars falling from heaven, and celestial bodies running amok in space, do not think the world will return to primeval chaos, to the emptiness of nothing from which God had drawn it. Mark 13 just employs traditional language of scripture to announce the imminence of a novelty, of a newness of things to come, whereby the wisdom, power, justice and love of God will shine forth with unspeakably greater brilliance and clarity.

Hence, instead of fearing and scurrying away from the consummation of the present world, God's chosen people should welcome it, welcome especially Jesus Christ whose return in the clouds with great power and glory will mark the new state of things. The consummation marks, not the destruction of what is, but the inauguration of what will be. Or if you wish, that terrific moment will be the cessation of all that is bad, and the beginning of all that is only good.

This is the message of the first reading (Daniel 12) which emphasizes that when the time comes, all the people whose names are written in God's book will be saved and will enjoy eternal life after being raised from the dead. The second reading (Hebrews 10) is even more emphatic and, and informative besides, about the novelty of the state of things in the DAYS to come. God's laws will be written in the hearts and in the minds of those whom Christ had purified from their sins made perfect forever by the one sacrifice he offered.

God will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer, nor will there be any possibility for them to commit offenses in the days ahead, for God's laws are written in their

and minds. There will be no need of offering further sacrifices than the one Christ has already offered, which is why the Lord Jesus now sits (a position of one whose mission is accomplished) at the right side of God, awaiting there until God puts his enemies as a footstool under his feet.

I conclude this homily with words from the same chapter 10 of Hebrews from which is taken the second reading, because it recommends to us the use of sacred liturgy, through which Mother Church continuously trains and educates us in the "New Life" Jesus gained for us. "Let us not give up," it says, "the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer."

November 23, 2003

Christ the King (34th Sunday) Cycle B

(Readings: Dan 7:13-14/Apoc 1:5-8/Jn 18:33-37)

Church liturgy is meant to educate, form and enlighten us in regards to Christian life. In placing today's feast of Christ the King between the end of the liturgical calendar and its beginning, Mother Church wants us to understand and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first source and the final goal of all things and all men.

Thus, Christ's kingship is defined in terms and concepts derived from the positioning of today's feast in the order we just described of the church calendar. Aside from this, today's three bible readings explain further the nature and qualities of his kingship.

These preliminary remarks are given to prevent any misunderstanding about Christ's kingship, either by way of exaggerations or of understatements, anyone of which will diminish the good results Mother Church expects when she instituted today's solemnity or feast.

For the modern Filipino Christian, the term and concept of king is very tricky and open to misinterpretations. We think we understand it, when in fact, we are unclear about it. Not only because we have no experience of a monarchy in our lifetime, but even if we look to our nation's past or to countries beyond our boundaries for comparisons, we discern elements and qualities that are embarrassing, scandalous, or disappointing at the very least.

Having stated, therefore, that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the source and the goal of all things and all men, what, furthermore, do the bible readings of today say about him? They teach us that he is king for the following reasons:

(1) He is the human being seen by Daniel in a vision as coming from heaven surrounded by clouds, endowed with authority, honor and royal power so that the people of all nations, races and languages would serve him as the One possessing authority lasting forever and a never-ending kingdom (Daniel 7, first reading);

(2) Jesus became the ruler of kings and authorities of the world in view of his sacrificial death and his being the resurrection's first fruits, aside from the fact that he made of us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and his Father on account of his never-ending love for us (Revelation 1, second reading);

(3) Finally, interrogated by Pilate if he was a king and what wrong had he done for his countrymen to reject him and demand for his blood, Jesus replied he is king indeed, but not in the sense Pilate and the Jewish authorities understood (John 18, third reading).

His kingship is completely non-political and non-national in character, and it offers no threat to any government or dominion. Given the non-competitive and spiritual nature of his kingship, governments and kingdoms, however, cannot claim absolute independence from the moral imperatives of Jesus the King. He was born and came into this world for one purpose - to speak about the truth. Neither can individuals refuse his authority on the ground it will limit their freedom and autonomy. Jesus once said that his truth will make men free (John 8:32).

But the world does not and cannot understand his language. It can comprehend only its own language. Naked power, undue influence, overbearing attitude, money, politics, untrammled freedom and license: these are a few samples of that language. Since the kingship of Jesus has none of these qualities, worldly governments and worldly individuals give little account or none to the authority of Jesus.

But today's bible readings say categorically that Jesus has been given authority, honor and royal power, and that people of all nations, races and languages will serve him. His rule will last forever, his kingdom will have no end, in contrast to this world's authorities and kingdoms. In fact, the book of Revelation invites us to look and see: Jesus will be coming on the clouds for all peoples to behold, including those who pierced him and rejected his authority.

His kingship is unstoppable, inescapable. It is, therefore, good and profitable for us to say often in prayer, "Holy be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as in heaven." In this manner just as Jesus said, we would not be like those who will watch his coming with craven fear and despair, but like those others who will stand up and raise their heads because their salvation is near.

November 30, 2003

First Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

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

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

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

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

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

To us Christians today, the expectation of Christ's Second Coming is as valid and crucial, as was the expectation for his birthday to the believers in ancient times. These two Comings or Advents are complementary: the first coming would be incomplete without the other; the Second Coming would be unexplainable without the First.

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

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

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

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

Our spokesman Isaiah directs to God these surprising questions: "Why do you make us so stubborn that we turn away' from you? Why do you let us stray from your ways? Come back, for the sake of the people who have always been yours, despite our continuous sinning, despite our having provoked your anger by our filthy actions."

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

December 7, 2003

Second Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

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

We are all familiar with the sound system that magnifies the power of the human voice. There is the sound system that uses one, two or three speakers, which increases a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred-fold the original volume of the human voice. With such enormous strength

and amplitude, the message which the human voice wants to impart rings out clear and unstoppable.

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

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

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

Let us see how the bible readings do that. Let us begin with Isaiah 40 (first reading). He recalls, firstly, his countrymen's state of banishment and wretchedness into which their sins have driven them and for which they have suffered long

enough. Then he announces, on God's behalf that now is the time for pardon, for taking comfort and putting up courage. Because their liberation is at hand, their homecoming is on sight, and the best news of all, God will personally lead them back to their homeland. Who is the Christian today who cannot get the message of the first reading of prophet Isaiah that men/women should return to God and leave behind all their sins and wrongdoing?

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

Finally, in Mark 1 (third reading), we have the best reason why we should accept enthusiastically the task of personal conversion despite its difficulty. Countless people, in John the Baptizer's time, picked up his message of repentance enthusiastically by having themselves baptized by him and confessing their sins. We Christians of today cannot afford to do less, in terms of enthusiasm and sincerity of personal conversion. While John baptized with water his repenting countrymen, Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit assuring a thorough cleansing of the heart and a transformation of life. But we must give ourselves to Jesus in order that he may work out that change in us.

December 14, 2003

Third Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 61:1-2, 10-11/1 Thess 5:16-24/Jn 1:6-8, 19-28)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

December 21, 2003

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

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

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

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

The first reading (2 Sam 7) serves to introduce us to the great mystery referred to above. King David, as you might know, was in the zenith of his power, strength and glory. God had helped him reach it. Looking around and happily settled in his palace, he noticed that God's Ark of the Covenant, symbol of his presence, was kept only in a tent! Feeling embarrassed, he confided to prophet Nathan a plan to build a temple worthy of his God.

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

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

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

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

This is another way of saying that it's impossible to put all of God's majesty inside our little heads. Neither Mary understood fully the mystery as it was being disclosed to her by the angel Gabriel. That is why she was asked many questions. But once enlightened by the angel, her reply was a great act of faith worthy of our imitation.

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

December 28, 2003

Holy Family Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas
(But if none then December 30)
Cycle B

(Readings: Sir 3: 3-7,14-17/Col 3: 12-21/Lk 2: 22-40 (or 2: 22, 39-40))
(Alternative readings: Greek 3: 2-6,12-14/Gen 15: 1-6; 21: 1-3/Col 3: 12-21/Heb 11: 8,11-12,17-19/Lk 2: 22-40 (or 2: 22,39-40))

Last Christmas, our attention was focused almost exclusively on the Child Jesus. This was understandable. Today, our attention is made to center on the Holy Family of which Christ is a member. The transition of our focus from the Baby Jesus at Christmas to that of the Holy Family this Sunday is

made spontaneously and effortlessly. After we look at a baby, it is only natural that we turn our eyes to the parents who produced the baby.

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

We cannot surely assume that the boy did not understand all the consequences of his choice. He was not aware that a painter, or a carpenter, or a jeepney driver, or a farmer would have to endure great difficulties and poverty in that kind of life. But what mattered for the boy was that he could follow in the footsteps of his father. How awesome is the power of example for good, and also for bad! This was my conclusion from the boy's reply.

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

positions and ways of behavior endorsed by the three readings are inexistent or in moribund state in those circles.

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

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

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